**COMMUNICATION IMPERATIVES AND THE THEATRE ADMINISTRATOR**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

To succeed, every organization including theatre necessarily requires human and material resources. The material resources cannot on their own function. It is the human capital within the organization that utilizes and drives the materials in a certain direction in order to achieve predetermined objectives. This places the human capital in a pivotal role and justifies the attention often paid to personnel matters in organizations. Personnel themselves have to be managed. One potent avenue for adequately managing human resources towards the realization of predetermined goals and objectives is good and effective communication. This paper examines the options open to the Theatre Administrator (the head of theatre organizations)) in order to foster coherence and adequately harmonize theatre personnel towards achieving the goals of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profits.

**Introduction**

To succeed, every organization necessarily requires human and material resources. The material resources including machines cannot on their own function. It is the human capital within the organization (including theatre) that utilizes and drives the materials in a certain direction in order to achieve predetermined goals and objectives of the organization. This makes human capital, a very vital and significant entity in any organisation, be it profit-oriented or non profit-oriented. This may have informed the assertion that:

Personnel is one of the pillars on which the organization is built along with money and materials. Personnel is the corner stone upon which the objectives of an organization are developed. When we talk of objectives we are referring to clearly defined future state of affairs which an organization is striving to reach. It is through the attainment of objectives that an organization can measure its progress and success or failure (Inyang and Akpama 26).

The realization of the pivotal role played by human resources in any organization, has necessitated the establishment of personnel departments or human resources management units in different organizations. Failure to adequately attend to matters affecting personnel and human resources often lead to a break-down in operations of the organization and the disruption of the conducive working environment. Consequently, morale of the personnel drops to the lowest ebb, resulting in a lull in activities. Ultimately, the organization fails to attain its set goals and objectives and may drift into extinction. This, Inyang and Akpama (2) say, goes to prove that managing the human resources of an organization is the most important and probably, the most difficult too.

Difficult as it may be, there exists one potent avenue for adequately managing human resources within an organization towards the realization of pre-determined goals and objectives – good and effective communication. Many organizations often find themselves in quack-mire due to certain anomalies bordering on human resources management. These any include the failure of management to adequately anticipate and make provisions for the future, poor working conditions which may heighten union activities, lack of future prospects or job security, poor communication between management and workers which may breed distrust and suspicion among others. But these defects could have been avoided in the first place or in the least, alleviated if the management had adopted good and effective communication within the organization. Inyang underscores the invaluable nature of communication as a tool towards getting things done through people and managing human capital in organizations. He states that:

Many of management problems today are traceable to failure in communication…. Too few appreciate that communication is at the heart of all business operations, that it encompasses all those activities by which we influence others. Actually, communication is the most important tool we have for getting things done and the basis for understanding, for co-operation and for action (97).

In theatre organizations, the human capital comes in form of artistes including the Director, Actors, Actresses, House Manager and Costume Designer. Others include the Production Manager, Props-man, Lighting Designer, Make-up Artist, Carpenters, Choreographer, Stage Hands etc. These artistes come to the theatre with varying ideas, orientations, wishes, aspirations, vocations and perceptions and their artistry is expected functionally to be rolled into one product (the play production). The production is the only end-product of the theatre. It is the only material available and at the disposal of the theatre organization for the purpose of attaining set goals and objectives. If the personnel (artistes) are not properly managed and harmonized, the product will be faulty and the theatre organization may not attain pre-determined goals.

The task of management is to help the organization attain its goals and objectives more effectively and efficiently. This is not only within the organization but as well as create an understanding environment between the outside world and the business and equally promote welfare conditions physiologically (Udoeyop 18). Individuals (artistes) in their aggregate constitute the building blocks of an organization (Inyang, “Organisational Behaviour…” 97). This paper therefore examines the options within the ambience of communication, open to the Theatre Administrator (the head of theatre organizations) in order to foster coherence and adequately harmonise theatre personnel towards achieving set goals and objectives of theatre organizations. These objectives according to Nwamuo, include guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profits(24).

**Understanding Effective Communication**

Communication is a pervasive phenomenon. It is a flash-light which illuminates the paths man tread in the intriguing environment he has found himself. Without communication, perhaps the paths would not only have been dark and slippery but also inundated by thorns and thistles. Ikpe opines that right from the inception of time, man has continued to be a communicating animal. He continues to create, transmit and use information to organize the environment and relate with one another. Communication has remained the most important survival skill for man in his environment. He states further that through the desire for convenient and confident survival, man has succeeded in evolving several communication tools to improve his capabilities. These tools have in turn transformed the human society (166).

