

Strategies for Remediating Poor Communication Skills among Entrepreneurs in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study investigated strategies for remediating poor communication skills among entrepreneurs in Rivers State. Two research questions were posed to guide the study and one hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The entire population of 250 was studied by the researchers and no sample was drawn. Data for this study were collected by means of questionnaire titled "Strategies for Remediating Poor Communication Skills among Entrepreneurs in Rivers State (SRPCSERS)". A total of 245 entrepreneurs who returned their instrument were studied. The questionnaire adopted a modified four point Likert scale. Test-retest method was used for the reliability test, while the validity test yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.89. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions while t-test for large group mean was used to test the hypothesis. Findings revealed that the strategies for effective verbal communication are necessary and essential for entrepreneurs in Rivers State. There is also the need for effective remedies to communication skills by entrepreneurs. Based on the findings, recommendations were made amongst which were that entrepreneurs in Rivers State should make effort to attend workshop and seminars as to help them improve in their communication skills; strategies and remedies to poor communication skills should be adopted and followed effectively as to enhance poor communication skills among entrepreneurs; practicing of effective communication skills, speech and attentiveness should be regularly done by entrepreneurs in Rivers State.

Introduction

Communication is so intricately bound with human activities that one considers the ability to communicate as perhaps one of mankind's most precious endowments from nature. We succeed in organizing our societies to the extent that we are able to communicate effectively and reach common understanding of what is transmitted to us either in written or spoken forms (Okoye & Eze, 2010). All entrepreneurs are what they are because of the possibilities of interaction among the human elements, and through communication, they have persisted and are able to transmit their business through generations (Amesi, 2011).

Communication occupies an important and central place in an organization. The scope of a business organization and the society entirely determines the manner, nature and technique of communication. Communication is by and large the foundation upon which entrepreneurship business is built (Nwaogwugwu & Okoye, 2009). Communication is viewed by Azuka and Agomuo (2002) as the process of exchanging ideas, opinions, or emotions between two persons. Azuka and Agomuo further stated that communication is the passing of information from one person to another (the entrepreneur to customers) by the use of words, letters, telephone, reports, invoices, orders and symbols. Communication as an important aspect of entrepreneurs in business is the only process that links the entrepreneur and his or her customer to function effectively (Dollinger, 2003). Furthermore, Dollinger added that for communication to originate, a message must be composed, transmitted and understood.

The word entrepreneurship cannot be defined without understanding the meaning or what entrepreneur stands for. Entrepreneur is a French word, referring to a person who is active and achieves something or one who takes between. The verb “*entreprendre*” means to “undertake something”. In a business context, it means to start a business. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016) presents the definition of an entrepreneur as one who organizes, manages and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise. According to Westhead and Wright (2013), the following definitions are reported about entrepreneur: Adventure; he that seeks occasion of hazard; he that puts himself in the hand of chance. Over time, the idea of entrepreneur in English became more broadly defined, and associated to circumstances where one person engaged in projects connecting risk and where the profit was uncertain. By the end of 18th century, the undertaker concept was replaced by the capitalist concept of a businessman.

Entrepreneurs and Communication Effectiveness

Dexterity in all areas of human endeavour results from two sources namely, the psychological characteristics of the individual and training received in the area of competence concerned (Erie, 2010). Whereas the psychological characteristics dimension points to inherited characteristics, and the training received refers to learning experience to which the individual may have been exposed to in the course of acquiring knowledge in the business area. As an entrepreneur in business, it is essential that the following methods or means of effective communication are strictly followed.

Think clearly: Clarity of message and language cannot be in doubt if an entrepreneur’s thinking is clear. Therefore, an entrepreneur in business needs to think first before committing his or her ideas into writing or speaking (Amesi, 2014).

Assemble facts: An effective entrepreneur in business needs to jot down the important points as he or she thinks about his or her business idea or issue. Also jotting down point of reference (if any) concerning the business and the way the business will grow to greater levels is necessary in business (Porterfield & Kleiner, 2005).

Arrange your points: Every entrepreneur sort points into logical sequence before he or she commits his or her ideas, information, opinions, and so on into writing. For an entrepreneur to be effective in communication, you have to make your reference handy and do not pass on information you are not sure of concerning your business (Amanda, 2008).

Good listening habit before jumping into conclusion: Good listening demands attention and concentration in business venture. For any entrepreneur to be effective in his or her business, such entrepreneur needs to be able to understand what customers actually want and concentrate on

the demands of the customers. Lack of understanding can lead customers or people to hasty and premature conclusion concerning their business (Alanis, 2009).

