



## Role of Internal Communication in Enhancing Employee Engagement in the Nigeria Customs Service: A Two-Way Symmetrical Approach

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**Abstract.** In today's dynamic organisational landscape, strategic internal communication has become a crucial driver of employee engagement and performance. Traditional top-down communication methods are increasingly being replaced by integrative approaches that align employee behaviour with organisational goals. This shift is particularly significant in paramilitary organisations, where hierarchical structures and rigid protocols often hinder transparent and inclusive communication. This study employs a descriptive research method, drawing on secondary sources such as literature, media reports, official documents, and online resources relevant to internal communication and employee engagement within the Nigeria Customs Service. Grounded in the Two-Way Symmetrical Theory of Public Relations, which emphasises reciprocal communication and mutual understanding between employees and leadership, this paper examines the unique communication challenges within the Service. These challenges are shaped by the organisation's diverse roles in revenue generation, trade facilitation, and law enforcement. The findings indicate that effective internal communication—supported by structured feedback mechanisms and transparency—enhances employee participation, satisfaction, and overall job performance. The study concludes that strategic internal communication not only mitigates operational complexities but also strengthens organisational cohesion, discipline, and shared values, all of which are essential for achieving institutional objectives.

**Keywords:** Internal Communication; Employee Engagement; Paramilitary Organizations; Job Performance; Strategic Communication; Nigeria Customs Service

### 1. Introduction

In the modern globalised business and work environment, organisations have transitioned from traditional communication methods to comprehensive strategies that emphasise employee engagement and motivation. This shift is driven by the need to align communication practices with organisational objectives, fostering a more engaged and productive workforce. Zanabazar et al., (2023) highlights this transformation as a departure from conventional communication models, underscoring the integration of employees into the communication process to enhance their motivation and performance.

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Similarly, Overton-de Klerk & Verwey (2013) emphasises that organisational communication has evolved from being merely transactional to becoming a strategic tool in achieving corporate goals, particularly in dynamic and complex environments such as paramilitary organisations.

The concept of strategic internal communication plays a pivotal role in this evolution. Welch (2011) describes it as a growing field of study that leverages purposeful and targeted communication to motivate employees and align their efforts with shared organisational values. This is crucial for fostering employee engagement, ensuring alignment with organisational goals, and promoting shared values such as duty and service (Mishra et al., 2014). Emmanuel & Chijoke (2016) assert that authentic and transparent internal communication fosters an engaged workforce, which is essential for driving performance. Clampitt (2020) reinforces this perspective, explaining that effective internal communication serves as a managerial tool to influence employee behaviour, enhance organisational effectiveness, and ultimately contribute to improved performance outcomes.

Organisational internal communication tools can be broadly classified into traditional and digital methods (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). Traditional tools include established methods such as newsletters, memos, notice boards, face-to-face meetings, and internal mail. These are typically one-way or controlled communication methods focused on disseminating information to employees. In contrast, digital tools leverage technology to facilitate two-way communication and engagement. Examples include intranets, email, instant messaging apps, video conferencing tools, and internally used social media platforms such as Yammer or Slack. These tools encourage dialogue, collaboration, and real-time interaction among employees.

According to Bekmeier-Feuerhahn et al. (2017), employees now serve as reliable sources of information for external audiences, highlighting their role as internal stakeholders rather than merely members of the workforce. This evolution recognises employees as vital communication assets contributing to the organisation's overall success in an increasingly digitalised, transparent, and networked environment.

Effective internal communication also aligns with the overarching goal of public relations: protecting an organisation's goodwill and reputation. Falkheimer et al. (2014) outline six main activities of internal communication that align with workforce objectives. These include meeting legal requirements for employee communication, endorsing major organisational changes, fostering teamwork and a sense of community, motivating employees to serve as organisational advocates, retaining valuable staff, and ensuring that employees understand and execute their responsibilities effectively.

In paramilitary organisations such as the Nigeria Customs Service, internal communication plays a critical role in maintaining order, discipline, and efficiency while aligning personnel with the organisation's core objectives. Unlike corporate settings, where communication may be more flexible, paramilitary organisations operate within hierarchical structures that necessitate a structured and directive approach to communication (Welch, 2011). These insights underscore the significance of internal communication as a catalyst for employee engagement and performance, particularly in paramilitary organisations where discipline and alignment with core objectives are paramount.

