

A CONGENIAL COMMUNICATION CLIMATE: THE CATALYST AND PANACEA FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

***Bifatife Olufemi ADESEYE, Ph.D.**
****Innocent Afolabi ARIREMAKO, Ph.D.**

Abstract

The spirit of positive relationships should be the sine qua non to communication climate. Social scientists use the term communication climate to describe the quality of personal relationships in an organization. Do people feel respected? Do they trust one another? Do they believe that they are appreciated? The weather metaphor suggested by the term 'climate' is apt. Your own experience shows that the mood of a workplace can be described as sunny and calm, cold and stormy, or in similar terms, organizations create an overall climate, which can be healthy or polluted, but within that environment, individual relationships have their own micro climate. For instance, your interactions with one colleague might be described as icy, while you and another person enjoy a warm or cordial relationship. There is no question that communication climate is a key factor in job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. For this reason, communicators need to understand how to create positive climates. This article focuses on how to develop and improve the personal communication skills that are critical to the well being and successes of individuals and corporate organisations. The study adopts trait theory of leadership as its framework. It describes the necessary and proactive ingredients that foster a positive communication climate between people. It goes on to offer pertinent pieces of advice about how to communicate in a variety of person-to-person-situations; leadership styles, congenial climate and emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Communication climate, Informal networks, Emotional intelligence, Leadership styles, Organizational communication

***Bifatife Olufemi ADESEYE, Ph.D.** is of the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
Email: bifatife.adeseye@fuoye.edu.ng

****Innocent Afolabi ARIREMAKO, Ph.D.** is of the Department of English, Houdegbe North American University, Cotonou, Republic of Benin
Email: Ariremakoinnocent@yahoo.com

Introduction

Communication, as used in this study, is a social process wherein people that occupy differing environments exchange messages in a specific context via one or more channels and often respond to each other's messages through verbal and nonverbal feedback. The effectiveness of communication can be diminished by physical, linguistic, physiological, or psychological noise, which can exist within the sender, receiver, or channel. Communication is an unavoidable, inevitable, irreversible process. Although it is vitally important, it is not a panacea that can solve every personal and organizational problem. Adeseye and Ibagere affirm the inevitability of communication as captured in the comment: "you cannot not communicate" (34).

Attending to the fundamental elements of the communication process can improve chances of success, choosing the most credible sender, picking the optimal receivers and attending to their needs, developing messages strategically and structuring them clearly, minimizing communication noise, and taking advantages of feedback to clarify confusing messages. James asserts that:

Formal communications networks – which can be pictured in flowcharts and organizational charts – are management's way of establishing what it believes are necessary relationships among people within an organization. Formal communication flows in several directions: downward from superiors to subordinates, upward from subordinates to superiors, and horizontally or cross-wisely among people of equal rank. Formal communication structures are necessary as a business grows and its tasks become more complex, but they must be handled carefully to avoid problems. (10)

Unlike formal relationships, informal communication networks consist of interaction patterns that are not designed by management. Informal networks can be based on physical proximity, shared career interests, or personal friendships. An informal network can be quite small or a large grapevine that connects many people. Informal networks serve many purposes: they can confirm, expand upon, expedite, contradict, circumvent, or supplement formal messages. Because these functions are so useful, it is important to cultivate and use informal contacts within an organization.

In business, communicators can exchange messages via a number of channels, some oral and others written. Little Peter explains

that “the channel used to deliver a message can have a strong influence on its effectiveness. Each channel has both advantages and drawbacks. The best choice in a given situation depends primarily on the nature of the message and the desired relationship between the sender and receiver” (6). Of course, the transmission of information (a message) between a source and a receiver using a signalling system: in linguistic contexts, source and receiver are interpreted in human terms. The system involved a language, and the notion of response to (or acknowledgement of message) becomes of crucial importance in organizational communication.

What is Communication Climate?