Reading: Every entrepreneur in business must be able to read and write effectively (Amesi, 2011). Reading as part of communication enables entrepreneurs to successfully carry out the operation of their business, where the entrepreneur cannot read and write, it is advisable for such an individual to enroll into adult education programme as to assist him or her to improve in the aspect of communication.

Entrepreneurs and Poor Communication Skills

Amesi (2014) reported that the phenomenon of poor communication skills manifested in the life (or lives) of entrepreneurs could be in varied forms, the commonest forms of poor communication skills among entrepreneurs may be outlined as thus:

Emotions: Fear and anxiety associated with communication known by some communication apprehension sometimes lead to failure to communicate effectively. Some entrepreneurs get easily frightened in the presence of their customers or authority figures as the case may be, and thus fail to communicate effectively.

Poor listening skill: A good communicator is expected to be a good listener, each time listening is absent, communication breaks down and its purpose is lost. A skilled entrepreneur builds upon his or her listening skill and abilities.

Obfuscation: Sometimes entrepreneurs intentionally scramble the message just to hide the substance of the story or confuse the audience or their customers. Each time an entrepreneur fails to meet the condition of common understanding of the message, it becomes poor communication.

Language inhibition: This could be in form of proactive and retroactive; the proactive language is often referred to one's mother tongue while the retroactive influences one's learning or speaking. Language inhibition shows more in the intonation and pronunciation of entrepreneurs. In most cases, it is not difficult to tell from which Nigerian tribe (minor or major) the entrepreneur may have come from.

Inadequate understanding of the communication process: The more an entrepreneur understands the fundamental principles underlying the process of communication, the better are his or her chances of communicating effectively. The entrepreneur may perhaps be more mindful of the piece of communication he or she originates if he or she is conscious of the fact that every communication effort attracts some response from his or her customer and is expected to influence the customer in some way. An entrepreneur, who is skilled, must have an idea of the kind of response he or she expects from the customers at all time (hence customers are the receiver of the communication). Other poor communication skills includes inadequate attention to basic rules of grammar, use of ghost words and phrases, gesticulation, beliefs and prejudices, voice moderation, use of jargons, slang and so on.

Remedies to Poor Communication Skills

The following according to Amesi (2011 & 2014); Azuka and Agomuo (2002), Dollinger (2003), Erie (2010), and Nwaogwugwu and Okoye (2009) are some remedies to poor communication

skills as is often said that some remedies can be applied with considerable level of success and some may be less.

Increased attention to the use of English Language: There should be no discrimination as to whether the course is a language course or not, the tendency is for customers to ignore language usage among entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs should be corrected and their attention drawn to it, as there is nothing wrong in adopting the „stop-and-correct“ as some do. It is necessary for one to stop the entrepreneur and correct the error which may be the essence why you find yourself at the entrepreneurs“ business place at that time.

Workshop and seminars on skill development in communication: This kind of workshop and seminars can occasionally be organized for entrepreneurs. One opportunity of attendance for the entrepreneur may mean a lot to him or her. Experts can be invited and a thorough analysis of the dimensions and causes of poor communication skills and remedies be communicated.

Peer review or editing of communication among entrepreneurs: Entrepreneurs could form informal groups of which their purpose will be to examine any piece of communication they propose to put across to their customers or audience. The material could range from letters to invoice meant for customers.

Transportation: This is very vital in the area of communication, the entrepreneur has to transport his or her goods effectively to his or her business point as at and when due to ensure that customers do not lose their money or time in waiting for their goods to be delivered. Talking about transportation as an aspect of communication skill, the entrepreneur has to ensure that all goods bought are delivered and transported to the owners (Amesi, 2011 & 2014).

Workshops and seminars on ability development in communication: Workshops and seminars according to Azuka and Agomuo (2002) are aspects of communication skills that make an entrepreneur to succeed in business because in it, entrepreneurs are thought how to facilitate the achievement of goal of improving their business among their equals.

Good planning and organization: Good communication needs planning and organization; lack of planning is a bane to effective communication (Dollinger, 2003). For an entrepreneur to succeed in business, the purpose of communication must be understood between the entrepreneur and his or her customers. To this, Nwaogwugwu and Okoye (2009) viewed that good communication planning promotes every entrepreneur“s business venture thereby, making such a business successful.

