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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY AND COMPANY IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

Business communication is the exchange of business related ideas and information in a specific manner to achieve the goals of organizations and dependent on reflective listening. The objective of this research is to determine the impact of communication on the productivity and image of organisations using Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority. Convenient sampling technique was used in selecting forty respondents, comprising of employees from eight departments. Questionnaires were administered to the respondents to get the needed information. It was identified that communication has a negative effect on productivity whiles it has a positive effect on company image since the company focuses more on external communication than internal communication. It was proposed that management should concentrate on effective communication in order to enhance its image and productivity.

Keywords: Business, Communication, Organisational development, Globalisation, Productivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The business market environment conditions are continuously changing. The competition is heating up; information is being disseminated faster than ever — thanks to developing technology (Dortok, 2006). Dortok (2006) further asserts that "given the changing conditions of the market, it is now a must that not only production, finance and business processes, but also communication processes are managed strategically" (p.322). Accordingly, the assumption that a company's interaction with its stakeholders is what makes up its corporate reputation (image) and this interaction has an impact on the company's business results (productivity), has been discussed and confirmed as compelling (Dortok, 2006). Ali and Haider (2012) consider this organizational

practice as "a dynamic process which involves complex communication techniques, networks and channels". It can also be explained as the transfer and exchange of information and understanding from one person to another through meaningful symbols

Communication is more than mere thought, speech or document. It is a process that involves thought and action and it is on-going. It occupies more time than any other activity and often makes the difference between success and failure for the organization as a whole (Adler and Elmhorst, 2005). Effective communication is a key component to business success it helps meet challenges such as advances in technology, growth of globalization and workplace diversity (Bovee *et al.*, 2004). It equally, defines most organizations in terms of their marketing campaigns, productive interpersonal relationships among co-workers and successful customer service resolutions. Therefore the impulse of this study is to assess the relationship that exists between communication and productivity and company image.

There have been several problems with communication on the part of workers and managers in various organizations (Ober, 2006). This has caused several organizations in diverse ways ranging from jobs left undone resulting in low productivity, to loss of revenue through reduction in sales as well as the company's image. Further, a national survey conducted by the U.S. Labor Department concluded that 20% of all U.S. managers lacked effective communication skills even though were trained as accountants, managers, marketers, financial analysts, engineers, and in other professions. Corporate image has become a major concern for companies, as it is now a value that is hard to achieve and yet easy to lose (Dortok, 2006). In order for companies to accurately manage corporate image, they have to identify and analyze the stakeholders' expectations and the role they play in a corporate image (Dortok, 2006). One of the key stakeholders who influence corporate image and vice versa, are employees. They are significant factors whose significant roles become increasingly effective in everyday business (Dortok, 2006). Other findings (from the aforementioned literature) reveal that productivity in the organization is affected by the communication between the supervisor/superior and the subordinate. This was attributed to the fact that employees work on the instructions of supervisors. Hence, when the communication to produce is not received effetively, then productivity is affected negatively and the reverse also holds.

This study therefore sought to explore the impact of communication on:

➢ the productivity of Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority [GPHA]
➢ the reputation of GPHA

2. THE LITERATURE

2.1. The Concept of Communication

Communication is derived from the Latin word "communis" meaning common. To Bonner and Chaney (2002), communication is the activity or the process of expressing ideas and feelings.

Bovee and Thill (2005) also define communication as the process of sending and receiving messages. They further explained that communication is only effective when the message is understood, and when it stimulates action or encourages the receiver to think in so many ways.

Communication has been widely accepted by scholars and academics as the lifeblood of an organization. This is because communication is needed for exchanging information and opinions, making plans and proposals, reaching agreement, executing decisions, sending and fulfilling orders and conducting sales (Alysa, 2005; Blalock, 2005; Kotler, 2006). According to Kotler (2006), communication is the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade and remind consumers directly or indirectly about the products and brands that they sell. This form of communicating to the customers does not just deal with the products and brands but also deal with the image of the company to the consumers.

According to Downs *et al.* (1973), when employees are not merely satisfied or dissatisfied with communication in general, they can express varying degrees of satisfaction about definite categories or types of communication. This explains why when employees are not communicated to effectively; they tend to interpret it the way they understand.

