



Revitalizing the fundamentals of communicating official communications inside the Nigerian civil service: selected communication strategies

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Abstract

The spirit and heart of any social organization be it in the public or private sector is communication. In a big bureaucracy like the Civil Service, it is no exaggeration to say that the communication function is critical to efficient and effective public service delivery and good governance. However, in the contemporary Nigerian civil service, the communication culture or tradition that made the institution unique from other institution is drastically declining with time as the experienced officers on the civil service customized communication have retired and are retiring daily. Sad enough, many of the officers in the system today are not adequately measured up to the expected standard demand of them by the institution, thereby resulting to poor fundamentals of communicating communications in the system which has its negative impact on developmental processes in Nigeria. It is on this note that the study aimed at examining the best practices that make communication unique in the institution. The paper is documentary research on selected communication strategies in the Nigerian civil service, and therefore, relied on qualitative data obtained from textbooks, Civil Service Handbooks and internet. The experience of the author as a retired technocrat from the public service also played critical role in this study. The data was subsequently analyzed using content analysis technique in the presentation of this study. Findings revealed that there was dearth of informed relevant literature on the communication culture in the institution which portends a danger for inter-generational knowledge and information transfer. The study, therefore, suggests the need for the institution to urgently restore in-house seminars that were once monthly activity facilitated by the superior officers or retired technocrats for serving officers in the past. This would definitely go a long way to revitalizing the fundamentals of the customized communication in the Nigerian civil service.

Keywords: Civil Service, Communication, Strategy, Fundamentals

1.0 Introduction

Civil service connotes the employees or officers of the state or government responsible for the daily functioning of government. But it is only communication that becomes the very vehicle by which government gets working, or things get done in the institution. In the civil service,

communication serves as a means by which officers in the system exchange information and ideas. In a big bureaucracy like the civil service, it is no exaggeration to say that the communication function is the means by which the activities in the institution are unified, the means by which social inputs



are fed into the system, or by means by which behavior is also modified, productivity, performance, change are achieved, and by which people in the social system are linked together in the institution for a common purpose for the good of the government, the society at large, and the institution itself. Indeed, the administration or management functions such as planning, decision making, organizing, staffing, budgeting, controlling, co-ordination etc. are impossible in a public bureaucracy without communication so that corporate goals and objectives can be achieved. Thayer (1978) in other words, communication is essential for the internal functioning of the civil service as it integrates the management functions and as well through communication it becomes an open system interacting with its environment and the concerns of the society where it domiciled.

Haven awared that the functions, activities and time in the civil service are communication functions or role, it is based on this fact that this study takes it as a point of responsibility to examine the means and fundamentals of communication in the Nigeria's civil service. Some of the means or channels through which official communications are carried out in the institution include the following: meetings, circulars, memoranda, minutes or minuting, reports, letters, abbreviations, petition, drafts, query, briefs, executive orders, handing over notes, endorsement, gazettes, file notes etc (FRN, 1997). Most of these means of communication in the system are daily routine or most frequently and intensively used in the administrative functions and activities. However, this study shall not be able to take all of these common communication strategies in the institution, as each of them takes volume and space, but shall examine some of them

that space would allow to do justice to them. On this note, communication strategies in the system that shall be primary focus or priority in this study are:

- Official letter writing
- Brief
- Abbreviations, and
- Circular Letter

Looking critically at the Nigerian civil service today, there is evidently a wide gap of knowledge and information on its internal working. The current dearth of informed literature on the nature and fundamentals of communication portends a danger for inter-generational knowledge and information transfer. Many of the good hands or experts on internal communication in the institution have retired and are retiring daily while many of the present crop of civil servants lack the requisite expertise. This inclement situation or problem is informed by the fact that many of the Nigerian scholars that have written on communication in Civil Service only concentrated on general knowledge on the topic such as communication concept, direction, types of communication, and its efficiently and effectiveness. Ironically, they left the fundamentals, culture or tradition of communicating in the system which are critical to good service delivery and good governance. They cannot, however, be blamed, because they could not give, talk or write on what they were not use to. The author of this paper, therefore, relied on the foreign authors or experts on the subject and as well his own bureaucratic experience in the system before retirement. The Nigerian civil servants over the have been years learning the culture of communication in the system only through learning on-the-job from their superiors, which is the only source of learning on the fundamentals of



communicating communication in the institution.

