Communication, Organisational Politics and Development in Contemporary Nigeria

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Abstract

Organisational politics has been a topic of conceptual and empirical interest for researchers and practitioners for many decades. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of communication in organisational politics, suggest possible reasons for organisational politics, determine the effects of organisational politics and its impact on development and proffer ways to reduce organisational politics. The study argues that, organisational politics has positive aspects when managed effectively with communication. The study found out that lack of trust, power struggle, reward system, jealousy among other reasons are why organisational politics exist. The study further discovered that the tendency to outdo others, limited resources, diversity of interest and the quest to be relevant among other reasons are why organisational politics is inevitable. The study recommends that communication should be used to assign work task to employees on the basis of work experience. This will reduce workplace politics because of job satisfaction. The study also recommends that there should be transparency at all levels in the organisation and organization should encourage teamwork in order to strengthen the bond of relationship between employees among other recommendations.

Keywords: *Organisational politics, communication, development, organisation, employee.*

Introduction

The word ‑communication‖ is said to have been derived from the Latin word ‑*communis*‖ which means ‑Common‖ (Nwanne, 2012, p.238-239). Communication is one of the most important activity in any organisation. It is through it that organisations maintain fruitful relationships with their various publics. Baran (2007, p.4) defines communication as ‑the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver‖. This means that for communication to be effective, the encoder and the decoder should be able to express their ideas. Stanton (2004) observes that the art of communication always takes place within a situation or context, and it flows from person to person, carrying along with it information, ideas, emotional feelings or views in an understanding way through the use of meaningful words, signs, letter or symbols for the purpose of information, education, entertainment and influencing the behaviour of another. Akarika (2021, p.67) defines communication as ‑an expression of thoughts, feelings, ideas,

messages from the sender to the receiver through verbal, non-verbal, written and non-written forms‖.

According to Femi (2014, p.75) communication has an important role in all activities aimed at gaining organisational objectives. Organisation, whether profit making or public service organisation needs to create a favourable environment which would facilitate effective communication in organising job-related activities. One of the most important aspect of organising is the ability to communicate the roles, expectation, goals and vision of the organisation. The success of any organisation depends on the efficiency and the effectiveness of its communication system and the nature of independent relationship (Akarika, Umoren and Ikon, 2021). Communication is essential for internal function of the organisation because it integrates the management function (Akarika, 2021). Therefore, every interaction is an organisation is made possible through the process of communication. The major objectives of communication in an organisation is to inform and educate employees at all levels in the company‘s strategy and motivates employees to support the strategy and organisational performance goals. This to a large extent is dependent on the organisational policies inherent in any organisation.

According to Aamodt, (2015) organisational politics are self-servicing behaviour that employees use to increase the probability of obtaining positive outcomes in organisations, it involves the use of power and social networking within a workplace to achieves changes that benefit the organisation or the individuals within it. Influence by individuals may serve personal interests without regard to their effect on the organisation itself. Organisational politics can increase efficiency, thus the need to pay attention to organisational politics and create the right political climate to enhance national development. The main link between individuals on a political climate is the access to in addition to-communication flow. Despite the recognition of the place of communication in business and organisational life, Soola (1998) cited in Akarika et al (2017) observes that it is yet to be accorded a pride of place in many profession and business. In lieu of this observation, this paper centrally examines the place of communication in organisational politics and its impact on development in contemporary Nigeria. It can be particularly damaging when employers engage in self-serving behaviour that is not accepted by the organisation. (Harris, Jarnes& Boon Thanom, 2005).

Scholars have largely focused on the negative consequences of organisational politics for employee performance. Organisation are seriously suffering from perceived organisational politics exhibited in the workplace and they are searching for way to remedy the situation. Both individuals and groups may engage in office politics (Marilyn, nd) which can be highly destructive, as people focus on personal gains at the expense of the organisation. According to Yusuf (2008) cited in Olurunleke (2015) politics may be positive or negative, but the fact is that no organization exists without politics. In lieu of this observation, what is the place of communication in organisational politics? What are the effects of organisational politics and its impact on development? These are the major concern of this study.

