



Internal Communication Channels as Operational Thrust in The Nigeria Customs Service

Abdullahi Aliyu Maiwada

Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja, Nigeria

Email: abdullmaiwda@gmail.com

Abstract: *In an ever-evolving, dynamic, and complex world, the field of public relations has taken on a transformative role in shaping our society. However, the context of internal communication practices within paramilitary agencies, such as the Nigeria Customs Service, diverges from conventional corporate organisational models. This divergence is particularly pronounced given the agency's multifaceted role in revenue generation, the suppression of smuggling, trade facilitation, and other functions. The study examines the channels of internal communication in the Nigeria Customs Service and the operational thrust of internal communication channels in the Nigeria Customs Service. Situational Theory of Problem Solving is used as a theoretical framework. The study employed a constructivist approach to research design, which informed the choice of in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling was employed to select twelve participants for the study. Data gathered from the interview were presented using thematic analysis, based on the themes that emerged during the interview sessions, using Nvivo, version 14. The findings revealed that while some channels, such as email and in-person meetings, were commonly used for sharing information, there were varying perceptions regarding their effectiveness. Additionally, the study identified challenges in timely disseminating critical operational information, indicating potential gaps in communication effectiveness within the organisation. In evaluating the effectiveness of current internal communication channels, the research found that while some channels were perceived as effective by most respondents, there were also instances where communication was considered ineffective. The study concludes that internal communication is an important concept and integral to internal public relations, and it links to positive organisational and employee outcomes such as employee engagement.*

Keywords: *Nigeria Customs Service; Internal Communication; Employee Relations and Operational Thrust.*

I. Introduction

The world is constantly becoming more advanced, dynamic, and complex. As a result, the field of public relations has continued to play amazing, creative roles in reshaping the cosmos. Through community ties, people tend to become more enlightened and conscious as human civilisation advances. As a result, every organisation's public relations strategy must consider employee relations. Any organisation's ability to endure depends on the level of goodwill and ongoing support it receives. The workforce will likely launch a major backlash against a company whose policies do not represent its needs and goals. The creation and maintenance of ecologically responsible programmes and actions that benefit the company, its employees, and the community (Nweke, 2001).

Scholars like Rim-Rukeh et al. (2008) have conducted studies on community relations and the corporate image of organisations. They tried to determine the activities organisations adopt to promote their corporate image, while other scholars like Plaskoff (2017) and Olaolu

(2012) examined the practice of employee relations in particular organisations. Samuel (2014) states that there is a consensus among public relations scholars that the best response to conflict is to be prepared or to be brave enough to handle it. According to Igben (2008), preventive Public Relations, also known as proactive Public Relations, involves taking action ahead of time. Aliyu and Mohammed (2008) also state that public relations professionals believe that proactive approaches to conflict management are the most strategic approaches.

Similarly, Walden and Westerman (2018) observe that one of the major goals of public relations is to help establish lines of communication for exchanging ideas on policies and programmes. The global trend on internal communication has focused more on employee engagement through the cultivation of a communication culture that engenders two-way communication with the aim of creating an organisational culture for better efficiency, accuracy, and ultimate attainment of the organisational objectives (Vitalis et al., 2025). As noted earlier, this study intends to aggregate internal communication and the challenges of employee engagement that usually create both external and internal problems that affect the delivery of organisational objectives.

Effective internal communication is also fundamental to the success of any organisation. It ensures that employees are informed, engaged, and aligned with organisational objectives. By promoting transparent, two-way communication and using appropriate channels, organisations can foster a collaborative culture, enhance performance, and drive long-term success. Improving internal communication also strengthens employee satisfaction and commitment, critical components of a thriving workplace (Aliyu et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, a study by Madsen, (2018) has emphasised the role of internal communication and employee engagement in relation to achievement, patterns and the creation of organisational culture to achieve corporate objectives. In addition, internal communication practice in paramilitary agencies like the Nigeria Customs Service deviates from the conventional corporate organisation models, especially since the Agency deals with revenue generation, suppression of smuggling, and trade facilitation, among other functions. Therefore, there is a need to fill the existing gap in internal communication and employee relations management in the Nigeria Customs Service. Within this context, this study examines the different internal communication channels that influence employee relations in the Nigeria Customs Service and the operational thrust of internal communication channels in the Nigeria Customs Service.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

a. Brief Background of the Nigeria Customs Service

What is now known as the Nigeria Customs Service is a paramilitary organisation that is said to have been established a little over a century ago, when the British colonial administration appointed Mr T.A. Wall, in 1891, as the Director General of Customs – an agency for the collection of inland revenue in the Niger Coast protectorate (Samuel, 2014). This is the formalisation of the duties which the department had been performing under the Royal Niger Company. The name, Department of Customs and Excise emerged in 1922 when the first Comptroller General of Customs and Excise of the amalgamated Nigeria was appointed. Towards the end of 1945, the Customs and Excise Preventive Service was established under the leadership of Mr Nicol Briton; this was made up of two divisions – maritime and preventive. The maritime division was responsible for collecting import and excise duties and related functions, while the preventive division was responsible for enforcement duties.