The only saving grace for the institution today is that some of the retired experts from the system have joined the academic system in the tertiary institution, thereby using their insider knowledge and experience to be publishing research papers on the subject in the public service books for the benefits of the serving officers or newly employed officers in the institution, and also in the academic journals. This efforts is now complementing the memoirs of some retired technocrats, which are quite scanty in recent time.

The irony in the civil service is that irrespective of one's intimidating professional or educational qualifications or knowledge, skills or expertise one has acquired overtime in the private sector, once a person by providence of political appointment or through civil appointment become insider in the system, the person would automatically familiarizes with the fundamentals of communication systems in the civil service through tutorials from the staffers on the ground. Not surprising then, all the political office holders that are new entrants into the public bureaucracy without exception make it or take it as a tradition, rite or norm to appoint not less than two of the experienced staff in the Ministry, Department or Agency concerned as Personal Assistant (PA) and Special Assistant (SA) to be putting him/her through on the job or schedule to familiarize with best practices in the system. The truth is that, civil service functions and activities are really not for the amateurs irrespective of a person's chains of educational degrees or professional certificates. The civil service not only a profession or career, but the institution is unique as it has its own norms,

values ethics, standards, techniques, patterns, best practices, principles, due process, formats etc of getting things done right and do right things as customized, conventional or peculiar to the institution.

In the contemporary Nigerian civil service, the communication culture or tradition that is peculiar or known with the institution is drastically declining or dying as a lot of experienced officers or hands that have acquired expertise on civil service customized communication culture or techniques on-the-job over a period of time have retired and are retiring daily. And unfortunately, the present or existing employees on the ground are not adequately measured up to the expected standard demand of them by the institution. The implication of this development is that the quality in communication production or output in the system is gradually disappearing which has a lot of negative impact on productivity and performance drive of the institution. The inclement situation above serves the statement of the problem and basis of the study.

Accordingly, this paper is significant as every civil servant will find the publication of this paper quite needful and useful, so also the appointed and elected political office holders as well as students of Public Administration.

Haven already earlier indicated the selected communication channels that are primary focus of this study, therefore, the study is aimed at examining the fundamentals, that is, the techniques, principles and procedures of the selected strategies that are best practices or standards in the Nigerian civil service. The primary and secondary sources of data collection shall be employed to aid in achieving the objectives of the study, while descriptive technique shall be purposely adopted as report writing of the findings of



the study. It should be noted that the experience of the author in the public service shall add meaningful value to this study.

1.1 Research Questions

The following are the questions carefully thought out to pilot this study:

1. What is the present state of the art of communicating communication in the Nigerian civil service?
2. What are the problems or challenges facing the culture of communication peculiar to the institution?
3. What are the communication strategies peculiar to the system?
4. What are the traditional communication formats or fundamentals of communicating communication?
5. In what way can the old best practices that made the Nigerian civil service to be among the best in the world revitalized or restored?

1.2 Methodology

This paper adopted an eclectic approach to the study. It is exploratory because the paper identified selected communication strategies in the Nigerian civil service and their features, by espousing the investigative stance of exploratory research. The study is also descriptive in nature in that it provides the best practices of communicating communication inside the institution and how it could promote good governance and effective service delivery in Nigeria. As well, it is explanatory because the study examined the nature or the culture of communicating in the system. In a sum, the study is descriptive and qualitative in nature, using secondary method of data collection

such as textbooks, Civil Service Handbook and internet, and using content analysis technique in the presentation of the study.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Civil Service Concept

