

EXAMINING THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND STRUCTURES FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE LEGISLATIVE SERVICE

Dr. Ifeanyi F. Didiugwu

Senior Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu.

ABSTRACT: *The legislature, irrespective of clime or political configuration, incontrovertibly plays a strategic role in the growth and consolidation of democracy. This explains why the political circle expects much from the legislature. Owing to the strategic role of this institution, this paper, among other things, reveals the place of effective communication and effective legislative service structure in Nigeria. Understandably, effective communication is at the centre of effective legislative service. Using descriptive research design, the paper concludes that effective communication is pivotal to a productive legislative system in Nigeria. Based on this, it is recommended that lawmakers should break down legislative information into essential units and keep the chain of information transmission short. Again, it is also recommended that a two way communication process that encourages feedback should be preferred in the place of linear communication.*

KEYWORDS: Effective communication, Legislative service, Feedback , Democracy

INTRODUCTION

Legislative service has been recognized as the totality of all the activities that includes everything being done by the group of people who have the power to make and change laws (Hornby, 2006). Consequently, leadership in the legislative service is composed of presiding officers, principal officers, committee chairmen and their Deputies as well as the clerks and their Directors. These are the people, who have the capacity to influence, inspire, rally, direct, encourage, motivate and organize other people in such a way that laws are actually made, amended, changed and repealed as necessary and required by society, community, state or country.

In this paper, the need for effective communication for leadership in the legislative service has been examined. Three questions have been posed and answered:

1. What actually is communication?
2. When is communication really effective?
3. Why is the need for effective communication for leadership in the legislative service be examined?

This paper also examined the need for structures for leadership in the legislative service. In doing so, it sought to answer the following questions: what exactly are the structures of the legislative service? When are the structures for leadership in the legislative service said to be effective? Of what importance are effective structures to the leadership of the legislative service? And how should the need for structures for leadership in the legislative service be examined.

The overall aim and objective of this paper are to highlight the urgency in effective communication amongst the leadership of the paper are to highlight the urgency in effective communication amongst the leadership of the legislative service and to establish the need for effective structures for leadership in the legislative service. These involve the in-depth examination of the various communication styles as they impact on the leadership in the legislative service as well as the assessment of the architectonics of leadership legislative service.

The Concept of Structures for Leadership in the Legislative Service

The main concerns of this paper, therefore, are to examine the need for effective communication styles for leadership in the legislative service and to, also, examine the need for effective structures for leadership in the legislative service. These structures have two branches thus:

The legislator service structure, which is made up of all the legislators

1The Presiding Officers, President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives in the National Assemblies.

2. The Speakers in the State Assemblies.

3. The Principal officers in the National and State Assemblies.

4. The Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Legislative Committees.

These constitute the leaders, who influence all the other legislators in acts of making, amending, replacing and repealing laws as appropriate. They inspire the legislature to authorize budgets, exercise control over the government via oversight functions and represent their people.

Bureaucratic service structure that includes the permanent staff and the legislative aides of legislators, who facilitate the lawmaking process. They draft bills, motions, resolutions and facilitate the conduct of Public Hearings, gathering background information and keeping records of proceedings as well as acting as institutional memories to the legislature. They work under the leadership of Clerks and a team of Directors, Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors. Thus, the bureaucratic service structure involves the National and State Assembly Service Commissions, who employ, promote, transfer and discipline legislative staff and legislative aides. It also includes the proposed National Legislative Training Institute, which would handle capacity-development in the legislative.

The Concept of Communication:

There are several definitions of communication; but for the purpose of this discussion, we shall take just a few:

According to Uche (1999,p. 15) communication is a rule-governed, dynamic, ongoing process of either verbally or non-verbally, from a communication source, through both conventional and non-conventional channels, to a receiver, for the purpose of establishing mutual understanding and exchanges for peaceful co-existence, conflict resolution, and the cumulative development, progress and well being of a social system, nation state, the international community and their inhabitants.

- Communication is the process by which we understand others and in turn endeavour to be understood by them. It is dynamic, constantly changing and shifting in response to the total situation (Dance, 1970).
- Communication is the act of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another. (Agee et al, 1988).
- Communication is WHO said WHAT through what CHANNEL to WHOM and with WHAT RESULT. (Lasswell, 1948).
- It is a dynamic, ongoing, transactional process of understanding and sharing meaning. (Ndolo, 2005).

Every time we knowingly or unknowingly send a verbal or non-verbal message to a friend, lover, relative, stranger, audience, superior, employee, co-worker or group, communication takes place.

When is communication really effective?

Effective communication will occur when the receiver successfully decodes the sender's coded messages (symbols) and sends a positive feedback to suggest that his/her subsequent behaviour is congruent with the shared experience contained in the communicated message. Effective communication hardly takes place in authoritarian, totalitarian and hierarchically structured class – conscious societies. This is because in authoritarian and totalitarian situations, communication is hampered by interferences from over bearing leadership. Uninterrupted communication, without any noise is the communication for development. In other words, such communication is said to be effective when there is a feedback, which is a clear indication that the contents of a message from a sender have been understood by the receiver.

