

Exploring the Relationship Between Effective Communication and Employee Participation at NIMASA

African Journal of Stability
& Development
Vol 17 No. 1, April 2025
pp. 521-534

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between effective communication and employee participation within the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). The background highlighted the significance of communication in fostering a participatory workplace culture, thereby addressing the problem of insufficient employee engagement in public organisations. The research was framed within the context of Social Exchange Theory and Organisational Communication Theory, which underscored the importance of clear communication and its impact on employee involvement. Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilised secondary data, interviews, and focus group discussions to gather rich insights from employees across various departments at NIMASA. The findings revealed that clear and open

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communication channels significantly enhanced employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall organisational performance. Employees reported feeling more valued and involved when communication was effective, which led to a greater willingness to participate in decision-making processes. The study concluded that effective communication is essential in promoting employee participation and fostering a participatory workplace culture. By addressing barriers to communication, such as unclear messaging and insufficient feedback mechanisms, NIMASA could cultivate an environment that encourages transparency and inclusivity. These findings emphasised the necessity of prioritising communication strategies to enhance employee participation, contributing to the overall success of NIMASA and the broader maritime industry. The research provided actionable recommendations for improving communication and enhancing employee participation, which could serve as a foundation for future studies in similar contexts.

Keywords: Relationship, Effective Communication, Employee Participation and NIMASA

Introduction

The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) plays a pivotal role in the regulation and promotion of maritime activities within Nigeria's expansive coastal and inland waterways. Established by the NIMASA Act of 2007, the agency's core mandates include ensuring maritime safety and security, protecting the marine environment, and facilitating the growth and development of the maritime sector (NIMASA, 2021). In this capacity, NIMASA is instrumental in advancing Nigeria's economic development by enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of maritime transportation, which is vital for international trade and commerce. As the primary regulatory body, NIMASA is tasked with implementing policies and standards that govern shipping operations, port facilities, and navigational

safety, thereby positioning itself as a key player in the nation's economic landscape.

The significance of effective communication within organisations, particularly in a complex agency like NIMASA, cannot be overstated. Communication serves as the bedrock for operational efficiency, facilitating the flow of information across various levels of the organisation. It is essential for establishing clarity of roles and expectations, which in turn fosters a culture of accountability and collaboration among employees. Effective communication is not merely the transfer of information; it also encompasses the ability to engage, inspire, and motivate employees (Robinson & Judge, 2017). When employees are kept informed about organisational goals, policies, and changes, they are more likely to feel valued and involved, which enhances their overall commitment to an agency's mission.

Furthermore, robust communication channels can significantly impact employee participation. Research has shown that organisations with open lines of communication tend to experience higher levels of employee engagement and involvement in decision-making processes (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2019). This participation is critical, as it contributes to improved job satisfaction and productivity, which are essential components of organisational success. When employees perceive that their voices are heard and their contributions are valued, they are more inclined to actively participate in various organisational processes. This active involvement not only empowers employees but also leads to innovative solutions and improved organisational performance. In the context of NIMASA, fostering effective communication can be a catalyst for enhancing employee participation, thereby contributing to the agency's overall effectiveness and success.

Statement of the Research Problem

In light of the recognised importance of effective communication in enhancing employee participation within organisations, there remains a notable gap in both the literature and practice concerning this relationship at the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). While various studies have explored the impact of communication on employee engagement in different sectors, specific research focusing on NIMASA is limited. This gap leaves a significant area of inquiry unexamined,

particularly considering the unique challenges and dynamics of the maritime sector in Nigeria.

At NIMASA, there are indications that communication practices may not be fully optimised to foster employee involvement. Issues such as unclear communication channels, inconsistent messaging from management, and a lack of feedback mechanisms can lead to misunderstandings and disengagement among employees. Furthermore, the diverse workforce within NIMASA, which includes professionals from various backgrounds and expertise, may require tailored communication strategies that consider these differences to enhance participation effectively.