Review of Related Literature

Communication is aimed at making employees empathize with management (Akarika, Umoren & Ikon 2021). The success of any organisation depends on the efficiency and the effectiveness of the communication system and the nature of the independent relationships (Akarika et al 2021). Similarly, Akarika (2021:67) sees organisational communication as the willingness of employers and employees to make efforts and to take actions towards organisational objectives. Thus, the purpose of communicating messages in an organisation has to do with the essence of sending and receiving messages within an organisation… as well as the function each message is supposed to perform (Akarika, 2021). Communication is used as a tool to facilitate the participation of people in development activities (Chouldhury, 2011). Communication has a vital role in an organisational life. It is one of the main things that must be

owned in order to achieve organisational goals and objectives (Akarika, Iwok and Ikon, 2021). Research on organisational politics has been shifted from the negative to the positive impact. Gotsis&Kortezi (2011) found out that organisational politics is not necessarily deleterious, despite historically considered as ‒self-serving, oriented to egotistically promote self-interest, and enhancing self-interest can be achieved at the expense of others well-being, since it is detrimental to others‘ goals and pursuits‖ (p.457).

Landells & Albrecht (2017) note that individuals view organisation politics through one of four lenses: reactive, reluctant, strategic, or integrated, and their interpretation informs their view of workplace politics and the extent to which they personally engage in political behaviour (Landells& Albrecht, 2017).

Organisational politics, also known as office politics or workplace politics involves the use of power and social networking within a workplace to achieve changes that benefit the organisation or the individual within it. Positive organisational politics are behaviours that are designed to influence others with the goal of helping both the organisation and person playing the politics (Aamodt, 2015). Both individuals and groups may engage in office politics (Marilyn nd) which can be highly destructive, as people focus on personal gains at the expense of the organisation. According to Bolander ‒politics is the lubricant that oils organisation internal gears‖ (Bolander, 2011). Mullins (1985) cited in Umoren (2010) sees organisation politics as involving sets of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups. A skillful and well-trained politics at work can help an organisation in getting its point across, neutralize resistance to a key project, or get a choice job assignment.

According to Yusuf (2008) cited in Olurunleke, (2015) politics may be positive (collaborative) or negative (destructive and competitive) but the fact is that no organization exists without politics. There are two dimensions of viewing organisational politics; either as an ailment of social influence that is of benefit to the organisation, or a self-serving interest that goes contrary to organisational goals and objectives. Robbins, Judge and Sanghi (2008) note that politics has a lot of potential consequences on work outcome and can affects organisational processes such as; decision making, promotion, rewards and among others either positively or negatively. Organisational politics represents deviant behaviours of employees towards their work place environment only for individual‘s self-interest. These self-interests may be at the cost of other employees or may be organsational goals as well (Shamaila&Aiyla, 2012).

Organisational politics involves intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups (Kreitner&Kinicki 2013). According to McShane and Von-Glinow (2000) organisational politics is ‒attempt to influence others using discretionary behaviour to promote personal objectives‖. Dubrin, (2001) defined organisational politics as informal approaches to gaining power through means other than merit or luck. According to Culbert and McDonough, 1985, Dubrin, 2001, organisational politics can hurt an organisation and its members when carried to excess. Too much organisational politics can lower morale, increase turnover, time waste in effort thereby lowering performance. Organisational politics is important since it provides an understanding of the informal processes of conflicts and co-operation in organizations, and their impact on the organisational performance (Olurunleke, 2015).

According to McGill, organisation politics is another influencing process along with norms, formal authority and expertise. Thus, it is important for leaders to understand the forms it can take and how to use it for the well-being of the organisation. Organisational politics has a potential destructive force, but when deployed effectively, it can help the organisation meet its strategic goals and live up to its values, especially during organisational change (Jarrett, 2017)

The term ‒development‖ has various meaning to different people and can be explained in different context. Development has often been confused with ‒economic growth as measured solely in terms of annual increase in per-capta income or gross national product, regardless of its

distribution and the degree of peoples participation in effective growth‖ (Mahmoud 1991, cited in Abuiyada, 2018). Similarly, Soers (1972) cited in Abuiyada (2018) notes that ‒development means the conditions for realisation of human personality. It's evaluation must therefore take into account these linked criteria: where there has been a reduction in (1) poverty (2) unemployment (3) inequality‖. According to Pearson (1992) cited in Abuiyada, (2018) development involves ‒an improvement qualitative, quantitative or both in the use of available resources‖. He also asserts that development does not refer to one particular perspective on social, political and economic betterment. Instead, it is a hybrid term for a myriad of strategies adopted for socio-economic and environment transformation from current states to desired ones.

