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# Ethical Standards and Effective Communication for Fostering Sustainable Organizational Development

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## ABSTRACT

In an era where organisations are increasingly held accountable for their actions and their impact on society and the environment, ethical standards and effective communication behaviour have emerged as vital components of sustainable organisational development. This study examined the important place that morality and effective communication use occupy within organisations and their long-term sustainability. The paper explores quality character and organisational development; sustainable organisational development; indispensability of quality character in organisational development; effective communication and sustainable organisational development; language use, morality and successful sustainable organisational development; leadership, communication, ethical behaviour and sustainable organisational development; and, power of communication in and organisations in the new age. It was concluded that the key to successful sustainable organisation is the ability of organisations to invest in sound ethical/moral standards and employment of effective communication channels. It was recommended, among others, that management of organisations should make policies that condemn negative character in the work environment and apply sanctions where necessary, and seminars and workshops could be organized regularly for employees in the area of communication and ethical behaviour.

**Keywords:** Ethical standards, Communication, Moral, Language, Organisation, Sustainable Development

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business environment is witnessing a paradigm shift in the way organisations perceive and pursue sustainability. Beyond profitability, modern organisations are increasingly expected to embrace ethical principles, environmental responsibility, and social accountability. In this context, the role of ethics and communication, has emerged as a critical determinant of sustainable development for organisations.



Omolawal (2021) observed that organisations are becoming more conscious of the fact that in surviving the increasingly harsh and competitive business environment in the contemporary world, all organisational resources, most especially the human resource element as the ultimate determinant of the success of organisations, must be fully harnessed, utilized and managed for attainment of organisational goals.

Human beings are the most important resource of an organisation through which other resources are managed effectively. The only way by which humans can understand each other is through interaction, hence interaction is inevitable for success in any human organisation and this is made possible through communication, which makes communication an important part of interaction because it makes interaction meaningful. Effective language use therefore makes interaction and communication possible among the workers of organisations without which human relationship will be chaotic. Shaibu (2013) stressed the importance of language in communication to man's interaction as incalculable because language functions as a vehicle of interaction and an instrument of communication, and that, to learn a language is not only reaching out to others but to maintain a variety of the social bond, a shared sense of values and communal awareness. It was averred that today, organizational communication has become an indispensable part of any organization which aims at achieving set goals.

Communication lies at the heart of whatever work people do, hence, the most important skill they will need in order to work successfully. Vogt and Kantelinen (2012) in Storevik (2015) asserted that more and more workplaces across all fields have become multicultural and multilingual, accordingly, qualified employees have to be proficient enough to communicate flexibly in diverse communication situations and professional discourse communities. Employees have to be competent enough to cooperate with colleagues from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in order to strike up professional and personal relationships. Thus, intercultural, professional and efficient workplace communication is becoming increasingly important.

Character is an essential ingredient to success in any organisation. However, Idumange (2015) noted that, it is evident that Nigeria is bedeviled with high level of moral decadence which is, in part, due to widespread lack of commitment to ethical behaviour, concern for excellence and self-reliance in Nigerian organisations. He stressed that every nation, state, community, organization or individual is guided by one moral standard or the other which have evolved over time to achieve a particular goal of growth and development, it is therefore imperative to adhere to moral values as a key indicator to achieving economic development in a nation, and, therefore, in an organisation.

The foundation of organizational development begins from effective and efficient moral and value system. Sound moral character and effective use of language are opined to help in organisational development, which will enhance both individual societal and organisational development. Elakhe (2014) emphasized that individual values and behaviors have been proven to be key factors that promote economic performance and that if moral values are promoted in an organisation, the economy will also perform well since the economy cannot be separated from the people.



Sustainable organizational development is no longer a choice but a necessity. This is because organisations operate within a larger society and are important to the success of it. Global Innovative Leadership Module (GILM) (2015) sees an organisation as a social entity that provides the necessary structures to achieve specific aims. Omolawal (2021), concerned with placing the organizations in a broader context of the society, stressed their importance as constituent parts of the global system and as micro-societies, exercise major influence in economic and social development, and, in the transformations that the contemporaneous world is incurring.