Emogor et al. (2023) further notes that clear and consistent communication mitigates organisational complexities, facilitating smoother operations and improving performance. Moreover, strategic communication creates opportunities for feedback and transparency



across hierarchical ranks, enhancing motivation and engagement even within rigid structures (Clampitt, 2020).

This paper evaluates the Nigeria Customs Service's internal communication methods and employee relations management in light of these evolving practices and insights. The aim is to propose how contemporary internal communication can be leveraged to enhance employee performance and, consequently, improve the organisation's overall effectiveness.

## 2. Methods

This study is exploratory in nature and employs a descriptive research method. It relies on secondary data obtained through consultations with and evaluations of various sources, including academic literature, media reports, official documents, online resources, and other relevant materials related to internal communication and employee engagement within the Nigeria Customs Service. By analysing these sources, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the communication challenges and strategies within the organisation.

Furthermore, this research examines the subject matter within the framework of the two-way symmetrical approach, which emphasises reciprocal communication between employees and leadership (Bharti et al., 2024; Marlina & Yaza Azahra Ulya, 2024). The use of secondary data allows for an in-depth exploration of existing theories, best practices, and documented case studies, offering valuable insights into how strategic internal communication can enhance employee engagement and organisational effectiveness.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1. Theoretical Underpinning for Understanding Internal Communication in the Nigeria Customs Service

The Two-Way Symmetrical Theory of Public Relations, developed by James Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984 (Pons et al., 2021), serves as the theoretical foundation for this study (Kriyantono, 2019; Lee & Kim, 2022). This model is based on a genuine two-way communication paradigm that fosters mutual respect and understanding between an organization and its stakeholders. Unlike one-sided communication approaches, it encourages dialogue and active engagement from both parties to achieve shared objectives, including fostering a positive organizational image (Theunissen & Rahman, 2011; Wang et al., 2009). Adaptability and negotiation are essential components of this model, making it particularly relevant for complex and structured environments such as paramilitary organizations (Adetipe & Aitaki, 2020; Kurfi et al., 2021).

The primary goal of the two-way symmetrical model is to establish a balanced relationship between an organization and its stakeholders, ensuring that both sides have the opportunity to influence one another. This approach contrasts with traditional, one-sided communication methods that prioritize the organization's interests over those of its stakeholders. Instead, it promotes transparent dialogue and mutual understanding between an organization and its internal and external audiences (Zanabazar et al., 2023). In modern public relations, this model is regarded as essential for fostering credibility, ethical communication, and long-term trust. By integrating stakeholder perspectives, it reinforces the importance of relationship-building in public relations and enhances organizational reputation.

In the IABC Excellence Study (1993; 2013), published as *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, Grunig posited that organizations with effective



communication systems typically adopt a two-way symmetrical approach. He argued that strategic communication management should be seen as a dynamic exchange rather than a unidirectional process (Xifra, 2020). However, while public relations plays a critical role in shaping corporate communication, it must be distinguished from related disciplines such as marketing and corporate communication, which serve different yet interconnected functions within an organization (Adetipe & Aitaki, 2020; Aondover Eric Msughter et al., 2023; Maikaba & Eric Msughter, 2019).

The relationship between public relations and digital media has transformed how organizations engage with stakeholders. Adetipe & Aitaki (2020) highlights the necessity of applying the two-way symmetrical communication model to assess the potential of social media in fostering constructive relationships between organizations and their target audiences. In the case of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), social media platforms serve as channels for gathering public opinions, addressing concerns, and improving service delivery. Researchers and public relations practitioners advocate for the use of digital platforms, such as organizational websites and social media, to facilitate two-way communication and enhance engagement between institutions and their audiences (Martha Msoo Hile et al., 2023; Olukayode, Olomu Babatunde et al., 2018).