Other remedies to poor communication skills includes; talk less and listen more, evaluate your message for meaning and purpose before sending it out, make sense in your communication, never assume you understand the message as it was, never use intimidating strategies when not sure of what to do or when your communication fails, have your arguments one at a time, do not talk when you have nothing to say, say to yourself first before voicing it out to your customer or audience, make your communication soft and sweet for it to be meaningful.

Strategies for Effective Verbal Communication

Westhead and Wright (2013) outlined the following strategies for effective verbal communication.

Focus on the issue, not the person: Try not to take everything personally, and similarly, express your own needs and opinions in terms of the job at hand. Solve problems rather than attempt to

control others. For example, rather than criticizing a customer's personality, express your concerns in terms of how to make the communication more effectively and smoothly in the future.

Be genuine rather than manipulative: Be yourself, honestly and openly in all aspect of your dealings with your customers. Be honest with yourself and to the customers and every one that comes your way, and focus on moving your business forward with the people around you, by acting with integrity.

Empathize rather than remain detached: Although professional relationships entail some boundaries when it comes to interaction with colleagues, it is important to demonstrate sensitivity in all aspect of your business, and to really care about the people (customers) you relate with. If an entrepreneur do not care about his or her customers, it will be difficult for the customers or those you associate with to care about you when it comes to functioning together.

Be flexible towards others: It is very necessary and essential to give allowance for other points of view, and be open to other ways of doing things as an entrepreneur. Diversity brings creativity and innovation.

Value yourself and your own experiences: An entrepreneur need to be firm about his or her own rights and needs. Undervaluing yourself encourages others to undervalue you. Offer your ideas and experiences and expect to be treated well.

Present yourself as an equal rather than a superior: Even when you are in a position of authority, focus on what you and the other person each have to offer and contribute to the business or society.

Use affirming responses: Always respond to your customers and other in ways that acknowledge their experiences. Thank them for their input and contributions. Affirm their right to their feelings, even if you disagree. Ask questions, express positive feeling; and provide positive feedback when you can.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that strategies for remedying poor communication skills among entrepreneurs in entrepreneurship businesses in Rivers State is essential and necessary. Effective listening and strategic communication is also necessary for entrepreneurs. Observation shows that entrepreneurs lack adequate strategies used for remedying poor communication due to not focusing on the issue while discussing, not being genuine rather than manipulative, not being empathize rather than remain detached, not being flexible towards others, not valuing themselves and their own experiences, not presenting themselves as an equal rather than a superior, and not using affirming responses. We need to consider these strategies and how they can help to improve the communication skills of entrepreneurs in entrepreneurship businesses. It is in this regard that this paper focused on strategies for remedying poor communication skills among entrepreneurs in Rivers State.

Purpose

The aim of this study is to:

1. Ascertain how effective verbal communication can improve entrepreneurs' communication skills.
2. Ascertain the remedies to poor communication skills in entrepreneurship businesses.

Research Questions

Two basic questions were answered here

1. How can effective verbal communication strategies improve entrepreneurs' communication skills in Rivers State?
2. How can the remedies to poor communication skills among entrepreneurs in Rivers State be ascertained?

Hypothesis

One hypothesis is formulated for the study

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female entrepreneurs in Rivers State on effective verbal communication remedies to poor communication skills.

Method

The study area was in Rivers State of Nigeria. Two out of the twenty-three local government in Rivers State was used for the study. The researchers are interested in the two local government because numerous entrepreneurs were identified which includes Obio Akpor local government and Port Harcourt local government. The study used a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 250, made up of male and female entrepreneurs within in the scope of the researchers. Details of the population are shown in the table below. The entire population was studied by the researchers and no sample/sampling was considered necessary. Data for this study was collected by means of questionnaire developed by the researchers from insight gained from review and titled "Strategies for Remediating Poor Communication Skills among Entrepreneurs in Rivers State" (SRPCSERS). The SRPCSERS has two parts "A" and "B". Part A sought information on the selected personal background of the respondents, and it contained four items. Part B sought information on the view of the entrepreneurs regarding the topic of the study and was broken into two as each contained seven question items. The questionnaire adopted a modified four point Likert scale which was as follows: Strongly Agreed (SA = 4 points); Agreed (A = 3 points); Disagree (DA = 2 points) and Strongly Disagreed (SDA = 1 point) The researchers and two research assistants trained by the researchers personally distributed 250 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents, with accompanying letters of appeal. In all, 245 copies of the instrument sent out were retrieved, which amounts to 98 percent return rate. The initial copy of the questionnaire was face and content validated by six entrepreneurs, other than those used for the study. Test-retest method was used to test the reliability of the items and a reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. Mean and standard deviation was used to analyze the research questions while t-test for large group mean was used to test the hypothesis. The criterion used for assessment of the responses are: Strongly Agreed (3.50 – 4.00), Agreed (2.50 – 3.49), Disagreed (1.50 – 2.49), and Strongly Disagreed (0.50 – 1.49) and if the calculated t-ratio is greater than the critical or table t-ratio, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