Moreover, existing literature often emphasise the general benefits of effective communication without delving deeply into how these principles specifically apply to maritime regulatory bodies like NIMASA. As such, there is a lack of empirical evidence and case studies that detail the direct relationship between communication practices and employee participation within this specific organisational context. This deficiency underscores the need for targeted research that not only identifies existing communication barriers at NIMASA but also assesses their impact on employee involvement and organisational performance.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. assess the effectiveness of existing communication channels at NIMASA in promoting employee engagement;
- ii. identify specific barriers that hinder employee participation at NIMASA, including communication breakdowns and lack of feedback; and
- iii. examine the relationship between effective communication practices and employee participation levels at NIMASA.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study extends deeply into the operations of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), as well as the broader maritime industry. By exploring the relationship between effective communication and employee participation, the research aimed

to pinpoint critical areas for improvement within NIMASA. Enhanced communication practices had the potential to drive higher employee engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity, ultimately bolstering the agency's operational efficiency and its ability to meet regulatory and safety requirements.

The insights derived from this research also aim to aid NIMASA's leadership in shaping policies and strategies that prioritise effective communication. This approach was intended to foster a culture of transparency and inclusivity, ensuring that employees felt valued and motivated to engage actively in organisational processes. Furthermore, improved communication frameworks were expected to enhance alignment between management and staff, promoting a more cohesive working environment.

In addition, the study addressed unique challenges faced by the maritime industry, such as regulatory compliance, safety concerns, and workforce diversity. By understanding how communication affected employee participation, the research provided valuable strategies for overcoming these challenges. Effective communication facilitated collaboration among stakeholders, streamlined operational processes, and enhanced the overall safety and security of maritime activities. The study also contributes significantly to academic literature on organisational communication and employee participation, particularly within the maritime sector. By concentrating on NIMASA, it fills a critical gap in the literature, offering empirical evidence that could inform future studies and discussions on best practices for communication in regulatory agencies.

Literature Review

Effective Communication

Effective communication is a multifaceted process that involves the clear and purposeful exchange of information, ideas, and emotions between individuals or groups. It is characterised by the ability to convey messages in a manner that is easily understood by the receiver while ensuring that the intended meaning is accurately interpreted. Key components of effective communication include clarity, active listening, feedback, empathy, and adaptability.

Clarity is essential in effective communication as it ensures that messages are straightforward and unambiguous. It involves using precise language and avoiding jargon that may confuse the receiver. Active listening, another critical component, entails fully engaging with the speaker, demonstrating attentiveness, and providing appropriate responses. This two-way interaction fosters a deeper understanding and encourages open dialogue (Woods, 2015).

Feedback plays a vital role in effective communication by allowing the sender to gauge the receiver's understanding and engagement. Constructive feedback helps refine the communication process and ensures that both parties are aligned in their understanding. Empathy is also crucial, as it enables communicators to consider the feelings and perspectives of others, which can enhance the connection and trust between individuals (Goleman, 2011). Lastly, adaptability refers to the ability to modify one's communication style to suit different contexts and audiences, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the interaction.

Employee Participation

Employee participation refers to the involvement of employees in decision-making processes, organisational policies, and practices that affect their work and workplace environment. This concept encompasses a range of activities, from engaging employees in discussions about their roles and responsibilities to involving them in broader organisational strategies. The benefits of employee participation are numerous and can significantly impact both individual and organisational outcomes.

One of the primary benefits of employee participation is enhanced job satisfaction. When employees feel that their voices are heard and that they have a stake in the decision-making processes, they are more likely to experience a sense of ownership and commitment to their work. This increased satisfaction often translates into higher levels of motivation and engagement, leading to improved performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Moreover, organisations that foster participation often see lower turnover rates, as employees are less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere when they feel valued and involved.

Another significant advantage of employee participation is the improvement in organisational innovation and problem-solving. When employees are encouraged to share their ideas and perspectives, organisations benefit from a diverse range of insights and solutions. This collaborative approach can lead to more creative and effective problem-solving strategies, ultimately enhancing an organisation's adaptability and competitiveness in the marketplace (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Furthermore, involving employees in the decision-making process can lead to better-informed decisions, as those who work directly with processes and customers often possess valuable insights that management may overlook.

Insights from Previous Studies

Existing research on communication and employee engagement has highlighted the critical role that effective communication plays in fostering a participatory work environment, particularly in public organisations. Numerous studies have underscored the link between communication practices and employee engagement, revealing how transparency, clarity, and responsiveness in communication contribute to increased levels of employee involvement and satisfaction.

