SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE BUSINESS MANAGERS' RATINGS OF OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS OF ENTERPRISES IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract
The need for SMEs to thrive in the Nigerian economy necessitated the study to determine small and medium scale business managers' ratings of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises in Enugu State. One research question guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The design of the study was a descriptive survey. Population of the study was all the managers of the 911 registered SMEs in Enugu State. A sample of 220 managers was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. This comprised 196 managers of small and 24 managers of medium enterprises. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Managers' Ratings of Operational Strategies for Success of Enterprises Questionnaire (MROSSEQ)" validated by three experts. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was established using test-retest method and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to obtain the value. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze data relating to the research question while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses. Findings revealed that all the operational communication strategies were highly relevant to the success of SMEs in Enugu State. Also, gender and years of experience did not influence the opinions of the SME managers regarding the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of their enterprises. Consequently, it was recommended among others that SMEs business managers in Enugu State should make concerted efforts to adopt the operational communication strategies identified in this study and also engage themselves in the training that will educate them more on operational communication strategies in order to keep their businesses viable.

Keywords: operational communication strategy, Small and medium enterprise (SME), success.

Introduction

The art of communication has attracted the attention of academics and practitioners to a very great extent during the last few decades. The basic reason behind this phenomenon is the growing importance of effective communication in day to day life

of people. The word ―communication‖ comes from the Latin word ―communist‖ which means to share, to mix and to unite (Modrea, 2012). Communication in a business enterprise has been seen as the binding force that permits coordination among people and thus allows for organized behaviour. Effective communication is a prerequisite for implementing organizational strategies as well as for managing day to day activities through people. SMEs business managers spend much of their day communicating with their employees which make the biggest relative contribution to them in effective running of their enterprise.

SMEs have been variedly defined by different nations based on level of development and periods in question. Central Bank of Nigeria (2010) defined SME's as any enterprise that has account base (excluding land) of between N5 million to N500 million; and labour force between 11 and 300. In Nigeria, SME's abound representing about 90 percent of the manufacturing /industrial sectors and contribute approximately one percent of the National Gross Domestic Product (Oyeyinka, 2014). These enterprises like other businesses are established as product of entrepreneurship, producing goods and services to improve the well-being of their owners and the societal general standard of living (Ezenwafor & Okoli, 2014). SMEs are seen as catalysts in economic development and plays major role in employment generation, rural development, national income growth and even produces for exports to attract foreign exchange. Therefore, any failure witnessed in this direction spells doom for the nation especially in a period of recession.

In addition, a business is successful if it is effective, in other words, achieving its intended objectives. It is also efficient if it is achieving its objectives at a minimum cost thereby making profits (Pickle in Okoli, 2008). SMEs are run by business managers who require indebt knowledge and skills in business strategies that enable businesses to thrive. Among such strategies is the operational communication strategy (Bracker & Pearson, 2006) which requires entrepreneurial communication skills needed by managers to enable them to clearly and succinctly convey the contents of the strategic plan and vision of their businesses to their employees. These employees will then make it their mission to accomplish the vision communicated to them thereby ensuring success of the business.

Unfortunately, these SMEs seem not to be performing up to expectations due to break downs in communication between managers and employees. This problem in communication has bogged down many SMEs and made their visions unattainable thereby leading to their failure. Thus, there is the need to expose SMEs business managers to operational communication strategies relevant for success of enterprises.

Business managers as used in this study refer to persons that are responsible to the day to day management of the enterprise operation. They could be hired personnel, but in most cases are the entrepreneurs and owners of the business. They are therefore in a good position to rate the operational communication strategies relevant for success of their enterprises. Success of SMEs in Nigeria means the success of the owners which justifies why their opinion is sort for as regards the

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operational communication strategies relevant for success of their enterprise. Despite the importance of communication in daily activities of individuals and businesses, the persistent increase in the failure of SMEs has not been adequately addressed. It is against this background that the study was concerned to determine in the opinion of the managers the operational communication strategies relevant to the success of SMEs in Enugu State.