Effective communication will assist the leadership in the legislative service to achieve the organization's set-goals, since roles will be clearly defined, and actions will be clearly defined, and actions will be promptly carried out. The extent to which the leadership of the Nigerian legislative service maintains the necessary relationships would be predicated on the communication skills acquired by the leadership, and the willingness to create conducive atmosphere for the free flow of information-both vertically and horizontally-legislative services. The ability to get other people say, "yes", to your proposition is a combination of how you see yourself, how you listen to others, how you respect others and the skills in the art of communication and the science of persuasion, at your disposal.

Being effective in our communication with other people will be predicated on certain skills and perceptions. Here are some tips which leaders in the legislative service must be sensitive to:

1. The ability to understand and communicate with yourself.
2. Knowledge of how and why you and those with whom you relate see things the way you do.
3. The capacity to listen and then process the information you receive.
4. Sensitivity to salient messages that you and others send.
5. Knowledge of how words affect you and those with whom you relate.
6. An understanding of how relationships develop.
7. An understanding of how feelings and emotions affect relationship.
8. The ability to handle conflicts by learning how to disagree without being disagreeable.
9. An understanding of how beliefs, values, and attitudes affect the formulation and reception of messages and the development of speaker-audience relationship.
10. An understanding of the behaviours that contribute to successful group decision making, leadership, and team-building.
11. The desire to apply all these skills and perceptions to each communication experience and arena.

Need For Effective Communication amongst the Leadership of the Legislature

The need for effective communication amongst the leadership of the legislature has been pointed out by Bankole (2009): The legislature is the institution pillar of democracy is well recognized in both developed and transitional democracies. This arises from the critical role it plays within the framework of separation of powers. While its primary responsibility is of law-making, the Executive implements and the Judiciary plays the role of the adjudicator in disputes between the other branches of government. So critical is the role of the legislature that it can be said without fear of contradiction that the history, growth and consolidation of democracy anywhere is intricately tied with the role of the parliament and how legislative assemblies attempt to give meaning to people's sovereignty.

Consequently, the leadership in the legislative service presiding officers, principal officers, committee chairman and their deputies as well as the clerks and their directors- needs a lot of information in order to perform optimally on all their very important legislative roles. Communication is the process and the act of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes; and all leaders in the legislative service would benefit tremendously from free flow of information and ideas which can best be provided via effective communication.

Examining the Need for Effective Communication for Leadership in the Legislative Service:

The best way for examining the need for effective communication for leadership in the legislative service is to consider the effect of noise on the communication process. Interferences constitute noise or challenges to communication.

One of the major challenges to effective communication amongst the leadership in the legislative service could be discussed within the context of the existing relationship among the personnel, who provide legislative services. The overbearing influence of the legislators on the supporting staff gives the impression that the latter's contributions in legislative services are of no significance; yet we all know that without the needed support service, much can not be achieved in legislative service. This presumptive atmosphere of an equal partner in the same ship; does not promote effective communication.

Political considerations rather than adherence to rules are another factor that constitutes an obstacle to information flow in the leadership of Nigeria legislative service. In this case, "who comes from where", could determine "who does what", or "who get what information first". In other words, there is a definite pattern of information flow, and this situation adversely affects effective communication in the leadership of legislative service. In the interest of the system, rules should be respected, whether elected or not elected.

One of the cardinal responsibilities of the legislature is representation, which calls for accountability to the people. However, extension of this important legislative service to this critical public of the legislature, suffers a serious set-back, especially in most states where financial constraints inhibit effective media publicity of the activities of the legislature. This situation creates a gulf in the relationship between the legislators and their constituencies because of communication gap.

The style of leadership that prevails in an organization, determines to a great extent the level of communication flow. This could affect the effectiveness or otherwise of communication in leadership of legislative service. Where the leadership is autocratic, the leaders exert high levels of authority and power over their subordinates. The leaders tell their followers what is to be done without seeking their input. Conversely, charismatic leadership style, tends to inject enthusiasm into the follower because of the leader's charming and dynamic disposition in moving others towards organizational goals. This style promotes effective communication and would also encourage participation of the subordinates in the decision-making process. It builds consensus through participation and cements existing relationships.

We can also look at the level of education as another factor or challenge to effective communication in the leadership of contemporary Nigerian legislative service. Where the sender and receiver of a message are not within the same frame of reference, communication will be

greatly impeded. The level of education and training of leadership in the legislative service may have to be looked into in order to enhance effective communication in legislative service.

The above discussion on the challenges to effective communication in the leadership of legislative service could throw up the following obstacles to effective communication viz: low morale and lack of confidence among staff; lack of will to communicate; failure to assess the effectiveness of previous communication methods; and lack of integrity and trust on the part of the legislative leadership.

