THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL CONFLICT IN AN ORGANISATION

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Abstract

The crux of this paper was to examine the crucial role of language in enhancing effective communication and the management of cultural conflict in an organization. In carrying out the study, self-designed questionnaire tagged "Role of Language and Communication in an Organizational Setting" was administered to the categories of people that were mostly involved in an organization (the head and subordinates). Four hypotheses were formulated using T-test statistical method to analyse the data. Findings revealed that language and communication influenced the management of cultural conflict in an organization. The study also established that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female workers on the topic of discourse ($P>0.05$). Thus, the study recommended that heads of organizations should employ a complete and sensitised communication system that would enhance harmonious relationship within an organization. The paper concluded that language and mode of communication must be given priority for conflict resolution in an organizational setting. If cultural conflict is properly managed it could lead to innovativeness and competitive advantage to an organization.

Keywords: Language, communication, cultural conflict management.

Introduction

This study examined the organization as a concept that has to do with people coming together to achieve a common goal and the role of language in achieving this objective. Language is the means or code of the information which can be verbal or non-verbal and its end product is communication. Language is the principal method of human communication that consists the words used in a structured and conventional way which are conveyed by speech, writing, or gesture. The structure of a language is its grammar while the free components are its vocabulary. There are roughly 6,500 spoken languages in the world today, and each is unique in a number of ways. In other words, one can say that the world we live is basically a world of people with different characters, views and opinions, which could only be derived with the use of adequate means of communication. Communication is a day - to – day activity that human beings use to

convey information, instruction, advice, feelings, opinions and facts from one person to another or group. Since management deals with human being, its survival will be related to its ability to receive, transmit, and act on information that comes in and out of the organization. In essence, language and communication play the prominent role in achieving all the qualities of a good organization. Communication is vital in the relationship governing employees and their employers, supervisors and their subordinates. Communication in any organization transverses every aspect of business systems. It creates the link between individuals in an organizations and people tend to know more about their colleagues through communication. Many relationships are strained because the individual concerned could be seen as the livewire of every human day – to – day activities. It is on this note that this paper focused on three concepts (language, communication and culture) that cannot be easily divorced from one another. In this study, language and communication are grouped together while language, culture and organization are put in the same group. Thereafter, the effects and importance of language and communication in managing the cultural conflict in the management process was considered.

Language and communication are two sides of the same coin that cannot be separated. In an organization, information is the content of the message sent which could only be effective when it has an impact on recipients. In the same vein, language could be viewed as a means of communication and can also be seen as one of the most important parts of any culture. It is the way by which people communicate with one another, build relationships, and create a sense of community. Okoli (2004) remarked that language and culture are intricately bound together and a comprehension of one without the other is impossible.

The word communication is derived from the Latin word "communis" meaning common. Hence, communication can be defined as the process of exchanging information within people that have things in common. It could also be seen as the transmission of information and understanding through the use of common symbols. Communication is a two-way-process interaction that transpires between the sender and the receiver. The efficiency of any communication is the successful understanding of the information and effective response of the recipient to the person that initiate the communication. Communication is therefore a core component of any society, and language is an important aspect of it.

Culture on the other hand is the total ways of life of people living in a society. It is generally believed that people from different cultures have different opinions about things around them which invariably affect their assumptions about life. Hofstede (2003) and Smircich (1983) view culture as the core set of attitudes and practices that are shared by the members of a collective entity such as nation or firm. The rate at which the culture or cultural differences are intermingling globally in the last decades cannot be overemphasized. Companies have to consider the cultural concepts in their daily businesses to operate successfully in the global market (Kivrak, Ross, Arslan, Tuncan Egbu et al 2008). In other words, culture (value, attitude or perception and behavior customs) influence environments that have distinct varieties across individuals in teams or workplaces.

Communication is very vital in human existence. According to Udall and Udall (1979), communication is viewed as the process by which one person or group can clearly understand each other. While Katz and Khan (1978) are of the opinion that man cannot exist without communication. In other words, communication is seen as the live-wire of human existence. In

an organizational setting, communication is the only process through which man exchange ideas and pass his views to others within the community. The general process of communication contains five elements: the communicator, the message, medium, the receiver, and feedback. It can be simply summarized as: Who…. Says What, What is said…. in which way,… to whom, ….with what effect? To appreciate each element in the process, the researcher examined how communication works. In other words, each element interacts at one time or the other before communication can be effective, that is, it has to follow the following process:

Who says What	What is said	In which way	To whom	With what effect
Source (message)	Information	Chanel	Receiver	feedback

The source: In an organizational framework, source could be the employee or employer, depending on the information, ideas, intentions and purpose for communication. It is the person that intends to pass information across to others. This information has to be encoded properly by the sources before passing it across to the decoder, so that it does not lose its content or originality.

