Public Relations: A Management Tool In The Workplace

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ABSTRACT: Managing any organization is not an easy task as we come across people of diverse economic, political and socio-cultural backgrounds. In an environment that is made up of persons with different personalities, care should be taken in order not to offend persons directly or indirectly. Work stress can also be a factor that might cause frictions at workplace. In the light of these, the principle of public relations should be streamlined into the management process in order for persons to get along in workplace. Management itself is a collective process and public relations is not done in isolation- is not a one man show. This work highlights the import of public relations in the workplace and how it can go a long way in maintaining continued good relationship among colleagues.

KEYWORDS: management, organization, public relations, workplace,

INTRODUCTION: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MANAGEMENT
The importance of cordial relationships in the work place cannot be relegated to the background. A good relationship among staff enhances the smooth running of any organization. From the top management staff to the last subordinates, it is important for both categories of persons to imbibe the act of maintaining and sustaining cordial and mutual relationship. In order to achieve this, public relations and management come in handy. A public relations as a separate career option has come into existence when many organizations felt the importance of maintaining good relationship with their various publics. Let us delve into some definition of public relations. According to Hasan (2013, p.513), “public relations is a management function that involves monitoring and evaluating public attitude and maintaining mutual relations and understanding between an organization and its public”. She went further to say “public relation is the art and science of managing communication between an organization and its key constituents to build image and sustain it positive reputation”. Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center, two American PR professionals in the book Effective Public Relation, posit: PR is a planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance based upon mutual satisfactory two-way communication. Other meaning of public relations includes the following: The International Public Relations Associations (IPRA) submitted that: public relations is a management function of continuing and planned character, through which public and private organization seek to win and retain the understanding, sympathy and support of those with whom they are or may be concerned by evaluating public opinion about themselves, in order to correlate as far as possible their own policies and procedures, to achieve by planned and widespread information more productive cooperation and more efficient fulfillment of this common interest. Edward Bernays defined public relations as the attempt by information, persuasion and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institutions. According to John W. Hill, “PR is the management function which gives the same organized and careful attention to the asset of goodwill as given to any other major asset of business” (slideshare.net, slide 10).

MANAGEMENT: ITS PURPOSE AND NATURE
At this juncture, we will take a look at the meaning of management, its purpose and nature for a better understanding of the two concepts. Management is the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish select aims (Koontz, O’Donnell and Weihrich, 1982). The authors went further to expand this definition for a broader understanding. According to them:
✓ As managers, people carry out the managerial functions of planning, organizing, staffing, leading and controlling.
✓ Management applies to any kind of organization
✓ It applies to managers at all organizational levels.
✓ The aim of all managers is the same: to create surplus.
✓ Managing is concerned with productivity, which implies effectiveness and efficiency.

If we take a closer look at the Nigeria business environment, there are some notable managers at the helm of affairs of their various organizations. Here are some managers you may know: AlikoDangote at Dangote Group; IfeanyiUba at Capital Oil; Mike Adenuga at Globacom; John Momoh at Channels TV and Zinox’s Stanley NnamdiEkeh. These individuals manage organizations. According to (Koontz & O’Donnell 2008, p.8), “an organization is a group of people working together to create surplus”. In our explanation of management, some key components were highlighted. Some of these components are:
✓ Management involves Individuals working together.
✓ Management applies to managers at all levels of an organization.
✓ Management applies to any kind of organization.
✓ Management is concerned with productivity which implies effectiveness and efficiency.
✓ The aim of management is to create surplus.

From the explanation of both public relations and management, it obvious that in an environment where people are working together (management), the principle of public relations is needed to enhance better understanding among them. Public relations isa factor that should be streamlined into the entire management process
to achieve effectiveness and efficiency and the desired select aim.

THE PRINCIPLE OF “ME”, “US”, AND “THEM”. We will shade more light to doctrine of “me”, “us” and “them” as discussed in Ekowa (2003) paper titled “Public relations for Internal Auditors”. Public relations and management is never a one-man show. People must work in tandem to achieve desired result in any organization. In the process of trying to achieve such result, you as a person is distinct from other people come to the front burner. The group to which you belong is also important, so also is the group’s select aim and public.