Just as factors such as weather and physical space impact us, communication climate influences our interpersonal interactions. Communication climate is the “overall feeling or emotional mood between people” (Wood 245). The climate of an organization is not so much from the specific task that members perform as the feelings they have about those tasks and each other. In fact, a positive climate can exist under the worst working conditions. Whenever there are people there will be a variety of attitudes, biases, and states of mind. The aura created by the totality of these determines the kinds of emotional attitude that pervades an organization (James 20). James opines that communication climate is what we refer to as the climate of the organization. The climate reflects the emotional environment of the entire organization; and, as must be expected, the quality of this environment varies from one organization to another.

In some organizations the climate is friendly and supportive. People come to work cheerfully, greet each other, discuss their professional and personal concerns, laugh, and tease each other, and cooperate, and help each other when difficult situations arise. Lapses or misdemeanours on the part of subordinates are discussed and dealt with in the context of each person’s relevance to efficient functioning of the organization. In other organizations the climate could be cold, formal, and tense. Interpersonal communication tends to be restricted to verbal exchange on official matters. When a subordinate does something wrong, he/she is not called and interviewed or quietly reprimanded; he/she is given a query. Letters of warning, queries and petitions are frequently used. Employees feel detached and overcautious. This cold, hostile climate breeds dissatisfaction, disaffection, rumour, pettiness, parochial jealousy, suspicion and bickering. In this regard, James claims that:

The atmosphere that prevails in an organization is influenced by the style of

leadership. Some managers are approachable, others are not. Some are authoritative and make workers cringe in their presence; others are friendly and treat their employees as members of their own family; they are easily accessible, discuss organizational problems and seek opinions. In organizations in which there is a conducive, cordial, respectful relationship between managers and subordinate staff, the climate is cheerful and open: workers tend to perform their duties to the best of their ability. This type of (congenial) climate is an asset to any organization. (20)

While communication climates are created by a variety of messages, they do share a common denominator. Positive climates result when people believe they are valued, and negative climates occur when they do not believe they are appreciated or celebrated. Scholars have labelled messages that express feelings of value as confirming and those that fail to express valuing – or those that explicitly show a lack of valuing – as disconfirming. Psychologist Jack Gibb, in *Defensive Communication* described six types of supportive statements that are likely to promote a confirming climate. Gibb's supportive categories provide a list of ways to promote positive, congenial, cordial, confirming relationships (20). They include the next sub-headings, but are not limited to them:

Use Descriptive “I” Language: Many communicators, according to Gibb, unnecessarily attack the other person when delivering a message: “Your report is too sloppy. You’ll have to retype it” (21). “This is the third time this month that you’ve been late for work. You’ll have to be more punctual”. “That was a dump promise you made. We can never have the job done by the end of the month” (21). Statements such as these are often called “you” language because they point a verbal finger of accusation at the receiver: “You’re lazy.” “You’re wrong.” By contrast, descriptive statements are often termed “I” language since they focus on the speaker instead of judging the other person. Notice how each of the evaluative statement above can be rephrased in descriptive ‘I’ language: “I am afraid the boss will get angry at both of us if we turn in a report with these many errors. We will get a better reaction if it is retyped.” “Since you have been coming in late, I have made a lot of excuses when people call asking for you. I am uncomfortable with that, and that is why I hope you will start showing

up on time". "I am worried about the promise you made. I do not see how we can get the job done by the end of the month" (22).

Statements such as the foregoing show that it is possible to be non-judgemental and still stay with what you want without landing any verbal punches. In fact, descriptive statements such as the ones you just read are more complete than are typical everyday complaints since they express both the speaker's feeling and the reason for bringing up the matter – things most evaluative remarks do not do.

Focus on Solving Problems, not Controlling Others

Locker Shuns observes that some messages try to force others to do something they do not agree with or understand. If you are up against a tight deadline, for example, it is easy to say, 'look, I do not have time to explain – just do it my way". Because control shows a lack of regard for the other person's needs, interest, or opinions, it can cause problems in the relationship even if it gets you what you want now. In control, problem-oriented messages aim at solving both persons' needs (6). The goal is not to solve a problem my way or your way but rather to develop a solution that meets everyone's needs. You will learn more about how to achieve problem-oriented solution when we discuss other strategies later in this paper.