Further, according to Okoro and Washington (2012), both practitioners and researchers point to education and communication as the key for corporations to transform the behavior of their employees toward embracing and accepting diversity. They continue that a diverse workforce that effectively communicates can take advantage of the strengths, talents, and differences in the workplace. This according to them eliminates communication barriers and develops employees to their fullest potential, and also increase productivity (Okoro and Washington, 2012).

2.2. The Concept of Productivity

To Teng (2013) productivity is about the effective and efficient use of all resources. According to him, resources available for organisations to achieve productivity include time, people, knowledge, information, finance, equipment, space, energy, and materials. Therefore, to manage the resources of a business, it is essential that a manager understands the requirements of customer demands. This can be achieved by explaining the requirements of customers to employees; establish a well-defined communication plan that clearly identifies work to be performed; and define and implement distinct methodologies to be used in the completion of all activities and tasks efficiently.

2.3. Company Image

According to Verčič and Verčič (2007), company image has been recognized as one of the key foundations on which to build corporate success. To them corporate image is not only the result of past performance but also 'a strategic construct, which includes deliberate attempts to

manage and monitor relations between organizations and their multiple stakeholders' Vercˇicˇ and Vercˇicˇ (2007). The multiple stakeholders here include employees who contribute to the day to day running of the organization. The employees may impact the image of the company positively or negatively. Moulding and shaping corporate image is a highly positive, constructive job, which needs to be approached with vigour and enthusiasm. There are, however, several problems that management should frankly face up to and some that it may have to live with (Theaker, 2004). Creating and selling a company image is far more than a task for the public relations staff. Every activity of the company adds some meaning to the public's picture of the management running the organization.

Companies have carried out institutional advertising for many years and refined public relations. People have long stressed the significance of many kinds of intelligent effort in building up a general reservoir of good will for a firm. As a result, the concept of a company image has been given much greater meaning to these efforts. In a remarkably few years, the goals of advertising and marketing in the consumer field have been broadened past the functional stages (Balmer and Greyser, 2003).Today, sophisticated strategy embraces a conscious effort to create a distinctive and, of course, positive company image. A successful brand always has psychological meanings and dimensions which are just as real to the purchaser as its physical properties, and in many instances the purely subjective attributes play a far more important role (Balmer and Greyser, 2003).

An organization's product and subsidiary brands are contributors of company image (Einwiller and Will, 2002). According to Balmer (1995), stakeholders can receive messages and information (through communication) from external sources (such as word of mouth) which may not be within the control of the company. Therefore, creating and maintaining a positive reputation and an implied favorable image of the company are the end goals of the corporate branding process (Hawabhay et al., 2009).

"It is purported that a good company image can be achieved by the promotion of the corporate identity through a corporate strategy based on primary communication highlighting the product / service performance" (Aberg, 1990 ; Balmer and Gray, 1999; Hawabhay et al., 2009). An understanding of all stakeholders' (internal and external) perceptions of the organization is critical so as to align corporate communication with the brand messages (company image).

Furthermore, a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program that contributes to the positive evaluations of new product and customer loyalty is a key factor to improving company image (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Maignan et al., 1999) while instituting a measurement system to determine the extent of integration in communication helps in most of the time (Barker and Angelopulo, 2006).

Klopper (2010), posit that the principle of "Don't judge a book by its cover", does not apply to corporate reputation, where image really matters. However, to him, company image comes as a

whole package, and therefore ensuring that the package appears consistent and appealing depends on communication between employees, departments and customers (internal and external; current and potential).

2.4. Relationship between Business Communication, Productivity and Company Images

Perfect communication is unattainable, yet a positive relationship exists between effective communication, company image and productivity. Whatever the sender's expectation, the message as decoded in the receiver's mind represents his or her reality and this reality will determine performance along with the individual's level of motivation and degree of satisfaction (Robbins and Judge, 2011). Effective communication is essential for any business or organization to prosper. It cuts out on wasted time and provides both customers and employees with the necessary tools to succeed and find satisfaction. When communication is not effective, the end result is increase in production time which results in decrease in productivity. In order to avoid this outcome, effective communication must be in place.