The “ME” This principle implies that you as an individual must ascertain your personality. You must ask yourself certain questions like: how do I see myself (me)? Am I arrogant? Am I approachable? Am I humble and receptive? The point being made here is that the “me” in you must be receptive, humble and dedicated to duty in order to get along with other staff. You must be willing to make sacrifice of self-denial in order to satisfy the needs of other staff members. With this approach, both top management staff and subordinates will endeavor themselves to one another. The following communication approach will help management staff arouse sentiments in others to their favour if practiced appropriately:
- Never ask a person to “do” something for you; rather ask for “help”. Although, top management staff can exercise their authorities, but not in excess.
- Never approach a staff with a “you must…” attitude. Rather use “I am sure you would….”
- Never tell your boss “I deserve a raise in my pay”. Ask him if in his opinion, your performance now seems to measure up for a pay raise.
- Use unexpected compliments about others.
- Avoid a serious or pensive mood at all cost, use humour.

THE “US” In our explanation of management, we were meant to understand that management entails working together to achieve select aim. No one is an island of itself; therefore, the principle of “us” (togetherness) should be integrated into the PR-Management process. Sometimes, despite one’s position, one may belong to a group with some other person as the leader. Despite your position in office or qualification, you need to imbibe team spirit in order to achieve management’s goal. In this situation, group interest comes subsumes individual interest. The point being made is that one need to be a team player, motivator and an inspirer. Since you need others to be able to create an impact in the work place, you should make it possible for your colleagues with whom you work to also make their mark with your assistance. These individuals make up your primary constituency, so your PR effort should start from them.

THE “THEM” You as a person (me) and the group and you (us) do not communicate or work for yourselves. The aim of the relationship is for a third party known as (them) – select aim/public. The importance of this triangular relationship is to achieve some objectives in the work place. Public relations for a person, group, or organization are to create and maintain a favourable relationship for “me”. “us” in the eyes of “them” – the management’s objectives/public. Without effective and efficient use of public relations in the work place, there might be unfavourable disposition among staff members. We should not forget that these staff makes up the organization, and if not well-managed internally, there are tendencies that staff members might not portray the organization thereby affecting the organization’s relationship with other stake holders.

UNIFYING FACTORS AT WORKPLACE: 3 THINGS PEOPLE WANT IN THEIR JOB Sirota, Mischkind, and Meltzer (2005) surveyed 2.5 million employees in 237 organizations in 89 countries about what they from their job. The authors outlined their findings in the “The Three Factors of Motivation in the Workplace. They include: equity, achievement and camaraderie. Let us take a close look at the third factor first before discussing others.

CAMARADERIE: this entails trust and friendship between people according to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English. Employees want to work collaboratively. They get the greatest satisfaction from being a member of and working on a team to achieve a common goal. In fact, the authors posit that cooperation, and not job description or an organizational chart is a unifying force holding the various parts of an organization together. This is in consonance with the “them” principle discussed earlier on. Team spirit is essential in the workplace and the instrumentality of public relations enhances camaraderie. The authors say that one key to overcome conflict and encourage cooperation is to build partnership. The parties involved do this by collaborating to work towards common goal. However, they caution that in order to build partnership within and through the organization, “Action must begin, and be sustained by senior management”, (Sirota et al, 2005, p.283). It is only when senior management has the foresight to see what can be, not just what is, along with the perseverance and hard work to translate philosophy into concrete daily policies will partnership emerge. Above all, it requires, “Seeing and treating employees as genuine allies in achieving change (Sirota et al, 2005, p.301).

EQUITY: employees definitely want to be treated justly in relation to the basic condition of employment. These basic conditions are:
- Physiological Safe work environment
- Economic Job security, fair pay
- Psychological Treated respectfully & fairly

Nobody wants to be treated unjustly in the place of work. But unfairness is predominant in many organizations. Top management staff should not take undue advantage of their subordinate, rather they should relate with their appropriately in order for them – subordinate to put in their best. There should be a top down-bottom up
relationship between both parties and it is the duty of top management staff to engineer it.

