



The Role of Interpersonal Communication in Enhancing Employee Morale and Productivity at United Bank for Africa (UBA)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of interpersonal communication in fostering employee morale and productivity at a Nigerian Bank, using United Bank for Africa (UBA), one of Nigeria's leading banks operating in a high-stress, competitive environment as case study. Due to growing demands and performance expectation, UBA's emphasizes on communication strategies that duly support the well-being and engagement of its employees. This study examines many of the communication practices employed at UBA, such as direct feedback, open door policy, and team meetings-assessing their impacts on employees' experiences of job satisfaction, trust, and cooperation. It examines the collective cultural context of Nigeria, respect for hierarchy and authority going hand in hand, thus guiding the interactions of employees at UBA in dealing with other management or peer levels. To that effect, the research evaluates three areas: morale and job satisfaction due to being influenced by direct feedback; open-door policies that mandate and nurture trust, hence help raise productive employee-manager relationships; and meetings that influence team cohesion and commitment. The paper, therefore, emphasizes how communication channels and frequency, in design to respond to employee needs, play a major role in the establishment of an enabling and caring work culture. Results show that a sound communication structure has a strong positive effect on employee morale, which eventually reflects in increased productivity and lowered turnover.

Introduction

In Nigeria's ever competitive banking industry, boosting employee morale and productivity through effective interpersonal communication is important (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). United Bank for Africa (UBA), one of the country's leading financial institutions, operates within an industry characterized by intense competition, stringent performance targets, and a high-stress work environment (Ogbuabor, Orji, & Uche, 2020). The dire need for communication practices that ensure well-being and engagement in the workplace has gone up high, with employees continuously encouraged to keep developing their career in a currently thriving company. According to studies, interpersonal communication practices such as direct feedback, open-door policy, and frequent team meetings may be key variables which influence morale, job satisfaction, and general performance of personnel. Employees who feel heard and valued are more likely to remain motivated, stay engaged, and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

This paper explores how UBA's commitment to communication practices influences employee experiences, focusing on creating a work environment where staff feel empowered, supported, and aligned with the bank's objectives. By examining various forms of interpersonal communication at UBA—including feedback systems, the accessibility of leadership through open-door policies, and team meetings that promote collaboration—this study aims to illustrate the link between communication strategies and employee productivity. Additionally, the paper delves into the cultural factors unique to Nigeria, which shape workplace communication dynamics. For example, Nigeria's collectivist culture places high value on hierarchy and authority, affecting how employees interact with management and how managers engage with their teams (Hofstede Insights, 2022). The study addresses three primary objectives: (1) to understand the impact of direct feedback on employee morale and job satisfaction, (2) to assess how open-door policies influence trust and employee-manager relationships, and (3) to explore how team meetings foster cohesion and commitment within teams. By analysing these factors, this paper provides actionable insights for UBA and other banks on implementing communication practices that improve employee morale and productivity, ultimately contributing to a cohesive and high-performing workforce in Nigeria's banking sector.

Understanding the Importance of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication encompasses all aspects of interaction both non-verbal and verbal at the workplace, this helps to build a supportive environment where the employees feel appreciated and understood (Heathfield, 2018). In organizations such as UBA involved in the greatly competitive as well as high-pressure banking industry, effective communication become critical in the sense of influencing a positive along with productive workplace environment. This bears in mind that the banking industry is complex and requires an individual to be highly demanding

(Robbins & Judge, 2013). For employees in UBA, who have so often been involved in sophistication regarding financial responsibility, clear communications help minimize uncertainty by assuring them that they would be better equipped to face the daily grind efficiently. Heathfield (2018) states that open communication, in particular, which is highly needed with regard to employee engagement and job satisfaction, gives employees a sense of belonging and makes them feel understood, which in return, is an issue of great importance when talking about high-stressed jobs like banking.