Table 1 - Population Distribution

S/N	NAME OF BUSINESS	Entrepreneurs in Obalga and Phalga		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	Fashion Designing/ (Seamstress) Tailoring	10	20	30
2.	General Merchandise/Trading	20	24	44
3.	Hotel/Hospitality Industry	20	20	40
4.	Interior/Exterior Decorations	15	22	37
5.	Cyber Café/Business Center Service	16	20	36
6.	Restaurant/Catering Services	15	18	33
7.	Beauty Saloon/Hairdressers	8	12	20
8.	Hat Making/Millinery	2	8	10
	TOTAL =	107	143	250

Source: Registered Association of Entrepreneurs, 2016

Results

The result obtained from the respondents is shown below:

Question 1: How can effective verbal communication strategies improve entrepreneurs communication skills in Rivers State?

Table 2: Effective Verbal Communication Strategies that Improve Entrepreneurs Communication Skills in Rivers State

S/N	Item	MEAN	S.D	REMARK
	The following verbal communication strategies are necessary for entrepreneurs			
1.	Focus on the issue not the person	3.55	0.67	Strongly Agreed
2.	Genuineness rather than manipulate	3.29	0.63	Agreed
3.	Empathize rather than remain detached	3.42	0.69	Agreed
4.	Be flexible towards others	3.51	0.60	Strongly Agreed
5.	Value yourself and your own experiences	3.67	0.53	Strongly Agreed
6.	Present yourself as an equal rather than a superior	3.60	0.66	Strongly Agreed
7.	Use affirming responses	3.38	0.77	Agreed
	Total Mean/S.D =	24.42	4.55	
	Grand Mean/S.D =	3.49	0.65	

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 2 which is for research question one shows that the respondents indicated that valuing oneself and your own experiences is a good strategy for verbal communication as it gave a high of 3.67 and standard deviation of 0.53, presenting oneself as equal to customers in business rather than a superior gave a mean of 3.60 and standard deviation of 0.66, this is followed by focusing on the issue and not the customer or person with a mean 3.55 and standard deviation of 0.67. In all, the respondents accepted that the items raised by in the table are effective strategies that can improve their verbal communication skills. This confirmation was made by the grand mean and standard deviation of 3.49 and 0.65 respectively.

Question 2: How can the remedies to poor communication skills among entrepreneurs in Rivers

State are ascertained?

Table 3: Remedies to Poor Communication Skills among Entrepreneurs in Rivers State

S/ N	Item	MEA N	S.D	REMARK
	The following are remedies to poor communication skills:			
1.	Increased attention to the use of English Language	3.51	0.77	Strongly Agreed
2.	Workshop and seminars on skill development in communication	3.23	0.80	Agreed
3.	Peer review or editing of communication among entrepreneurs	3.60	0.75	Strongly Agreed
4.	Transportation	2.61	1.08	Agreed
5.	Workshop and seminars on ability in communication	3.49	0.75	Agreed
6.	Good planning and organization	1.93	1.01	Disagreed
7.	Evaluating your message for meaning and purpose before sending it out	3.40	0.81	Agreed
	Total Mean/S.D =	21.77	5.97	
	Grand Mean/S.D =	3.11	0.85	

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 3 which is for research question 2 shows that the respondents indicated that all the items in the table results to remedies to communication skills as peer review or editing of communication among entrepreneurs gave a high mean of 3.60 and standard deviation of 0.75, this is followed by increased attention to the use of English Language with a mean and standard deviation of 3.51 and 0.77, good planning and organization gave a low mean of 1.93 and standard deviation of 1.01. In all, the total mean of 21.77 and standard deviation of 5.97 proves that application of these remedies to poor communication skills will help the entrepreneurs improve in their businesses. This confirmation was made by grand mean and standard deviation of 3.11 and 0.85 respectively.