Civil service is the administrative organ of the executive arm of government. It is a vital administrative machinery in a modern nation. It is the term used to cover those public servants who are direct employees of the federal, state and local government councils other than the police, the armed forces personnel, the judicial personnel, the teachers etc. The civil service comprises all servants of the state, other than those holding political appointments, who are employed in a civil capacity. It is the body of permanent officials appointed to assist the political executive in formulating and implementing government policies, programmes and activities. It is a body or organ which enjoys continuity of existence. Literally, civil service means public or government service, which is a body of officials employed to serve the public in a civil capacity. And to be able to assign responsibility for specific activities or group of activities, the civil service is organized into the Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs) (Adebayo, 1986).

2.1.2 Communication Concept

Haven highlighted earlier that communication is the most critical instrument of civil service functions and activities, it becomes then imperative at this juncture to examine communication as a concept. Communication informs, educates, instructs and directs civil servants in the civil service while it is the same communication that controls the institution. The effective management of any human organization is a function of effective communication. In a cross cultural survey



on communication involving Japan, Britain and the U.S.A., it was discovered that communication breakdown was the single greatest barrier to organizational excellence. Inefficient communication in an organization is symptomatic of a faulty corporate chain. That all the key functions of an organization such as planning, organizing, controlling, leading or directing depend on effective communication for proper implementation or execution. Thus, the role of communication in organizations is highlighted by an empirical study that discovered that white-collar employees either in private or public sector communicated 70% of the time, which involves speaking, listening, reading and writing (Davis, 1954). In other words, communication is the most basic function of management, and a very vital aspect of the civil service. No human institution can succeed unless it has a properly developed communication system. It is the mainstream and survival, hence it was asserted by Randall (1974) that communication for any institution is like blood flow in the human body. The question is, what then communication connotes?

According to Austin (1962) he crystalized communication to be:

In human society, communication is not mere talk or exchange of information. Communication is a form of action in making advice, assertion, argument, command, demand, inquiry, judgment, request, report, warning, and similar interpersonal statements constituting a class of speech acts called the illocutionary acts.

The kernel of this Austin's postulation on communication is that, communication is not done for doing sake neither is it done in a vacuum. It is geared at achieving a terminal valued goal of a social institution. Thus implies that communication, as most organizational employees are engaged in the communication process most of the time, which is estimated to range between 70% and 90% (Gerba, 1979).

In this book, "Communication", Verderber (1994) proffered one of the most widely acknowledged best attempts at defining communication. He defined communication as "a dynamic, on-going, transactional process". By this definition, communication is

(i) Dynamic because it is constantly in motion

(ii) On-going because it has fixed beginning or end

(iii) Transactional because the elements occur simultaneously and the people communicating are interdependent.

On his own, Peter (1989), communication is "who – says What – How – to Whom – with what Effect". That is, communication is a two-way process, it is circular, meaning, it goes from sender to receiver and back again, and only then can communication to be said to be complete.

With regards to communication in the Nigeria's civil service, it is an open system which exists through a process of on-going wealth creating interactions (communications) with environment; that is, its publics. The institution's publics include: (a) The host environment or society (b)The employees (c) The suppliers of goods and services (d) The potential employees (e) The investors (f) The Distributors (g) The consumers or users of goods and services (h)



The opinion leaders. The above implies that the resources are drawn from the environment, converted inside the organization, and then released back into the environment in form of goods, services, information and wastes.

2.1.3 Theoretical Framework

Mowlana (2018) propounded theory of human communication, opined that human communication is conceptualized as a process of interaction among and between two or more human beings, that is person to person with language and technology as the medium. The theory that communication is vital to good management and the key factor in the success of an organization. The scholar described communication to have three things: a sender, a message and receiver which takes the form of human being and the perceived environment through messages in the form of signs symbols and thought.

The thrust of this theory is that communication is that for society to survive, human beings must communicate with others and among themselves. Communication is a way which helps individuals to express their power and authority among other individuals. It is actually not the flow of information from the sender to the receiver but actually the thoughts or feelings of the sender which he tries to share with the recipients. It also includes the reactions or feelings of the receiver after he decodes the information.