Communication in the workplace takes several forms and each impacts employee's productivity in a different way. To Internal communication between management and employees builds understanding of organizational goals and helps motivate employees. Communication helps employees complete their tasks more efficiently. Mobile communication ensures that employees can maintain productivity levels when they are working away from the office. Literature shows that poor communication can result in missed opportunities in business and poor performance in the office. Poor communication can be a bane for any company or organization, small or large (Sriussadaporn, 2006). Effective communication increases productivity because it empowers those working in the organization. The more information each employee has, the more he will feel empowered to execute his tasks with confidence and direction. When an employee has an accurate understanding of what needs to be done and how to get the task accomplished, he/she will be more willing and motivated to do it. Effective communication empowers people to do their jobs right the first time. When an organization practices effective communication skills, the workers are prone to keep one another accountable. Because effective communication provides clear instruction, each employee knows exactly what is expected of him. This allows co-workers to maintain a certain level of accountability with one another, which increases productivity (Rho, 2009). Besides, other scholars have found that effective communication significantly impact employees workplace behaviour (Kim, 2002; Maertz and Griffeth, 2004; Abugre, 2010). Employees are ambassadors of the company therefore once they effectively communicate with a client and answer her questions clearly, it can raise the client's confidence in the company as well enhance the company's image. Nothing can lower morale more in your organization than poor communication. Poor communication can spread hard feelings and frustration, starting from the top. If leadership in an organization fails to communicate a clear vision and clear objectives for

571

staff morale can suffer. Other than creating a sour mood in the workplace, poor morale can harm productivity and external relations as well, and poor communications can play a large factor in fostering a negative cycle (Abugre, 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive research. The population of the study consisted employees of Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority [GPHA] in the Tema Municipal Assembly of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The sample size used was forty (40). The sampling technique used was convenience sampling. Convenient sampling was used in selecting the respondents since the respondents were contacted during their working hours; it was difficult to get the attention of all the employees. Therefore, those who were willing to respond to the questionnaires were used.

The study used primary data through questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to help achieve the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section covered the demography/personal information of the respondents, which contained both open and close-ended questions. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse this section. The second section of the questionnaire covered the actual objective of the study. The questions in this section were closed ended. The five-point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) was used in this section. Questionnaires were administered to respondents and collected 3 days later. The data was analysed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Microsoft excel software. The Pearson's Correlation test was used as a tool to test the correlation (if there is) between communication, productivity and company's image.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The Table 4.1 below shows that out of the forty employees interviewed twenty- five were males representing 62.5% while fifteen were females also representing 37.5%. The gap between male and female employees was wide which represents the fact that most of the departments are male-dominated.

Table-4.1. Demographic Data

	Department	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	25	62.5
	Female	15	37.5
	Total	40	100.0

The Table 4.2 shows that twenty-eight of the respondents have attained Master's degree representing 70% while one person has attained a professional certificate representing 2.5%, three respondents representing 7.5% have 'A' level and Doctoral degree respectively while five respondents representing 12.5% have WASSCE/SSCE qualification

Table-4.2. Educational Background

Level of education	Frequency	Percent
Masters' degree	28	70
Doctorate degree	3	7.5
A-level	3	7.5
WASSCE / SSCE	5	12.5
Other professional Certificate	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

Table 4.3 depicts the years of service of respondents. From the table, eighteen of the respondents representing 45.0% have been with the company for 7-10 years while two of the employees have worked for less than 2 years. This table also explains the level of loyalty of respondents.

Table-4.3. Tenure

Length of service	Frequency	Percent
7-10 years	18	45
<2years	5	12.5
Audits	5	12.5
Total	40	100.0

The Table 4.4 below shows the various departments sampled for the research. In all, eight departments were used and five questionnaires were distributed equally representing 12.5% to all the departments.

Table-4.4. Departmentalization

Department	Frequency	Percent
Accounts	5	12.5
Central data	5	12.5
Audits	5	12.5
Revenue	5	12.5
Personnel administration	5	12.5
Operations	5	12.5
Marketing	5	12.5
Public relations	5	12.5
Total	40	100.0

Source: Field survey, May 2013.