The Relevance of Honesty

Once people discover that they have been manipulated, a defensive reaction is almost guaranteed. As Roger Fisher and Scott Brown explain, "If one statement of mine in a hundred is false, you may choose not to rely on me at all. Unless you can develop a theory of when I am honest and when I am not, your discovery of a small dishonesty will cast doubt over everything I say and do." By contrast, simple honesty is less likely to generate defensiveness, even when the news is not welcome. Even though others might sometimes dislike what you have to say, your reputation for candour and sincerity can earn you the respect of subordinates, co-workers, and of course management.

Show Concern for Others

Indifference or lack of acknowledgement or concern for others- is a strong disconfirming message. By contrast, a genuine message of interest can make a tremendous difference. A simple apology for making you wait can do wonders. The secretary who takes the time to find the right person to answer your question can leave you feeling grateful and worthwhile, encouraging you to do business with that company again. The manager who seems genuinely concerned with

Table 3: Potential Problems

Insufficient or unclear messages	Superiors may discourage, disregard or downplay importance of subordinates	Rivalry may occur between employees
Messages overload	Physical barriers discourage contact	Specialisation makes understanding difficult
Messages distorted as they pass through one or more intermediaries	Supervisor may unfairly blame subordinates for unpleasant news	Psychological barriers discourage contact

The tables (1-3) above show tools for diagnosing communication climate of a working group – (Locker 6-7).

Communication Functions in Organizations

It is no exaggeration to say that the communication functions are the means by which organized activity is unified. Eisenberg believes that “it may be looked upon as the proactive means of which social inputs are fed into social systems. It is also the means by which behaviour is modified, change is affected, information is made productive, and goals are achieved” (30). Whether it is within church, a family, an industry, an institution, or a business enterprise, the transfer of relevant information from one individual to another is absolutely essential. In organization communication, managers need to inspire, to lead, to communicate a vision. A clear idea of the organizational purpose is essential but insufficient for leading. This vision must be articulated. This means not only stating the facts, but also delivering them in a way that inspires the employees of the organization by catering for their values, their pride, and their personal objective.

Rational reasoning needs to be supplemented by emotional appeal, and the message must be delivered in an understandable manner to the employees. State the mission in a way that is congruent with positive values and beliefs. Also show your enthusiasm and emotions in articulating your vision and mission for the company.

Leadership Styles in Organizational Communication Climate

Leadership demands information about what is really going on in the organization. According to George and Stone, “managers who never leave the office and who rely on formal communication channels may receive only the information that places subordinates in a favourable

light. To overcome their isolation, managers need to supplement the formal communication channels with informal ones" (17). In their search for excellent companies, Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman noted that managers at United Airlines practise what has been labelled "management by walking around." A similar practice is called "management by wandering around" at Hewlett-Packard (www.businessdictionary.com/definition/management-by-walking-around-MBWA.html). The belief is that managers will improve informal communication channels by walking through the plant.

However, a survey of CEOs in Fortune 500 enterprises indicated that executives spend little time with lower-level employees. Henry Mintzberg, who previously studied the activities of executives, interpreted the findings as showing that "management by walking around" is not very prevalent in these large companies. Managers spend a lot of time with those who are at similar organizational levels. Yet by wandering around, managers could obtain a great deal of information not available through formal communication channel.

Leadership and Communication

Communication is versatile because it is a sine-qua-non in every society, organization, school, church, family, etc. The effective functioning of these ties largely depends on an uninterrupted information flow through the different units of this system. This is only possible where there is a leader who also serves as a sender or initiator of a communication process. A leader is one that is saddled with the responsibilities of harnessing and mobilizing the natural and human resources available to any society, organization, school, church or family. McGinnies conceptualises leadership as a process involving a man's ability to take the initiative in social situations, to plan and organize actions and in doing so, evoke co-operation (237).

Theories of Leadership

The concept of leadership can be viewed from five different perspectives; trait, psychiatric, environmental, contingency and humanistic. The study adopts trait theory of leadership as its main theoretical framework. However, the relevance of other leadership theories to congenial communication climate will be explored.