Critics of the two-way symmetrical model, such as Stevanović and Gmitrović (2015), argue that it is inherently audience-oriented but does not sufficiently account for audience diversity. Within the NCS, key stakeholders include employees, importers, exporters, logistics firms, and clearing agents, each with distinct communication needs and expectations. Common challenges such as bureaucratic delays and inefficient feedback mechanisms often hinder effective engagement. Therefore, while two-way communication is crucial, internal communication tools—such as internal social media platforms and structured feedback channels—are equally vital in addressing employee concerns and ensuring operational efficiency (Maikaba & Eric Msughter, 2019).

Effective internal communication in the Nigeria Customs Service requires active employee participation and structured feedback mechanisms. The two-way symmetrical model underscores the importance of reciprocal engagement, enabling employees to voice their concerns and contribute to decision-making processes (Grunig, 2013). By fostering open dialogue, leadership can enhance organizational transparency, boost employee morale, and align personnel with institutional goals. The model also suggests that organizations must be willing to compromise and adapt to public expectations (Grunig, 2013; Martha Msoo Hile et al., 2023).

While the core principles of the Two-Way Symmetrical Theory remain relevant in the digital era, organizations must consider audience diversity and evolving communication preferences. Negotiation and adaptation are crucial for improving employee satisfaction and engagement. This study, therefore, explores how the Nigeria Customs Service adapts its internal communication strategies to meet the needs of its workforce. It also examines how the agency leverages digital media to cultivate positive relationships and facilitate two-way communication with its employees (Dan et al., 2020).

### *3.2. Communication Challenges in Paramilitary Organisations*

Martha Msoo Hile et al. (2023) observed that paramilitary organisations often face unique communication challenges due to their hybrid nature, structured similarly to military forces but operating within civilian contexts. These organisations maintain a highly hierarchical structure with strict chains of command, which can hinder the upward flow of information. Lower-ranking personnel may feel discouraged from voicing



concerns or providing valuable feedback, leading to unaddressed critical issues. Additionally, the emphasis on confidentiality in operations and protocols, necessary for security and effectiveness, can limit both internal and external communication. This secrecy may result in delays in information dissemination, misunderstandings, and even distrust among team members.

Paramilitary organisations frequently use technical or specialised language, which can be difficult for non-specialist personnel or external partners to understand. Miscommunication in such contexts can lead to operational errors and ineffective collaborations. While these organisations rely on strict protocols, rapidly evolving situations often demand flexibility. However, rigid communication structures can delay decision-making and responses, creating a conflict between protocol adherence and the need for swift action (Kriyantono, 2019). Madubuko Cyril et al. (2023) further notes that paramilitary units often collaborate with government agencies, NGOs, and local communities, all of which may have distinct communication styles and priorities. Misalignment in these interactions can lead to conflicting goals, reducing the overall effectiveness of joint operations. Cultural and linguistic barriers also pose significant challenges when paramilitary units are deployed in diverse regions. Without proper cultural awareness training, these differences can lead to misunderstandings and strained relationships with local communities, ultimately undermining operational success.

Ogunkanmi (2021) and Obinna (2020) highlight the difficulty paramilitary organisations face in balancing transparency with operational security, especially when dealing with the media. Poor media relations or the absence of a well-defined communication strategy can result in negative public perception and reduced trust, potentially distorting the organisation's role and actions. Furthermore, high-stress environments, common in paramilitary operations, can impair decision-making and communication clarity. Stress often contributes to miscommunication, heightened tensions, and interpersonal conflicts, particularly in high-stakes scenarios. Another significant issue is the lack of advanced communication technology or proper training in its use. Limited access to efficient communication resources can cause delays, disrupt coordination, and even lead to operational failures at critical moments. Addressing these communication challenges is essential for improving internal cohesion and enhancing the overall effectiveness of paramilitary organisations in complex and high-risk environments.

### *3.3. Internal Communication and Organisational Culture in Nigeria Customs Service*

The Nigeria Customs Service's organisational culture profoundly influences its internal communication, shaping how information flows, how employees interact, and the agency's overall effectiveness. As a paramilitary organisation, the Nigeria Customs Service embodies a structured, hierarchical culture that emphasises discipline, order, and top-down communication (Lau & Idris, 2001). This structure aligns with what Neck et al. (2020) describe as a "power" dimension in organisational culture, where authority and decision-making are concentrated at higher levels. While this setup ensures operational efficiency and command clarity, it also limits two-way communication, making it difficult for lower-ranking officers to provide feedback or voice concerns. Additionally, the organisation exhibits characteristics of the "role" dimension, where communication is formal and follows strict protocols (Welch & Jackson, 2007). This approach ensures consistency and accountability but may reduce the flexibility needed to adapt to rapidly changing situations. Kalla (2005) suggests that internal communication should involve





collaboration across public relations, human resources, and internal marketing functions, indicating that the Nigeria Customs Service could benefit from a more integrated communication strategy.

