The Role of Internal Communication in Employee Identification and Commitment: A Case Study of Multimedia University of Kenya

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ABSTRACT*:* This article analyzed the role of internal communication in employee identification with Multimedia University of Kenya. The study objectives were to assess how internal communication contributed to employee identification with the institution.A descriptive research design was used to achieve the research objectives and the researchers used random sampling technique and purposive sampling to get the participants in data collection exercise. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used in the study. The findings indicated that communication is a key factor in employee identification with an organization and results showed that managers have a key role in enhancing employee identification with an organization by creating a good communication climate which promotes two- way communication. This study's theoretical contribution is significant as it addresses how communication can be used to promote employee identification with an organization and identifies the employees most preferred communication channels and the satisfaction level for each channel. The study recommends that managers should take internal communication seriously and provide avenues to enable employees feedback to reach them and in return managers should take the feedbacks seriously.

Keywords:*employee identification, internal communication*

I.   INTRODUCTION

The success of any organization depends on its internal communication system and it is throughit that an organization operates and makes sense of day-to-day activities within it. Employees being the key stakeholders in organization need effective internal communication to enable them to perform their duties and enable the organization to achieve its goals and compete with others in the same field. Scholars Stevanovic and Gmitrovic, (2016) and Vora and Patra, (2017) note that one cannot underestimate the importance of internal communication. This is because employers are appreciating its positive impact on the productivity and future of organizations. In addition, it enhances organizations activities such as making business decisions and maintaining organizations stability.

Internal communication takes the form of messages which provide employees with important information about the organization such as goals, norms, values, processes, structures and policies (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). This information is crucial to employees as it determines whether they will identify with the organization or not because it helps them to identify the salient characteristics of the organization they are working forand thus are able to identify with those characteristics.   Without internal communication, organizations will cease to exist (Hart, Vroman, & Stuiz, 2015).

Effective internal communication leads to employee engagement (Lemon & Palenchar, 2018), organizational identification (Neill, Men, & Yue, 2019 ;Smidts, Pruyn, & van Riel, 2001), trust and organizational commitment (Jo & Shin, 2005) and also has the ability to create positive relationships among managers and employees (Ruck & Welch, 2012). In addition, it is central to organizing and necessary to the creation and maintenance of effective organization (Atouba, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary that internal communication is given the priority it deserves in any organization as it is the conduit that brings together all the organization's activities.

Argenti & Forman (2002)argue that communication acts as a precursor to how employees view their organization and it portrays what the organization is. How the employees view the organization has a great effect on the organization's reputation as employees' behavior and action toward the organization to a certain extent is based on how they view their organization and these actions contribute to the organization's reputation.

Not only is communication important but the method used also matters and studies indicate that effective communication is dialogic or symmetrical two-way communication as this provides opportunity for interaction between employees and managers (Argenti, 1998). However, it has also been noted that this kind of communication cannot be achieved all the time especially when dealing with big organizations. This calls for a different way of addressing the above need. Welch and Jackson, (2007) addressed it by suggesting that organization can adopt a one-way communication method using a mediated means of communication. Mediated communication involves the use of some sort of communication media such as external news release, corporate television advertisement and corporate website among others. Internal mediated communication will be effective "if its content meets the employee need to know rather than the management's need to tell " (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002 p. 487). Thus, there is need for communication managers to find out what the employees need to know and their preferred channels of communication if they are to be effective in their communication role and achieve the organization's objectives. The same sentiment was given by Ruck and Welch, (2012)who expressed the need to recognize employees needs as vital and recommended that messages targeted to the employees should reach them in the formats that they find to be useful and beneficial. It has been noted that technician prefer written communication over verbal communication and managers preferred face to face communication (Kelleher, 2011;Woodall, 2006). However, Uusi-Rauva and Nurkka, (2010)observed that there was little research done to find out what employees consider important in the internal "expert communication process" (p. 303) and further studies need to be done to find out the communication content meaningful for the various categories of employees.