Information: The result of the encoding process is what is called message. It could be the content that has to be transmitted or what the source intends to pass across. The passing of this message could be verbal or non-verbal. People have numerous purposes for communicating; it could be to exchange ideas or to produce an action.

Channel: This is the carrier of the message, which depends on the message that is being sent. For instance, when we speak, the speech is the channel while what we speak out is the message; when we write, the writing is the medium or channel etc.

Receiver: The message sent has to be decoded and acted upon by the person that the message is being directed to, this person is known as the receiver.

Feedback: The action that is put up by the receiver is known as the feedback or the response. A feedback loop provides a channel for receiver's response that enables the source or sender to determine whether the message has been received and has produced the intended impact or not. Feedback in communication may come in many ways. In a face-to-face situation where direct feedback is through verbal exchange(s) subtle means of communication such as facial expressions of discontent or misunderstanding is always well pronounced in the receivers face and utterance.

Culture is the "historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings, and norms." While using a language automatically enables someone to identify with others who speak the same language, people with different cultural backgrounds interact and one of the most difficult barriers they face is that of language as means of transformation. As language began to develop, different cultural communities put together collective understandings through sounds. Over time, these sounds and their implied meanings became commonplace and language was formed. Hence, the development of intercultural interaction as a symbolic process whereby social reality is constructed, maintained, repaired and transformed into language. The common symbol may be verbal or non-verbal. Culture is a multi-layered structure that showcases the entire being in individual interactions, therefore there is increasing nature of cultural conflict in business

environment which have posed a lot of challenges facing managers of organization today. This degenerated into conflicts due to misreading and misinterpreting the signs and symbols of other cultures.

Cultural conflict is the disapproval of behavior patterns and values that occur when different cultures are incompletely assimilated. Cultural conflict occurs when different cultural values and beliefs clash. A behavior pattern or value that is found acceptable to a culture may not be tolerated in another culture. An example of cultural conflict is the debate over abortion. Ethnic cleansing is another extreme example of cultural conflict. Wars can also be a result of a cultural conflict; for example, the differing views on slavery were one of the reasons for the American civil war. The conflict may find expression in high rates of criminality and delinquency. Conflict is mostly triggered when there are cultural differences between individuals within an organization or through general interaction with one another. This often leads to cross-cultural conflict which generally occurs in the context that individuals are not willing to understand each other's diversity in cultures. The aforementioned revealed that culture is an essential part of conflict especially when individuals are not from the same cultural background. Hence this study examined how language and communication can be used as ameliorating measures to address conflict that may arise in a workplace.

Statement of Problem

Conflict generally affects the psyche and morale of the people involved. It will equally do the same to members that have different cultural background. Cultural conflict in the workplace is a divisive phenomenon that can lead to a significant drop in productivity. Managing such conflicts leads to a more harmonious relationship in a workplace and more often than not, generate more creative ideas through multiculturalism. This study therefore examined the role language plays among people with different cultures that make up an organization. It entails and encompasses acceptance and respect, recognition and valuing individual differences in the management of an organization.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female workers management of cultural conflict in an organizational due to language and communication break-down.

2. There is no significant difference between the cultural management level of both the superiors and the subordinate's consequent upon language and communication break-down.

3. There is no significant difference between the language and communication usage mostly used by both the superiors and the subordinates.

4. There is no significant difference in language and communication application between superior and subordinate management of cultural conflicts within an organization.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the place of language and communication in the management of cultural conflict in an organization. This study determined the difference that exists between the independent variables (gender, designation and organization), language and communication and conflict management.

Methodology

The descriptive survey was used for the study. A sample of 120 workers were selected from three different sets of organizations (school, bank and business sector) using simple random sampling technique.