Effective internal communication strategies within the Nigeria Customs Service play a crucial role in ensuring smooth operations, fostering employee engagement, and enhancing organisational performance (Capurro et al., 2023). Clear communication helps officers and staff understand their roles, responsibilities, and the organisation's broader goals while facilitating coordination between departments. However, challenges such as technological limitations and fragmented communication channels hinder efficiency. Walden and Kingsley Westerman (2018) emphasizes that internal communication should be clear, consistent, and inclusive to boost performance and satisfaction within an organisation. While the paramilitary structure of the Nigeria Customs Service requires a disciplined chain of command, evolving organisational practices are gradually opening pathways for two-way communication. Welch and Jackson (2007) highlight the importance of two-way channels like town hall meetings and anonymous feedback mechanisms, which increase transparency and foster trust. Implementing these strategies aligns with Harrison and Stokes' "support" dimension, which promotes mutual respect and a healthier communication climate. Such initiatives can enhance employee engagement by encouraging feedback and participation even within a structured environment (Quansah, 2024).

Internal communication in the Nigeria Customs Service functions as a strategic management tool that reinforces its goals. Effective internal communication aligns with the organisation's strategic objectives, ensuring that employees understand and embrace organisational values and standards. Syaifuddin and Sumartik (2022) notes that organisational culture significantly influences employee commitment, making effective communication essential in fostering engagement. Training, recognition, and open communication are crucial in shaping employee commitment (Lau & Idris, 2001). While the Nigeria Customs Service's top-down management structure may not fully incorporate these elements, integrating clearer communication channels and recognition opportunities can improve morale and performance. Meyer and Allen (1991) argue that fairness, teamwork, and consistent feedback contribute to a stronger internal communication structure, helping organisations cultivate a balanced and achievement-oriented culture.

As a strategic public relations function, internal communication in the Nigeria Customs Service should go beyond simple information dissemination and focus on relationship management. By fostering transparent, two-way communication, the agency can redefine its practices to promote greater organisational unity and employee loyalty. Overton-de Klerk and Verwey (2013) highlights that organisational communication should be seen as an interpretive process where employees actively engage rather than passively receive information. This perspective requires rethinking internal communication as a strategic function that enhances cohesion, resilience, and adaptability in a complex operational environment. For example, the Nigeria Customs Service uses email to distribute updates, memos, and policies, ensuring access to authoritative information. However, incorporating interactive features like forums or feedback sections within the email system could allow employees to engage with the content actively. Additionally, regular parades provide direct engagement opportunities between leadership and staff, fostering a sense of inclusion and open dialogue (Willett et al., 2023). These evolving communication strategies demonstrate how internal communication can



transition from a one-way information flow to a dynamic, two-way process that supports organisational growth and responsiveness in an increasingly complex environment.

#### *3.4. The Usage and Effectiveness of Internal Communication in Nigeria Customs Service*

Internal communication in a large and complex organisation like the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) plays a crucial role in ensuring that all personnel, from leadership to frontline officers, remain aligned with organisational goals, aware of policies, and equipped to perform their duties efficiently. Various communication strategies, including emails, memos, newsletters, meetings, and digital platforms, facilitate the smooth flow of information. Emails and memos are commonly used for official communication, with emails serving daily interactions while memos handle significant policy updates and operational directives. Internal newsletters and bulletins further keep employees informed about organisational developments, fostering engagement and morale. Effective internal communication employs a mix of top-down, bottom-up, and horizontal communication strategies to ensure inclusivity and alignment with organisational objectives.