Sequel to the promulgation of the Customs, Excise and Management (CEMA) No.55 of 1958, the affairs of the Department were brought under the management board (Ya'u, 2017). In 1992, the Department of Customs and Excise was transferred back from the Ministry of Interior to the Federal Ministry of Finance and its status as a paramilitary organisation was maintained. This is what is now known as the Nigeria Customs Service.

Within this context, customs must ensure that goods entering and leaving the country move in a controlled manner and are cleared through customs in compliance with extant laws and government fiscal policies (Samuel, 2014). The dynamics of technology have changed the conduct and scope of international trade. As a critical factor in the unfolding developments, The Customs Service cannot afford to be indifferent. Information dissemination about customs operations is therefore considered very vital to trade facilitation in a world that is becoming increasingly technologically driven (Ya'u, 2017).

b. Concept of Internal Communication

One of the functions of Internal Communication (IC) is to influence how communication is done within an organisation, not really to communicate on behalf of the organisation (Idris & Msughter, 2022). Maintaining an effective and satisfied workforce is the job of internal relations. Public relations professionals who specialise in internal relations have the primary responsibility of communicating with the inter-organizational public, executives, management, administrative staff, and labour.

It is on this premise that Kent (2021) posits that internal communications is a branch of public relations that deals with communication within a business or organisation. It's a form of PR that happens internally. It's used to inform, engage and motivate employees and ensure everyone in the organisation is 'singing from the same hymn sheet.' Internal communications should be part of the overall PR strategy and should reflect the brand promise, values and business goals in exactly the same way as external communications (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). Just like an external PR strategy, the consistency of the message, the frequency of the message and the channel used are key to organisational success.

Multidisciplinary by nature, internal communication can be positioned between public relations, human resources management and (internal) marketing. However, in practice, it is public relations and strategic communication practitioners who have the best understanding of internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders, predominantly employees, are active players in the internal communication process, who co-construct meaning with the organisation and co-create the relationship as opposed to being merely passive message receivers (Men & Bowen, 2016; Yue et al., 2021).

Yue et al. (2021) also suggest that internal communication is both a management function and a public relations specialisation. It is strategic in nature and aims to achieve specific internal communication goals that contribute to organisational effectiveness. Hence, internal communication can be more appropriately coined as "strategic internal communication," which is distinct from a similar but easily confused term, organisational communication. As a well-established field of study, organisational communication is concerned with studying all communication phenomena inside the organisation (e.g., persons and their characteristics or motivations, organisations, structures, teams, networks, discursive resources, discourse, interpretation, representation, construction of meaning, processes, etc.)

Traditionally perceived as a function of information exchange, a fundamental role of internal communication is to keep employees informed and updated regarding their job roles, the organisation, market, environment and each other (Men & Bowen, 2016; Yue et al., 2021). As a strategic management function, internal communication involves listening to gather employee feedback, views, perspectives, and ideas. Symmetrical internal communication highlights listening, feedback, reciprocity and an employee-centred approach, which has been recognised as an important characteristic of excellent public relations (Men & Bowen, 2016; Yue et al., 2021)

c. Operational Thrust of Internal Communication in NCS

Operational thrust refers to the strategic focus and alignment of organisational activities designed to achieve set goals and objectives. Within the context of internal communication, operational thrust emphasises the systematic and purposeful dissemination of information, fostering collaboration, and ensuring all stakeholders are aligned with the organisation's mission and vision. According to Men and Bowen (2017), effective internal communication serves as the backbone of operational thrust, creating a shared understanding among employees and enhancing their ability to contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives. This strategic alignment ensures that communication processes are not only clear but also reflective of the organization's overarching priorities.

Operational thrust in internal communication involves two critical elements: clarity of purpose and employee engagement. Clarity ensures that all messages align with the strategic direction of the organization, reducing ambiguities and enhancing efficiency (Ruck & Welch, 2012). Meanwhile, employee engagement ensures that staff feel informed, valued, and motivated to participate actively in organisational initiatives. Studies by Welch (2011) affirm that organisations with a strong operational thrust in communication tend to achieve higher levels of employee commitment and performance.

In relation to the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), operational thrust in internal communication is integral to achieving its core mandates of revenue collection, trade facilitation, and border security. The NCS leverages structured communication channels to align its workforce with its strategic objectives, ensuring seamless information flow between management and staff. The NCS fosters an inclusive and participatory work environment that drives performance by emphasising both bottom-up and top-down communication (Hile et al., 2023). This aligns with the views of Lee et al. (2019), who argue that strategic internal communication frameworks enhance employee collaboration and organisational success.

d. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Situational Theory of Problem Solving. The Situational Theory of Problem Solving, as proposed by Grunig in 2002, forms the basis of most public relations research and practice today. It builds on the concept of 'publics', defined by Dewey as being issue groups that form around problems that the people involved in them are directly affected by (Grunig, 2005). It provides measures for the identification and segmentation of these publics. The Situational Theory of Problem Solving is a theory of communication developed to explain people's motivated communicative actions when encountering problematic life situations (Idris & Msughter, 2023). Tam et al. (2022) theorised that the Situational Theory of Problem Solving is a continuation of its parent theory, the Situational Theory of Publics, which started with James Grunig's original situational theory about the role of information in human decision-making (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

The theory is built on the assumption that decision-makers have perfect knowledge and that information is available freely and sufficiently for decision-makers. In reality, however, people make decisions with imperfect knowledge or in a lack of relevant information and thus as decision-makers, tend to face the risks of their choices and decisional consequences. People become motivated to seek more information about their decisions as the risks or the opportunity costs increase.