Stevanovic and Gmitrovic, (2016) state that "the essence of internal communication is a two-way communication" (p. 302). The symmetrical model in strategic management focuses on how individuals, organizations and publics use communication to adjust their ideas and behaviors, rather than trying to control or manipulate how the other party thinks or behaves (Kim & Ni, 2010 ;Men & Stacks, 2014). It is suggested that it is the most effective way to communicate with employees (Kim & Ni, 2010) as it is rewarding in that it invites employees to participate actively in discussions about their organizational issues and involves them in decision making. Symmetrical communication allows both parties to negotiate and share ideas that are accepted by all participants involved (Yue, Men, & Fergusson, 2020). In return, the employee'sself-esteem is boosted and thus identifies more with the organization.

According to Cornelissen (2013), managers have a role in making internal communication effective. He points out that "the degree to which managers communicate to employees' and involve them in decision making has a direct impact on employees' morale and commitment to the organization" (p. 168).Argenti (2013) emphasizes that effective internal communication should reinforce employees' beliefs that they are important assets to the organization. Employees need individualized attention through internal communication (Kang & Sung, 2017). It is upon communication officers and managers to ensure that their employees get the necessary communication and allow them to own the organization'sactivities by permitting them to participate in decision making processes.

According to Wilkins, Butt, and Annabi (2018) when communication moves up the hierarchy to the organizations strategic decision makers, it implies that individuals are valued and have a higher level of authority. When employees know that they are valued, they will reciprocate by giving out their best to the organization and identify with it. Wilkins et al.(2018) emphasize that strategic decision makers can use internal communication to provide information about the organization's goals, values and achievements. To add onto that Smale et al. (2015) highlighted that if communication from the organization's strategic decision makers is relevant and of high quality, employees are more likely to recognize shared goals and values which will strengthen organization identification. In addition, when employees feel that they participate in decision making and are able to exert some control over their working life, they identify more with the organization (Cornelissen, 2013). Also, giving positive feedback to employees contribute in employee identification with the organization (Burns, Rockman, & Yim, 2014).

Though communication is considered as an important element in an organization, it was noted that it had been neglected as a management tool for engendering identification (Smidts et al., 2001) and it is on this basis that this study sought to find out the role of internal communication in employee identification in institution of higher learning.

Internal communication and Organizational Identification

Cornelissen (2013) defines employee organizational identification as the perception of oneness or belongingness to an organization, where individuals define themselves in terms of the organization in which they are members. Mckenna (2012)states that identification is the process of adopting the qualities of a group so as to have a good relationship with it. Therefore, identification involves internalizing the organization's values and adopting them as one's own. A person who identifies with an organization takes the organization's success and failures as his/her own and this gives him/her a sense of belongingness (Subba, 2019).

Identification is derived from identity which is the way an organization describes itself to its publics. It is what distinguishes an organization from the rest. For employees to identify with an organization, the organization must have its own identity. This identity influences the way employees interpret the organization's issues and will affect their attitude and behavior towards it (Maletye, Coet zee, & Ukpere, 2014). This identity can be fostered by having open channels of communication between employer and employees where promotion of positive organization identity takes place (Bartels, Peters, De Jong, Pruyn, & van der Molen, 2010). The identity can be in form of brand, corporate image or its manner of delivering services. This identity makes it to be perceived as authentic or not authentic by its stakeholders. Riel & Fombrun (2007) emphasize that "a company will never be perceived as authentic if its employees don't believe and express the company's shared values in their day-to-day interactions with customers and suppliers, investors and the public" (p.62). An organization's identity creates identification by giving it unique characteristics that are specific to it. These unique characteristics can be manifested in the way an organization communicates with its stakeholders, its culture and artifacts in the organization and the organization can use this to brand themselves. Cornelissen(2013)points out that "employee organizational identification increases as a result of the degree of overlap between the personal identity of the employees and the identity of the organization" (p. 167). The more attractive an organization's image is perceived to be by the employee, the stronger the identification an employee will have with the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