Development is a political term that has a range of meanings depending on the context of usage and may also be used to reflect and to justify a variety of different agendas held by different people or organisations. The idea of development articulated by the World Bank, for instance, is very different from that promoted by Greenpeace activists. Since development depends on values and on alternative conceptions of the good life, there is no uniform or unique answer (Kanbur, 2006:5). Developments in organisational politics present a comprehensive analysis of organisational politics and its meaning and applications for employees and managements in modern worksites (Vigoda-Godat, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

This work relies on two theories namely: Social Exchange Theory and Procedural Justice Theory.

Social Exchange Theory

The theory of social exchange which evolved from Thorndike's (1932, 1935) work on the development of reinforce theory and mills (1923) managerial utility theory states that modern-day influences have been derived from the work of sociologist such as Homans (1950, 1961), Blan (1964), and Emerson (1972). The model that emerges to explain social exchange theory is comprised of five central elements. Behaviour is predicated upon the notion of reality, relationships is based on reciprocation, social exchange is based on a justice principle, individuals will seek to maximize their gains and minimize their costs in the exchange relation and individuals participate in a relationship based out of a sense of mutal benefit rather than coercion. Cropanzano, Prehar, and Chen (2002) also pointed to the social exchange as a possible explanation for justice and fairness in organisations, thereby indicating the usefulness of social exchange variables (trust, social support, social reciprocity and helping behaviour in understanding workplace politics. Hence employers tend to view the work sphere as fairer and just in cases where social ties can support their interests and ambitions.

The social exchange theory is relevant to the present study in that its central elements is predicated upon the notion of reality, reciprocation, justice principle, and that individuals in an organisation communicate and participate in a relationship based on mutual benefit rather than coercion.

Procedural Justice Theory

Procedural justice refers to the idea of fairness in the processes that resolve disputes and allocate resources. It is a concept that when embraced, provides positive organisational change and bolsters better relationship. Procedural justice concerns the fairness and the transparency of the processes by which decisions are made, and may be contrasted with distributive justice (fairness in the distribution of rights or resources), and attribute justice (fairness in the punishment of wrongs). Some theories of procedural justice hold that fair procedure leads to equitable outcomes, even if the requirements of distributive or restorative justice are not met (Tyler et. al, 1985) cited in (Hagan &Hanns 2017). The theory of procedural justice was developed, tested, and approved by Tom Tyler and his colleagues. Tyler and his colleagues have elaborated and empirically test procedural justice theory across a range of domains including

organisational behaviour, dispute resolution (MacCou 2005) cited in Hagan & Hanns (2017). The procedural justice theory is relevant to this study because it is a concept when embraced by organisations provides positive organisational change and bolster organisational relationship in terms of fairness and transparency of the processes by which decisions are made in terms of fairness in the distribution of rights or resources and fairness in the punishment of wrongs.

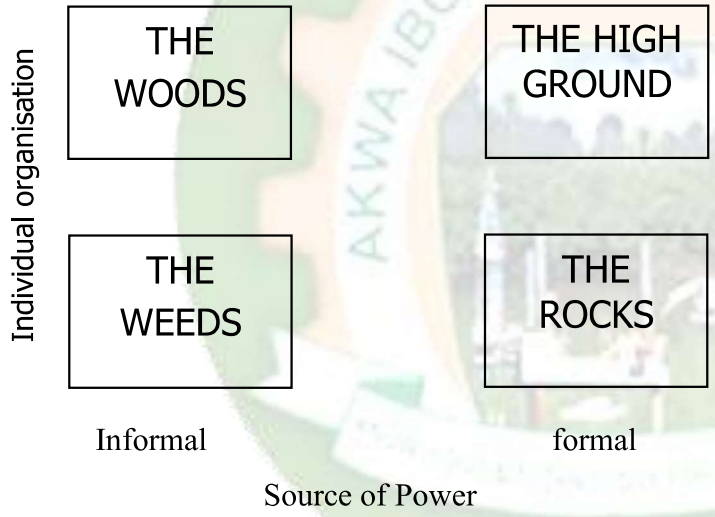
Method and Material

This study relies on secondary data sources which include: books, personal sources, journals and websites in order to critically examine the role of communication in organisational politics, examine possible reasons for organisational politics and determine the effect of organisational politics and its impact on development in contemporary Nigeria.