James Grunig originally set human communication as a purposeful action related to the problems that one identifies. This conceptual transition is an important theoretical landmark for the development of both situational theories. Specifically, the situational theories posit that a) communication behaviours increase and decrease across people's decision situations, b) communication could better be understood as a variable (vs. a constant) and better be a dependent variable, c) motivators of communicative behaviours could vary across situations, as one's personal perceptions about problem significance, connection, and obstacles in doing something about the problematic situation vary (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). As such, the situational theory upsets the common assumptions (i.e., the perfect knowledge assumption and the sender-based view of communication) to the notion of communication being an activity through which people to cope with their problematic life situations within the constraints of one's internal and external conditions (Mojaye & Aonover, 2022). The main goal of the Situational Theory of Problem Solving is to describe and explain communicative aspects of human problem-solving by conceptualising perceptual and cognitive processes and epistemic motivation that rise and fall in our life situations.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Empirical Review

Lee et al., (2019) examine the impact of different types of corporate issues and Employee Organisation Relationships on employees' perceptions of the issues and of communicative actions. Specifically, the study investigates how employees who have experienced an internal or an external issue within their organisations differently perceive the organisational issue and engage in positive and/or negative communicative behaviours. An online survey was conducted with 363 full-time employees in large-sized companies in the United States of America who have experienced any internal or external issues for months. Findings revealed that employees are more cognitively aware of and feel more involved and less constrained in solving an internal company issue than an external one. On many occasions, experiencing internal issues has led employees to share negative information about their organisation externally. The quality of Employee Organisation Relationships pre-issue significantly increases employees' involvement and positive communication behaviour and decreases constraint levels and negative communication behaviours regarding an issue.

Lee and Kim (2021) advanced the theoretical understanding of employees' advocacy on social media, testing an integrative model that incorporates individual and organisational antecedents. Drawing from the relationship management theory in public relations and online behaviour literature, the model specifically examines the collective impacts of the social media-related behavioural motivations of individuals and the quality of Employee Organization Relationships on their positive information-sharing intentions about their company on personal social media. An online survey was conducted with 419 full-time employees in the United States of America who use social media. The results showed that Employee Organisation Relations influenced by symmetrical internal communication significantly increase employees' advocacy intentions and social media-related motivations. Considerable

and distinct effects of individuals' positive behavioural motivations on social media (i.e. self-enhancement, altruism, enjoyment) on advocacy intentions are also found.

Salim (2022) assessed the contribution of internal communication to the organisation's level of performance by specifically identifying tools used by the employees in the organisation to communicate internally. A qualitative questionnaire with 150 questionnaires was conducted together with interviews and observations, and the data obtained were analysed using the Software Package for Social Sciences. The results have validated the connection between the internal communication tools used and the organisation's performance. Organisations found to be using multiple tools of internal communication that produce a positive contribution for better performance and with the presence of scatted employees' workstations as in the municipal case, face-to-face communication through conference and mobile telephone were mostly preferable to an internal memo and email address due to poor Information and Communication and Technology. The employees cited the benefits of internal communication in their organisation's performance since their activities were planned and implemented by internal communication, and hence, employees were able to remind each other of the working agreement as the principle to achieve the organisation's plan and objectives.

A study by Karen et al., (2019) outlined that internal communication (or internal marketing) is generally led by marketing or Public Relations professionals with expertise in human resources, public relations, marketing, social media, and/or employee engagement. One new way that companies are extending internal communication is by extending its use of digital communication. A study by (Siciliano, 2020) also showed that successful leaders had better communication strategies in their operations across major job descriptions and departments within the business organisation compared to unsuccessful ones. Equally, Shannon, (2018) argued that the implications for positive social change include the potential for managers with direct reports to improve their understanding of the causes of engagement and disengagement, internal communication strategies that cause disengagement, and the benefits of implementing engagement strategies.