The Table 4.4 above shows that an equal number of fifteen respondents representing 37.5% agree and disagree with the perception that employees receive information about departmental plans, the requirement of their jobs and some personal news can be said to be satisfactory. While

17.5% representing seven respondents strongly agree, two respondents representing 2.5% strongly degree. The data collected shows that twenty-five of the respondents representing 62.5% agree with the perception that subordinate responsiveness to downward communication and the extent to which subordinates initiate upward communication can be said to be fair, while three of the respondents representing 7.5% strongly agree.
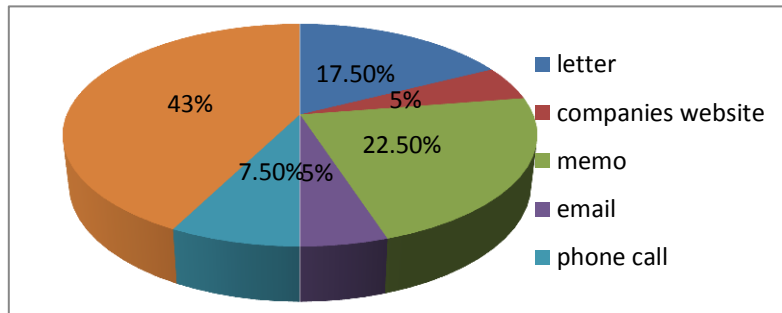

Figure-1. Channels of communication

Besides, this paper has equally demonstrated that Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority does make use of the technological media much as compared to the face-face (43%) and print (40%) in its day- day communications as portrayed by figure 1.

4.2. Effects of Business Communication on Productivity Level in the Organization and Company Image
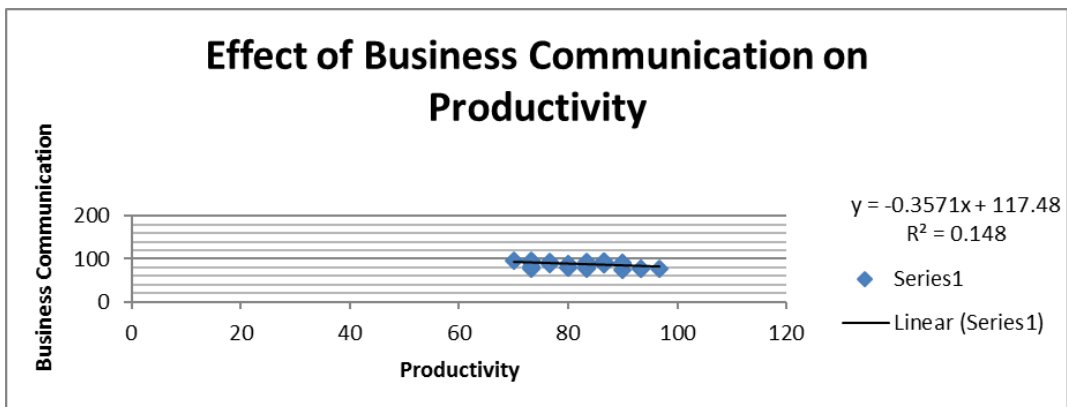

Figure-2.

The independent variable used was business communication while the dependent variable used was productivity. The equation of the line of regression is y=-0.3571x + 117.48. The results indicate an inverse relationship between business communication and organizational productivity. This means that in the organization, an increase in the level of effective communication will lead to a decrease of approximately 15% rather in productivity. This is due to the fact that employees think the internal communication does not have a major effect on their productivity on the job.
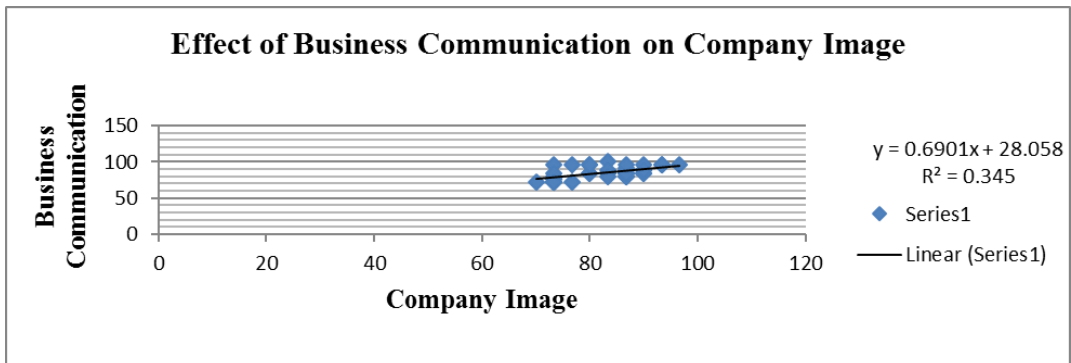