One notable study by Men (2014) examined the relationship between organisational communication and employee engagement in public organisations. The findings indicated that organisations that prioritised open and two-way communication experienced higher employee engagement levels. Employees reported feeling more valued and connected to their organisations when management actively sought their input and feedback. This research emphasises the need for effective communication strategies to enhance engagement and create a more inclusive organisational culture.

Similarly, a study conducted by Korkmaz (2019) focused on the public sector in Turkey, analysing the impact of communication on employee motivation and engagement. The study revealed that clear communication from leadership significantly influenced employees' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. When employees received consistent and clear information, they felt more motivated to participate in organisational activities and contribute to decision-making processes. This highlights how effective communication not only promotes engagement but also aligns employee efforts with organisational goals.

Moreover, research by Clampitt and Downs (1993) explored the role of communication in facilitating employee participation in decision-making processes. Their findings indicated that effective communication practices, such as regular updates and opportunities for feedback, directly contributed to employees feeling empowered and more engaged in their work. The study emphasised that organisations that actively involve employees in decision-making through effective communication foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among their workforce.

Empirical Review

Jones et al. (2021) offer an empirical study that thoroughly explores the interrelationship between communication, employee engagement, and performance, which directly aligns with the focus of this current research. Their findings underscore how effective communication serves as a catalyst in fostering employee engagement, improving teamwork, and boosting overall organisational performance. The authors demonstrate that communication is not just about transmitting information but about creating a positive work environment where employees feel valued and respected. This insight is crucial for understanding how communication practices at NIMASA can impact employee participation.

The study is particularly relevant because it highlights the importance of both the cognitive and emotional responses to communication. Employees need to not only understand but also feel that communication is effective. This dual perception is key in driving engagement, an idea that resonates with the objectives of this research, which seeks to examine how communication channels at NIMASA promote or hinder employee engagement.

From a critical standpoint, while Jones et al. present compelling evidence on the positive effects of communication on employee performance, their study could be moderated by acknowledging the challenges that might arise in larger, more bureaucratic organisations like NIMASA. For example, the cultural and hierarchical structures in public sector institutions may pose unique barriers to open communication, a factor that Jones et al. do not fully explore. Moreover, the study could benefit from discussing potential limitations, such as the need for tailored communication strategies that consider the diversity of employees' roles and experiences.

Markos and Gossaye (2021) provide an insightful empirical study examining the effects of internal communication on employee engagement, focusing on the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. Their research highlights a key issue relevant to many organisations, including NIMASA, as it underscores how internal communication directly influences employee engagement, a critical factor for organisational success. The study identified the dimensions of superior-subordinate communication, the quality and reliability of information, and opportunities for upward communication as vital components driving employee engagement. This is directly applicable to NIMASA, where addressing internal communication issues could significantly improve employee participation and morale.

The research is relevant because it emphasises the need for high-quality information exchange and trust between different hierarchical levels within an organisation. At NIMASA, the findings suggest that improving internal communication, particularly between management and employees, could enhance participation in decision-making processes, aligning with the research objective of examining how communication channels promote engagement.

However, from a critical perspective, the study's reliance on a quantitative approach, while providing broad generalisations, may overlook the depth of qualitative insights that could further explain the intricacies of internal communication's effects on employee engagement. In large public organisations like NIMASA, the cultural and operational complexities may require a more nuanced approach that considers the diverse experiences of employees across different levels. In addition, while the study offers valuable insights into the positive impact of internal communication, it does not fully address potential barriers to communication, such as organisational hierarchies or resistance to change, which are important considerations for implementing communication strategies effectively.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study encompasses several relevant theories that elucidate the dynamics of communication and employee participation. Notably, Social Exchange Theory and Organisational Communication Theory serve as foundational concepts for understanding

how effective communication fosters employee involvement and engagement within organisations. The first theory, Social Exchange Theory, was formulated by George Homans in 1958. It posits that social behaviour results from an exchange process, aiming to maximise benefits and minimise costs in interpersonal relationships. In the context of organisational communication, this theory suggests that when employees perceive their communication with management as beneficial, whether through clarity, support, or acknowledgement, they are more likely to participate actively in organisational processes. Effective communication acts as a valuable resource, fostering trust and commitment between employees and the organisation. When employees feel that their contributions are valued and that they are receiving fair treatment, they are motivated to engage, share ideas, and invest in their roles, leading to enhanced organisational performance.