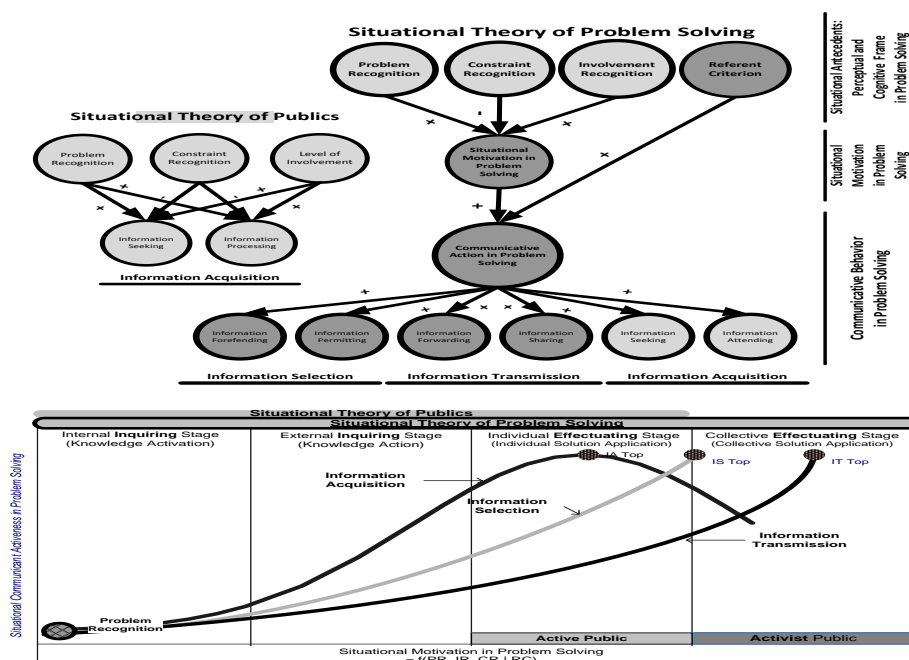


Figure 1. Situational theory of publics and situational theory of problem-solving
Source: (Grunig, 2005)

Therefore, based on the lacuna in the literature, most of the studies presented earlier have one or more gaps to be filled by the current research. The gaps relate to the limited scope of some, different geographical locations, study structures and concepts examined. Many of them focused on different aspects of internal communication without sufficient consideration to existing strata and application to champion organisational culture to achieve the organisational objectives. Besides, the time gap between the period when some of the studies were conducted and now makes their findings inapplicable because of certain intervening variables that might have created distortions in internal communication practice.

Specifically, research on internal communication in government agencies, specifically paramilitary, appears to be limited, and theories and methods in the area need to be strengthened. Thus, the current study will demonstrate empirical strength over previous ones because of the pragmatic approach of the qualitative method is adopted in this study for data gathering since its significant focus is on internal communication practices in the Nigeria Customs Service.

The Situational Theory of Problem Solving provides a framework for understanding how individuals approach problem-solving in specific situations based on factors like involvement, recognition of the problem, and constraint recognition. When applied to internal communication and employee performance, the Situational Theory of Problem Solving offers valuable insights into how employees interact with communication channels, identify communication problems, and actively work to improve them. The Situational Theory of Problem Solving offers valuable insights into how employees engage with and solve communication-related issues in the workplace. By recognising problems, becoming involved, overcoming constraints, and actively seeking and sharing information, employees can significantly improve organisational communication channels. High-performing employees tend to exhibit proactive problem-solving behaviours, leading to more effective, transparent, and collaborative communication systems. These improved communication channels contribute to a more engaged, productive, and efficient workforce.

III. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study employs an interpretative approach to research design, which informed the choice of in-depth interviews. Interpretativism belongs to the school of thought that believes in qualitative methods or paradigm, which informed the choice of in-depth interview as a significant qualitative research method. This method involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a few respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation.

This study focuses on the internal communication strategy (top-down and horizontal) at the Management (Strategic) level. All Deputy Comptrollers General heading seven departments in Nigeria Customs Service or their representatives, Assistant Comptroller General Headquarters, Assistant Comptroller General, ICT Modernization, the Assistant Comptroller General Board, and Assistant Comptroller General Headquarters provided the data for the in-depth interview in response to research questions addressing top-down and horizontal communication at the strategic level, making a total of 12 interviewees. Data gathered from the interviews are presented/analysed using thematic analysis, based on the themes that emerged during the in-depth interview, using Nvivo, version 14.

Table 1. Framework of Metrics

S/No	Participants Coding	Participants Ranks
1	Participant 1	Assistant Comptroller General (Board)
2	Participant 2	Assistant Comptroller General (Excise, Free Trade Zone & Industrial Incentives)
3	Participant 3	Assistant Comptroller General, Headquarters
4	Participant 4	Assistant Comptroller General (Information Communication Technology & Modernisation)
5	Participant 5	Assistant Comptroller General (Strategic Research & Policy)
6	Participant 6	Assistant Comptroller General, ZONE A
7	Participant 7	Assistant Comptroller General, ZONE D
8	Participant 8	Deputy Comptroller General (Enforcement, Inspection & Investigation)
9	Participant 9	Deputy Comptroller General (Finance, Administration & Technical Services)
10	Participant 10	Deputy Comptroller General (Human Resource & Development)
11	Participant 11	Deputy Comptroller General (Traffic & Trade)
12	Participant 12	Deputy Comptroller General (Training and Doctrine Command)

Source: (Researcher's informants list, 2024).

Table 1 shows the interviewees, their designations and locations. Nvivo software version 14 was used to analyse the data from the interviews. Nvivo is a product of qualitative research software developer of qualitative data analysis. Thus, the study adopts the four main stages for data analysis using Nvivo. These stages are pre-coding stage, coding stage, post coding stage and thematic framework analysis/matrices.