Wilson avers that communication has had, and created tremendous impact on the society, thus influencing the order of change with its attendant effects. It is perhaps the most instrumental source of change in our society today. Communication shapes society and it is in turn shaped by society. As water surrounds fish, so does communication encompass us and every one of our activities (151).

Communication is phenomenon that affects all aspects of human activity through the avenues of messages, symbols, signs, sounds etc. It remains significant for social, economic and political sustenance and growth of the society. The concept of communication is sufficient condition for survival of any individual, organization and society. Man is involved in communication either consciously or unconsciously and this makes communication a survival skill (Ebitu 17-18). It touches every sphere of human activity. It is at the centre and informs all of man’s actions since it is predicated upon man’s need to interact with his fellow man (Agbo 73).

James et al see communication as the acts involved in 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). Iji and Enambe posit that this phenomenon remains the process of conveying meanings, thoughts, ideas and feelings among human beings using various methods and elements. It is acclaimed as a social function involving more than one living organism interacting under rules or agreed conventions; in which signs of sharing are mutually beneficial. They go further to assert that achieving good communication is the life-blood of any system, formal or informal (146).

The word communication is said to have evolved or originated from the Latin word “communis” which means, common. In that case, whenever one communicates, the intention is to establish “commonness” with someone (183). This is the driving force behind every communication activity. The extent to which this motive is achieved, marks the degree of success in that endeavour. The process is effective and rewarding when the originator’s intentions are succinctly decoded and action ensues or a feedback is sent. Thus effective communication is a situation where both parties engaged in the process come to a point of “oneness”, that is, understand each other and go beyond this to actualize the motive behind the process, perhaps satisfactorily (Domninick 9).

Within the parameters of an organization, communication still serves the purpose of making the parties to come to terms with each other. Beyond this, it facilitates the attainment of set goals and objectives of the establishment. These are the cardinal objectives of communication in an organisation. Onyene asserts that:

In the management of organizations, to communicate implies having mutually connotative interactive procedure that can enhance not just person to person relationships but the basic and general requirements for the attainment of set goals. Messages, information packages, objectives, decisions and the total mission of organization are carried into action via communication devices (185-186)

Consequently, communication remains a potent tool in the hands of management; for the harmonization of its human capital by creating oneness towards the attainment of the organisation’s goals and objectives. In a theatre organization, effective communication would be deemed to have occurred when the artistes involved in the production actually come to terms with and understand the vision of the Theatre Administrator and tailor their artistry towards achieving same. The concern of this paper is how the Theatre Administrator can employ communication in managing theatre personnel towards achieving the set goals and objectives of his organization.

**The Theatre Administrator**

As stated earlier, the singular product of the theatre is the play production and the organization involves several individuals with different temperaments. Theatre work is a composite. All the individual ideas, notions and skills must be fashioned into one whole presentation for the audience. The presentation itself is life a chain, intimately related and dependent. A lapse or flaw in one section may not be hidden and affects other sections. Anything that would create such anomaly must be avoided and this is where the harmonization of the human capital and their artistry becomes crucial and the theatre administrator takes the centre stage.

The theatre administrator, sometimes called theatre manager, is the head of the theatre organization. The position carries along with it many responsibilities. Remi Adedokun says that he combines both artistic and administrative responsibilities. He is responsible and at the head of the day-to-day programme execution team of the entire organization. He is responsible for almost everything that takes place in the theatre, from policy formulation to programme control (35). Essien agrees with this position in submitting that the theatre administrator facilitates the union of the artistic and non-artistic areas of production and is held responsible for the success or failure of any play production endeavour. This personality engages the services of all the personnel in the organization (22)

Nwamuo asserts that any artiste who consciously plays a significant role in bringing together or facilitating two or more elements of a theatrical performance can rightly be called a theatre administrator. He outlines the elements to include a creative raw material (the script, concept, scenario), a place where the material can be presented (a theatre, a street, a village square, a town-hall, a clearing in the woods), a person to refine the material (an actor, dancer, a singer, a witch-doctor, a choreographer) and an audience ( a group of people who have come to share and witness the production) (43). On his part, Ohiri believes that the theatre manager is that individual, person or staff who takes the pain to procure and mobilize human and material resources in the theatre and profitably utilizes these resources towards achieving good theatre business (81).