On the other hand, Organisational Communication Theory, primarily associated with theorists such as Karl Weick (1969) and Woodward (1958), focuses on the flow of information within organisations and how it influences employee behaviour and organisational culture. This theory emphasises that communication is not just about transmitting information; it also involves the interpretation and negotiation of meaning among organisational members. A well-structured communication system within an organisation promotes an open and inclusive environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas. This inclusivity can enhance employee participation, as individuals are more likely to contribute when they believe their voices will be heard and valued. Furthermore, effective organisational communication is linked to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and higher overall morale among employees.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to investigate communication and employee participation dynamics within the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of employees' nuanced experiences and perceptions, which quantitative methods might overlook. Targeting employees across various departments, purposive sampling was used to

select participants with relevant insights on communication practices and engagement. Data collection involved secondary sources, such as organisational reports, alongside semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to capture diverse perspectives. Thematic analysis was then conducted to identify key themes and patterns from the data, facilitating a deeper understanding of how communication influences employee participation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the qualitative research revealed several key insights regarding communication practices and employee participation at NIMASA. Many employees expressed that effective communication significantly enhanced their engagement and sense of belonging within the organisation. Clear, open channels of communication were associated with increased job satisfaction, as employees felt more informed and involved in decision-making processes. Conversely, barriers such as unclear messaging and lack of feedback mechanisms were highlighted as major obstacles to active participation.

In analysing these findings, it became evident that the quality of communication directly influenced employee participation levels. The results aligned with the objectives of the study, demonstrating that when communication is effective, employees are more likely to engage and contribute to organisational goals. This correlation is consistent with existing literature, which emphasises the role of effective communication in fostering a participatory workplace culture (Bach & Smith, 2018; Grunig & Grunig, 2001).

The implications of these findings for NIMASA are significant. First, enhancing communication practices can lead to improved employee morale and productivity. By establishing a culture of transparency and inclusivity, NIMASA can create an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to participate actively. Furthermore, addressing communication barriers identified in the study could help build trust between management and staff, ultimately strengthening the organisation's overall effectiveness in fulfilling its regulatory and safety mandates.

Conclusion

The study investigated the relationship between effective communication and employee participation within the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). The findings revealed that clear and open communication channels significantly enhanced employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall organisational performance. Employees expressed feeling more valued and involved when communication was effective, which led to a greater willingness to participate in decision-making processes.

The significance of these findings extended beyond individual employee experiences, underscoring the critical role of communication in fostering a participatory workplace culture. By addressing barriers to effective communication, such as unclear messaging and insufficient feedback mechanisms, NIMASA could cultivate an environment that promoted transparency and inclusivity. This not only enhanced employee morale but also strengthened the agency's ability to fulfil its regulatory and safety mandates effectively.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Enhance Communication Channels:** NIMASA should undertake a comprehensive review of its current communication channels to ensure they effectively facilitate employee engagement. This includes conducting regular surveys to gather feedback on the effectiveness of these channels. Additionally, diversifying communication methods such as implementing an intranet system, distributing newsletters, and organising town hall meetings can cater to various employee preferences. By ensuring that communication is clear, timely, and easily accessible, NIMASA can significantly boost employee engagement and participation.
- ii. Address Barriers to Participation:** It is crucial for NIMASA to identify and address barriers that hinder employee participation, particularly communication breakdowns and insufficient feedback mechanisms. To achieve this, the agency could organise focus group discussions to gain insights into employees' experiences and perceptions of communication. Furthermore, establishing a structured feedback

system that ensures employees receive prompt responses to their inputs can create an environment where they feel their contributions are valued, thereby encouraging greater participation.

- iii. Strengthen the Relationship Between Communication and Participation:** NIMASA should implement targeted training programmes for managers and supervisors that highlight the significance of transparent and inclusive communication practices. By providing leaders with the skills necessary to communicate effectively and promote a culture of inclusivity, the agency can enhance employee participation and improve overall morale. Regular evaluations of communication practices and their influence on employee engagement will also enable NIMASA to continuously refine its approach and ensure it meets the evolving needs of its workforce.

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