Listening Skill as a Significant Tool in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

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Abstract

Effective communication is a crucial element in our lives and it is the basis for organizational objectives achievement. It is well known that quality communication has a direct impact on good relationships and this is why effective communication skill is crucial. Through effective listening skill, people have better understanding of other people's perspectives, emotions and needs. The ability to listen and understand what other people say is essential for conflict resolution. Understanding others and building trust through listening are major prerequisites for success in relationships; they have the power to influence the attitudes of all participants in the negotiation process. Effective listening is a conscious effort to liberate ourselves from the beliefs and experiences that shape our perception of the world and to immerse ourselves in the thoughts and feelings of others. The process of effective listening skill thus transcends both the barriers that separate groups or individuals from other groups or individuals and the barriers that exist within each of us. It becomes a process of personal transformation; and it is in this sense that effective listening produces its long-lasting effects. This paper shows that effective listening skill is a significant tool in resolving conflicts in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Listening skills, Significant, Conflict, Resolution, Communication*

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Background to the Study

Communication involves transmission of spoken and unspoken messages. It consists of a sender, a receiver and channel of communication. Communication is the process of sharing ideas, information and messages with others. The most basic communication methods that are known to man are speech and non-verbal expressions such as facial expressions and body language. Effective communication usually requires a two-way flow of information rather than simply delivering messages without feedback. A sender conveys a message and the receiver responds with feedback and perhaps a new message (Cullinan, 2016). Communication can be described as, "an act of interchanging ideas, information, or messages from one person or place to another via words or signs which are understood to both parties". (Surbhi, 2018). Communication is a process of transferring messages. It is a way of interchanging information between two or more people. Poor or inaccurate communication can lead to conflict and negativity. It can even lead to cancellation of deals or loss of good will. This presupposes that communication has a big role to play in conflict management. Little wonder (Jija, 2012) describes communication as the process of sharing and exchanging information between personalities, groups and potential parties in a conflict situation. The implication of this is that despite conflict situations, individuals or parties involved can still talk. Whenever it is possible to have a communication link between two parties in conflict situations, there is the possibility of exchanging perceptions, assumptions and attitudes which have been built up by conflict groups vis-àvis others. There are many communication strategies that can be employed to resolve conflicts. These include active listening, writing about the conflict, asking questions, recognising differences etc. however, for the purpose of this study, we shall be looking into listening skill as a tool for resolving conflicts in Nigeria.

The Concept of Listening Skill

"Listening is a fundamental communication skill, it is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process" (Jija, 2012). Listening enables people to understand the messages that others convey to them in spoken language. It is the first in the chronological order of communication skills which are as follows: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening as a vital communication skill plays an integral part of communicating and the differences from actively listening can be seen in multiple facets of our daily lives and development. Listening is key to effective communication; without the ability to listen effectively, messages will be easily misunderstood. Listening is a panacea for conflict management and resolution. Listening involves more than simply hearing the words spoken, it requires active involvement that includes understanding, acknowledging, and responding. When you are actively listening, you are also listening for content, meaning, and feelings. One can deduct from Jija's view that listening skill is venom (bullet) that fights conflict and win. It is a panacea for managing/controlling conflicts. Listening is a resolution (decision/ determination, solution, collective opinion, process) to solving conflicts.

Listening is a vital component of oral communication, or the interactive process in which the individual takes the roles of speaker and listener through verbal and nonverbal components. Listening is an essential part of the communication process. Listening is a vital mental capacity, one of the principal ways through which an individual understands and takes part in the world around him/her (Hoppe, 2018)). Listening empowers people with the capacity to formulate thought verbally and communicate with others, so it is the skill that underlines all verbal communication". Listening is not merely not talking; it means taking a vigorous human interest in what is being told you. You can listen like blank mall or like a splendid auditorium where every sound come back fuller and richer (Purdy, 2017). Listening is the ability to identify and understand what the speaker is saying through understanding his accent, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and grasping his meaning.