Table 4: T-test result of the Difference between Male and Female Entrepreneurs on Effective Verbal Communication Remedies to Poor Communication Skills

	N	Mean	S.D	Df	Std Error	t-cal	t-tab	Remark
Female	140	24.42	4.55					
Male	105	21.77	5.77	243	0.89	2.98	1.96	Rejected

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-ratio is 2.98 while the critical or table value t-value is 1.96. Since the calculated t-ratio is greater than the table value of t, the researchers rejected the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis at 243 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Based on the test of hypothesis, the researchers conclude that there is significant difference in the responses of the respondents, on effective verbal communication strategies and remedies to poor communication skills by entrepreneurs in Rivers State.

Discussion

Discussion in this study was done according to the findings of the study. Findings from research question one proved that the respondents considered valuing themselves and their own experiences, presenting themselves as equal to their buyers or customers rather than superior, focusing on the issue not the person, being flexible toward others and so on, as effective verbal communication strategies that can improve their communication skills in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with the view of Westhead and Wright (2014) who opined that effective communication strategies can only be achieved through being focus on the issue at stake and the person, being genuine rather than manipulative, being empathize rather than remain detached, being flexible towards others including your customers, valuing yourself and your own experiences, presenting yourself as equal with your customers rather than a superior and using affirming responses at all time. In agreement with the views of Westhead and Wright, Amesi (2014) depicts that entrepreneurs in business need to think first before committing his or her ideas into writing or speaking as this will certainly improve their communication skills at all time.

Findings from research question two proved that the respondents considered increased attention to the use of English language, workshop and seminars on skill development in communication, peer review or editing of communication among entrepreneurs, transportation, workshop and seminars on ability on communication, good planning and organization, evaluating your message for useful meaning and purpose before sending it out as remedies to poor communication skills in businesses. This finding is in agreement with the views of Amesi (2011 & 2014); Azuka and Agomuo (2002), Dollinger (2003), Erie (2010), and Nwaogwugwu and Okoye (2009) who opined that remedies to poor communication skills are increase attention to the use of English language, skill development in communication workshop and seminars, peer review or editing of communication among entrepreneurs, effective transportation of goods, workshop and seminars on ability development in communication, good planning and organization and evaluating your message for effective meaning and purpose before sending it out. The researchers posit that the only thing that can help entrepreneurs in their businesses is to ensure that they attend frequent workshop and seminars on communication skills and to adhere to the remedies to effective communication skills.

The findings of the study revealed significant difference in the responses of both male and female entrepreneurs, on effective verbal communication strategies and remedies to poor communication skills by entrepreneurs in Rivers State. The finding is in line with Amesi (2014) and Erie (2010), who proffered some remedies to poor communication skills of entrepreneurs that can be applied with considerable level of success.

Conclusion

Remedying poor communication skills among entrepreneurs in entrepreneurship businesses in Rivers State is essential and necessary. Effective listening and strategic communication is also necessary for entrepreneurs. The researchers are of the view that if the strategies outlined here are followed by entrepreneurs, their communication skills will improve which will in turn help and improve their businesses. This is because most entrepreneurs drive their customers and send

away their buyers out of ignorance of the actual language to use while communicating with them. An unambiguous communication will certainly attract acknowledgement and appreciation from the entrepreneur. When entrepreneurship business expands beyond level it will lead to lack of communication within the organization, inefficiency, lack of co-ordination and difficulties in attainment of plans & policies. To this, it is necessary to state that poor communication skills among entrepreneurs need to be improved as the researchers conclude that since entrepreneurs is so incredibly diverse and communications come in such a wide variety of forms, it is important for entrepreneurs to attend seminars and workshop as to enable them improve in their communication skills as this will enable their co-entrepreneurs and friends including their customers have the confidence to come to them when they find themselves in need. Remember, great communication skills take practice. Do not give up on a day. Your ability as an entrepreneur to express yourself will grow almost daily as long as you apply yourself in improving communication skills.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward by the researchers:

1. Entrepreneurs in Rivers State should make effort to attend workshop and seminars as to help them improve in their communication skills
2. Entrepreneurs in Rivers State should inculcate the culture of reading habit as to enable them read and write effectively.
3. The strategies and remedies to poor communication skills should be adopted and followed effectively as to enhance poor communication skills among entrepreneurs.
4. Practicing of effective communication skills, speech and attentiveness should be regularly done by entrepreneurs in Rivers State.

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