3.0 Communication System

The communication system is a complete communication cycle. In other words, there are certain steps through which an idea or information goes from its concept to the time it reaches the receiver and a feedback is received. These steps are called the communication process or cycle. The cycle involved the entire process of

communication entailing the origin, conceptualizing the desired message to its being communicated to the right person, who interprets it and responding to it, according to Katz and Kahn, (1978). In the words of Derlo (1960), in the communication system, there is no total agreement on the exact number and precise labeling of the steps involved. For instance, some communication scholars put the process to be three elements – the Source, the Message and the Destination, regardless of the size or sophistication of the system, while other scholars put the procedure to be seven elements – the Originator or Sender, the Message, the Channel, the Decoding Process, the Action of the Receiver, the Feedback and the Noise (Agagu, 1999). According to Lucy (1987), opined that the features of relevant information for effective communication are: the information must be timely, appropriate, accurate, detailed and understandable between both the sender and receiver of information.

4.0 Direction of Communication in Civil Service

Generally speaking, communication flows in various commands or directions in the Nigeria's civil service. Every aspect of management in the civil service involves communication, hence there exists a system of communication developed and maintained in the institution, in which communication direction is vital. As regards the Nigerian civil service like other social institutions, communication can be horizontal, upward or downward, according to Banihashemi (2011):

These directions of communication explained above are what actually obtainable or operational in the Nigeria's civil service, which are patterns of information in the system. It should be noted that these patterns of communication in the



institution though different, or separated, they are mutually interwoven for accomplishing the institutional goals or objectives in the system.

4.1 Conventional Communications in Nigerian Civil Service

The Nigeria's civil service has various strategies of communication that are conventional within the institution. This study has listed them under the introduction in this paper, and it has been also clearly stated as well that only four (4) of the various communication channels within the institution shall be the focus of this study. The selected channels by this study are as following: (a) Official Letter Writing (b) Brief (c) Abbreviations (d) Circular letter. The primary responsibility of this study is to unveil and unfold the fundamentals, that is, techniques, principles, procedures or format involved in writing them in the Nigeria's civil service. They are as follows:

4.1.1 Official Letter Writing

A letter is a piece of communication indicating its recipient and sender, a means of communication between one person and another. But an official or business letter in the Public Service is a piece of communication carrying information/message from a Public Institution e.g. Ministry, Department or Agency (MDA) to another institution or an individual, printed on paper and usually put in an envelope and sent. Today, it is not absolutely necessary to put a letter in an envelope as there is a technology device now, which can be written and send through E-mail. A letter is successful when the writer achieves his objective and not when misunderstanding exists (John, 1970).

At all times, when writing official letter in the Public Service, Rollin (1970) stated that there are three questions to put to oneself as a preliminary: They are:

a. What is your purpose, and what are you trying to do/state?

b. Can you state briefly the theme of your letter? If not how coherent do you yourself find it?

c. Along what main lines will you develop it?

In other words, critical considerations when writing an official letter in the Public Service are:

a. How do I begin?

b. How do I set the tone of the letter and makes the good impression on the reader? and

c. How do I tell or inform the reader what he/she wants to know?

The common characteristics of all official letters in the Public Service is that they inform the reader in some way. Here, according to the Scholar, are purposes for which official letters are frequently written: (a) To make request (b) To persuade on an issue (c) To instruct on a matter (d) To make a compliant (e) To convey appreciation (f) To convey views or opinion, approval or disapproval (g) To order for a service or to place an order (h) To award contract (i) To apply for something (j) To give order/directive etc (k) To explain issues

In the Public Service, the conventional way of beginning an official letter according to Adebayo (2000) is "I am directed", and it is only at much higher levels i.e. Hon. Minister, Director-General, etc that the unconventional form like "I am writing...", "I refer to...", are permissible. This opening sentence set the tone of an official letter.