Effective/Active Listening
Many scholars have identified several types of listening skill. Thus, we have: informational listening, effective/active listening, discriminative listening, biased listening, sympathetic listening, comprehensive listening, empathetic listening etc. For the purpose of this study, active listening will be explored. Effective listening, also known as active listening requires concentration and a conscious effort to listen to understand what someone else has to say. It is not just to hear what someone is saying. www.revolutionlearning.co.uk>article. Active listening skill according to Elgin 2014, can be defined briefly as "listening with one's full attention and an open mind which aims to bring an understanding of others on a much deeper level than in casual everyday communication." In other words, effective listening is actively absorbing the information given to you by a speaker, showing that you are listening and interested, and providing feedback to the speaker so that he or she knows the message was received. Effective listening is an important way to bring about changes in people. When people are listened to effectively, they tend to make clear exactly what they are feeling and thinking. Effective listening brings about changes in people and people's attitudes towards themselves and others. People who have been effectively listened to, become more emotionally mature, more open to their experiences, less defensive, more democratic and less authoritarian (Prachi, 2022). Effective listening is a way of showing concern for others. It tends to reduce conflict tendencies and increases the likelihood that when conflicts arise, they will be resolved easily. Effective listening fosters bonds, commitment and trust. In conflict, communication most often fails because each side is too concerned with their own argument to pay enough attention to the other side or inversely they do not perceive the other to pay attention to their statements (Fisher et al, 2011). In contrast, a display of our attention and earnest intention to understand brings satisfaction to the other and in turn increases his willingness to listen. The demonstration of empathy also satisfies one of the basic human needs: the need to feel recognized and accepted by others. As a consequence, it builds trust and encourages the participants to share their concerns more openly. Thus, active or effective listening can promote the two major aspects of communication: listening and speaking.

The Concept of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a process in which one party perceives that their interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party. This may be a mild disagreement between two people regarding the best choice in decision. Conflict can be defined as, "a clash, a fight or simply a confrontation between individuals or groups. It means opposition or antagonism towards other individuals or things" (Olerede & Olerede, 2015). It also refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group, when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. It can occur between two individuals, groups of friend, within and between families, within ethnic groups and between organizations etc. Conflict is a common phenomenon which has become present at one time or the other in every environment (ibid).

Resolution is the process of resolving things such as problem or conflict, or a determination to achieve a purpose. Most of the non-violent methods of conflict resolutions, according to Bogoro (2013) "such as collaboration, negotiation and dialogue as well as third party interventions like mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, are largely dependent on effective communication." In a situation whereby the parties in conflict can talk together on issues tearing them apart with the genuine purpose of finding a solution to the conflicting situations, it is envisaged that the resolution of such conflicts is at sight. The same process can also prevent crises or conflicts.

Conflict resolution can be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute. Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution (ibid). The term conflict resolution may also be used interchangeably with dispute resolution, where arbitration and litigation processes are critically involved. The concept of conflict resolution can be thought to encompass the use of non-violent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution.

Basic Causes of Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria is characterized by diversity of norms, values and beliefs, a distinctive multiculturalism that makes it vulnerable to variety of conflicts. This is typical of multicultural societies. The situation of conflicts in Nigeria has recently reached quite unprecedented heights that no day passes without gory pictures and heart-breaking details of excessive destruction and senseless killings on the television screen, radio broadcasts, newspapers etc. The basic causes of conflicts in Nigeria mostly are seven: these are ethnicity, religion, oil or resource control, politics, poverty, unemployment and, above all, poor leadership (Adedimeji, 2013). Each of the divers groups making up the country has a value and interest which at times conflict with those of others. For example, the Niger Delta unrest, the incessant Benue-Taraba crisis, the Hausa and Kataf, Jos unrest, the Ife-Modakeke unrest, the resent Ife Yoruba - Hausa clash, herdsmen

crises as well as a host of others are just part of quite an endless list of rifts in Nigeria and other parts of Africa (Malumfashi, 2006). The consequences of these on peace and national unity are only circumstances of imagination.

Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

The history of conflict is as old as human history. From the dawn of human history, communities have been competing for control of resources and for dominance. These competitions inevitably led individuals as well as social, political, economic and religious groups to conflicts. It is true that conflict has devastating effects and it is unwanted. It is also true that conflict is unavoidable and it continues to occur. Since the causes of conflict are different, it would be better to use different mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. By avoiding conflict, we avoid not only one of the hindrances of economic development but also foreign powers' intervention, which may exacerbate domestic conflicts (Ladan, 2013). Therefore, more than anybody else, the government, whose main duty is maintenance of peace and security, are responsible for providing their respective people with alternative conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. Popular and widely used among these are the African Traditional mechanisms.

Nigeria is a country of multilingual and multi-cultural societies. These ethnic nationalities could belong to the different religious groups represented in Nigeria such as Christianity, Islam or African Traditional religions. Impliedly therefore, within a family, it is possible to find adherents of Islamic, Christian and African religions co-habiting. This is a clear indication that Nigeria is also a multi-religious country with large number of followership of all these faiths, especially the two messianic traditions of Christianity and Islam. Religious pluralism therefore signifies the importance of recognizing the existence of other faiths by the state and its peoples. It is necessary to observe that multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies are prone to conflicts because of contested interests of the distinct groupings (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2012). Nigeria, like other African countries had had its own share of conflicts from pre-colonial times. These conflicts often arise from petty communal inter personal relations like stealing of farm products, abduction of wives, encroachment into neighbouring community's land, ponds and economic trees, etc. These conflict challenges were however taken care of by the urgent application of extant conflict resolution. Conflict resolutions adopted by the government have both short- and long-term measures aimed at curtailing conflicts and civil unrest in the country (ibid). Although, more still needs to be done, these peace initiatives instituted by government, if well pursued, will go a long way in resolving conflicts in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large. The institute of peace and conflict resolution was established to look into the problems of peace and conflict resolution in Nigeria. Also, courses associated with peace and conflict resolution are being offered in some universities across Nigeria to curb the menace of threat to peace in Nigeria (Utazy, 2016). Moral philosophy, which is one of the prerequisite courses for graduation in the university, is being taught in virtually all the universities of this country to enhance peace and unity in the country.