- (a) **Trait Theory:** In psychology, trait theory (also called dispositional theory) is an approach to the study of human personality via the measurement of traits, which can be defined as habitual patterns of behaviour, thought and emotion (www.simplypsychology.org/traittheory). This theory stipulates that leaders are measured in terms of physical height or weight which makes them unique when

compared to their followers. Other traits of a leader are: tact and intelligence, self-confidence, loyalty, knowledge, cleverness, initiative and courage.

- (b) **Psychiatric Theory:** This theory posits that leaders should be clinically certified to be mentally sound without any trait such as quick loss of temper, derailment of thought flow, etc which are commonly associated with mentally sick people.
- (c) **Environmental Theory:** This theory according to Stodgill (1974) quoted in Olateju (99) says "leadership is an innate and acquired modal societal tendency of force; that is, it is related to the organized and organizing phases of the social process or to the habitual, tensional-adaptive phase of association". In essence, leadership is the product of the society because environment or society helps to create certain leadership qualities in any personality.
- (d) **Contingency Theory:** It is a permissive and considerate leader who depends more on the cordiality of the group members and performs better under a less stressful working condition.
- (e) **Humanistic Theory:** This concept of leadership believes that a leader possesses the ability to effectively harness and mobilize individual followers so that such individual can realize his potentials without disturbing the group objective.

In all, the trait theory of leadership accommodates most of the concepts enunciated by the other four examples listed above, thus making it the best choice for the framework.

Leadership Styles

All these constituents of leadership outline above are realizable only if there is a due communication process in place. This communication process is achievable through the use of verbal and non-verbal methods of communication. Raheem affirms that:

The style a leader employs in any environment is determined by the type of leadership in place. For instance, a *bureaucratic* leader who believes he/she should relate with followers in accordance with the laid down rules may prefer to communicate with them through the written communication than any other method. An *autocratic* leader who exhibits boss to servant disposition towards his/her followers

may employ spoken method of communication since he/she would want to have immediate feedback on how his/her instructions and directives are carried out by his/her followers. (6)

A *democratic* leader who believes in a collective responsibility and dual flow of information from the people to the leader and from the leader to the followers may prefer to use both the verbal and non-verbal communication methods so that he/she may be able to reach out to different cadres of his/her followers. A spiritual leader and traditional leader, like a democratic leader, employ the same methods of communication. Lastly, a diplomatic leader is a type who believes in manipulating his followers for his selfish interest. Therefore, he/she needs to have all the methods of communication at his disposal to achieve his anticipated desire.

Qualities of a Leader

A good leader possesses certain qualities. According to Pearson, the qualities include the following:

1. He/she must be intelligent.
2. He/she must be dynamic.
3. He/she must be courageous.
4. He must be tactful.
5. He/she must be initiative.
6. He/she must be tolerant.
7. He/she must be organized.
8. He/she must be sensitive.
9. He/she must have a positive influence over his members.
10. He/she must be a good listener (Pearson 273).

Human Relations in Communication Climate

Human Relations involves the dealings, interaction or association between people or group of people. It is studied through observations of human communication by examining the existing flow of information (verbal or non-verbal) to know what went in, what went out, and how it affects or modifies behaviour or shapes attitude. Human Relations therefore involves linkage between information, attitude and behaviour. Human Relations helps us to understand the forces, causes, factors and circumstances that can influence people's behaviour or opinion. It enables us to know what will work or will not work in any relationship. Because it promotes an atmosphere of mutual understanding and

confidence in relationships, the knowledge of the principles of Human Relations empowers individuals and organizations in the task of ensuring peaceful co-existence among the general public, individuals, institutions and the society as a whole.

Communication in Human Relations

Stewart and Tubbs further expand their assertion that “communication in human relations deals with the exchange of thoughts, ideas, and information, verbally or non-verbally, meant to bring about mutual understanding and confidence” (12). The key issue in communication is that a signal or set of signals provide the frame-work with which to process the contact. Communication is very important in any relationship. It is for this reason that what people say to each other and how they say them affect relationship. For instance, the way we greet and the response to it can make someone to decide against greeting that person next time. Man is critical part of the communication behaviour. So, in communication, we study these different kinds of communication behaviour exhibited at the cognitive and affective levels and the persons involved in the communication.

