

## Communication and Organisational Change: The *Ntepsmart* Model

Dr. Nevelyn William Batta, Goodness Solomon Essien

&

Obongawan Victor Willie

Department of Strategic and Corporate Communications

University of Uyo, Uyo

Email:nevelynbatta@uniuyo.edu.ng

### **Abstract.**

*The study was borne out of the recognition of the role of communication as a catalyst for change and a key factor in organizational change management. NTEPSMART, a chain retail store since 2021 till date has made significant changes in its method of operation across its several branches in Akwa Ibom state. Consequently, this study sought to identify those changes (innovations), assess the role that communication played in the change processes as well as the perception of employees regarding the impact of these changes on the organization. The survey method was adopted for the study with an interview schedule and questionnaire as measuring instruments. Findings revealed that many innovations including the creation a formal organogram for the organization, creation of a customer service Department as well the introduction of e-payment platform for staff salaries among others. Face to face channels were perceived as the most effective channel of communicating the changes/innovations while employees had a positive perception of the impact of the change on the organization. The study recommended continuous use of Face to face channel of communication in order to leverage on all the advantages it has.*

**Keywords:** communication, change, channels, effective, Organisation strategies.

### **Introduction**

Change is a phenomenon that is constant and imperative for organisational growth. Kassim, Tahajudd, Shazad, Isa and Mat (2010), explain that organisational change usually originates from discrepancies noticed from the environmental dynamism which takes the form of series of activities that supports the process of improvement in the capabilities of individuals and groups that work in organisations. The goals of organisational change in their opinion, are very many, but the major ones centre on performance improvement, prevention or elimination of organisational crises and the capacity to withstand competition environmental turbulence. This implies that all prospective change programs must be supported by effective communication processes in order to convince the employees on the need for change, to enable individuals to appreciate the positive impact that the change will have, if successfully

implemented to identify structural loopholes in the change process and to keep open the channels of communication as the plan progresses. This therefore behaves on communication to be done meticulously, as poorly managed change can meet with rumours and resistance. It is on this note that Iseng and Pung (2007), maintain that Communication is vital to the effective implementation of organisational change

Passenheim (2010), in his book “Change Management”, defines change as an alteration of a company’s strategy, organisation or culture as a result of alterations in structure, design of jobs, span of control, authority, relationships or coordinating mechanisms. In the same vein, Stickland (2002), explains that the word “change”, could be characterized as multi-dimensional with multiple meanings because it refers to and synonymous with concepts such as “transformation, development, metamorphosis, transmutation, evolution, regeneration, innovation, revolution and transition. From the above definitions of change, organisational change is seen as a concept that is constant and adaptable. Organisational change can either be planned or emergent as noted by Benn, Dumphy and Griffiths (2014). They note that planned changes are predicted thus their process, implementation and directions is pre-defined. Organisational changes being planned or emergent requires effective and careful communication for success.

Communication has to be done in a way that the individuals in the organisation must be prepared for the change, must be motivated to accept the change and must be willing to comply with the change. The success or resistance to, of this lies in communication as it keeps the employees informed, empowered and engaged. Thus, this study sets out to assess how communication served as a successful tool for organisational change in *Ntepsmart*, a service delivery organization with chains of outlets all over Akwa Ibom State. **Statement of the Problem**

Change is a constant process in every organisation, from the formulation and execution, change strategy required engagement which helps communicate management’s respect for individuals’ ideas and expectations which enables employees to understand what is expected of them. Organisational communication scholars’ note that the management’s ability to achieve maximum benefit from change depends in part on how actively they create and maintain a climate of change that minimizes resistance and encourages support. Managing change could be a very complicated task in an organisation. However, if not well, managed may lead to conflict or resistance within the organisation, thus decrease in profitability and sometimes the loss of an organisation’s reputation.