3.2 Pre-Coding Stage

During the pre-coding stage, the researcher imports the data into the software and reviews the various data from the interviews using both auto and manual coding. The researcher then used the 'Query' command to identify the words and phrases used by the participants and how frequent they were used. This is aimed at coming up with the initial concepts and theme from the interviews. Below is the word cloud from the interviews.

3.3 Coding Stage

At the coding stage, the researcher used both manual and auto coding to come up with the initial codes derived from the earlier identified concepts. Auto coding was first carried out using major concepts from word count and text tree. Similarly, the researcher used manual coding by thoroughly reading the transcripts from all the interviews to identify any recurring or key theme in order to allocate the concepts into nodes (containers for storing particular concepts or idea). In manual coding, each interview was reviewed and coded, bringing out underlying ideas, meanings and codes in line with the research questions. After coding all the interviews, the researcher then created labels for the nodes. These labels form the frameworks for thematic analysis. At the end of the process, six themes/nodes emerged: these are internal communication, communication barrier, employee relations, crises communication, motivation and performance. Similarly, the researcher also identified other sibling nodes that affect employee relations directly or indirectly (positively or negatively) and these are communication channels and improved staff wellbeing. Figure 5 below shows the main themes that emerged from the interviews as contained in Nvivo 14.

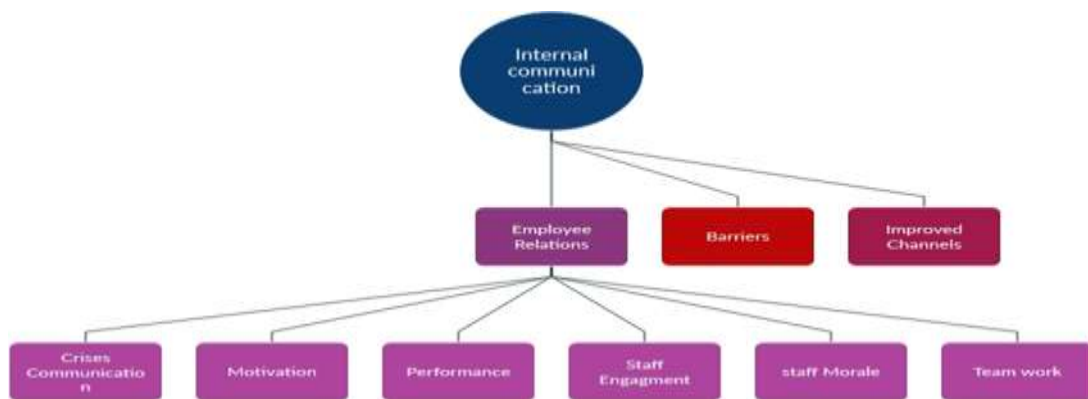


Figure 5. Mind Map of themes for the Study

Source: (Nvivo, version, 2014).

The figure above is a mind map showing the nodes (themes) identified for the study, these are dominant themes from the interview session. At this stage, the researcher coded the significant part of the interviews, ideas were recorded, case nodes were identified, case classifications were created for respondent demographic data and nodes were categorised into various child and parent nodes for analysis. Moreover, the researcher used the Nvivo 14 'Explore' tab to analyse the relationship between the various nodes and the interviews, this is to ensure that all relevant codes have been taken into account, Figure 6 below shows the relationship that exists between all the nodes and all the interviews analysed for this study.

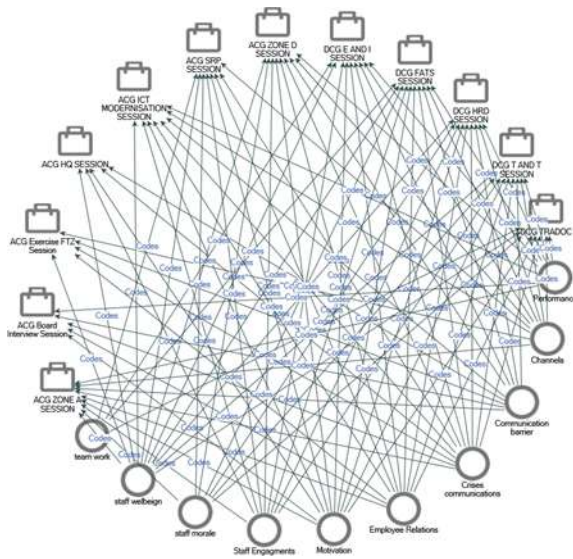


Figure 6. *Interconnectivity of the Themes for the Study*
 Source:(Nvivo, version, 2014).

Figure 6 above shows the themes generated for the study and also connected to all the interview sessions.

3.4 Post Coding Stage

Having generated the themes for analysis from the data, the study then proceeded to post coding stage, at this stage, the researcher carried out matrix coding in order to show the coding reference count graphically and represent the data quantitatively. The matrix coding is shown in figure 7 below.