Figure-3.

The independent variable used was business communication while the dependent variable used was company image. The correlation is strong and positive this means that an increase in business communication will lead to, a significant or direct increase in company image. Since the co-efficient of determination $R^2 = 0.345$, it means that there will be a 34.5% increase in the company's reputation.

4.3. Discussion of Research Findings

The objective of the study is to examine the effects of business communication on productivity level in the organization and company image. According to Robbins and Judge (2011), perfect communication is unattainable, yet a positive relationship exists between effective communication, company image and productivity. Study shows that employees perform their tasks effectively when they have access to sound information relating to their jobs (Adler, 1999). Also according to (Sriussadaporn, 2006) most communications break down through ambiguous language between co-workers or unclear instructions between managers and staff. Sometimes it might be misunderstood due to poor writing or unclear messaging, however, clear communications, on the other hand, can improve productivity, leading to a more efficient and effective workplace.

The results showed that communication was perceived to have an inverse relationship or effect on productivity that varied in both kind and magnitude. The findings suggest that the link between communication and productivity is more complex than previously assumed. Meanwhile,

in other studies, (Kim, 2002; Maertz and Griffeth, 2004; Rho, 2009; Abugre, 2010) effective communication rather empowers employees to do their jobs right the first time. Effective business communication also helps to cut out on waste time in production since employees are provided with the necessary tools to succeed and meet set objectives of the organization, provide accurate feedback on employee performance hence improving their productivity on the job.

However, in another study by Hassan and Bahtiar (2009) an attempt was made to find out the differences of employees' perception of their superior's communication behavior. Results of a simple regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between superior-subordinate communication and working relationship for male respondents, while results from female respondents showed there is no significant relationship between superior-subordinate communication and working relationship. In terms of company image, effective business communication can also yield positive results for the organization. This finding rather seems to contradict what literature suggests. For instance, Garnett *et al.* (2008); Pandey and Garnett (2006) posit that effective communication like customer service and relations on all levels of an organization can affect how business is done and communication plays a huge role in making sure business transactions and business relations run smoothly. Other effects it has on a company's image is that it helps attract investors, improve client relations to help reduce the number of dissatisfied customers and helps create favorable perception about the company to customers.

However the findings indicate that at Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority, communication has a negative effect on productivity while it has a positive effect on company.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

It can be concluded that business communication has positive effect on the organization in terms of company image but, surprisingly, inverse effect on productivity. The positive effects include; improving accountability among employees, empowerment of employees, helps to reduce waste in production and provide accurate feedback on employee performance. In terms of company image, it helps attract investors, improve client relations and also helps create favourable perceptions about the company to customers.

5.2. Recommendations

In view of the findings, the following recommendations are made to improve business communication at Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority.

Management should also make use of other channels of communication so as to enhance not only its productivity but its image as well since the study found face –face, letters and occasionally, memos as the most used and preferred choices of channel among workers. This in the long run could enable management of Ghana Ports and Harbors Authority to control the

informal communication (Grapevine) in the organization since it can be misleading than accurate and can also breed conflict among employees.

The inter-personal communication among employees should be improved so that accurate and timely information can be passed on for completion of tasks to cut out on wasted time so that the objectives of the organization can be met.

To other researchers, though this research work can serve as a point of reference, they should make attempts to find out the relevance of communicating through electronic media in terms of its impact on employees' effectiveness and operational cost reduction especially in those companies in the public sector.

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