*Ntepsmart* is a retail company that was established in January 1993 as a small retail shop in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State. The company has six branches all in Akwa Ibom State, with its head branch in 107 Oron Road, Uyo. Other subsidiaries include branches in No. 1

Tunde Ogbegha Drive, No. 253, Mbiabong, Oron Road; No. 2 Market Road, Ikot Ekpene; Harly Drive Old Stadium Road by Library Avenue, Ikot Ekpene and No. 10, Marina Road, Eket. As stated earlier, *Ntepsmart* is a retail company that is into the sale of daily consumables, cosmetics, household items, wearables, gift items, children's toys and games etc. In the space of 28 years, with it binding principles of honesty, innovation, customer focus, efficiency and diligence, the organization has constantly strove to maintain its culture of trustworthiness amongst its customers. Like any other organisations, *Ntepsmart* has an organisational culture of responsiveness, customer value proposition, politeness, integrity, performance-driven reward system and confidentiality. This organisational culture has established and cemented the core values and behaviour of *NTEPSMART*. From 2021 till date, the organization it seems has made notable and significant changes in its operations. This study seeks to identify those changes (innovations), assess the role that communication played in the change processes as well as the perception of employees regarding the impact of these changes on the organization.

The study had the following Objectives

- i. What organisational changes were carried out in *NTEPSMART* from January 2021 till date.
- ii. What communication channel is most effective in communication organizational changes?
- iii. How does the Changes Influence Organisational Growth?

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Organisational Change/Types**

Aravopoulou (2016), notes that Organisational change is an integral part of an organisation's strategy. It is also a ubiquitous and dominant feature of organisational life. The "word" change can be categorized as multidimensional with multiple meanings because it refers to and synonymous with concepts such as transformation, development, metamorphosis, innovation, revolution and transition. The scholar further opines that the concept of organisational change can be examined from different perspectives. This can be in terms of "focus of change" and "types of change". Several types of change that can be effected in organisations identified by Karaxha, Karaxha and Ramosaj (2018) include :

Increasing change-gradual change that take place in small steps; transforming change-processes that provide an organization to develop and implement major programmes and strategically respond to new requirement; strategic change - wider, and longer-term changes; organizational changes-reassessment and reorganizing the structure of the organization; systems and process changes-changes that affect operations, agreements and practices that

work for part or all employees or revision of operational methods, introduction of new technology etc. Others include cultural change that aimed at changing the existing culture of the organisation and lastly, behavioural change-taking measures to encourage people to be more efficient.

Aravopoulov (2016) classification includes strategic and non-strategic, planned and emergent, episodic, transformational and developmental. Non-strategic refers to the alterations aiming to enhance organisational performance, while strategic changes results in modifying the orientation of business. Planned changes are predicted and the process of their analysis and implementation are pre-defined. The main aim of these changes is to guarantee that a business adjusts to it needs. Planned changes could be generally defined as intentional actions following conscious reasoning aimed to ensure that an organisation can meet the demands of it internal and external environment. Emergent changes are unpredictable and there are no precise clear prior intentions for change.

Transformational change is radical in which a new change is formed from the previous one. Developmental change aims to contribute to the further development of existing features of a business by mainly improving processes or skills so thus that type of change is both people oriented and process oriented. Episodic change can be caused by internal or external factors, it is planned, continuous, ongoing, takes place at the same time, accumulative and can create a major change. Summarily, organisational changes concern minor and major changes which occur in an organisation, it can be changed in strategy, structure, skills, performance of employees and leadership style. Citing Anderson (2008), Karaxha, et al (2018) believes that developing a strategy that will fit the type and the extent of changes we are working on is the key to successful change.

### **Change Communication**

In a digitalized and globalized world, organisations are continuously confronted with the need to adapt to shifting external conditions. Organisational changes, such as downsizings, restructurings, mergers, and acquisitions have become everyday occurrences and represent serious challenges for organisations. Change communication is an important determinant of how employees perceive the change and thus can contribute to reducing resistance and generating support. If, however, organisations fail to implement the change communication properly, it can become a source for resistance itself. A well-planned and executed change communication strategy is therefore essential for successful change.

Communication is regarded as a key issue in the successful implementation of change because it is used as a tool for announcing, explaining or preparing people for change, Malek and Yazdanifard (2012). Change communication is an organisation fulfills two essential tasks.