Benefits of Identification

Studies indicate that employees who identify with an organization will be more satisfied with their work, will be cooperative in their work and will go an extra mile for the organization (Cornelissen, 2013;Wilkins et al., 2018). In addition, they will be supportive to the organization and make decisions that are consistent with the organizations objectives (Miller, Allen, Casey, & Johnson, 2000), they will also achieve superior work performance and demonstrate positive organizational citizenship behaviors (Millward & Postmes, 2010 ;Liu, Loi, & Lam, 2011).

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

i. What communication channel is preferred by Multimedia University of Kenya employees?
ii. How does internal communication affect employee identification with Multimedia University of Kenya?

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This was a single case study that employed a mixed research approach. The case study offered anopportunity for a holistic study using multiple tools such as survey and interviews to gather data in Multimedia University of Kenya (MMU). Sequential explanatory strategy was used where quantitative data was collected first followed by qualitative study(Creswel, 2009). The case study method was chosen as it offered an opportunity to conduct a holistic study using multiple tools such as survey and interviews to gather data in MMU. The aim of the study was to understand how internal communication enables employees to identifywith an organization. The results of the study can be used by other organizations to help them enable their employees to identify with their organizations.

Source of data

In this study questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data.

Study site

The study site was Multimedia University of Kenya and the population for the study was all employees on permanent and contract employment. The population comprised of teaching (faculty) staff and non-teaching staff. The non-teaching staff were three hundred and thirteen (313) whereas the teaching staff were one hundred and seventeen (117), totaling to four hundred and thirty (430) staff members as at July 2019.

Study site was selected because it is an institution of higher learning which has gone some positive transformation in its sector. Originally, it was founded as a Communication College which was highly esteemed in East Africa and then it was elevated to a university status. The study aimed to examine the role of internal communication in employee identification and commitment to it with an aim of finding out how communication can be used to enhance employee identification with institutions of higher learning.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

Simple random sampling technique was used to get a sample size of one hundred employees for the quantitative study and purposive sampling used to get four employees who held supervisory roles in the institution and had more than ten employees reporting to them.

The sample size for this study was 100 for quantitative study and 5 for qualitative study. The number for quantitative study was considered as adequate based on the guidelines given by Gay, Mills, & Airasian, (2009 p. 133) that where a population is less than 100 , survey the entire population. If the population size is around 500 (give or take 100), 50% should be sampled, if the population is 1,500, 20% should be sampled and when it is above 5,000, sample size of 400 will be adequate.

Methods of Data Collection

Survey and interviews were used to collect data. The data collection instrument used modified version of Denis communication climate and a modified version of (Cheney, 1983) organizational identification questionnaire.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using percentages,Pearson Product Moment Correlation and thematic.

Table 1
Reliability Analysis Table

S/no	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	S/no	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
1	Communication climate	.912	25	5	Opportunities for upward communication	.808	3
2	Superior subordinate	.894	8	6	Reliability of information	.665	2
3	Quality of information	.919	12	7	Commitment	.849	15
4	Superior openness	.868	3	8	Identification	.878	8

The instruments used for the study were reliable as they had Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Table 2 Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

S/no	Attributes	Sub attributes	No	%	S/no	Attributes	Sub attributes	No	%
1	Gender	Male	44	52.4	3	Work years	0-5	11	13.1
		Female	40	47.6			6-10	52	61.9
2	Education level	Certificate	12	14.3			11-20	12	14.3
		Diploma	24	28.6			21-30	6	7.1
		Bachelor	27	32.1			31& above	3	3.6

		Masters & above	21	25.0				

Forty-four male and forty females participated in this study representing 52.4% and 47.6% respectively. The highest number of participants had a bachelor's degree at 32.1%, followed by diploma at 28.6% and majority of the participants had worked for the institution for 6-10 years representing 61.9%. This % (61.9) gave a good reflection of the employees' perception of the communication climate and identification to the organization as they had worked for the organization for more than five years.