When a cooperative attitude dominates any interaction, the performance contributes to a successful resolution of conflicts. But when competitive or confrontational stance dominates, there would be no opportunity to save face and successfully resolve conflicts. Moreover, for strangers and casual acquaintances, optimal persuasive strategy is required in communicative situations. To communicate effectively, the participant should be guided by:

- (i) the necessity of meeting the needs of the recipient(s); and
- (ii) the purpose of communicating the information.

Three basic purposes of communication in human relations have been identified as:

- (I) to inform;
- (II) to request; and
- (III) to build goodwill. This is also described as an investment in social support.

When we communicate information, the message should be effectively and explicitly communicated. It should be explicit and effective so that the objective can be achieved without delay. In communicating a request, opinions should be presented softly and clearly so that disagreements that may surface could be resolved early enough, and the request granted. If the intention is to communicate in order to build goodwill, then there is the need to build a positive image of oneself.

Interpersonal Relationships in Communication Climate

The ability to express an idea clearly is well-nigh as important as the idea itself. Interpersonal communication relationship skill is the ability to build continuous personality, likeability, openness, credibility and believability into everything we communicate. This is because interpersonal communication dominates our daily activities in the office, at home, in the club, in the market, and everywhere. In business, industry and similar organisations, interpersonal communication systematically helps to break the barrier of formal relationships, generates warmth, cordiality, and creates productivity. It is therefore a very significant form of communication that makes a difference to your social and professional effectiveness because of the increasingly competitive environment.

It must be noted that communicating with one another is not a science. It does not have a regimented or mechanical set of precise and exacting procedures. There are specific sound principles and themes, but there are thousands of variations on these themes. Thus, it is an art to use your skills and capabilities to best advantage within the framework of the principles outlined in organisation/industries. In all human relationships, offence comes during our interacting with one another daily. Interpersonal communication among other benefits helps us to live in harmony, share our feelings, gain pleasure and companionship, exchange ideas and experiences, influence others, develop speaking skill, create rapport, create a storehouse of information, and develop a real interest in different kinds of people. Without interpersonal communication, there would be no friendships, cordial relationships and a congenial communication climate. This paper, therefore, provides the basics of good interpersonal skills; all of which can be learned and improved upon with practice. It further gives you the 'brush-strokes' of interpersonal communication list of some communication circumstances or situations where interpersonal skills are applied. Bernard affirms that;

Some interpersonal situations repeat themselves so often that we can learn certain protocol for handling them successfully. These situations include asking questions, answering questions, giving directions, apologizing, making introductions and participating in conversations. Effective interpersonal communications improve their skills by ensuring that their communication meets these standards; assertiveness, facts, courtesy, specificity, relevance and sincerity.

Because these situations are so common, they are important for anyone in social and personal communication. (8)

Going by the submissions made so far, we observe that interpersonal skills are used proactively in the following moments: a job interview; a business meeting; an after-dinner speech; a marriage proposal; a house dedication; a naming ceremony; a send forth party; a press conference; a departmental meeting; a cocktail party; a shareholders' meeting; a play; a conversation with friends/boss; a teacher teaching; a doctor consulting; a lawyer briefing; a pastor counselling or delivering sermon, etc. Interpersonal communication has a unique and singular advantage of immediate response/feedback which may provide a signal for the source or encoder to modify his subsequent message. Finally, it promotes team/work spirit, lightens jobs assigned, and facilitates congenial environment, mutual understanding, intelligibility and congenial communication climate.