They are a part of the society and must be seen as important players in the dynamics of the social, political and economic history. Manuel Castells (2007) emphasized that they are not separated, on the one side the worldwide context, the social context, the context of the institutions, and on the other, the activity of the company; rather, there is an absolutely intimate relationship, which is why if the business practice does not assimilate what is happening in the world and fails to contribute to the transformation of the context, its dynamics reach a point of paralysis.

This paper therefore provides organizations with actionable guidance on integrating ethical moral standards and effective communication strategies into their practices in order to achieve sustainable organizational development. By emphasizing the moral dimension of behaviour and effective language use, organizations will not only enhance their reputations but also contribute positively to society while achieving long-term sustainability goals.

## **2. QUALITY CHARACTER AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Character is an indispensable factor to successful achievement in any human endeavor. Character or moral makes or mars an individual, organisation or community and can go a long way to determining the success or failure of such. Haglund (2012) averred that, as in real life, first impressions are not to be underestimated, "characters, like people, make good or bad first impressions". Organisations are organic entities similar to humans and having unique character which constitutes a source of competitive differentiation (Yu, Xiao and Bo, 2018). Citing Shee and Abratt (1986), organisational character was viewed as the sum of organizational behaviours and intellectual characteristics; and Slaughter, Zichar, Highhouse and Mohr (2004) saw it as personality trait of organisations similar to individual personality, that can be perceived by the outside world.

Turyakira (2018) observed that most scholars generally agree that ethics is a set of principles, rules, morals and values that inform and guide the conduct of individuals and groups in society or a business organisation. For instance, Okafor (2011) refers to ethics as a system of moral principles or rules of behaviour which involves doing the right thing in the right manner, that is, behaving ethically implies doing what is morally right. Abiodun and Oyeniya (2014) see ethics as moral principles that govern the action of an individual or a group, based on broad principles of integrity, transparency, accountability, responsibility and fairness, and focuses on internal stakeholder issues such as product quality, customer satisfaction, employee wages and benefits, and local community and environmental responsibilities. It is the discipline that deals with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligations. Ethical rules of conduct generally attempt to provide guidelines of human behaviour that will preserve an organisation and its individual members.



Elakhe (2014) opined that if morality has to do with issues of right and wrong, good and evil, acceptable and unacceptable etc., it therefore implies that individual values and convictions are involved and play critical roles in determining human behavior and thus economic or organisational performance.

### **2.1. Indispensability of Quality Character in Organisational Development**

Yu, Xiao and Bo (2018) established that along with increasing product homogeneity in many industries, companies are usually faced with the dilemma of relying solely on providing high-quality products/services that may not be able to assist them in maintaining sustainable competitiveness because consumers are more willing to measure the characters demonstrated by the corporate world from their self-cognition so as to make better consumption decisions since only companies that can better strengthen the self-cognition of consumers can better stimulate their consumption desires, improve product satisfaction, and even enhance their loyalty.

There are principles/rules of ethical behaviour that should guide people's conduct at work. Velentzas and Broni (2010) view business ethics as the set of moral principles and values that take control over the behaviour of the organisation with reference to what is regarded as right and wrong. As such, business ethics can be seen as what is regarded as right and wrong or good and bad human behaviour in a business setting which can obviously be influenced by various factors such as the type of staff and their cultural background, and will vary from business to business (Wiid, Cant & Van Niekerk 2013).

Business ethics involves how a business integrates core values such as honesty, trust, respect and fairness into its policies, practices and decision-making (Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, & Klopper, 2008). Idumange (2015) highlighted some principles of business ethics to be trust, integrity, open mindedness, obligations, fairness, clarity of documents, maintaining accounting control, reputation & morality, respect, excellence & leadership.

He explained further the importance of business ethics, among others, to be:

- Regulating employee-organizational relationship and boosting employees' morale;
- Improving customer loyalty;
- Reducing the risk of negative exposure and public backlash caused by poor ethics;
- Impacting positively on the community and managing a sustainable business mainly because of the serious consequences that can result from lack of respect for ethics which are the basis of much litigation that amount to damages;
- Protecting the interest of Business Community and having public trust;
- Creating an environment in which workers can create an environment that is consistent with organizational values.

Alejandro (2014) emphasizing the benefits and importance of ethics in the workplace, reported that a strong ethical culture within a business safeguards assets, as employees who abide by workplace ethics would be able to protect and respect business assets, thereby increasing employees pride and enhancing the environment for optimal productivity. Furthermore, ethics fosters teamwork among employees and helps in aligning the values of businesses with those of workers'.