Operational Communication Strategies Relevant to the Success of SMES

Communication is simply a way or an approach via which messages are passed across from one person to the other. It is crucial in managing human resource as well as in leading organizations successfully (Barrett, 2006). When both speaker and hearer understand themselves in a manner that brings engagement, understanding and collaboration rather than mere sending information from one point to the other, it is considered to be effective communication (Smith & Taylor, 2006). Thus, effective communication is the process in which intended meaning of what is being said is transmitted in a way that the hearer makes sense of it. It is therefore an engagement process that is bi-directional; not a liner process (Nwagbara, Oruh, Ugorji & Ennsra, 2013).

It has been noted that communication plays an important role in managing human relationships, strategy formulation, and eventually, implementation and monitoring of organizational performance. In organizations, managers and employees are usually exposed to the significance of communication. Duke II (2013) stated that managers are confronted with the challenge of articulating a clear and suitable direction in which the organization is heading. Surviving and thriving in the long term involves getting the right people focused on the right things and engaged in collective effort (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012). Thus, people in organizations act together and need to communicate regularly in order to achieve organizational goals. However, to effectively drive this, the manager requires the capacity to communicate complex ideas in simple ways; an ability to build and play in teams as well as trouble-shoot (Duke II, 2013).

Communication is a variable that shapes and determines operations and performance. Thus, improved communication systems leads to improved response and behaviour in an organization. When a new strategy is introduced, staff members generally respond in four ways: indifference, resistance, disbelief and support (Speculand, 2009). These reactions are determined by how the strategic plan is communicated to the staff members. Dandira (2011) believes that most organizations lack people who can articulate the contents of a strategic plan and its vision. How they respond will have a significant impact on how well a strategy is implemented. The quality of communication practices is likely to be associated with role clarity and job satisfaction. Effective communication is critical for the development and maintenance of positive working relationships (Nelson, Brunetto, Farr-Wharton & Ramsay, 2007). According to Kumar, Markeset and Kumar (2006), excellent communication which is one of the key ingredients in the success of strategy implementation model proposed

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by Okumus in 2001, and transparency between the parties involved, as well as clearly defined performance factors, play vital roles in the implementation and execution phase. The authors argued that well aligned communication and relationships are the foundation of trust building between the parties in the implementation and execution process. Successful implementation goes beyond ensuring that staff members understand the strategy; they must know exactly what to do and be motivated to do it (Speculand, 2009). The quality of relationships between employees and management determines employees' ability to access relevant information in order to solve day to day problems that arise in the workplace (Nelson et al., 2007). Organizations need to develop mechanisms that send formal and informal messages about the new strategy.

Any delay caused by poor communication or coordination could create conflict between the parties and have an impact on the business and relationships (Kumar et al., 2006). Communication barriers are reported more frequently than any other type of barrier to strategy implementation, which might be influenced by the organizational structure (Li, Gouhui & Eppler, 2008). Managers spend a lot of time communicating and promoting strategy i.e. trying to sell it (the strategy) to different stakeholders (Suominen & Mantere, 2010). Much communication about new strategy focuses on its launch, but it must also cover other issues like the actions that need to be undertaken to participate in the new strategy, ways to motivate those who implement the strategy, measures to track the new strategy and the new behaviours to be encouraged (Speculand, 2009).

Communication in African culture is mostly top down, with the owner-manager running the show, and is mostly negative. In the African culture, those in authority cannot be questioned and what they say is final; this approach is prevalent in SMEs activities and is at odds with the communication models advocated for strategy implementation (Nyamwanza, 2014). According to Nelson et al. (2007) most SMEs do not have a developed Human Resource Management infrastructure, nor do they have well developed knowledge management processes and vehicles such as operational manuals, instructions and guidelines. Hence, within the SMEs context, the relational dimension assumes that employees will use a range of communication processes, particularly the relationship with the manager, to gather information and skills in order to perform their tasks effectively.