A study by Emmanuel and Chijoke (2016) examined staff perceptions of the intranet's role in enhancing communication within the NCS. Their findings revealed that while the intranet was seen as a valuable tool for disseminating organisational news, postings, and circulars, 92.5% of the staff were unaware of its existence and usage. Despite high computer literacy among employees, email remains the most popular internal communication platform, though the study highlighted a poor email culture across all cadres. This suggests that while digital tools exist, their adoption and utilisation require improvement to enhance information accessibility and efficiency.

Formal internal communication channels within the NCS include memos, meetings, and circulars, while informal interactions also play a role in daily operations. Effective communication ensures the timely dissemination of policies, procedures, and operational guidelines essential for achieving organisational goals. Tools such as intranets and emails provide real-time updates on regulatory changes and operational protocols (Tam et al., 2023). Given the hierarchical structure of the NCS, communication predominantly follows a top-down model. However, efforts have been made to incorporate feedback mechanisms through structured platforms such as town hall meetings and employee suggestion boxes (Fairbank & Williams, 2001). These initiatives help balance the rigid command structure with opportunities for personnel to voice concerns and provide input.

The effectiveness of internal communication in the NCS significantly influences operational efficiency and employee engagement. Studies indicate that transparent and inclusive communication fosters trust and cooperation among employees, increasing their commitment to organisational objectives (Arif et al., 2023; Veshne, 2017). However, challenges such as bureaucratic bottlenecks, communication delays, and inadequate technological infrastructure sometimes hinder optimal information flow (Suleiman M. Yar'Adua et al., 2023). To address these issues, initiatives such as periodic training on communication tools and adopting digital communication platforms have been introduced, demonstrating promise in improving organisational performance (Grunis et al., 2021). Furthermore, clear and efficient communication reduces operational errors and fosters accountability by ensuring that employees fully understand their roles and responsibilities (Martha Msoo Hile et al., 2023).

The NCS relies on a structured internal communication framework to coordinate its diverse functions, disseminate information, and align its workforce with organisational



goals. While the formal and hierarchical nature of its communication channels ensures consistency, integrating feedback mechanisms highlights a shift toward a more interactive communication approach. Despite challenges such as communication delays and infrastructural limitations, ongoing efforts to enhance communication have yielded positive organisational outcomes. Effective internal communication is not just a strategic tool but a catalyst for employee engagement, trust, and performance, underscoring its vital role in the operational success of the Nigeria Customs Service.

### *3.5. Internal Communication and Employee Performance in Nigeria Customs Service*

Internal communication plays a critical role in shaping employee engagement, motivation, and alignment with organisational objectives in the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS). As a paramilitary agency, the NCS operates under a highly regimented structure that relies heavily on hierarchical communication and strict adherence to protocols (Ojedokun & Idemudia, 2014). The way information flows within the organisation influences employee behaviour, performance, and overall effectiveness in achieving institutional goals. Manager-subordinate interaction, in particular, is central to ensuring clarity in roles, fostering trust, and driving performance within the service.

The structured nature of the NCS necessitates organised and hierarchical communication to maintain discipline, order, and mission clarity (Emmanuel & Chijoke, 2016). McPhee and Zaug (2008) argue that effective internal communication aligns individual contributions with broader organisational objectives, which is essential in an agency tasked with critical functions such as border security, revenue collection, and anti-smuggling efforts. Without clear communication, employees may struggle to understand how their roles fit into the larger mission, leading to reduced engagement and suboptimal performance.

Mazzei (2014) highlights the significance of internal communication in fostering knowledge-sharing and proactive engagement. Customs officers require timely, relevant, and actionable information to perform their duties effectively. Their ability to assess and act on this information is directly linked to their performance, as it enhances their decision-making skills, strategic thinking, and problem-solving capabilities. Given the regimented structure of the NCS, managers must ensure that communication is both instructive and empowering to enable officers to perform their roles with confidence (Dan et al., 2020).

The NCS prioritises top-down communication, where managers play a pivotal role in ensuring employees understand organisational objectives (Welch & Jackson, 2007). In a rule-driven environment, managers must clearly communicate goals, policies, and expectations to foster a shared sense of purpose and direction among employees. When supervisors communicate openly, employees can align their daily tasks with organisational objectives, enhancing confidence, morale, and trust in leadership (Willett et al., 2023).