First, it serves to pass on information and second, it integrates all relevant members of the organisation in the process. Good change communication in an organisation is characterized by providing complete and honest information at an early stage that addresses the concerns of employees and allows for participation.

In communicating changes in an organisation, those in charge should ensure that they are transparent and clear about the steps of the change process and further engage in dialogue with the workforce. This way, employees feel appreciated and participated actively in the change, which increases the likelihood of their support. If this is neglected, employees will likely feel left alone by the organisation in the change process.

### **Channels of Organisational Communication**

Communication is a major component of organisations. Whether it is oral, written, informal or formal, it helps to manage products, employees, services and customers. It is important for the company's image as poor communication leads to poor and negative image of the company, (Gerson & Gerson (2007, cited in Ketoja (2009)).

Batta and Nkanta (2019) asserts that determining the most appropriate channel or medium is critical to effectiveness of communication. She classifies organizational channels into oral and written modes. Oral modes included telephone calls and presentations while written modes includes reports, memos and e-mails. Communication channels are categorized into 3 larger entities according to Bovee and Thill (2005 ) cited in Ketoja (2009)) viz written media, oral media and electronic media.

**Written Media:** Written Media refers to printed texts in general, they include long and short reports, notes and memos. Batta and Nkanta (2019) asserts that written channels are deployed when permanents of rules and procedures for efficient organizational functioning are required. Written channels are also effective channels when context, supporting data and detailed explanation are necessary to inform and persuade others.

**Oral Media:** This refers to verbal communication channels, they include telephone and informal and formal meetings. Ketoja (2019) observes that in these days because of product development, telephones are now used for both oral and written communication as well as for illustrated communication. It is a rich medium because it allows the person to use voice and language diversely and one can express emotions behind the message. It is the fastest channel, and provides for two-way communication. Informal and formal meetings can be a great way to meet people from different departments and teams. Informal meetings are not planned while formal meeting is planned.

**Electronic Media:** Electronic media refers to the different types of communication channels presented in electronic forms. A typical example is the E-mail. Acvedo (2019), notes that communication by email is almost instantaneous, which enhances communication by quickly disseminating information and providing fast response to customer inquiries. Emails reduces geographic and time zone barriers for business. Employees can communicate regardless of their location. Email can help increase productivity. Business owners can communicate with established distribution lists, automatically forward information based on a topic or send based on a topic or send information to specific individuals as needed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Kurt Lewin's Three-Step Change Model. Kurt Lewin developed a change model involving three steps: unfreezing, changing and refreezing. The model is a practical model for understanding the change process. For Lewin, the process of change entails creating the perception that a change is needed, then moving toward the new, desired level of behavior and finally, solidifying that new behavior as the norm. Krithika, and Devadas (2021) describe the model as one that contends for a successful organisational change and involves unfreezing from status, changing to a desired end state, and then refreezing the change to make it permanent.

**Unfreezing stage:** This is the initial stage of transition and one of the most important in the change management process. It entails cultivating a realization for transitioning from one's current comfort zone to a transformed circumstance as well as enhancing people's preparedness and willingness to change. Krithika, and Devadas (2021) continue that it entails raising awareness of the need for change and increasing people's motivation to adopt new ways of working in other to achieve better results. Effective communication is critical at this stage in gaining the needed support and participation of people in the change process.

**Changing Stage:** This stage is also known as the transition stage or the stage of actual change implementation. To Krithika, and Devadas (2021), it entails the willingness to adopt new ways of doing things. The persons are unfrozen at this point and the actual modification is applied. This step necessitates careful preparation, good communication and promoting individual participation in endorsing the change

**Refreezing Stage:** The organization is ready to refreeze once the changes have taken place and personnel have accepted the new ways of functioning. Hussain, Shen, Akram, Heider (2016) cited in Krithika, and Devadas (2021) identify steady organizational hierarchy, consistent job description etc. as visible evidence of the refreeze

## Methodology

This study adopts surveys as a research method. The population of the study was made up of the 238 members of staff working in the 5 branches located at Oron Road Head Office, Ewet Housing Branch, Mbiabong Branch, Ikot Ekpene Branch 1, Ikot Ekpene Branch 2. Taro Yamane formula was adopted to determine the sample size of 149 while the proportional sampling method was used to select respondents from each of the branches. The instrument used for this study was an interview schedule used for eliciting responses for answering research question 1 and the Communication and Organisational change Questionnaire” (COQ) with 4-point Likert scale of Strong Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) used for answering research 2 and 3. For the questionnaire, the decision rule was that responses above the weighted mean of 2.50 indicated agreement while responses below 2.50 indicated; while for the interview schedule, the explanation building method was used for the analysis.