What Communication Channel is Preferred by Multimedia University of Kenya Employees?

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Preferred Channels

Channel	Frequency	Percent
None	4	4.8
Email	40	47.6
Internet	4	4.8
Intranet	2	2.4
Memo	20	23.8
Phone	10	11.9
Reports	1	1.2
Websites	3	3.6
Total	84	100

The most preferred channel of communication as indicated by employees were email at 47.6% followed by memo at 23.8% and the third position was taken by phones at 11.9%. The least preferred channel of communication was reports at 1.2%, followed by intranet at 2.4%. The respondents to the survey questions were employees in subordinate position whose nature of work is mostly technical in nature and thus the results supported what Kelleher (2011) andWoodall (2006) stated that technicians preferred written communication over verbal communication informing their choices of emails and memo as the most preferred channels of communication.

How Does Internal Communication Affect Employee Identification with Multimedia University of Kenya?

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Employee Organization Identification

S/no	Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I really care about the fate of the organization	84	3.98	.918
2	I am proud to be an employee of this organization	84	3.94	.910
3	I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected to help the organization to be successful	84	3.94	.949
4	I find it easy to identify myself with organization	84	3.68	.880
5	I often describe myself to others by saying "I work for this organization' or 'I am from this organization'	84	3.63	1.159
6	I am glad I chose to work for this organization rather than another company	84	3.58	.960
7	I talk of this organization to my friends as a great company to work for	84	3.46	1.058
8	In general, I view organization's problems as my problems	84	2.90	1.188
	Organization identification	84	**3.64**	**1.003**

The aggregate mean of 3.64 (SD=1.003) indicates that employees identification level with MMU is moderate with the highest mean of 3.98 (SD=0.918) showing that they agree to the statement "I really care about the fate of the organization and agree less to the statement "in general, I view organizations problems as my problems" with a mean of 2.90 (SD=1.188). According to Cornelissen (2013), identification with the organization includes sharing its values and goals and taking the organization's attribute as one's own. The

results indicated that employees really care about the fate of the organization probably which is a good indicator that they identify with their organization. This was followed by 'I am proud to be an employee of this organization' which is also a good indicator that employees identify with their organization. The third position was taken by 'I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected to help the organization to be successful' showing that employees would do extra roles for the sake of the organization, which is also an attribute of person who identify with their organization (Albrecht, 2012). The results also indicated that employees found it easy to identify themselves with the organization with a mean of 3.63 (SD=.880) and describing themselves as 'I am from this organization 3.63 (SD=1.159). All these communication items had a mean grade of above 3.6. this corroborates Cornelissen (2013) statement that identification involve employees defining themselves with the organization's attributes.

However, employees disagreed to the statement 'In general, I view organization's problems as my problems' with a mean of 2.90 (SD= 1.188), followed by 'I talk of this organization to my friends as a great company to work for' with a mean of 3.46 (SD=1.058). These results indicate that there is a need to help employees see the value of their organization by being informed of its success, goals and visions and what it takes the organization to be what it is. Managers should take it upon themselves to always update the employees on what is happening and involve them in decision making process so that they can own the institutions goals and aims as their own (Cornelissen, 2013). This way employees will be ready to identify with the organization and will take its problems as their own and thus workout solutions for the organization. The results though weak show that MMU employees identify with the organization and there is a need to help employees identify more by improving the organization's communication climate.