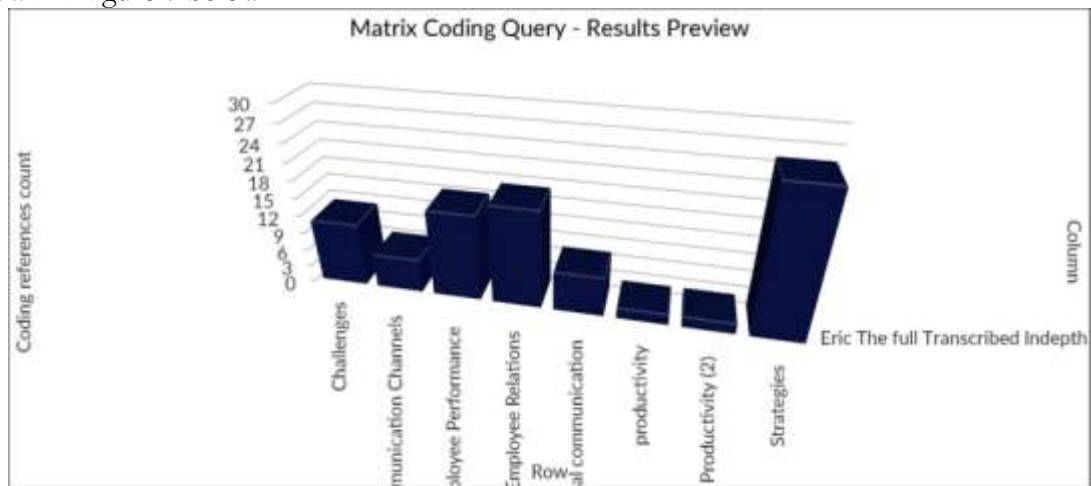


Figure 7. *Matrix Coding of the Interviews*

Source:(Nvivo, version, 2014).

Above Figure shows the graphical representations of all themes and sub-themes for the study. Similarly, the researcher compared the coding of the two interviewees selected randomly to ascertain how the nodes related and how they are dispersed in order to give clear interpretations of interviewees' experiences and observation as required when analysing multiple interviews in Nvivo. Figure 8 shows the comparison between the Deputy Comptroller General interview, Assistant Comptroller General and Zonal Coordinators' interviews.

mechanisms. Overall, the Nigeria Customs Service's internal communication practices demonstrate a significant commitment to facilitating effective dialogue, although there is room for improvement to bridge occasional gaps in understanding.

The diverse communication channels adopted by the Nigeria Customs Service suggest a commitment to effective internal communication, which is crucial for operational efficiency. Using digital tools, such as emails and WhatsApp, alongside traditional methods like memos, shows a deliberate approach to adapting to modern communication needs within a regimented structure. However, the limitations caused by hierarchy and bureaucratic delays imply that while the organisation values effective communication, its strict structural norms occasionally impede the speed and openness of information flow. This suggests a potential need for Nigeria Customs Service to explore ways to streamline communication hierarchies, especially for critical information, to enhance responsiveness and reduce delays. Salim (2022) corroborates that the employees has the benefits of internal communication in their organisation performance since their activities were planned and implemented by internal communication and hence, employees were able to remind each other of the working agreement as the principle to achieve organisation plan and objectives.

2. Communication Barriers

Communication barriers within the Nigeria Customs Service are a recurring issue, primarily due to the organisation's paramilitary structure, which emphasises a top-down approach and limits certain communications to senior personnel. This structure, while ensuring command and control, sometimes limits junior staff's access to timely information and discourages open feedback. Furthermore, some participants pointed to a lack of authority to disseminate information across departments, resulting in delays and potential misunderstandings. In a few cases, the absence of automation in certain processes was also mentioned as a hindrance, as it prolongs communication in departments like Free Trade Zones.

Sociocultural diversity within the Nigeria Customs Service adds another layer of complexity to effective communication. Nigeria's ethnic and cultural differences occasionally lead to misunderstandings or hesitation in open dialogue, which participants identified as barriers to smooth communication. Several participants recommended training programs focusing on communication skills for both junior and senior officers to overcome these barriers. Additionally, some participants suggested that the organisation should work towards creating more informal channels where employees can engage freely and raise issues without fear of reprimand, thus improving transparency and clarity across ranks.

The identified communication barriers highlight the challenges of operating within a hierarchical, paramilitary environment where authority lines and structural formality are pronounced. The hesitation to communicate openly and the issues posed by sociocultural diversity point to a need for more inclusive communication strategies that bridge cultural and hierarchical gaps. These findings suggest that training on communication skills and inclusive practices could improve clarity and engagement across ranks. Additionally, increasing automation in some processes may address delays and support a more seamless flow of information, especially in departments that currently lack digital infrastructure.

3. Employee Relations

The Nigeria Customs Service's commitment to strengthening employee relations is evident through its focus on open, transparent communication and recognition-based

motivation strategies. The Nigeria Customs Service actively fosters a sense of belonging and engagement among staff members by using internal communication to build trust and involve employees in decision-making. Regular meetings, where junior officers are encouraged to share ideas and voice concerns, contribute to a collaborative culture that boosts employee morale and creates a more positive work environment. Participants noted that although the Nigeria Customs Service is a paramilitary organisation, it still emphasises transparent, two-way communication, enhancing employee trust and engagement.