## Presentation of Data

**Research Question1:** Identify the organisational changes that were carried out in *Ntepsmart* from January 2021-2024

### The organisational Changes in *Ntepsmart*?

Responses from the interview schedule revealed the following: creation of the human resource department which was saddled with the responsibility of handling recruitment, staffing, application for leaves among others, to enable the company have a corporate image rather than being relegated only to the trade business of buying and selling. This according to the respondents, would also enable the company compete favourably in the trade market.

Findings also revealed an establishment of a formal structural organogram indicating the hierarchical chain of command. This change created a system of hierarchy and superiority ranging from the top management to the members of staff. This formal creation of a hierarchical chain of command, was also documented formally, as it became a working document for the company as well as a point of reference.

Findings also revealed that the company created a Customer Service Department. These personnels served as the face of the company and projected the image of the company corporately. The Customer Service Department handled enquired, complaints, as well as served as a point of communication between the company and its customers. This became the company’s means of getting closer with its customers in order to serve them better. The company, it was also found commenced the payment of salaries by bank accounts as opposed to payments in cash by hand. This ensured that no worker suffered any loss.

**Research Question2:** What communication channel is most effective in communication organizational changes?

**Table I: Mean Response on most effective channel of communication**

| S/<br>N           | Channel of Communication                                                  | 4            | 3          | 2            | 1          | Total | Mean        | Rmks         |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|-------|-------------|--------------|
|                   |                                                                           | SA           | A          | SD           | D          |       |             |              |
| 1.                | Email was effective in communicating the organisational change            | 10<br>(40)   | 9<br>(27)  | 108<br>(216) | 22<br>(22) | 305   | 2.04        | Agree        |
| 2.                | Memo was effective in communicating the organisational change.            | 2<br>(8)     | 9<br>(27)  | 128<br>(256) | 10<br>(10) | 301   | 2.02        | Agree        |
| 3.                | Staff meetings were effective in communicating the organisational change. | 109<br>(436) | 10<br>(30) | 14<br>(28)   | 16<br>(16) | 510   | 3.42        | Agree        |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |                                                                           |              |            |              |            |       | <b>3.16</b> | <b>Agree</b> |

Table 2 indicates that the mean response of three items on the most effective channel of communication, that was used in communicating the organisational changes is greater than the average rating mean of 2.5. Therefore, the table shows that the grand mean of the most effective channel of communication is 3.16. This indicates that staff meetings were the most effective measure of communicating the organisational changes.

**Research Question3:** How do Changes Influence Organisational Growth

**Table 2: Summary of mean scores on how the Changes Influence Organisational Growth**

| S/N | Growth                                                   | SA          | A           | SD         | D       | Total | Mean | Remarks |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|---------|-------|------|---------|
| 1   | The organisational changes improved sales.               | 76<br>(304) | 43<br>(129) | 13<br>(26) | 17 (17) | 476   | 3.1  | Agree   |
| 2   | The organisational changes improved on work productivity | 33<br>(132) | 64<br>(192) | 28<br>(56) | 24 (24) | 404   | 2.7  | Agree   |



|                   |                                                    |        |         |         |         |     |            |              |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-----|------------|--------------|
| 3                 | The organisational changes brought about expansion | 7 (56) | 28 (84) | 41 (82) | 73 (73) | 295 | 1.97       | Disagree     |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |                                                    |        |         |         |         |     | <b>2.6</b> | <b>Agree</b> |

Table 2 reveals that the mean response on the extent of influence of changes on *Ntepsmart* as greater than the average rating mean of 2.50. Therefore, the grand mean of extent of influence is 2.60. This implies that respondents agreed that the changes in *Ntepsmart* influenced sales, improved on work productivity. However, respondents disagreed that the changes brought about expansion.