Emotional Intelligence in Organisation Communication

Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage and use your emotions in positive and constructive ways. When it comes to satisfaction and success at work, emotional intelligence is about communicating with others in ways that draw people to you, overcome differences, repair wounded feelings, and defuse tension and stress. Emotional intelligence is further defined as the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and emphatically. Emotional intelligence is the key to both personal and professional success (www.pluralsight.com/introduction+to+emotional+intelligence). Emotional intelligence in the workplace has four major components. Stewart and Tubbs suggest the following proactive antidotes to organizational communication:

- i. Self-Awareness: The ability to recognize your emotions and their impact while using gut feeling to guide your decisions.
- ii. Self-management: The ability to control your emotions and behaviour and adapt to changing circumstances.
- iii. Social-awareness: The ability to sense, understand and react to other's emotions and feel comfortable socially.
- iv. Relationship management: The ability to inspire, influence and connect to others and manage conflict. (17)

Key skills of emotional intelligence are further proposed by Stewart and Tubbs:

- i. Realize when you are stressed and act quickly to do things that can calm and energize you. It could be through any of the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.
- ii. Stay connected to your internal emotional experience. Let it guide you in appropriately managing your own emotions on a moment to moment basis.
- iii. Recognize and effectively use the non-verbal cues. These make up 95%- 98% of our communication process. E.g. eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, posture, gesture, body language and touch. Your non-verbal messages can either produce a sense of interest, trust and desire for connection or they can generate confusion, distrust and stress. You also need to be able to accurately read and respond to the non-verbal cues that other people send you at work.
- iv. Develop the capacity to meet challenges with humour. Mutually shared humour and a hearty laugh have been described as the best stress busters.
- v. Resolve conflict positively. Resolving conflict in healthy and constructive ways can strengthen trust between people and diffuse workplace stress and tension. Disregard old hurts and resentment when handling emotionally charged situations, connect with your emotions, and hear both the words and the non-verbal cues being used. If a conflict cannot be resolved, choose to end the argument even if you still disagree (19).

Further Remarks and Conclusion

Without pretending to be exhaustive, this article has established and clearly demonstrated that effective organizational communication is immensely dependent on a congenial communication climate. However, to achieve the lofty goals, a proactive number of elements or ingredients should be taken into consideration in an effective, conducive organisational communication climate, namely, type of formal communication channels in organizations. The communication functions, leadership styles, theories and qualities, human relations syndrome/in communication, emotional intelligence are recipes among other factors. Of course, it is axiomatic that communication is said to have taken place if the message transmitted by the sender/encoder is understood in the same way by the receiver/decoder without distortion. It is important to consider the needs of the employee or receivers of the information. Whenever appropriate, one should communicate something that is of value to them, in the short run as well as in the more distant future. At times, unpopular actions that

affect employees in the short run may be more easily accepted if they are beneficial to them in the long run. For instance, changing the duration of the workweek may be more acceptable if, it is made clear that this action will strengthen the competitive position of the company in the long run and avoid layoffs.

There is a saying that the tone makes the music. Similarly, in communication the tone of voice, the choice of language and the congruency between what is said and how it is said influence the reaction of the receiver of the message. An autocratic manager ordering subordinate supervisors to practise participative management will create a credibility gap that will be difficult to overcome. Too often information is transmitted without communicating, since communication is complete only when the message is understood by the receiver and one never knows whether communication is understood unless the sender gets feedback. This is accomplished by asking question, requesting a reply to a letter, and encouraging receivers to give their reactions to the message. The task of this study has been to show that the function of communication is more than transmitting information. It also deals with emotions that are very important in interpersonal relationships between superiors, subordinates and colleagues in an organization. Furthermore, communication is vital for creating an environment in which people are motivated to work towards the goals of the enterprise while they achieve their personal aims. Another function is control. As explained in the discussion of management by objectives (MBO); philosophy emphasizes self-control, which demands clear communication with an understanding of the criteria against which performance is measured.

It is realized that, effective communication is the responsibility of not only of the sender but also of the receiver of the information. Ultimately, problem-solving will surely depend on information. Without information, the problem-solving sequence is random, based on hunches, emotions, feelings, and supposition. Hunches are important, but they are no substitute for good information about the problem being addressed. It is not an extravagant claim to reiterate that there is no genuine/effective organizational communication unless the transmitted message is received by the appropriate person to who it is addressed and has a congenial atmosphere or positive relationship to pervade or exist generally.

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