This strong sense of alignment is enhanced by strong business ethics and corporate social responsibility (CRS) which manifestations are increased productivity, teamwork and motivation. Positive moral character is therefore essential in building successful organisations.

### **3. SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Sustaining organizations all over the world today is very challenging as all organizational resources need to be harmonized for optimal productivity. Globally, human resource in every organization constitutes a major challenge because effective management of employees is required for skillful handling of thoughts, feelings and emotions to secure the highest productivity in the organization (Ufuophu-Biri & Ayewumi, 2022). Jones (2017a) revealed that sustainability should be understood as a concept that has been socially and politically constructed, also by business, and has reflected the interests and values of entrepreneurs, social groups and organizations being involved.

Organisations are powerful entities within the society. Stuart Hart (2006) in Margarida (2014), stressing what is the power of the organizations, opined that in this new century, companies outstand as the most powerful institutions of the Planet, noting that 700 years ago it was religion as cathedrals, mosques and temples characterized the period; 200 years ago it was the State as tourism to impressive palaces, congressional buildings and governmental complexes, reminded us of how the government was centrally important in the era of enlightenment; he noted however, that today, the most powerful institutions are the companies as office towers, banks and shopping malls dominate the large cities and that there is no doubt that business has become the most dominant institution.

Bergquist (2017) on new business history perspectives about business and sustainability noted that it is often assumed among scholars and business practitioners that business challenges related to sustainability is a recent phenomenon but that from the 1960s and the 1970s the issue of business and the environment grew to become broader and more complex. The Brundtland report in 1987 brought environmental issues into the concept of sustainable development paraphrased as: "meeting the needs of the present generation without comprising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). Translated into a business context, this implied that business could no longer regard the environment as limitless pool of natural capital that could be drawn down upon without liability (Blowfield, 2013).

Nwokike, Ezeabii and Jim (2018) described sustainable development as the all round development of an individual. Citing China, Lilly and Igbemi (2017) and Hansa (2014), sustainable development is all about improving the lives of people. Hansa (2014) opined that sustainable development deals with the carrying capacity of natural system with social, political and economic challenges faced by the society; believed to be a holistic approach to improving the quality of life through judicious use of available natural resources. Nwokike, et al noted however, that In the context of business enterprise, sustainable development means adopting business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders presently and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future.



The aim of sustainable development is to balance economic, environmental and social equity and justice. Some of the sustainable development goals to transform the world by 2030 as outlined by The United Nations development program (2015) in its framework include, among others, the promotion of economic growth and decent jobs within the planetary boundaries. If this is to be achieved, Ukairo (2017) agreed that there must be a balance between environmental, societal and economic considerations needed to maintain and improve the quality of generations to come.

### **3.1. Effective Communication and Sustainable Organisational Development**

Achieving success in today's workplace is closely tied to the ability of employees and managers to communicate effectively with each other, with people outside the organization, and with people from many cultures (Hess, 2019). Communication is the process of transferring information and meaning between senders and receivers, using one or more written, oral, visual, or electronic channels, the essence of which is sharing in simple and successful transfer of information, where the sender and receiver arrive at an agreed-upon meaning, and situations in which the receiver creates a different message than the one the sender intended to convey.

Ayeni (2021) agreed that although communication is key in every human relationship or encounter, the use of language in communication is tied to individual's mastery of such language because factors such as social class, education, position, among others, go a long way to influence the individuals' ability for language use. The reason noted for this is because when people from different social background or class meet to communicate for whatever reason, efforts are put in place to ensure that there is effective communication between such interactants and that since the average Nigerian is bi/multilingual, the choice of language employed in business is carefully and deliberately done for reasons other than a display of bi/multilingualism.

Effective communication is guided by some principles that have implications for an effective communication as highlighted by DeVito (2008) in Joe and Teng (2017) such as: adjustment, which is a process of reflecting very much on intercultural communication when one has a different cultural background with different signals and meanings in trying to hinder the gap by understanding to make communication meaningful and successful; ambiguity, which can lead to misinterpretation; accommodating, which is brought up to overcome the hindrance generated by ambiguity; communication content and relationship, which involve the relationship between the speaker and the listener; the content of the communication; power dimension, which is one's ability in influencing or controlling the behavior of another person; punctuation, which entails the cause and effects of a communication; and, purposefulness, that is, to learn, to relate, to help, to influence and to play. It is also inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable, which holds the idea that interaction is always on going all the time, where, what is said, cannot be reversed and repeated.