One can go on and on examining the criteria for being called a theatre administrator. But one issue remains unarguable; the fact that he remains the head of the theatre organization and is responsible for the success or failure of the organization. To succeed in the task of steering this multi-faceted but uni-directional ship, the theatre administrator must possess certain skills. Nwamuo (62-64) and Ohiri (86-88) prescribe three kinds of skills a theatre administrator must possess. They are Human skill, Technical skill and Conceptual skill.

Consequent upon the significance of the human capital in theatre organizational framework, the human skill requirement of the theatre administrator is highlighted. Ohiri, quoting Ade Oyedijo states that:

Human skill refers to the ability of the manager to work co-operatively with other people to lead subordinates in the desired direction, to understand and consider their needs as human beings, to communicate to them effectively and create a climate under which they can feel secured and willing to participate actively in planning and decision making and in executing those things that directly affect their interests (86-87).

This skill assists the theatre administrator work adequately with people (the artistes). It helps him communicate effectively with the artistes. A theatre administrator without human skill is a failure *ab initio* because he would have lost a very essential tool of the office. He will not be able to communicate effectively with the personnel. Communication is an essential element for the task of working through people. His inadequacy in this regard will make him a failure. In summary, the human skill is an invaluable tool he must posses in order to functionally communicate with the personnel towards achieving the aims and objectives of his theatre organization.

**Communication Imperatives and the Theatre Administrator**

It is established that personnel are the building blocks and one of the live-wires of an organization. It is also noted that the theatre administrator needs posses human skills in order to communicate effectively. It is equally understood that communication remains a potent tool for the task of getting things done through people. It needs be stressed that the hall-mark of communication is understanding and co-operation. Thus, the theatre administrator is seeking to elicit understanding of his view points, his perceptions and projections from the various artistes. He wants them to come to terms with the rationale behind the decision to pursue a particular format or course in realizing the productions. Beyond this, he desires their co-operation to bring these visions to consummation. Without their understanding and co-operation, the divergent views and perceptions of the artistes cannot be harmonized into one complete whole that would affect the audience in the desired manner. What avenues and options are open to the theatre administrator to explore in order to ensure understanding and co-operation of the personnel? Below are some of the recommendations.

**Self Conviction**

Psychologists believe and indeed it is a truism that the first step towards solving a problem hinges on the acknowledgement in the first instance that there is a problem. It is rather difficult for one to embark on problem-solving when there is no realization of the existence of a problem. So the theatre administrator must in the first instance be convinced of the potency of communication. He must also acknowledge the importance and significance of effective communication in the execution of his functions. He needs equally to be adequately schooled in the art of communication and believe in the capacity of communication to assist in the handling of personnel towards the attainment of pre-determined goals and objectives.

Without this very important aspect, the theatre administrator may just be groping. He knows his target but does not know how to get there. If at all he employs communication in this case, it would be done out of intuition not from the stand-point of knowledge and information. A well known principle in law support this assertion in the maxim, *nemo dat quod non habet* meaning that no one can give what he does not own or have (Worugji and Ekpo 88-89).

**Breakdown of All Barriers**

Barriers are barricades that obstruct and sometimes distort communication messages. These could manifest in form of disparities in educational attainment, technical know-how and other aspects. The theatre administrator should endeavour to come down and operate on the same pedestal with his personnel. If he belongs to the group that speaks in poetic and high language, he should endeavour to be prosaic for the understanding of the personnel. He should speak the language of the personnel. This may be the reason why Nwamuo recommends that a theatre administrator needs to be a trained artist. This, he states, would enable him appreciate his job, the work of fellow artistes and the quality of the production he wants the audience to patronize. If he is a trained artiste, he would consider himself a partner with the other artistes and regard all as being in a co-operative venture of a theatrical production (40).

It is indeed necessary for the theatre administrator to take steps to break down these barriers. Without this, his messages may be blurred and subject to misinterpretations. Feedback may not come to him. Even where it does, it would be wrong since the premise is already wrong.