According to Rollin (1970), an official letter in the Public Service consists of (10) major parts, which are:

1. Reference



- 2. Date: The writing of date can be that of America or British. In the date of America, there is a comma between the day and year (Oct 4, 2011) while this is not so in the British style (4 Oct 2011). Style like 4/10/19 is not permissible.
- 3. The inside address (the person to whom it is written). Address of addressee
- 4. Indicating attention of specific member of staff in charge of the matter in question (ATTENTION OF DIRECTOR, FINANCE AND ACCOUNTS)
- 5. Salutation: All the words in the salutation start with a capital letter i.e. "Dear Sir"
- 6. The Subject Heading/Matter
 - 7. The Body of the Letter: This part conveys the information or message to pass and are arranged in paragraphs written clearly and concisely. And it is conventional to number all paragraphs except the first.
 - 8. The complimentary close: The first word in the closing starts with a capital letter and the second letter with a small letter i.e. "Yours faithfully".
 - 9. The title of the writer of the letter. This comes immediately under the complimentary close, which are the signature, name title (post/rank), or in some cases the indication of under-directive i.e. "for Hon. Minister" if directed.
 - 10. Notations: Below the title of writer is indication of notations where appropriate i.e. ("cc", "Enclosure" etc).

4.1.2 Formats for Letter Writing

In writing an official letter in the public service, there are three(3) formats to such according to Rollin (1970). They are:

- a. Block style: This justified left, without indentations which is most common.
 - b. Modified Block Style: Heading and closing are indented along with the first of each paragraph.
- c. Simplified Style: Similar to modified style with the omission the salutation or closing.

The first two formats are the most common, however, the first format is the frequently used one in the public service.

4.1.3 Basic Principles/Essentials of Letter Writing

- a. It must be written throughout in a manner which is COURTEOUS. How? According to Michael (1979); he stated examples of courtesy in letter writing.
- i. When you have to admit a MISTAKE, never fail to APOLOGIZE for it;
 - ii. When you have to REFUSE a REQUEST, include a discreet expression of REGRET, and try to make it sound as though refusal were inevitable.
 - iii. Be as HONEST in your TONE as in your statement of fact. Do not apologize for something which is really the fault of your correspondent.
 - iv. When expressing REGRET be sure to regret the right thing i.e., "I regret that the act did not provide for compensation to be paid..."
- b. There is need for clarity of languages. It is better to ensure that the points or issues are properly grasped. This implies that the writer thinks deeply of what to write before committing himself into writing.

- c. Simplicity of languages and punctuations must be observed to enhance easy reading of the letter.
- d. The writer must bear in mind the position of the addressee to enable him couch his languages properly
- e. Facts must be assembled and must be logically arranged
- f. Since letters are meant to convey views, explain issues, give directive etc, such messages should be straight forward, well worded and meaningful
- g. Formal letters should be addressed formally.
- h. Avoidance of jargons, pomposity, colloquia English or idiomatic expressions.

The conventional letter writing in the Nigeria's civil service is a lot different from the type one learnt in the school for passing academic examinations.

4.2.0 Brief

A brief in the language of the Public Service is in essence a concise, self-contained written summary of the facts or arguments about a specific aspect of government business prepared for the use of a superior authority or a government functional. For example, a newly appointed political functionary be it Minister, Commissioner, Director-General, Executive Secretary, Chairman of a Commission or Parastatal, President of a country, or Governor of a State, on assumption of duty always request the sitting Permanent Secretaries or Directors to prepare Briefs for him/her on the vision, mandate or activities of their MDAs, to have first hand information or knowledge of the situation reports in their establishments. A brief can also be informed for use at a meeting which the chief executive needs adequate information or knowledge on particular subject or matter in

his establishment which he/she would discuss at the meeting. A brief is always prepared by schedule officers in their establishments (Olagboye, 2005).