According to Macey & Schneider (2008), there is a strong linkage between regular and transparent communications and job satisfaction, employee engagement, and overall organizational productivity. In the operational landscape of UBA, where employees are expected to meet strict targets while maintaining high service standards, effective communication stands out as a cornerstone of success (Robbins & Judge, 2013). This ensures that the employees remain tuned to the goals of the organization, are motivated towards their targets, and feel supported in their roles. Communication is therefore not just the issuance of information but plays an important role in employee empowerment and their equipping in handling these various challenges (Heathfield, 2018).

The demands in the banking sector being one of high stress, this further makes the point for communication within an organization important (Macey & Schneider, 2008). For UBA, clear and open channels of communication ensure that staff manage their levels of stress, the customer's needs are met, and performance standards upheld. As Robbins and Judge (2013) put it, "open and effective communication improves mutual understanding, which in turn builds cooperation and lessens misunderstandings." It also, in that respect, improves morale, reduces stress, and generally opens up performance capability, which is essential to continued success.

Direct Feedback: Reinforcing Employee Performance and Satisfaction

The most powerful types of interpersonal communication that one can encounter in an organizational setup are feedbacks (Stone & Heen, 2014). For the employees at UBA, timely and specific feedback will clearly guide performance expectations and areas of improvement (Kim, 2019). Ashford & Cummings (1983) states that "through feedback, employees develop a better understanding of their job, thereby enhancing self-efficacy and job satisfaction". The direct feedback relevant in UBA, whether from superiors or equals, plays a dual role: it encourages positive behaviours but also points out areas of needed improvement constructively (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2014).

Therein lies one of the major advantages of feedback: reducing ambiguity, ambiguity is one of the prime causes of stress and disengagement in high-stakes industries, of which banking is a prime example (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). London (2014), mention that employees are most likely to continue working competently and confidently when regular feedback by the manager is provided, since it provides a clear roadmap to organizational expectations. This linking of individual performance with organizational objectives develops a sense of security and clarity that could result in huge improvements in morale and productivity of the workforce (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Besides this, the positive impact of feedback on morale extends to the collective workforce where workers feel valued and motivated. It, therefore, enhances the performance and dynamics of a team (Kluger & Nir, 2010).

The Impact of Open-Door Policies on Trust and Job Satisfaction

Open-door policies, where managers make themselves available for employee queries and concerns, are another means of effective communication that helps in the workplace (Tannenbaum & Salas, 2020). In the case of UBA, such policies could close hierarchical gaps and build a sense of inclusion by allowing employees to have a say in what affects them. Open-door policies open a setting where transparency is promoted toward the solution of the problems and ideas of workers (Schneider & Bowen, 2013). These policies breed a work culture of openness and trust both being fundamental to the success of an organization, researchers indicate that when employees have easy access to leadership, it might create an active birth of communication, collaboration, and problem-solving (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

As Eisenberger et al. (2002), have already established, agencies or businesses using open-door policies show employees that their inputs are appreciated; this tends to bring workers' satisfaction, loyalty, and even trust in such kind of organization (Men, 2014). Open-door policy eases such tensions as it provides avenues for employees to reach out to management over issues or suggestions they may be having. This will foster communication and help in fostering relationships within the company for a more supportive and productive atmosphere (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Trust, in particular, is an aspect that is essential in organizations such as UBA, where the pressure to meet set targets sometimes strains relations between management and junior employees (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Open-door policies therefore help in minimizing such challenges since employees may be protected from retaliation by coming up with grievances and suggestions (Bennis, 2009; Men, 2014). It is through building trust that misunderstandings are minimized, and through that, a good relationship is established for employees and management to work together in high-stress work environments. Open-door policies should be particularly effective in Nigeria's collectivist culture, in which employees may especially feel comfortable in settings that allow interpersonal closeness and accessible leadership (Adair, Buchan, & Chen, 2016; Triandis, 2001). For instance, being given direct access to the organisation's decision-makers makes employees feel valued and supported within the organization, thus enhancing their job satisfaction and loyalty.