Muske, Stanforth, and Woods (2004) established operational communication strategies that give managers and employees the information they need to execute their businesses successfully. The authors asserted that people thrive in an organization where communication is clear, direct and honest. The authors advised the managers and employees to learn the following skills:

i. To deliver information so that it is received the way intended.
ii. To exercise greater direction over how and what to say.
iii. To deliver constructive feedback while maintaining respect and goodwill.
iv. To make the source for the greater collaborative communication possible.
v. To create a climate of trust, foster safe place for interaction.

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vi. To use communication techniques to resolve differences and diffuse anger

Managers of SMEs must realize the relevancy of the strategy of effective communication in the work place as a very effective operational tool in managing (planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling) human and material resources as well as maintaining a healthy manager-worker relationships.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

1. How relevant do SME business managers rate operational communication strategies for success of enterprises in Enugu State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female small and medium scale business managers on the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises in Enugu State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of experienced and less-experienced small and medium scale business managers on the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises in Enugu State.

Method

The study used a descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in Enugu State in South East of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all the managers of the 911 (812 small enterprises and 99 medium enterprises) registered SMEs in Enugu State. The sample of the study was 220 (196 managers of small enterprises and 24 managers of medium enterprises). Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled ―Managers' Ratings of Operational Strategies for Success of Enterprises Questionnaire (MROSSEQ)‖. It consisted of two parts, Part A and Part B. Part A sought information about the respondents' personal data such as gender and years of experience while part B covered the research question and contained 10 items on operational communication strategies. The instrument was validated by three experts. Reliability of the instrument was determined using test-retest method of reliability by administering it twice within an interval of two weeks to 20 SMEs business managers who were not part of the population. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to analyze the data and a reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained. A direct three research assistants. At the end of the exercise, two hundred and two (202) copies of the questionnaire which represents 92 percent returns rate were retrieved and finally used for data analysis. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research question. z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Item by item analysis were done using the following real limit of numbers:

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Keys	Ratings	Boundary limits
Very Highly Relevant (VHR)	5	4.50 – 5.00
Highly Relevant (HR)	4	3.50 – 4.49
Moderately Relevant (MR)	3	2.50 – 3.49
Slightly Relevant (SR)	2	1.50 – 2.49
Not Relevant (NR)	1	0.50 – 1.49

The null hypotheses were not rejected if the calculated z-value was less than the critical z-value while the null hypotheses were rejected if the calculated z-value was greater than or equal to the critical z-value at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1

Respondents' mean ratings on the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises in Enugu State

S/N	Items on operational communication strategies.		SD	Remarks
1	Maintaining good telephone manners.	4.36	0.78	Highly Relevant
2	Making instructions clear and simple.	4.49	0.62	Highly Relevant
3	Being polite when interacting with subordinates.	4.07	0.84	Highly Relevant
4	Speaking fluently.	4.08	0.83	Highly Relevant
5	Having a high degree of writing ability.	3.97	0.97	Highly Relevant
6	Having a high degree of proof reading skill.	3.78	0.97	Highly Relevant
7	Interacting and conceiving ideas with subordinates.	4.08	0.78	Highly Relevant
8	Utilizing good listening and understanding skills.	4.39	0.79	Highly Relevant
9	Being clear and succinct in expression.	4.19	0.73	Highly Relevant
10	Using social tools to enhance communication among employees.	3.74	0.92	Highly Relevant
	Cluster mean	**4.12**		**Highly Relevant**

The information in Table 1 revealed that all the items were rated highly relevant for success of enterprises. The cluster mean of 4.12 signifies that items on operational communication strategies are highly relevant for enterprises to succeed. The standard deviation scores of items 1-10 are low and aggregated around their mean scores indicating homogeneity in the opinions of the respondents. This means that SMEs business managers in Enugu State require these communication skills so as to be efficient in their operations

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Table 2
Summary of z–test analysis of male and female managers on the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises

Variable	N	-	SD	α	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male managers	119	4.10	0.82					
				0.05	200	-0.16	1.96	Not Significant
Female managers	83	4.13	0.82					

Data presented in Table 2 indicated that at 0.05 alpha (α) level and degree of freedom of 200, the z-calculated value of -0.16 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96. The hypothesis is thus accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female small and medium scale business managers on the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises in Enugu State.

