

Communication Gap and Role Ambiguity among Lecturers in Public Universities in Anambra State

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Communication is very important in achieving any organizational roles effectively. However, communication gap can create role ambiguity as employees would find it unclear to know the task assigned to them. This can jeopardize the set goals of any organization. Thus, the study investigated the relationship that exists between communication gap and role ambiguity, selecting the two public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. Data were collected using questionnaires on sample size of 344. 245 was allocated to Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK), while Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University, Uli (COOU) got 99. The analysis was done using descriptive method and simple regression of analysis of variance (ANOVA). The key findings show that communication gap is statistically and positively related to role ambiguity in the selected universities. It is therefore suggested that the culture of effective communication should be adopted so that employees would know their responsibilities, as this would help the growth of the organizations.

Keywords: Communication gap, role ambiguity, organizational goals, public universities, Anambra State, Nigeria, effective communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Information is transferred from one person to another through the process of communication. Rumour and ambiguity are reduced when communication in an organization is open and flowing in both directions. According to Usendok (2022), open communication and collaboration promote the flow of new ideas and strengthen work connections, both of which can improve employee morale. On the contrary, a communication gap can suggest misrepresentation, one-way communication, or late communication. This might lead to role uncertainty at the workplace. Ambiguous communication might lead to conflict. When someone misinterprets a message or isn't given access to information, the individual becomes frustrated and angry, resulting in a conflict situation. Conflict in the workplace arises when an employee requests information from another who fails to answer appropriately (Ngemukung, 2022).

Communication gaps have been identified in numerous studies as a major cause of conflict in companies. For example, Hotepo et al. (2010) identified a number of variables that have contributed to disputes in the Nigerian service industry, including a lack of resources, disparate expectations, competition, a lack of cooperation, interdependence, and communication issues. Tsevendorj

(2008) asserts that communication breakdowns, perception issues, issues with values, and cultural differences are major causes of conflict in the banking sector. A 2009 study on conflict in Canadian workplaces by Psychometrics Canada found that a stressful work environment, personality conflicts and warring egos, leadership from upper management, and communication problems all contribute significantly to the development of conflict at work.

Consequently, communication gap has been adjudged to cause role ambiguity in organizations because someone is not clear about the role assigned to him/her. According to Rizwan et al. (2014), role ambiguity occurs when someone's authority and knowledge on how to carry out or finish the work that has been assigned to them are unclear. It is a circumstance in which a person lacks clear expectations for his role within an organisation (Yousef, 2002). Yung-Tai and Chang (2010) also stated that unclear role-related information may lead to role ambiguity. Having high role ambiguity influences the performance of an employee, because an employee that does not know what is required of him/her may not achieve or contribute much to the growth of an organization. According to Lang et al. (2007), there are a number of benefits to having a lower level of role ambiguity or more role clarity. These benefits include less psychological stress, increased

interests, creativity, autonomy, self-actualization, autonomy, and self-esteem, as well as reduced tension, physical stress, and exit intention (Sethela & Rosli, 2020). The reverse will be the case if the situation is a higher role ambiguity or lower role clarity.

The issue of communication lapses in UNIZIK and COOU to some extent has caused lots of lecturers not doing the right thing at the right time. However, lecturers at these educational institutions have expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of support they receive from their respective department heads, university administration, union organizations, and even the government. Some committee members also lack adequate information about what they ought to do, thereby making some of them redundant in contributing effectively to the growth of the committee. If workers have to rely on the grapevine for information and if employees are not carried along in decision making, especially when such decisions affect them directly, then job/task ambiguity may ensue. This could lead to confusion about who is to do what and when, which may affect the performance of the workers in the universities. It is as a result of all these that this study becomes necessary at this point to examine how communication gap contributes role ambiguity in the selected universities in Anambra State since no study has been carried out in the study area chosen, and findings revealed that role ambiguity in these universities is as a result of communication gap. The rest of this paper is structured to include literature review, methodology, data presentation and analysis, and conclusion and recommendation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Review of Empirical Literature

The available studies on the subject matter are reviewed in this section to empirically link this study with previous studies.

Jensen and Thomsen conducted a survey in 2023 to find out how managerial communication could reduce uncertainty among service workers in Denmark. A sample size of 240 professionals who work in nursing homes were selected. A low-cost experimental communication experiment was used to assess the data. The results showed that professionals' perceived ambiguity about volunteer activities is reduced when volunteer tasks are clarified through strategic communication.