Organisational Politics and Development in Contemporary Nigeria: A Critical Discourse

At the root of organisational politics and development is communication. Little wonder Stephen (2011) sees communication as a critical factor in directing and mobilizing workforce towards the accomplishment of the organisational goals and objectives. According to Vigoda et al (2006) organisational politics are important since these provide an understanding of the informal processes of conflicts and co-operations in organisations and their impact on employees‘ performance.

The four metaphors of organisational politics



Source: Jarrett (2017)

According to Jarrett (2017), this quadrant represents the terrain in organisational politics.

The weeds - This is where personal influence and informal networks rule. It is called ‒the weeds‖ because it is a dynamic that grows naturally without any maintenance. ‒The weeds‖ can be positive when checked and negative if left unchecked. Informal networks and personal influence can be a counterproductive force to legitimate power and detrimental to the long-term interest of the organisation.

The Rocks - Power in ‒the rocks‖ rests on individual‘s interactions and formal sources of authority such as expertise, role, title or those with access to resources, political capital due to membership or strong ties to a high-status group such as the finance committee, special task force or senior management team.

The High Ground - This is a combination of formal authority with organisational systems. This describes the rules, structures, policies, guidelines and procedures that form the basis of political

activities. Thus, ―the high ground‖ provides guide for ―the rocks‖ it is a functional political procedure that uses structures of control system, sanctions, incentives that keep the organisation in compliance with its goals and objectives.

The Woods - This refers to the implicit norms, hidden assumption and unspoken routines in the organisation. The aim of organisation politics is to sell ideas, influence others and to achieve objectives; they are informal and unofficial and can sometime occur behind closed doors (Brandon & Seldman, 2004).

Discussion of Findings

There are several reasons for organisational politics:

Tool for lazy individuals - Every individual may wish to acquire wealth without making an effort to acquire this wealth through hard work. These individuals are in the habit of looking for a short cut to come in the limelight without much effort. Organisational politics provides a tool for such people to create a negative image of the people they think are a hindrance in their pathway. Sometimes, non-performances are favoured by their bosses or managers because of their involvement in organisational politics. This might not be taken well by other employees within the organisation. In fact, it discourages the serious employees with the organisation (Serven, 2001).

Individuals that cannot adjust to change - Change is constant in any organisation and employees must always be ready to work towards change in an organisation. Some employees find it difficult to accept change and it proves unsettling for them. This provides an avenue for organisational politics to thrive in order to demean the individuals that have accepted the change in the workplace.

Cordial/Personal Relationships - In any organisation, cordial/personal relationships has no breeding ground in a professional working environment. It is often seen that supporting an employee you have personal or cordial relationship causes organisational problems, thus the reason for organisational politics.

Manipulation - Manipulation of information, messages, data with an intent to mislead a superior and pass the wrong information is usually done with the help of organisational politics. Organisational politics can also facilitate dissemination of wrong information among employees of the company. Employees that engage in organisational politics can manipulate information before it reaches others. In fact, information will not be disseminated in its original form (Jais, 2006).

Jealousy - Jealousy exist in any organisation between employees especially if another employee‘s effort is being appreciated by top management staff. This leads to organisational politics as other employees will try to tarnish the smarter employee‘s image in the organisation.

Lack of Trust - Lack of trust between colleagues is another reason for organisational politics. Employees do not want their colleagues to get more acknowledgements for work done by them than others. This result in workplace politics by finding ways to pull others down in the organisation. Wilshire et al (2014) observe that individual who score low on honesty-humility have a tendency to manipulate or flatter other for personal gain, feel entitled, as well as to feel tempted to bend the rules for personal profit (Lee & Ashton, 2004, p.237).

Gossips - Another reason for workplace politics is gossips. This happen when employees are in the habit of taking part in unending gossips about colleagues, peers and other staff in the organisation. Workplace gossip that may be viewed as negative is often the result of a lack of communication through formal channels, as employees seek honest information (Grosser, Lopez – Kidwell, Labianca, and Ellwardt, 2012 p.54).

Power Struggle - Power struggle in an organisation often becomes one of the reasons for organisational politics. Employees who lack self-confidence start displaying superiority at the detriment of others. This result in workplace politics where employees adopts wrong tactics in order to prove their worth.