Effective communication could also be enhanced in the legislative service by adopting the following steps:

1. Break down information into essential-unit
- i. Keep amount of information transmission short. Don't overload.
- ii. Keep the chain of information transmission short.
- iii. Make sure the message received is understood.
- iv. Showing is often more effective than talking.
- v. Whenever possible use two-way communication, which guarantees "feedback".
- vi. Record important delays
- vii. Information has to be shared in order to be used.
- viii. Effective oral communication requires careful listening.
- ix. Don't mistake assumption for facts.

The need for structure for leadership in the legislative service

Already, the concept of structures for leadership in the legislative service has been explained above. Two branches of the structure have been identified

- a. Legislator service structure
- b. Bureaucratic service structure

Why the legislator service structure is under the leadership of the presiding officers (President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives in the National Assembly as well as the Speaker of the State House Assembly) working with their various principal officers and chairman and deputy chairman of the different committees of the legislatures-the bureaucratic service structure is under the clerk, working with their respective directors, deputy directors and assistant directors. These two branches of the structures for leadership in the legislative service ensure that division of labour is maintained. The structures ensure that the legislator and the legislative staff work together in harmony, in synchrony and in cooperation with each other.

Structures for leadership in the legislative service prevent overlap while encouraging togetherness in the learning of legislative tricks. Such structures define roles and describe method for taking on all the tasks, which the legislature must learn in order to become effective in the act of rendering selfless services to the country.

Indeed, when structure for leadership in the legislative service are defined, it becomes very easy for growth and development to be sustained because confusion and waste of energy would be

checked and energy would be focused, organized, controlled and influenced by the leadership. This is because structure cast firmness on the behaviour of the leadership and makes it able to achieve effectiveness. Without structure, legislative activities or service would become amorphous and fluid, dispersed and ineffective. Thus, structures are earnestly required for transformational leadership in the legislature.

When are Structures Effective?

When structures for leadership in the legislative service are able to work together synchronizes and cooperating in harmony they are said to be effective. This can be achieved by establishing and maintaining a National Legislative Training Institute, which would study the contemporary Nigerian political and moral situation, circumstances, challenges and problems before prescribing solutions and corrections using communication skills that should be very effective in both the moral re-armament and political re-orientation of the leadership in the legislative service. It is only by training and re-training that the leadership in the legislative service would be re-oriented and made transformational.

Lessons in legislative ethics would need to be designed and taught all through the entire gamut of the legislature with a very a high resolve to enkindle nationalism in every legislative worker. This is because the peculiar situation and role of the legislature in building and sustaining of any democracy. Structures that are effective would facilitate the making, amending, replacing and repealing of law as necessary are required. They would make the work of the legislator easy.

The Need for Effective Structure for Leadership in the Legislative Service

It is therefore, important for remark that every honourable commissioner or director in the national and state assembly commissions in Nigeria MUST become familiar with organizational communication structure; and internal communication is the first step in communication skills. Effective employee communication doesn't just happen. It takes time and it takes practice to learn the skills of communication, but doing so will build better workplace relationships and increase career success. It is the proposed national legislative training institute that would plan out and teach effective communication skills for addressing contemporary problems and challenges in the leadership of the legislative services.

Such training cannot be given equally to all legislator and legislative staff at once. The leadership would need to be trained first. They should be able to train those they organise and influence. Consequently structures for leadership in the legislative service need to be effective been really visible and capable of taking on the transformation of the legislative process and procedure along cultural, social, political and traditional milieu.

Examining the Needs for Structure for Leadership in the Legislative Service:

To examine the need for structure for leadership in the legislative service, the entire team of the legislator and legislating staff would be considered. Confusion and ineffectiveness would be the

characteristic of any that has no leadership. If the leadership is not structured, confusion and ineffectiveness would still arise. It is when the legislative service is structured that efficiency and effectiveness would be introduced there in.

Structure would also assist in the creation of workable and acceptable succession plans in the legislative service thereby preventing the politicization of the legislative service. Structure make training and retraining easier and more meaningful than where and when structure are absence or weak.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Having discussed communication and what makes communication effective; and having explained the meaning and structures of leadership, this paper has explained the need for effective communication and the need for effective structures for leadership in the legislative service.

The paper has defined legislative service “as the totality of activities of the legislature” and has described leadership in the legislative service in two branches of structures. Service rendered by every staff in legislative service and every legislator to the institution where used as indices for describing the structure. Effective structures were described as those that facilitate legislative services. It went ahead to highlight some difficulties and challenges in the use of effective communication by the leadership in the legislative service; and proffered solutions to those difficulties and challenges.

The implication of this that leadership in legislative service should utilize the various communication patterns explored in this paper to encourage free flow information. An attempt was also made at pointing out the usefulness of the proposed National Legislative Training Institute in the study of Nigeria’s contemporary political and moral situation, circumstances, challenges and problems before prescribing solutions and corrections using effective communication skills.

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