Lukersmith et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive top-down hierarchical quality analysis of communication on Case Management (CM) roles and duties in an Australian program for people with disabilities. The main actions as outlined in a validated CM taxonomy were employed in the study along with content analysis techniques. 53 CM scheme policy and practice documents were thoroughly searched and examined for this study between 2013 and 2019. The results showed that role communication was deficient, with vagueness and ambiguity as well as gaps in the explanation of CM roles and responsibilities. A number of parliamentary inquiries, research studies, formal complaints, and judgment appeals pertaining to the Scheme have revealed that CM users have connected inadequate role communication to unfavorable

experiences and consequences of CM acts of planning and coordination.

The impact of efficient communication on organizational performance in Zambia was also investigated by Musheke and Phiri (2021). The 88 respondents' data were analyzed using descriptive and Pearson correlation methods. The results demonstrated that good communication improves organizational performance. The impact of communication gaps on the accomplishment of organizational goals was examined by Mohammed and Kojoli (2020) at Adamawa State University in Mubi, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive research design. There were 824 people in total who participated in the study: 592 non-academic employees of various cadres and 232 academic staff members. Using the Yemani Yaro formula, the sample size of 269 was ascertained. A questionnaire was distributed to collect data, and percentage analysis was used to examine the data. Nonetheless, the findings showed that a communication gap contributes to a decrease in information exchange between management and employees, which confuses workers.

The mediating roles of role ambiguity and intra-team communication among Italian footballers were investigated by Nateri et al. (2020). There were 291 Italian players in total—174 men and 117 women. Structural equation modeling was utilized to analyze the data from the questionnaire. The results described that effective intra-team communication moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and functional states, while job uncertainty mediated the correlation between emotional intelligence and dysfunctional states.

Kichura (2019) investigated organizational factors that either increase or minimize job ambiguity in school social workers. A sample of seventy-three members of the School Social Work Association of America were used for a cross-sectional survey design. The research indicates that there is a noteworthy moderating influence of internal communication and supervision on role ambiguity. Yakubu et al. (2019) conducted research on the impact of communication problems on project performance in Nigeria. One hundred construction companies completed questionnaires, and the data was gathered using both descriptive and inferential statistics to answer the questions. The results showed that the project performance of the chosen construction companies was positively correlated with ineffective communication.

Nebo et al. (2015) investigated how Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka's organizational performance was impacted by effective communication. The study made extensive use of primary and secondary data and employed a survey research approach. The population consisted of 170 non-academic and 130 academic staff members. The sample size consisted of 166 individuals using the Taro Yamane technique and stratified random sampling. To investigate the theories, the chi-square test was used. The study's conclusions demonstrated that good communication is the key to an organization's employees' productive and successful management performance.

A study by Owusu-Boateng and Jeduah (2014) sought to determine the impact of organizational communication on

worker performance at the Agricultural Development Bank, which includes the three branches located in Ghana's Tamale Metropolis—Tamale Main, Aboabo, and Kaladan. The case study design was employed. All three branches' employees were sampled using a combination of stratified and simple random sampling techniques. While six respondents were selected using stratified sampling from both senior level and junior level personnel to be interviewed, thirty respondents were obtained through simple random sampling from a population of fifty respondents for the interviews. A combination of questionnaires and interviews were used to obtain information from bank employees. The acquired data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods, and the data was represented using tables and figures. Based on the survey, staff possess extensive knowledge about the bank's performance because information about the bank is posted on the website. Findings additionally demonstrated that the bank mostly uses formal, top-down channels for communication.

Rasmussen and Kroon (2012) investigated how communication gaps affect workplaces. The study focused on personnel from Swedish pyrotechnical factory which deals with flammables and explosives. Qualitative interviews were done with nineteen employees of the factory and the study found that communication gaps can cause job ambiguity (tension, poor working environment, division among the management and workers).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Due to the nature of the investigation, a survey research design was chosen. This research design is suitable for this study because it enables the researcher to sample the perceptions or opinions of lecturers concerning the role of communication gap in reducing or increasing role ambiguity. Data were collected from sampled respondents (lecturers) through questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire designed were administered in order to obtain responses from the target audience.

3.2. Area of the Study

The area of this study is Anambra State which is one of the five South East States in Nigeria, with its capital situated in Awka. Anambra State has two publicly owned universities which are Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University, Uli.