**Information Management**

Every good administrator is a good information manager. If information concerning the operations of the organization are not properly managed, there will be room for speculations and rumours which may be injurious to the corporate existence of the organization, especially when they border on personnel interests. Example is the Cross River State Cultural Centre Troupe’s participation in the annual (National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST). For some years, between 1999 and 2007, the troupe did not participate in the festival but each of these years, the centre had been assembling and preparing the troupe and other guest artistes for participation.

Due to the dearth of information and lack of proper briefing, the artistes were left to speculate and rumours were peddled here and there over the non-representation of the state. Some artistes believed that their officers and managers had connived to embezzle funds meant for the festival. Others artistes had some other wrong notions. This affected the output of the artistes who adopted nonchalant attitudes, but for the fact that they operate under the civil service, they would all have abandoned the productions. The guest artistes pulled out progressively. The truth of the matter is that due to massive investments in other sectors, provision was not made for participation in the festival for the years above mentioned. It is necessary for the personnel to be adequately briefed and on time and the position of the government clearly known to the artistes and their managers.

**Sense of Belonging**

To administer properly the affairs of the theatre organization, the theatre administrator must give every personnel a sense of belonging. He must listen to everybody or create channels which give every artiste the opportunity to air out his view. This breeds a sense of belonging. He has to make the artistes realize that they are all partners in progress. That the success of the organization is everybody’s success, not a crown for one individual. He should have that humane touch which propels him to be interested in the affairs and well-being of the personnel and to help solve whatever problems they may have.

Certain decisions can be taken by the artistes. For instance a decision whether to repeat a particular production or not, even though a prerogative of the theatre administrator, can be handled by the artistes. It gives them a sense of belonging and breeds commitment. An artiste with Kesimekpa troupe based in Calabar and Ikom, or Ikon Africana based in Uyo, who is so treated, sees himself as part of the theatre family and would strive to put in his best and ensure the organization’s success.

**Transparency/Prudent Management of Funds**

It is recommended that the administrator be transparent in his dealings. If this is done, the personnel would be confident that they are in a worth-while venture. They would have the feeling that the administrator has nothing to hide; no skeleton in his cup-board. The artistes as a result, would be willing to co-operate with him and follow directives issued by him. It is likely that they would share more in the aspirations of the administrator and strive to help him attain them. Even where the outfit is not that buoyant financially, with transparency, the personnel are likely to persevere and make recommendations for the up-liftment of the theatre organization. They will trust in the organization.

Finance is a very crucial issue in organizational management. Prudent management of funds is essential. Once a wrong signal is sent from this area, the personnel are likely to be jittery because their livelihood is threatened.

**Accessibility**

The administrator must not be a semi-god. He must make himself approachable and accessible. He must earn the respect of the artistes instead of demanding for same. With this, the artistes or personnel will be able to approach him and pass any information without fear, reservations or resentment. This enhances the possibility of getting feedback on policy executions and suggestions on issues and operations. The artistes are like foot soldiers or field workers; they need to be listened to.

**Conflicts between the Artistes**

The vision and yearning of any theatre administrator involves basically the tripartite objectives of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profits. Due to the nature of theatre as a collaborative art involving various artistes like the director, assistant director, stage manager, actors, actresses, house manager, costume designer, production manager, props-man, lighting designer, make-up artist, carpenters, choreographers, stage hands etc, with different temperaments, aspirations and vocations, conflicts often arise between the artistes, which sometimes threaten the success of the production and the attainment of the objectives. It is the duty of the theatre administrator to identify such conflicts and settle or nib them in the bud (Essien 21-22). If this is not done, the problem may escalate with other artistes taking sides. The aggression may be transferred to the production. This is the only product the theatre and theatre administrator have; they cannot afford to toy with it.

**Conclusion**

Human and material resources are pre-requisites for the success of any organization including theatre. The human capital seems to tower above others in the sense that it utilizes other factors and drives them in a certain direction to achieve pre-determined goals.

The theatre administrator is the head of the theatre organization and has artistes with varying temperaments, vocations, aspirations etc as his building blocks. He must possess certain skills to succeed in his endeavour, particularly human skill and to harmonize the artistry of the various artistes. One very potent tool for the purpose of harmonizing the human capital available to him is communication. The hall-mark of this phenomenon is understanding and co-operation. The administrator is seeking for understanding of his visions and co-operation from the artistes. If he wants to succeed in the task of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profits, then he should explore the realms of communication. It would be interesting to compare a theatre administrator who employs communication and the one who does not.

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