Employee recognition is a cornerstone of the Nigeria Customs Service's employee relations strategies. By acknowledging outstanding performance through awards, promotions, and unique responsibilities, the organisation creates an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to excel. Such recognition and supportive management encourage officers to feel invested in their roles and the organisation's success. These efforts align with a belief expressed by participants that effective communication and recognition foster a workplace where employees feel supported, leading to higher job satisfaction and productivity.

The positive impact of open and transparent communication on employee relations indicates that the Nigeria Customs Service recognises the importance of engagement and inclusivity for morale and productivity. A collaborative approach to employee relations, especially through regular meetings and acknowledgement of junior staff input, shows that the organisation values a two-way communication culture despite its hierarchical structure. This suggests that the Nigeria Customs Service could benefit from further formalising these participatory practices by implementing regular feedback sessions or structured channels for employee ideas. Such practices could bolster trust and satisfaction, creating a more empowered and motivated workforce. The findings validate the position of Lee and Kim (2021) that employee organisation relations influenced by symmetrical internal communication significantly increases employees' advocacy intentions and social media-related motivations.

4. Crisis Communication

Conflict management is essential to Nigeria Customs Service's operational framework, with multiple mechanisms to address conflicts constructively before they escalate. Recognising the inevitability of workplace conflicts, the Nigeria Customs Service has established structured channels for crisis communication that include grievance reporting, counselling sessions, and, when necessary, a disciplinary committee. Participants noted that these approaches ensure that disagreements are handled at the department level and, in most cases, prevent issues from reaching external authorities or law enforcement. Direct communication between unit heads and employees is encouraged, which helps create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

Moreover, departmental/unit leaders are critical in guiding employees through conflicts by fostering open communication and mediation. Staff members are encouraged to meet with departmental/unit heads to discuss their grievances when conflicts arise. This counseling and direct dialogue system reinforces the Nigeria Customs Service's stance on maintaining internal harmony and provides a constructive outlet for employees to address their concerns. Participants expressed that this approach promotes a family-like environment within the organisation, reducing the likelihood of unresolved issues that could disrupt work relations.

The Nigeria Customs Service's structured approach to crisis communication, including grievance reporting and unit-level counselling, demonstrates a solid commitment to resolving

conflicts internally and maintaining workplace harmony. This approach reflects a preference for non-punitive, reconciliatory measures, which is unusual in regimented organisations but suggests a progressive shift towards empathy-driven conflict resolution. The reliance on unit heads and counselling sessions points to the importance of a supportive chain of command. However, the findings imply that further empowering unit leaders to make conflict resolution decisions could help resolve issues more swiftly and alleviate escalations to higher management.

5. Motivation and Performance

Recognition programs and a strong emphasis on welfare heavily influence motivation and performance in the Nigeria Customs Service. The organisation's strategies to motivate employees include performance evaluations, welfare programs, and structured feedback mechanisms, with high-performing officers regularly acknowledged. Promotions, special assignments, and awards also incentivise productivity and show appreciation for dedicated service. Several participants highlighted that these methods inspire officers to take pride in their work and commit to achieving the Nigeria Customs Service's objectives, thus boosting overall performance.

In addition to formal recognition, the Nigeria Customs Service fosters motivation through empathetic leadership and support for personal well-being. For instance, supervisors often take a hands-on approach to understanding their employees' individual circumstances, such as family or health issues, which helps create a supportive and motivating environment. The Nigeria Customs Service also promotes training and development initiatives to provide officers with the necessary skills to advance their careers. This combination of recognition, welfare programs, and opportunities for professional growth creates a work culture where employees feel valued and driven to perform at their best.

The emphasis on recognition and welfare as motivation tools reveals that the Nigeria Customs Service values employee satisfaction and retention and understands the link between motivation and performance. This indicates that the organisation has identified a connection between employee engagement and job productivity, as seen through awards, welfare, and empathetic management practices. However, it also suggests that more structured programs for ongoing feedback and career development could further enhance performance and loyalty among officers. Implementing formalised mentorship or personal development initiatives may help officers feel more invested in their professional growth. Siciliano (2020) findings also showed that successful leaders had better communication strategies in their operations across major job descriptions and departments within the business organisation compared to unsuccessful ones

6. Communication Channels

The Nigeria Customs Service employs various communication channels, from traditional memos, letters, and circulars to digital tools like email, video conferencing, and social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Zoom). Each channel serves a specific purpose within the organisational framework; for example, WhatsApp is commonly used for quick, confidential exchanges, while emails and memos handle formal documentation. Participants noted that this multi-channel approach allows the Nigeria Customs Service to communicate effectively across different levels, adapting to the needs of field operations and administrative tasks.

However, participants also preferred reducing reliance on paper-based communication, with some officers advocating for more digital solutions to improve efficiency. This shift towards digital communication aligns with the organisation's effort to streamline information sharing and create a more accessible communication structure. By integrating both traditional and modern channels, the Nigeria Customs Service ensures that its communication strategies cater to the unique demands of a paramilitary structure, enhancing overall operational effectiveness.