Reward Systems - Reward system used to encourage employees often lead to workplace politics because every employee wants to obtain the reward. This result in an unhealthy rivalry, which leads to employees sabotaging the work of other colleagues in order to become better than others.

Effects of Organisational Politics and its Impact on Development

Organisational politics if not properly managed can prove counterproductive to the attainments of organisational goals and objectives. The following are some of the perceived effects of organisational politics and its impact on development.

Decrease in Productivity - Employees who are engaged in workplace politics often pay less attention to work and engage more on rumours, gossip and underhand dealings. This result in a decrease in productivity, as employees are unable to achieve targets within a time limit and work gets delayed and postponed. This greatly affects the organisational development strides in any society. Employees that indulge in organisational politics will pay more attention to their organisational politics than their work. This is not productive and will waste the time and resources of the company (Ivypanda, 2018).

Negative Work Environment - Organisational politics often result in a negative work environment. People who engage in workplace politics are often despised by others. This tend to make the office environment harmful which directly impact on efficiency of the employees. This leads to a retardation in the growth of the nation.

Low level of Concentration - An employee engaged in workplace politics often finds it difficult to concentrate on his work. The individual is interested in pulling others down and tarnishing their image than the task assigned to him, thereby leading to poor job performance and inefficiency in carrying out assigned task.

Attitude Change - The most critical impact of workplace politics is attitude change in employees because of negative emotions. This result in a loss of job interest because employees feel that their hard work is not being recognized. A negative change in attitude leads to stagnation of growth in an economy and job inefficiency.

Increases Stress - Employees in organisation are fearful of discussing their problems with colleagues because of the fear that the information might be leaked. Every individual needs a confidant and a friend and when this is unavailable in a workplace because of organisational politics, it results in anxiety and stress. This greatly hinders employee‘s productivity (Muhammad et al 2019).

Why Organisational Politics is Inevitable

Tendency to outdo others - Every employee wants to outshine the other and step on the ladder of success. In an organisation this is usually achieved through organisational politics. This explains the emergence of various trade union in many organizations.

The quest to be relevant - Some people are more political inclined than others. According to a popular axiom, ―man is a political animal‖. These individuals engage in organisational politics in order to have their way.

Limited Resources - In any organisation, there exist limited resources in terms of training facilities, rewards, gratification, promotion opportunities among other resources. The unavailability of resources leads to competition, this makes organisational politics inevitable.

Authority and Power - In any organisation, those in position of authority and power take major decisions that must be complied with by subordinates. These individuals are being perceived by employees as influential persons in the organisation. Some people have more authority and power than others based on their position or role in the organisation and they often engage in organisational politics.

Diversity of Interest - Diverse interest is one of the fundamental reasons why organisational politics is inevitable. Tracing the long history of organisational politics. Aristotle observed that the reason politics is present in an organisation is due to diversity of interest.

Conclusion

Organisational politics is an area of organisational study that spans many debate and decades of research. Although organisational politics and perceptions of workplace politics have been related to negating individual and organisational outcomes, this paper argues that negative effects of organisational politics can be reduced through the use of effective communication in order to enhance development in a contemporary Nigeria. Howbeit, despite the negative perception of organisational politics, there is evidence that organisational politics are not necessary evil but that political skill, if used effectively, can aid in gaining compromises in difficult workplace situation (Hochwarter, With and Kacmar, 2000).

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Communication should be used to assign work task to employees on the basis of work experience, and efficiency. This will make employees not to indulge in workplace politics because of job satisfaction.
2. There should be transparency in the organisation at all levels. Employees perceive organisations as more political when they do not feel clear about their job responsibilities (Muhammad, 2007).
3. Organisations should encourage teamwork in order to strengthen the bond of relationship between employees. This will definitely reduce workplace politics.
4. Effective communication can be used to eliminate the chances of workplace politics by providing regular performance feedback to all employees. In providing feedback, management can reduce the perception of organisational politics and this can lead to improvements in morale and job performance (Rosen, Levy & Hall, 2006).
5. Informal networks of communication should be reduced and a positive frame of mind in the workplace should be encouraged in order to eliminate rumours and lies in an organisation.
6. The core values of the organisation should be recognized, accepted and maintained. This helps in dealing with organisational politics in a positive manner.

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