Instrumentation

A self-designed questionnaire tagged "Role of language and communication in an organizational setting" was used in the study. The questionnaire consisted of three (3) sections. Section 1 consisted items on the personal data of the workers, section 2 comprised some items on rating scale of workers while section 3 contained items on the place of language and communication on conflict management. The instrument (ROLCCM) was given to experts in Business Management to establish the face and content validity of the instrument. The instrument however yielded a reliability co-efficient value of 0.87 using Cronbach Alpha. The researchers personally administered the instrument with the support of two research assistants. The questionnaires were collected and the scores collated while the T-test statistical method was used to analyse the data.

Results

The table below presents the analysis of data collected in relation to the research hypotheses raised in the study.

Table 1: The perception of male and female workers on management of cultural conflict in an organization.

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-val	Sig level
Male	60	15	6.29		2.88		
Female	60	10	5.29			1.98	0.05

P<0.05, t-cal=2.88, t-val=1.98

The above table revealed that, the "t" calculated ratio of 2.88 is greater than the "t" value of 1.98. Hence, the hypotheses which states that "there is no significant difference between male and female workers management of cultural conflict in an organization" is rejected.

Table 2: Perception of Superior and Subordinate workers on the place of language and communication on conflict management in an organization.

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-val	Sig level
Superior	45	19.5	5.95		0.73	1.98	
Subordinate	75	20.5	6.29				0.05

P < 0.05, t. cal = 0.73, t. val = 1.98.

Table 2 revealed that "t" calculated ratio of 0.73 is less than "t" table value of 1.98. Hence, the hypothesis which states that "there is no significant difference between the cultural management level of both the superior and the subordinate" is accepted. This means that majority of the workers had similar opinion of the place of language and communication on conflict management in an organization.

Table 3: Analysis of the language and communication mostly used by the superior and the subordinate.

Groups	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-val	Sig level
English	100	24.2	8.74		2.62		
Pidgin	20	15.8	5.49			1.98	

P<0.05, t-cal=2.62, t-val=1.98

From the table above, it can be deduced that the t-calculated ratio of 2.62 is greater than the t-value of 1.98. Hence, the hypothesis which states that "there is no significant difference between the language and communication mostly used by the superiors and that of the subordinates" is rejected.

Discussion

The result of the findings in table 1 revealed that the t-cal ratio of 2.88 is greater than the t-value of 1.98. Hence, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female workers on the management of cultural conflict in an organization is rejected. In view of the above, the study has shown in its result that there is significant difference in male and female workers perception of language and communication effectiveness in the resolution of conflict management in an organization. Invariably, it has shown that sex has significant influence on language and communication and conflict management.

This study further confirms the view of Adegboyega (2001), that sex, marital status and experience are important because they usually affect the effectiveness of workers depending on the nature of their jobs. Moreso, the result on table 2 shows that there is no significant difference between the cultural management level of both the superiors and the subordinates. The hypothesis however was accepted. The study also examined the conflict management level of both superior and subordinate workers and a significance difference was revealed. This hypothesis agrees with the perception of Superior and Subordinate workers on the place of language and communication of conflict management in an organization. The above study revealed that there is no significant difference in the cultural management level of both the superior and the subordinate workers in the resolution of conflict management in an organization. Invariably, it has shown that workers status has no significant influence on language and communication and conflict management.

Moreover, table 3 illustrates that there is a difference between the language and communication mostly used by the superiors and the subordinates in conflict management. Hence, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the language and communication mostly used by the superior and the subordinate on conflict management in an organization is rejected. In view of the above, the study has shown in its result that there is significant difference in language and communication mostly used by the superiors and the subordinates in conflict management in an organization. Invariably, it has shown that status has significant influence on language and communication and conflict management. Again, this study also

confirms the view of Adeola (2001) that experience is important because it usually affects the effectiveness of workers as well as the stability of labour force in the system but it requires, sometimes, the re-deployment of staff to outside locations.

Conclusion

For peace to prevail in any organizational setting, language and communication should be re-activated and channeled towards the achievement of the set-out goals and objectives of the organization. This will make workers irrespective of their cadre have the sense of belonging as members of one inseparable unit working jointly towards achieving set goals. It is through interaction and communication with subordinates that superiors can carry out their managerial functions. No wonder Ugboajah (1996) tagged communication as "man media".

Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are made among others:

i. The head of an organization should endeavour to employ a complete, sensitised communication system as it is vital in the relationship governing the atmosphere of such an organization. He should therefore learn to be a good listener, develop listening skills and be able to discuss freely with his coworkers irrespective of their cultural background.

ii. Motivation of workers is also a key factor that can bring about effective communication in an organization.

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