Using traditional (memos, letters) and modern (email, WhatsApp) channels within the Nigeria Customs Service points to an adaptable communication strategy that considers the operational demands of a paramilitary organisation. However, participants' preference for reducing paper-based communication suggests a potential shift toward a more digital, streamlined environment that could improve communication efficiency. This adaptation implies that the Nigeria Customs Service could benefit from further investment in digital tools and training to encourage paperless communication where possible. This shift would not only enhance accessibility but also ensure that information can be tracked and shared more effectively. Shannon (2018) also argued that the implications for positive social change include the potential for managers with direct reports to improve their understanding of the causes of engagement and disengagement, internal communication strategies that cause disengagement, and the benefits of implementing engagement strategies.

7. Improved Staff Wellbeing

The Nigeria Customs Service prioritises staff wellbeing through initiatives that balance professional and personal needs, reflecting the organisation's commitment to employee health and satisfaction. Programs like the National Health Insurance Scheme, the Customs Officers Wives Association, and other welfare initiatives ensure that employee and their families access essential healthcare and support. Additionally, the Nigeria Customs Service emphasises physical and mental wellness through organised sports activities and counselling services, which help to alleviate work stress and promote a healthier workforce.

Participants noted that the recent reactivation of welfare programs, such as the Group Personal Accident plan, provides an added layer of security for officers who may face health challenges or accidents. By fostering a culture of mutual support and offering comprehensive healthcare benefits, the Nigeria Customs Service demonstrates a proactive approach to enhancing employee well-being. These initiatives improve job satisfaction and contribute to the organisation's productivity, as officers feel cared for and motivated to fulfil their duties effectively.

The Nigeria Customs Service's commitment to staff well-being through programs like National Health Insurance Scheme, sports activities, and welfare services indicates an understanding that employee health and personal support are key to sustained productivity and morale. Focusing on mental and physical health and reactivated welfare programs suggests a proactive approach that aligns with modern organisational practices focused on holistic employee care. These findings imply that continued investment in wellness and support programs may increase job satisfaction and enhance workforce resilience. Ensuring regular wellness check-ins and potentially introducing mental health resources could further strengthen employee loyalty and well-being in this demanding work environment. The Situational Theory of Problem Solving also provides a framework for understanding how individuals approach problem-solving in specific situations based on factors like involvement, recognition of the problem, and constraint recognition.

IV. Conclusion

The findings underscore the critical role of effective internal communication in achieving operational success and employee engagement within the Nigeria Customs Service. Through various communication channels, the Nigeria Customs Service strives to foster a collaborative work culture and maintain open lines of communication across its hierarchical structure. However, challenges such as bureaucratic delays and communication barriers highlight areas where further refinements could benefit operational efficiency and employee satisfaction.

Recommendations

1. The Nigeria Customs Service should implement a centralised digital communication platform that integrates various channels, such as emails, memos, and instant messaging, into a unified system. This platform should include features for real-time updates, streamlined approval workflows, and secure access for urgent or classified information. By consolidating communication tools into a single, accessible interface, the organisation can reduce delays caused by bureaucratic processes, enhance the timeliness of information flow, and foster greater transparency and inclusivity across all levels of the workforce. To address communication barriers, particularly those stemming from sociocultural diversity, the Nigeria Customs Service could introduce intercultural communication training and inclusive practices to bridge hierarchical and cultural divides. Establishing informal communication channels, such as regular town hall meetings or virtual question-and-answer sessions with senior leadership, could foster a more transparent and engaging environment where employees feel comfortable raising issues.
2. The Nigeria Customs Service should establish structured, inclusive communication training programs for all personnel, with a focus on bridging hierarchical and sociocultural gaps. These programs should be designed to equip both junior and senior officers with skills for effective, culturally sensitive communication while promoting openness and mutual respect across ranks. By fostering a culture of transparent dialogue and inclusivity, the organisation can mitigate the barriers posed by its hierarchical structure and sociocultural diversity, thereby enhancing overall communication efficiency.
3. The Nigeria Customs Service should formalise a structured employee feedback system, such as quarterly feedback sessions or an anonymous digital suggestion platform, to consistently capture and address employee input. This system would reinforce the organisation's commitment to two-way communication, ensuring that employees at all levels feel heard and valued. By integrating regular feedback into its employee relations strategies, the NCS can further strengthen trust, enhance morale, and cultivate a more engaged and motivated workforce.
4. The Nigeria Customs Service should empower departmental and unit leaders with advanced conflict resolution training to enhance their capacity to address grievances effectively at the departmental level. This training should focus on mediation techniques, active listening, and empathetic leadership, enabling unit heads to resolve conflicts swiftly and constructively without escalating issues unnecessarily to higher management. Such empowerment would streamline the crisis communication process, reinforce internal harmony, and foster a supportive workplace culture.
5. The Nigeria Customs Service should invest in a comprehensive digital communication platform that integrates traditional and modern communication channels into a unified system. This platform should include features such as secure document sharing, real-time messaging, and tracking capabilities to replace or minimise paper-based communication. Additionally, the organisation should provide targeted training programs to ensure staff

proficiency in using the digital system. This approach would enhance operational efficiency, improve information accessibility, and align with the participants' preference for a more streamlined and modern communication environment.

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