A brief shares many of the qualities of a minute, there is no hard and fast rule about its format. It is not usually addressed to any officer in particular. The name and designation of the functionary, in the case of a chief executive, presenting the brief at say, an Executive Council meeting may be stated at the beginning or end of brief. Unlike the letter writing, a brief has no address and is not as pointed out, addressed to anyone in particular. That is unlike a minute or letter, it has no address or addressee; not addressed to anyone either by name or rank.

4.2.1 Essential Features of a Good Brief

A good heading which gives an idea of the content of the brief; an introduction which summarizes the background of the subject such as how the matter arose, previous action taken, if any and why the issue is being raised again; a clear analysis of the points at issue, where necessary, the points for and against a course of action should be stated; a specific recommendation or suggestion, where two or more recommendations or suggestions are possible, they should be put in order of importance; in the case of a brief for the council of Ministers, name and designation of the personage submitting the brief should be shown; every good brief should be self-contained. All relevant questions should be anticipated so that the user of the brief does not get the feeling that he cannot take a decision as some factors have been omitted; a brief should be concise and constructive; and a brief should try to recommend the solution of an outstanding problem.(FRN, 1997).



Be all that as it may, a good brief should, like an official letter, have a beginning; a middle and an ending. (Olagboye, 2005).

The Beginning: The beginning of a brief will normally consist of a heading followed by an introduction. The ending is usually cast in such a way that it highlights the subject or matter. Look at this heading or title for an example: “A Brief on 2019 Promotion Examinations Exercise”. After the heading, the introduction should be of two to three paragraphs depending on the subject summarizing the background to the subject. Such background could include how the matter originated; previous actions if any, relevant developments and why the subject has assumed currency. The length of the introduction will be determined by the nature and complexity of the subject under consideration.

The Middle: All the facts and arguments relevant to the subject at hand are stated and if necessary analyzed. The points for and against suggested course of action are recounted with a clear statement on the situation on the ground.

The End: The end of a brief forms the conclusion, the thrust of which is determined by the purpose for which the brief was prepared in the first place. The conclusion will put forward specific suggestion or recommendations, preferably in their order of importance. And where no recommendations are unnecessary, the brief may end with a general statement on the state of the art regarding the matter at issue. Like the official letter, it is essential that a brief be factually accurate in every aspect. And these are why the facts and arguments presented in a brief should be carefully researched in order to save the user from any unnecessary embarrassment. For instance, a single inaccurate fact in a brief makes every other fact a suspect. Therefore, any

painstaking effort or trouble taken to obviate such a situation is worth it.

In summing up, partly because of frequent position changes in the machinery of governance in Nigeria, resulting from political instability in the country, the brief has become a common means of communication in the Nigerian public service. New public office holders in the government MDAs often require self-contained information on specific aspects of governance business for which they have responsibility. It has been a brief that is ideal to such purpose and situation.

4.3 Circular Letter

Circular letter or circular is a means of communication in the Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in the Nigerian Public Service. It is used in conveying an important information or directive from a superior authority to public servants e.g Head of Service of the Federation to all the public servants in the MDAs. And once a circular is issued or circulated, it becomes an official rule or regulation which requires compliance by the MDA or officers concerned. A circular letter differs from the regular official letter mainly in the fact that unlike the letter, it is addressed to more than one person, officers or MDAs that are expected to know, note and perhaps take any necessary action that may be indicated in the circular. The format of a circular letter is about the same as that of any official letter. Like any normal official letter, also, the text of a circular letter must be clear, logical, simple, accurate and courteous, and with an eye on brevity. A circular is a short written message intended for a wide circulation. It always shows from who emanates it and to who they addressed (FRN, 1997).

Circular is used in conveying important information or directive from one



Government Ministry to its Departments or Agencies under its auspices. And when a Ministry issues a circular to its Departments or Agencies under its Supervision, one copy of the circular is placed in its own circular series file and a copy is also placed in the relevant subject file. In the Nigerian Public Service, many of the Circulars ever issued were from the Office of the Head of Service of the Federation, Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Federal Civil Service Commission, Federal Ministries of Education, Finance, Office of the Accountant – General of the Federation, Office of the Auditor – General of the Federation etc. to the Government MDAs. It should be noted that a letter issued, carrying instructions or directives or information by any MDA to its staff at the Headquarters is not a circular but it is called an internal memorandum (memo).