Table 3
Summary of z–test analysis of experienced and less-experienced managers on the relevance of operational management strategies for success of enterprises

Variable	N	-	SD	α	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Experienced managers	129	4.12	0.82					
				0.05	200	0.23	1.96	Not Significant
Less-experienced managers	73	4.09	0.83					

Data presented in Table 3 indicated that at 0.05 alpha (α) level and degree of freedom of 200, the z-calculated value of 0.23 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96. The hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of experienced and less-experienced small and medium scale business managers on the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises in Enugu State.

Discussion of Results

The findings of the study revealed that managers of SMEs in Enugu State unanimously rated all the operational communication strategies as highly relevant for success of their enterprises. These include; maintaining good telephone manners (Muske, Stanforth, & Woods, 2004); as well as making instructions clear and simple (Duke II, 2013); being polite when interacting with subordinates (Nyamwanza, 2014); speaking fluently; having a high degree of writing ability; having a high degree of proof reading skill; interacting and conceiving ideas with subordinates (Speculand, 2009); utilizing good listening and understanding skills (Dandira, 2011; Kumar et al., 2006); being clear and succinct in expression (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012; Speculand, 2009); and using social tools to enhance communication among

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employees (Muske, Stanforth, & Woods, 2004). It is a fact that when information is not clear to the managers or their employees, it leads to a breakdown in communication thereby having an adverse effect on the business. This finding relates to that of Holbeche and Matthews (2012) who reported that surviving and thriving in the long term involves getting the right people focused on the right things and engaged in collective effort. Thus, people in organizations should act together and need to communicate regularly in order to achieve organizational goals. Furthermore, the results of hypotheses one and two revealed that SMEs managers in Enugu State irrespective of their gender and years of experience were of the same opinion in their mean ratings concerning operational communication strategies relevant for success of enterprises.

From the Tables 2 and 3, the z-calculated values of -0.16 and 0.23 respectively were obtained by the researcher compared with the z-critical value of 1.96 for business managers' responses based on gender and years of experience. This indicates that hypotheses one and two were not rejected as regards the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises. The study disagrees with the assumptions of Okafor (2011) that gender and years of experience could be an influencing factor in the SMEs managers' ratings of operational strategies for success of enterprises. However, environmental factors prevailing within the locale of the study could be the influencing factor in the SMEs managers' rating of operational strategies for success of enterprises.

Implications of the Study

This study has implication for the SMEs business owners and managers to update themselves with the skills required for the application of the operational communication strategies in order to have an efficient work environment that could lead to their success.

Curriculum planners to include in business education programme the operational communication strategies needed for success of SMEs.

Business education students who would become future entrepreneurs would be exposed to the operational communication strategies that are relevant for success of enterprises so as to utilize them in their businesses. It would also enable them to become resource personnel to advice the SME managers who operate in the rural and urban areas. Business education students will also be motivated to establish and run SMEs having found that operational communication strategies are highly relevant for success of SMEs

Conclusion

Based on the findings, all the operational communication strategies were found highly relevant. Also, male and female managers of SMEs did not differ significantly in their opinions regarding the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises. The opinions of experienced and less experienced

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managers of SMEs also did not differ significantly regarding the relevance of operational communication strategies for success of enterprises.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. SMEs business managers in Enugu State should make concerted efforts to adopt the operational communication strategies identified by this study and also engage themselves in trainings that will educate them more on operational communication strategies in order to keep their businesses viable.
2. Government should particularly be involved in making sure that SMEs in Nigeria thrive by promoting and sponsoring SMEs workshops and trainings in the nation. This will help build a vibrant and diversified economy

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