The qualitative study sought to find out how internal communication can be used to enhance employee identification with MMU and it was suggested that in order to have employee who will identify easily with the organization, the management need to have both formal and informal meeting with staff members at least once in a semester, this will enable them to create avenues to engage with the employees and involve them in decision making process. As a result, employees will identify more with the organization and in return will give their best to it (Argenti, 2013). In addition, the managers should be generous with their compliments, praises and rewards to the employees who perform their duties exceptionally well. When these are done, employees will be motivated and in return will identify more with the organization. When employees get positive feedbacks from their superiors they identify more with the organization (Burns et al., 2014). Lastly, internal communication should be used to build good relationship among the employee. Good relationship will result in trust which in return will result to a bond that binds them together and the end result will be identification with the organization.

Table 5 Correlations of Employee Identification and Commitment with Communication Climate

		Communication	Identification
Communication	Pearson Correlation	1	.601[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	84	84
Identification	Pearson Correlation	.601[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	84	84

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson coefficient correlation was used to test the correlation of employee identification and organizations communication climate and the results showed that there was a moderate relationship between the two r=.601, p=.000. This supports Smidts et al. (2001) that there is a relationship between communication and employee identification with an organization. The interview results indicated that communication can be used to create good working relationships among employees and their supervisors/ management. It was suggested that managers should take it upon themselves to provide communication avenues for the employees to share their opinions and assure them that their views are important and can be used in the organization's decision-making process. In addition, the employees should get timely feedbacks which are adequate and reliable to enable them perform their tasks well.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on the role of internal communication in employee identification with Multimedia University of Kenya. The study results showed that the communication climate affects employee identification with the organization and that employees prefer emails and memo as channels of communication.

To improve the internal communication managers, need to provide avenues for upward communication, be willing to listen and give employees adequate information to enable them perform their duties well.

The quality of information needs to be improved to ensure employees get information from their preferred sources and their jobs specified in clear language. They should be allowed to freely exchange information and opinions and be open and candid with each other. Top management should also strive to provide relevant information to their employees and mean what they say especially when it comes to implementing organization's goals and objectives.

Organization should ensure that the internal communication leads to an adequate information flow and focusing on employee's individual communication needs if they are to strengthen employee's identification and commitment to the organization (Walden, Jung, & Westermann, 2017). There is need to establish strategic employee communication programs that are sustainable over time. Organizations should continuously provide communication that employees perceive as open, thorough and suitable to their daily work needs (Walden et al., 2017).

Finally, the study established the following roles of internal communication in employee identification with Multimedia University of Kenya. Communication has the role of building trust in organization, this trust is what leads the employee to be committed to the organization. in return the commitment will enable them to easily identify with the organization. It also makes salient the unique characteristics of the organization highlighting its prestige to the employees. These help in making employees to identify with the organization. Communication also provides the employees with the information required to enable them accomplish their tasks and also helps in building interpersonal relationship which is core to the success of any organization. Internal communication also enables the employees to know the goals, values and mission of the organization and thus enables them to identify with it. Apart from that, communication shapes the organization culture and when the culture is good, employee will identify and be committed to it.

Recommendations

There is need to empower the supervisors to enable them provide employees with the kind of information they need to perform their duties and offer sufficient explanations for how things are done the way they are. When employees feel that they are part of the organization's decision-making process they can easily identify with the organization as they will own the process. Likewise, employees' opinions and recommendations should be put into consideration if the organization is to have a committed workforce who identify with the organization (Smidts et al., 2001).

Use informal communication then follow it with formal communication. Informal communication makes the staff members to be at ease with the supervisor and thus its effective in making them committed it also brings the supervisor to their level helping the employees to gain trust which is a variable of commitment.

Communicate regularly about everything. Informed employees will be committed and will identify with the organization.

Managers to have face to face meetings with the junior staff at least once a semester to gauge them and gain information as they allow the employees to give information too. This engagement will create a rapport with the employees and will boost their commitment and identification level with the university. The meetings should be both formal and informal.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should examine multiple organizations to compare the results and find out how internal communication can be used in employee commitment and identification with the organizations. Also, there is need to find out the role of communication channels used and their general impact on organization communication climate.

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