In this way, employees are more supported and heard at UBA, while their satisfaction and engagement in their job roles are correspondingly very well improved, hence reducing the tendency for burnout and eventual turnover (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This is very important, considering the banking industry, which often faces a high rate of turnover and usually presents very costly actions to any organization concerned (Tannenbaum & Salas, 2020). If UBA could establish a free and responsive environment for communication, then as Men (2014) and Tannenbaum & Salas (2020) noted, the company would be able to enhance employee morale, increase retention rates, and ultimately improve their job performance.

The Role of Team Meetings in Enhancing Collaboration and Cohesion

Team meetings at UBA serve as a vital platform for fostering collaboration and enhancing interpersonal communication within departments, in UBA's high-stakes banking environment, where customer satisfaction and efficient service delivery are paramount, team meetings play a critical role in aligning employee efforts toward shared goals (Hu & Liden, 2015). Frequency of meetings among the staff will offer avenue to update, talk over challenges, and collectively strategize towards solutions that give life to departmental and organizational success (Hu & Liden, 2015; Shuffler, DiazGranados, & Salas, 2011). It is important to hold such meetings to ensure that teams at UBA work consonantly with meeting the targets set by the bank in a dynamic and competitive industry.

However, psychological safety-developed definitely within team meetings-means an environment in which people feel no discomfort in taking the interpersonal risks of voicing their concerns or making suggestions for new ideas (Lee & Edmonds, 2021; Zhang & Chen, 2020). This sense of safety can then create enhanced problem-solving and innovations since employees would not be as hesitant to give out key insights that would advance efficiencies, customer service, and internal processes (Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017). This would, at UBA, mean that this openness in some ways would translate into more valuable solutions finding their way into operational challenges and hence an improvement in the delivery of the services in general (Shuffler, DiazGranados, & Salas, 2011).

Also, team meetings can be a great platform to continue instilling UBA's organizational values and objectives in the long term. When these meetings are led by managers, they are communicating to employees the core values and the mission of the bank; this helps them better understand how their individual goals can fit in with the aims of a team and even the bigger organization (Lee, Park, & Koo, 2015). It is such alignment that builds up the morale and develops a sense of shared responsibility-an ingredient so important to be developed in establishing high productivity in the competitive banking sector.

Moreover, the employees are more satisfied with their jobs while feeling even more motivated to work effectively if they are given an opportunity to be actively involved in all discussions and decision-making of the team (Shuffler et al., 2011). Such involved employees will definitely be well-equipped to bring more new ideas to the table or proactively work on improvement, which would positively impact the whole organization. This heightened participation will enable problem-solving not only at the immediate level but also provide a force for UBA in achieving its wider organizational objectives by fostering a motivated and high-performing staff (Kahn, 1990; Shuffler et al 2011).

Communication Channels and Frequency: Balancing Engagement and Efficiency

The medium of communication and frequency have very strong implications on the engagement, morale, and productivity of the employee (Bridgman, Cummings, & Ballard, 2019). In an evolving workplace like the UBA, the right balance between in-person meetings, email, and digital communication platforms should be an important concern in maintaining efficient and effective communication (Treem & Leonardi, 2020). Different means of communication will enable UBA to meet the needs of all the varying employees since different messages gain from using different styles. Recent studies state that the selection of the channels of communication is important, and face-to-face communications are usually better in subjects which are either complex or sensitive while digital channels can be used if the update to be communicated is simple (Treem & Leonardi, 2020).

While modern organizations need to keep communicating on a very frequent basis, there has to be balance in order not to over-inform the employees, banking is a rather fast-paced and high-stakes industry where, sometimes, the very process of productive pursuance gets disrupted and employee focus interrupted by excessive communication (Cameron, Decker, & Scriber, 2021). Employees may feel overwhelmed or micromanaged if constant updates and messages interrupt their workflow. Effective communication frequency ensures employees are informed without feeling pressured, which supports both productivity and well-being (Bridgman et al., 2019).