4.4 Abbreviations:

Abbreviations are as old as writing itself. Abbreviation have a long history, created so that spelling out a whole word could be avoided.. Abbreviation is from Latin “brevis”, meaning short. Shortened words were used or initial letters were commonly used to represent words in specific application. In classical Greece and Rome, the reduction of words to single letters was common. In Roman inscriptions, words were commonly abbreviated by using the initial letter or letters of words and most inscriptions have at least one abbreviation. However, some may have more than one meaning, depending on their context. Abbreviations have been in use as long as phonetic script existed. An increase in literacy has historically spawned a trend towards abbreviations particularly in the 15th through 17th centuries when English became standardized. In these periods, abbreviations in English were frequently used from its

earliest days, when manuscripts of copies of the old English poem used many abbreviations. Thus, standardization of English in the 15th through 17th centuries included such a growth in the used of abbreviations. (Wikipedia, Internet).

By definitions, an abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase. It consists of a group of letters taken from the word or phrase. It is a shortened form of a written word or phrase used in place of the whole word or phrase. It is an abridgment. It is a short phrase or reduced form used to represent a larger, more complex idea, situation, set of beliefs etc. An act of abbreviation is reduction in length, duration etc, an abridgment, a summary, a sort of a contraction, yet not a contraction. In strict analysis, abbreviation should not be confused with contractions, crisis or acronyms or initialisms, with which they share some semantic and poetic functions, though all the four are connected by the term abbreviation. In loose parlance, abbreviation is a shortening by any method, a contraction is a reduction of size by the drawing together of the parts. A contraction of a word is made by omitting certain letters or syllables and bringing together the first and last letters or elements; an abbreviation may be made by omitting certain portions from the interior or by cutting off a part. Though, a contraction is an abbreviation, an abbreviation is not necessarily a contraction, while acronyms and initialisms are regarded as subsets of abbreviations (Merriam-Webster, Internet).

The styling of abbreviation is inconsistent and arbitrary, and includes many possible variations. Some abbreviations according to Oxford English Dictionary, are formed by omitting all but the first few letters of a word, such abbreviations usually end in a period: Oct. for October; and univ. for



university, cont. for continued. Other abbreviations are formed by omitting letters from the middle of the word and usually also end in a period: govt. for government, Dr. for Doctor and atty. For attorney. Abbreviations for the names of states in the US and Nigeria are two capitalized letters e.g. AR. for Arkansas, ME for Maine, TX. for Texas CR. For Cross River, for Alkwa Ibom and KW. for Kwara. Also, names of personalities are also abbreviated in Nigeria e.g. IBB. for Ibrahim Babaginda, OBJ. for Olusegun Obasanjo. As earlier pointed out, abbreviations are as old as writing itself. They allow a writer to save time, space, and efforts. The cost materials like paper and ink were another major impetus to shorten words and phrases. Since the use of abbreviation has grown of age, many abbreviations have become standard e.g. abbreviations for days of the week (Mon., Tues.), and months of the year (Jan., Feb.), units of times and measurements (min., ft.), titles of individuals (Mrs., Rev.) titles or names of organizations (UNESCO, UNDP).

providing some conventional abbreviations in the Nigerian Public Service. They are as follow:

a.b.c – at back cover;
a/c – account;
a.f.c – at front cover;
a.y.c – at your convenience;
A.I.E – authority to incur expenditure;
b.c – back cover;
B/F – Brought forward;
b.o.f – back of file;
B.U.F – Bring up. Brought up;
C/f – carried forward;
PSR – Public Service Rules;
c/o – care of;
cap – chapter;
cons – consideration;
conf – confidential;