Decision making is a key activity in the management of business organisations and that for organisations to be able to meet the present and future needs therefore, effective communication is an indispensable factor. GILM (2015) outlined the functions of communication to include: controlling employee behaviour, motivating employees, providing release for emotional expression of feelings and fulfillment of social needs, and, providing information.



### **3.2. Language Use, Morality and Successful Sustainable Organisational Development**

Language is a tool of character. The way language is used will reflect what character is. Positive character and effective use of language will determine success in organisations. According to Settlemeyer, Widera, Grünhage-Monetti (2019), it is generally acknowledged that language and communication skills are crucial for acquiring vocational proficiency, completing successfully vocational training and maintaining employability, as well as for communication and interaction in everyday work.

Communication at work can be both formal and informal. Formal communication takes place within prescribed organizational work arrangements while informal is not defined by organizational hierarchy. Global Innovative Leadership Module (GILM) (2015) recorded that the informal communication system fulfills two purposes: it permits employees to satisfy their need for social interaction, and, can improve an organization's performance by creating alternative and frequently faster and more efficient channels of communication.

Glaze, Zegarac and Giroux (2008) reported that Ontario Skills Passport (OSP 2007), based on extensive research and consultation by Human Resources and Social Development Canada, and Ontario's Ministry of Education, identified essential skills and important work habits that are used in virtually all occupations such as reliability, responsibility, integrity, initiative and respect. This is reinforced by the perspectives of Canadian employers in the Employability Skills Profile by the Conference Board of Canada (2000), which states that personal management skills such as honesty, adaptability and respect for diversity are essential skills for entering the workplace. They noted however, that policy makers and agents of national development are often quick to forget or ignore the fact that national development itself is a moral concept, hence, when they engage in their attempts to introduce their development agenda, mention is not made of morality.

Idowu (2018) investigating the influence of effective communication and compensation management on employees' engagement in some selected financial institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria revealed that effective communication within and outside the organisation has a significant influence on employee engagement and that honest communication is an important tool for enhancing employees' engagement in an organisation. An organisation where the channels of communication are not effectively utilized is dead and will gradually lose its best employees to other competitors in the labour market because effective communication is the back one of an org that wants to grow either locally or globally. It was stressed that effective communication makes employees get along with organisational goals and objectives.

### **3.3. Leadership, Communication, Ethical Behaviour and Sustainable Organisational Development**

Organisational leadership has important roles to play in achieving sustainable organizational development. Jiang, Du, Zhuo and Cui, (2020) maintained that organizational communication is a source of power and means for applying the optimal legal and administrative actions that are vital in the organization's hierarchy. Its effectiveness is important for management in every organization. accountingcpd.net (2019) states that ethical behaviour must come from the top, that is, the leader must know that encouraging effective and open communication through the organisation is crucial, hence his team feels they can trust and report unethical practices to him.



Communication is a very important skill through which managers coordinate relationships and establish and maintain interactions between employees, hence the golden rule of business ethics is that morality must permeate an organization from the top to bottom and embrace all stakeholders. Alejandro (2014) noted that investors should consider both the profit and the public image and products of the company because before some investors consider the Final Investment Decision, they look at the reputation of the company and that businesses can only attract good partners when they maintain a high level of integrity and good practices.

Margarida (2014), seeing organisations precisely in the new complex contexts that they exist and operate, observed the incumbency of communication managers to sensitize the directors that it does not suffice to generate jobs, pay taxes and earn profits, but must contribute to a better society by having a synergic relationship between the world and the organizations, which communication renders viable through organizations' social responsibility, transparent attitudes, ethical behaviors, among others.

Odine (2015) showed that effective communication serves as a reliable vehicle helping employees fulfill their organizational obligation; however, managers must be willing to promote free-flow communication across the existing different department/units in the organization to enhance employee productivity. Jiang, Du, Zhuo and Cui, (2020) emphasized that effective communication helps in building trust among employees and top management officials of the organization which will encourage the employees to perform effectively on the job.