3.3. Population of the Study

The population of the study is 3492 academic staff of the selected universities. The source of this figure is the personnel department of the respective schools studied. The distribution of the population is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Population Distribution of Selected Universities Firms

S/N	Name	Population
1	UNIZIK	2480
2	COOU	1012
	Total	3492

Source: Personnel Department of the Schools Studied, 2023

Table 1 shows the distribution of the population of the study, with UNIZIK having 2480 academic staff while COOU has 1012 academic staff, making a total of 3492 staff.

3.4. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study made use of Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula to determine the sample size of the study. The workings are shown below:

$$s = \frac{x^2 NP(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + x^2 P(1 - P)}$$

Where

s = Sample size

x^2 = Table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at 0.05% confidence level (3.84)

N = population size (3492)

P = population proportion (assumed to be 0.5 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

d = Degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05)

$$s = \frac{3.84 (3492)(0.5)(1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2(3492 - 1) + (3.84)(0.5)(1 - 0.5)}$$

$$s = \frac{3333}{8.7275 + 0.96}$$

$$s = \frac{3333}{9.6875}$$

$$s \cong 344$$

In determining the proportion of questionnaires to be allocated to the studied institutions, Bowley's allocation formula was used and the workings are shown below:

$$nh = \frac{nNh}{N}$$

Where n = total sample size.

N_h = No. of items in each stratum in the population.

N = population size.

3.5. Allocation of the Sample Size

UNIZIK 344 (2480) / 3492 = 245

COOU 344 (1012) / 3492 = 99

From the calculation, it is seen that UNIZIK got a total of 245 copies of the questionnaire in corresponds to the population proportion of the institution while COOU got a total of 99 copies of the questionnaire in correspondents to their population proportion.

3.6. Method of Data Collection

The data for the study was collected in person, with the help of one research assistant. The research assistant was properly trained to entertain questions from the respondents and to also know those to distribute the questionnaire.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2 below shows the distribution of the demographic characteristics of the people that responded to the questionnaire.

Table 2: Demographic Factors				
No	Biographic	Frequency	Percentage	Total
1	Gender			300
	Male	173	58	
	Female	127	42	
2	Age			300
	18-27	-		
	28-37	54	18	
	38-47	76	25	
	48-57	130	44	
	58 and above	40	13	
3	Marital Status			300
	Single	76	25	
	Married	211	70	
	Divorced	2	1	
	Widow	4	1	
	Widower	7	3	
4	Educational Qualifications			300
	HND/B.Sc	13	4	
	M.Sc/MBA/MA	186	62	
	Ph.D/Post-Ph.D	101	34	
5	Working Experience			300
	5 – 10 years	198	66	
	Above 10	102	34	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2 shows the demographic factors of the respondents. From the Table, 173 of the respondents are male while 127 are female. It can also be seen from the Table that none of the respondents is between the ages of 18-27, while 54 respondents are between 28-37, 76 are between 38-47. 130 are between 48-57, while 40 are 58 years and above. On the marital status of the respondents, 25% are single, 70% are Married, 1% are either divorced or widows while 3% are widowers. On their educational qualification, 13 of the 300 respondents have HND/B.Sc, 186 have

M.Sc/MBA/MA while 101 have Ph.D/Post-Ph.D. Enquiry about their work experience shows that 66% of the respondents have worked between 5–10 years while the rest 34% have work experience that is above 10 years.

4.2. Distribution of Questionnaires

The questionnaire distribution schedule is presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Questionnaire Distribution Schedule

S/N	Institution	Distributed	Collected	Analyzed
1	UNIZIK	245	229	225
2	COOU	99	81	75
Total		344 (100%)	310 (90%)	300 (87%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 3 shows the total number of distributed copies of the questionnaire, retrieved copies and the number analyzed for the study. From the Table, a total of 344 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in accordance with the sample size of the study, 310 copies were collected

representing 90% of the distributed copies of the questionnaire while 300 copies were analyzed as they were some questionnaire copies that were incompletely answered.

Table 4: Distribution of Responses for Communication Gap and Job Ambiguity

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA (5)	A (4)	UD (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Verdict
Independent Variables (Workplace Conflict)								
Communication Gap								
1	I am carried along in decision-making in my firm.	59	76	-	102	63	2.89	Reject
2	I get information at the appropriate time at my university.	41	80	11	34	134	2.53	Reject
3	The medium of communication with me is appropriate.	68	80	5	46	101	2.89	Reject
4	My university ensures I get enough information I need to function well.	70	101	1	78	50	3.21	Accept
5	I am left to guess in my institution because of communication gaps.	49	101	-	90	60	2.96	Reject
Dependent Variables (Employee Engagement)								
Role Ambiguity								
6	I am sure of what is expected of me always in my firm.	89	90	-	71	50	3.32	Accept
7	My role in the organization is not confusing.	101	70	-	66	63	3.27	Accept
8	Because of good communication, my job expectation is clear.	99	70	-	89	42	3.32	Accept
9	I am not quite sure of what is happening in my institution for lack of clear information.	40	67	-	78	115	2.47	Reject
10	The information I have in my university is not enough to make my job and responsibility very clear.	50	78	-	65	107	2.66	Reject