## Discussion of Findings

### Research Question 1

The finding from the interview schedule on the organisational changes that were carried out in *Ntepsmart* from January 2021-2024 agrees with researchers' view on organisational change. For instance, Kumarasinghe and Dilan (2021) opined that the world of business is very dynamic and it is changing so rapidly in very short times. These changes may come in organisational structures, technologies that the companies use, employees and their perceptions, production techniques and concepts etc. Also, Elving (2005,p:129) asserted thus "The only thing constant within organisations is continual change of these organisations. Barbara Stensaker and Jackson (2015) buttress the change narratives when they say that organisation and organisational fields continue to experience transformations of various kinds- less hierarchy, more teaming, new types of collaboration, novel work locations and work practices, innovative practices and technologies, greater reliance on network structures, and process improvement, all of which create the need for renewed understanding of change and its consequences for organisations.

### Research Question 2

#### What communication channel was used for the change communication in *Ntepsmart*

The answer to this question is contained in Table 1.

Information provided by the respondents showed that staff meeting was the means used in communicating the organisational changes. It is believed that employees will feel a sense of trust for their leadership because they are included in planning and other processes that make the workplace a better place to be for all. This finding agrees with Mcdade (2020) who notes that staff meetings is an effective means for effective commas holding regular staff meetings

with employees in the workplace will greatly enhance the communication efforts that make up the foundation of any work group.

This finding also agrees with Rafael (2015), who asserts that staff meeting's allow employees to be part of the decision-making process of an organisation by communicating their opinions, ideas etc. in a structural yet commonly accepted forum, while find authority and decision making belong to the leadership of an organisation, leaders often reach out to their employers for their valuable input.

Ketoja (2009) found in a study that although e-mail and informal meeting were the most preferred channel of information when it came to getting information from management, if the company is about to face change, employees preferred formal face to face meetings. This position buttresses the above findings moreover, Batta and Nkanta (2019) in a study found that face to face communication, video conferencing, telephones as well as written channels prove to be most effective in communication at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

### **Research Question 3**

#### **How do the Changes Influence Organisational Growth?**

This finding is revealed in Table 3.

Findings revealed that respondents agreed that the organisational changes improved on sales and work productivity however, they disagreed that it brought about expansion. This finding agrees with Banutu-Gomez and Banutu-Gomez(2016) who note that organisational change and development are essential to make an organisation grow and adapt with its given market. experience growth. Organisations can continue to do things the same way for a long period of time, but at some point, organisations infrastructure needs to change to accommodate a growing customer base and industry changes.

This finding also agrees with Joseph (2019) who asserts that businesses that are adept at handling or even embracing change on foster an environment that encourages innovation Joseph (2019), further notes that change can increase the efficiency of work processes, which can make for satisfied customers as well as employees.

### **Conclusion**

Effective change communication is undoubtedly crucial in enhancing the overall activities in an organisational setting. Change communication is a human input used to chart a clear course for employees within an institution to attain set goals. Communication offers avenues for unhindered exchange on ideas and thoughts so that change actions are engaging and clearly understood. Where communication is effective there is always the atmosphere of trust, loyalty and better relationship among groups members thereby positioning them to be able to attend to various stakeholders through better service delivery.

Communication and organisational change strategy is one of the things the management organisations including *Ntepsmart* must consider and give priority attention if it must drive value, innovation, employee productivity and growth. This is because they have to contend with influence and market competitions which are simultaneously at work in complex interrelationship.

### Recommendations

Following the findings made and conclusions reached herein, the following recommendations were made:

- (i) The management of *Ntepsmart* should encourage participatory communication where employees are encouraged to contribute to the change process through meaningful suggestions.
- (ii) Management and staff meetings should be promoted periodically to evaluate and facilitate information dissemination in contrast to the existing memo or circulars as channel of organisations communication.
- (iii) Management of *Ntepsmart* should set up a self-appraisal mechanism where employees can give feedback on management decisions and change execution.

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