Effective and proper communication within an organization has always been an essential part of management success as poor organizational communication usually results in defects and flaws in the mandate of an organization (Ufuophu-Biri & Ayewumi, 2022), and will definitely affect the managerial functions of coordination, planning, organization, control, among others.

#### **4. Power of Communication in and Organisations in the New Age**

Technology has radically changed the way organizational members communicate as it improves a manager's ability to monitor performance; gives employees more complete information to make faster decisions; provides employees with more opportunities to collaborate and share information; and, has made it possible for people to be fully accessible, anytime anywhere and influences the way members communicate, share information and do their work (GILM, 2015). Fasae (2021) referred to this period as the information age when information is basic to life and is needed to function in every facet of life and ability to access correct information in the workplace is critical to effective performance of workers and achievement of organizational goals.

Ufuophu-Biri and Ayewumi (2022) averred that in the new information era, managers have realized that the assets of the institution lie very much in the hands of the employees and that when organizations commit themselves to effective communication with their employees, well-informed employees are usually satisfied and more engaged. Human communications are of intrapersonal (within) and interpersonal (with others) which can be face-to-face as well as through electronic channels (mediated) when one sends a message through some electronic device to a receiver. (DeVito, 2005) in Joo and Teng (2017).





Margarida (2014) stressed that the power that communication exercises in the contemporaneous world is amazing as it is an instrument of divulgement or transmission of information, and a basic social process and phenomenon present in the society, conceived as a transversal power that trespasses the entire global social system, including organizations in this scope. Information and communication technologies are revolutionizing the society and its way of life which is evident in the cultural industries, multimedia, television (interactive, digital, cable and high definition), on cell phones and in all of the available media interactions Facebook, Twitter etc.). All of this media convergence is a reality that is present in these days and occurs in the individual, in the society and in all of the spaces – family, work and social participation.

According to Castells (2014), the Internet is the heart of a new socio-technical paradigm, which in reality represents the material base of our lives and of our forms of relationship, of work and of communication. Furthermore, Mustafa and Hamzah (2011) in Joe and teng (2017) emphasized that the Internet is increasingly being used and has become an effective means of communication tool in social interaction, hence communication modes are changing and have crossed distances with the help of computerization and digital technology especially the emergence of Internet and its various new applications. Communication and interaction may now take place through online or in virtual world or cyberspace without having to face each other at the same place and same time. Many more people use the new media technology, the Internet in particular, to meet their psychological and social needs. Internet is the place to meet and interact and form relationships. In fact, this form of social interaction or communication has become increasingly common in our daily lives. This view has indicated the pattern of behavior at the advancement of technologies. The use of social network sites (SNS) is designed to connect people with friends, family, and other strong ties, as well as to efficiently keep in touch with a larger set of acquaintances and new ties (Burke, Kraut, & Marlow, 2011).

## **5. CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS**

This paper examined the role of communication in fostering a sense of commitment among employees, including their engagement with the organization's values and sustainability goals. Ethical standards and effective communication strategies are an integral component of sustainable organizational development as they foster stakeholders' trust, aligns with ethical leadership practices, and contribute to cultural sensitivity in the workplace. However, there is need for a careful balance between profitability and ethical principles, especially in the digital era because their impact in adapting to cultural differences are key considerations to be measured by organizations striving for long-term sustainability. Furthermore, effective communication strategies shape and promote an ethical organizational culture where ethical principles are embedded in daily practices.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

If organisations are to create a system that is sustainable to keep going indefinitely into the future, then they should invest in character development of employees and employ effective communication channels. In view of the great importance of ethical standards and effective language as a tool of character for success in the development of the individual and the organisation in general, it is, recommended among others, that:



- Management of organisations should make policies that condemn negative character in the work environment, applying sanctions where necessary.
- Seminars and workshops could be organized regularly for employees in the area of communication and ethical behaviour.
- Organisations could incorporate into its handbooks the need for employees who are monolinguals to study at least one extra language in its environment giving special emphasis to the requirements of communication.
- Employees should engage in personal development in order to be able to deliver appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude that are positive and necessary in achieving organizational goals.
- Policy makers and agents of national development should emphasize the importance of morality and good character when they engage in their attempts to introduce their development agenda.
- Employers should go beyond downward communication; employees should be given the opportunity to express their views and opinions as this is a key driver of employee engagement.
- There should be improved information flow within staff in an organization as this will help achieve the diverse strategic objectives of the organization

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