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 indicates the distribution of responses for communication gaps relate to job ambiguity of the respondents. The analysis is based on the mean of the individual questionnaire items, with a benchmark of acceptance of 3 and above. For questions used in measuring communication gap, the respondent rejected that they are carried along in decision making in their institution, with a mean of 2.89. Similarly, a mean of 2.53 also shows that they rejected that they get information at the appropriate time in their university. They also rejected that the medium of communication with them is appropriate as indicated with a mean of 2.89. They, however, accepted that the university ensures they get enough information they need to function well as indicated with a mean of 3.21 and rejected that they are left to guess in their institution because of communication gaps with a mean of 2.96.

For questionnaire items bothering on role ambiguity, when the respondents were asked if they are sure of what is expected of them always in my university, a mean of 3.32 shows that they agreed. Similarly, a mean of 3.27 indicates that they agreed that their role in the organization is not confusing. On the same line of thought, they agreed as shown with a mean of 3.32 that because of good communication, my job expectation is clear. However, they rejected that they are not quite sure of what is happening in their institution for lack of clear information and also disagreed that the information they have in their university is not enough to make their job and responsibility very clear with a mean of 2.66.

Hypothesis Testing

There is a significant relationship existing between communication gaps and job ambiguity among lecturers in public universities in Anambra State.

Table 5: Regression Result for Hypothesis Testing

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.979 ^a	.959	.959	1.506

a. Predictors: (Constant), COMGAP

Source: SPSS Output, 2023

Where:

COMGAP = Communication gap

Table 5 gives details of the regression analysis result for hypothesis three which states that there is a significant relationship existing between communication gaps and job ambiguity among lecturers in public universities in

Anambra State. The result indicates that there is a positive correlation between the variables (communication gap and job ambiguity), as indicated by the R of .979. Additionally, it reveals that R-Square is .959, meaning that changes in the independent factors (communication gap) account for 96% of the variation in the dependent variable (job ambiguity).

Table 6: ANOVA Output for Hypothesis Testing

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15886.223	1	15886.223	7000.889	.000 ^b
	Residual	676.213	298	2.269		
	Total	16562.437	299			

a. Dependent Variable: JBAMB

b. Predictors: (Constant), COMGAP

Source: SPSS Output, 2023

Where:

JBAMB = Job Ambiguity

The ANOVA result is displayed in Table 6. The result indicates that the p-value is .000 and the F statistics is 7000.889. Since the p-value is below the chosen level of significance (p-value < .05), this suggests that the relationship between communication gaps and job uncertainty is statistically significant.

Implication: Accept the alternative hypothesis.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

The hypothesis, which claimed that there is a substantial correlation between employment uncertainty and communication gaps among academics in public universities in Anambra State, supports the study's findings. Simple regression analysis was used in testing this hypothesis at a 5% level of significance, the finding shows that indeed, there is a statistically significant relationship existing between communication gap and job ambiguity among lecturers in public universities in Anambra State. The relationship observed was a positive relationship and the extent of this relationship is high (96%). This finding means that an increase in communication gap also leads to a concomitant increase in job ambiguity. That is, when there is communication gap; when information does not come as and when due, when the medium is not right or when it is deliberately hoarded, then people are kept in the dark that they are not quite sure what is expected of them. When a clear-cut message mandate is not given, when people are not carried along, then there will be ambiguity with respect to what to do and at what time. This finding is aligned with that of Musheke

and Phiri (2021) which established that effective communication has a positive effect on organizational performance.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study investigates the role of communication gap in role ambiguity in public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive approach, while the hypothesis was tested using ANOVA. The outcome of the finding reveals that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between communication gap and job ambiguity among lecturers in public universities in Anambra State. This shows that communication is very essential in any organization as it will help employees to deliver tasks timely and effectively. Thus, ineffective communication can lead to job ambiguity. In line with the findings of the study, it is therefore recommended that communication between departments, faculties and management of the institution and government should be as open as possible and two directional (top bottom and bottom top) so as to make sure people at all times know what is expected of them to avoid ambiguity in roles, tasks and responsibilities.

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