ACHIEVEMENT: Employees are enthusiastic working for organizations that provide them with clear, credible and inspiring organizational purpose – reason for being here.

THE PERSONALITY FACTOR: NINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT ENHANCE YOUR OUTPUT AT WORK

Professor Thomas W. Harrell of the Stanford Graduate School of Business did a twenty year research relating to career success. While there were no “certain passports” to success”, Harrell concluded thus: “The consistent variable found which related to management success was the personality trait of social extroversion or sociability. This variable was consistently related to success throughout a twenty year career”. According to Decker (1996), there are nine behavioural skills that we need to master in order to boast our personality at workplace. These skills are:

- Eye Communication
- Posture/Movement
- Gesture/Facial expression
- Dress/Appearance
- Voice/Vocal Variety
- Language/Non-words
- Listener-Involvement
- Humour
- The Natural Self

But in this paper, we will be discussing 5 of these skills:

- Eye Communication
- Dress/Appearance
- Humour
- Listener-Involvement
- Gesture/Facial Expression

EYE COMMUNICATION: Eye communication is the most important skill in your personal impact toolbox. Your eyes are the only part of your Central Nervous System that directly connects you with your environment. Here are some tips for improved eye communication in the workplace:

- Intimacy, intimidation and involvement
- Five seconds for more involvement
- Beware of eye dart
- Beware of slow-blink
- Beware of angle of eye incidence

DRESS AND APPEARANCE: There is saying that goes you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. And another goes, you addressed the way you dressed. To dress, groom and appear appropriate to the environment that you are in, as well as yourself. Since ninety percent of our persona is covered by clothing, we need to be aware of what our clothes are communicating. The ten percent of our body not normally covered by clothes is largely our face and hair. This is the most important ten percent of all because this is where people look. The impression other receive is very much influenced by the style of how we groom our head (e.g., hairstyle, make-up and jewelry for women; hairstyle, facial hair or lack of it for men, etc)

LISTENER-INVOLVEMENT: When your listener look bored, do you get upset, or do you change your strategy and involve them? Here are some tips that will put you on the right track:

- Create a strong opening by announcing a serious problem, telling a moving story, or asking a rhetorical question to get each person thinking
- Survey your entire listener when you start speaking before beginning extended eye communication with any individual.
- Keep your listener involved and engaged by maintaining 3-6 second contact with as many as possible.
- Never back away from your listener(s). Move toward them – especially at the beginning and at the end of your communication.
- Add variety by using visuals. Give your listener(s) something to look at in addition to you.
- Rhetorical questions will keep your listeners active and thinking.
- Have a volunteer from the group to help you in your demonstration.
- Develop a sense of humour and use it

HUMOUR: Create a bond between you and your listeners by using humour to enable them enjoy listening to you more. Humour is one of the most important skills for effective communication, yet one of the most elusive. Some people are naturally personable and likeable. Others have to work for it. Humour is a learnable skill and we can all learn to use this key tool more effectively. According to Malcolm de Chazall, “the man who causes them to laugh gets more votes for the measure than the man who forces them to work”.

GESTURE/FACIAL EXPRESSIONS: To be effective at face to face communication you should have your hands and your arms relaxed and natural at your sides when you are at rest. You should gesture naturally when animated and enthusiastic. You should learn to smile under pressure, in the same way you should with a natural smile when you are comfortable.

CONCLUSION

Public relations principles have always been used to maintain mutual understanding among individuals and corporate organizations. Managing individuals’ personalities in the workplace no doubt requires this vital tool. When fully harnessed, it facilitates two-way symmetric communication. It also has the potential of making the workplace conducive, thereby creating maximum output out of the employees.

REFERENCES


Author’s Profile

Silas Udenze graduated with a Second Class Upper degree in Mass Communication from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. He is currently studying for MA degree in Media Arts in the University of Abuja, Gwagwalada, Nigeria. His research specialties are: New media, Public relations, Advertising, Development Communication and Media theories and writing.