Furthermore, granting employees more control over the timing and channels of communication can enhance their job satisfaction and work-life balance—key factors in demanding fields like banking (Pignata et al., 2018). Respecting employees' time and boundaries fosters a sense of empowerment and loyalty, which are critical for engagement and performance (Cameron et al., 2021). By maintaining a thoughtful balance in communication frequency, channel, and timing, UBA can cultivate a supportive environment that values employee well-being alongside organizational goals. A communication strategy that considers these factors not only ensures clear and efficient interactions but also builds a workplace culture focused on employee engagement and productivity (Treem & Leonardi, 2020).

Cultural Considerations: The Influence of Nigerian Values on Communication Practices

Cultural dynamics play a significant role in shaping workplace communication, particularly in a diverse country like Nigeria, where different cultural influences shape employee interactions (Usman, 2021). Nigeria's collectivist culture, which emphasizes respect for hierarchy and community, influences how communication is structured in organizations like UBA (Hofstede Insights, 2022). In this respect, indirect styles of communication may be favored by employees, who tend to avoid authority figures and may have a worsening effect on a number of variables like response to feedback, managerial directives, and open-door policy (Okeke & Emecheta, 2018). The understanding of the cultural dynamics underlying these assumptions will be an important avenue for effective communication in Nigerian organizations, where relatively more importance is given to relationships and social status than to straightforwardness in communication (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

For UBA to optimize communication practices, it is essential to recognize and respect these cultural norms. Managers who approach communication with cultural sensitivity—acknowledging values such as respect for hierarchy, community, and relational harmony—are more likely to foster a positive workplace environment (Adair, Buchan, & Chen, 2016). Employees tend to feel more at ease in engaging in open dialogue when they feel that their cultural values are respected, thereby significantly improving communication at all levels (Cameron et al., 2021). By making selecting adjustments in the way communications are conducted to better suit the requirements imposed by culture, such etiquette will help generate an environment of inclusiveness at which employees are made to feel valued and appreciated. This sensation of cultural alignment will encourage not just a continuous flow of smooth communication but subject employees to high morale and be loyal. As tensions in the bank increase due to authentic needs and values being suppressed (Shuffler et al 2011).UBA will be sure that employees belong through sensitive cultural communication strategies, engendering trust and maintaining high levels of organizational performance (Adair, Buchan, & Chen, 2016).

Conclusion

Basic interpersonal communication inspires a good working environment, which increases productivity, especially in the high-stress working environment such as banking. This is where United Bank for Africa has taken the initiative in implementing an all-rounded communication strategy entailing direct feedback, open-door policies, and regular team meetings that help improve morale among employees and productivity at work. With direct feedback, UBA provides its employees with an overview of their responsibilities, hence increasing their confidence and loyalty. This type of feedback gives a sense of security that leads the employees to continuous improvement and job satisfaction. An open-door policy strengthens the workplace culture by infusing transparency and access to managerial layers with the objective of fostering trust and inclusivity. Besides, team meetings at UBA provide an important avenue for collaboration, alignment, and problem solving as part of departmental and organizational objectives. They create an environment where employees feel psychologically safe to express ideas and concerns, resulting in more innovative solutions and enhanced team cohesion. By reinforcing the bank's values and aligning individual and team goals with the organization's mission, team meetings play a pivotal role in maintaining productivity and job satisfaction. A balance in communication frequency and channels is also key, helping prevent information overload and respecting employees' work-life boundaries.

Incorporating Nigeria's cultural values into these communication strategies fosters a sense of belonging, which enhances morale and loyalty. Overall, UBA's commitment to effective interpersonal communication not only improves employee engagement but also strengthens organizational resilience and performance. This study underscores the significance of a well-rounded communication framework, advocating for other financial institutions to adopt similar practices to improve productivity and create a supportive and efficient work environment.

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