In essence, using of abbreviations as a form of communication or strategy of communication in the Civil Service the world-over is as old as the institutions itself. It has become a convention and standard in writing on subjects or matters in the public service. In the Nigerian Public Service, there are some abbreviations that are commonly used in official correspondence but not in communication with the general public, and such common abbreviations have become general convention or norms in official communication in the institution. Adebayo (1980) opined that abbreviations are often used in minutes in files. This is because, minutes are addressed to particular persons or officials. For example, “pls. see b.c.f.f.a the letter faired f.y.s. The full meaning of this statement is “please see at back cover for further action”, the letter faired for your signature. This type of abbreviation above cannot be used in a memorandum because memorandum is usually a document meant to be studied and considered by many people concerned. At this juncture, this study is

D – Director;
d/d – dated;
e.g – for example;
Enc – Enclosure;
f.f.a – for further action;
f.i.o – for information action;
f.n.a – for necessary action;
f.u.a – for usual action;
f.y.c – for your consideration;
f.y.i – for your information;
T.y – Thank you;
u.f.s – under flying seal (to pass through a higher authority);
i.a.w – in accordance with;
s.f.i – submitted for information;



s.f.s – submitted for signature;

“T” – Temporary;

p.u – put up;

ref. – reference;

recd. – received;

p.t.o – please turn over;

p. – page;

para – paragraph;

n.f.a – no further action;

misc. – miscellaneous;

It is obvious that a great deal of work or schedule of duties in

the civil service involve communicating with people (colleagues, superiors, subordinates and the public) through the art of minuting, drafting, letter writing, abbreviations etc. in official communications in the system. And it is through practice on the job, one get used to the technique as they are not in-born, besides that bureaucracy has its own officialdom though not too sharply different from situations in the private sector. The fact remains that bureaucracy entails in the art of official communication in the public service has gone a long way to ensure continuity, accountability, orderliness, responsibility and above all effective and efficient facilitation in governance processes or service delivery.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has shown that communication is the pivot in the entire gamut of organizations either in the public or private sector. Communication has been examined in this study not only as routine in the Nigeria’s civil service, but the fundamentals of communicating communication or information in the institution, which takes most of the time every working day. And whatever the channels of communication adopt in the organizational operations or functions, good communication result only when the sender and receiver are in accord

i.f.o. – in favour of;

i.r.o. – in respect of;

i.v.o. – in view of;

k.i.v. – keep in view;

n.a.t. – necessary action taken;

i.e. – in other words;

i.d.c. – in due course;

i/c – in charge of, etc etc etc

(Source: Civil Service Handbook).

over the meaning of a particular message. That is, a mutually agreed and acceptable meaning, otherwise, misunderstanding will occur. Hence, for effective communication to take place, communication must be effectively communicated which must in addition be timely, appropriate, detailed, accurate, and of course understandably to create desirable values in the systems. It is the very vehicle by which the managers in the civil service get things done, the channel and mechanism of influence and change aims at producing desired results in the system. It is in the light of the highlights above that the study painstakingly and carefully show-case the fundamentals involved in communicating communications in the Nigerian Civil Service. The mysteries of communication in the civil service require a great deal of period of time, patience, learning, and intelligence on-the-job in the system. They are not function of professional or educational qualifications acquired, though they are essential for good footing and take off point.

Since the channels of internal communications examined by this study are specialized and technical aspects of communication, therefore, there is the need for the civil service authority or leadership in each of the MDAs to be organizing regular seminar, workshops, or in-service



training and re-training programmes for their staff where communication experts or serving or retired technocrats could elucidate the science and art involved in communicating communication in the system. This study also suggests that the in-house seminars that were monthly programmes in the past should be re-invented for acquisition of necessary skills, professionalism and competence in communicating information in the institution. The training that was found to have ever organized was on effective communication in the Public Service which have been an overview of communication system in an organization, without bias on art and science of communicating communication in the system. Hence, the so called trainings ever conducted have no significant impact on effective communication within the system. Therefore, the need for continuous communication improvement in the institution should be given a great deal of emphasis by the government and the leadership in the institution.

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