Mishra et al. (2014) argue that transparent and consistent communication fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose, which is crucial in paramilitary organisations where morale directly affects operational efficiency. Trust in leadership, clarity in communication, and a sense of purpose create an environment where employees feel motivated to actively engage in their roles. Given the high-stakes nature of customs operations, building trust through effective communication is essential for commitment and operational success.





While top-down communication is fundamental, the absence of effective feedback mechanisms can hinder employee performance and engagement. Ruben and Gigliotti (2017) suggest that internal communication systems should incorporate feedback loops that allow employees to express concerns, share insights, and suggest improvements. A two-way communication approach fosters a culture of openness and continuous improvement, making employees feel valued and more committed to organisational goals.

Aondover Eric Msughter et al. (2023) emphasize that structured feedback mechanisms enhance employee agency and contribute to performance improvements. For instance, implementing regular feedback sessions where officers can report challenges and propose operational improvements could foster accountability and a culture of continuous learning. Managers can also identify skill gaps and areas needing additional training, enabling targeted interventions that elevate performance across the service.

Advancements in digital communication present opportunities for the NCS to improve its internal communication framework. Ruben and Gigliotti (2017) note that technology enhances information accessibility and facilitates interactive communication. The adoption of digital platforms within the NCS could enable faster dissemination of critical information and provide employees with access to essential resources for informed decision-making, particularly in field operations.

For example, a secure and accessible intranet system could allow officers to receive real-time updates, access training materials, and review policy documents, thereby improving operational readiness and performance. Digital communication tools such as internal chat platforms, virtual training sessions, and email alerts can streamline information flow and ensure that employees remain well-informed about evolving procedures and regulatory changes.

Recognition of employee contributions is another critical factor in enhancing performance. Regular performance appraisals, informal acknowledgments, and team-based recognition reinforce individual and collective efforts, motivating employees to maintain high performance. The NCS could further strengthen its employee performance systems by implementing structured recognition programs that reward outstanding contributions. Team-based achievements, in particular, promote a culture of shared responsibility and collective accountability, aligning employees with organisational goals.

Internal communication is a cornerstone of employee performance in the Nigeria Customs Service. The agency's hierarchical structure necessitates clear, top-down communication to ensure operational efficiency, while incorporating feedback mechanisms enhances engagement and continuous improvement. The adoption of digital communication tools can further streamline information flow, improving decision-making and operational effectiveness. Additionally, recognising employee contributions fosters motivation and strengthens organisational commitment. By optimising its internal communication strategies, the NCS can enhance employee performance, reinforce trust, and achieve its operational objectives more effectively.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that internal communication within the Nigeria Customs Service is still predominantly characterized by a rigid hierarchical structure. While this approach supports discipline and order, one-way communication often hampers the smooth flow of information, quick responses, and feedback in dynamic situations. The study found that inflexible internal communication negatively affects employee engagement and motivation, ultimately limiting organizational effectiveness.



Therefore, a more hybrid communication approach that combines top-down communication with two-way feedback mechanisms and trust-building strategies can enhance internal communication effectiveness and foster a more participatory work environment that supports employee performance.

To transition towards a more supportive and achievement-oriented work culture, the Nigeria Customs Service can adopt elements of a communication culture that emphasizes openness and trust, as identified by Harrison and Stokes. A supportive culture is characterized by open communication, mutual trust, and respect across ranks. To facilitate this transformation, the internal communication system must be restructured to incorporate two-way communication channels where employees can freely express ideas, provide input, and share feedback. Implementing open discussion forums such as "town-hall" meetings, anonymous feedback platforms, and leveraging digital communication tools will enhance employee engagement, strengthen their sense of belonging, and create a more inclusive work environment.

This study has several limitations, including its primary focus on formal and hierarchical communication while not extensively exploring the role of informal communication within the organization. Additionally, the study is confined to a paramilitary context, making its generalizability to other institutions, both in the public and private sectors, uncertain. Future research should consider comparative studies with other organizations to gain deeper insights into how internal communication can be tailored to different institutional needs. A more diverse methodological approach, such as triangulation through surveys, in-depth interviews, and case studies, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of internal communication effectiveness across various work environments.

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