Effective Listening Skill as a Significant Tool for Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

Conflict resolution has emerged as an area of general interest within the past thirty years as a consequence of the advancements in transport and technologies and the resulting effects of political, economic and global interactions. Its rapid development has been fuelled by the growing awareness of the limitations of traditional negotiation (based on positional bargaining) and the search for more productive negotiating methods that will bring mutually satisfactory and long-lasting outcomes. Nowadays conflict resolution is applied across wide range of situations; from ethnic conflicts on an international scale, such as the tension between Bosnians, Serbs and Croats in the wake of the 1995 war, to local disagreements, such as a clash between the management and the workers in a factory, to interpersonal conflicts, e.g. between roommates in a residence.

Effective listening skill is a set of techniques designed to help an individual hear and understand what someone else is saying and to help the speaker express themself clearly. Adejimola, 2009, says that poor listening skill can easily escalate conflict between the parties or individuals involved in conflicts. Whereas, effective or active listening can help in a great way to resolve crises and build confidence and peace between parties involved in the conflict. Effective listening skill focuses on both facts and feelings, reduces tension and defensiveness and allows conflicts to be resolved more effectively. Effective listening is a way of showing concern for subordinates, and that fosters bonds, commitments and trust. Effective listening tends to reduce the frequency of interpersonal conflicts and increases the likelihood that when conflicts emerge, they will be resolved with a "win-win" solution. In any organisation, effective listening is very vital for leaders. If you listen to the people you manage, you will learn "what makes them tick. When you know what makes them tick, you will be more effective at motivating them." (Haney, 2009). Leaders can encourage their subordinates when they need encouragement by listening to them. By listening to them you will know what kinds of things they value as reward for a job well done (e.g. additional responsibility, public praise etc.).

Listening skill has been widely recognized as the most important tool for conflict mediation and negotiation (Anstey, 2012). The key role of effective listening is justified by its purpose: to generate a profound understanding of other people's concerns and motives which will provide the basis for exploring mutually acceptable solutions and eventually resolving the conflict. In addition to gaining understanding, effective listening demonstrates that we understand others and thus build mutual trust, which can be as important as the understanding itself in order to arrive at a satisfactory outcome (ibid). Effective listening is actively absorbing the information given to you by a speaker, showing that you are listening and interested, and providing feedback to the speaker so that they can know their message was received (Haney, 2009). It is expedient for listeners to choose the right words and nonverbal cues that will convey a message that will be interpreted in the way that you intend. Effective listeners show speakers that they have been heard and understood.

Conclusion

Listening skill is a necessary prerequisite to curtail conflicts. Through effective/active listening skill, individuals understand others' opinions, emotions and needs. The ability to listen and hear what another person says is a remedy for conflict resolution. Gaining an understanding of others and building feelings of trust through effective listening results into successful outcomes. And of course, this will build rewarding relationship among all participants in the resolution process. Effective listening is a conscious effort to free oneself from unnecessary rancour that may trigger conflicts in any society. The strategies of effective listening skill bring better understanding to any organization and build strong and better relationships to the society at large.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following as ways of resolving conflicts:

1. The role effective listening plays in resolving conflicts cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, leaders in various organisations in the society such as government agencies, private organisations, churches, mosques, schools etc. are advised to utilise effective listening skill as a tool for building strong and healthy relationships within the organisations.

2. There is need for a structured mechanism for conflict resolution by various stake holders in the society. Policies that abhor conflicts should be tactically and carefully put in place in government agencies and private organisations.

3. Communication skills should be effectively used during the process of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups, communities or parties in conflicts or disputes. There must be strict avoidance of utterances capable of inciting tension and confrontation between the individuals or groups in conflict.

4. Government should be more proactive on issues that affect human rights. Government should also ensure that justice prevails in the country. Peace and development can only anchor in an environment where people's rights and freedom are respected.

5. Listeners in conflict situations should be impartial. They should rather be empathetic. They must create a positive and safe confidential environment to help speakers say what is important to them. Speakers' experiences, concerns, needs and values should also be acknowledged by listeners.

6. People generally should learn to be accommodating of others. We should learn to tolerate one another in other to live in peace with one another. Sometimes, we may need to stoop low to conquer.

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