

Effective Management of Corporate Organizations Through The Use Of Suggestion Box: An Empirical Insight from Nigeria Banking Industry

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Abstract: Information is very essential in every human enterprise. More importantly, in the corporate business world, information gathering and utilization cannot be ruled out in the onerous effort to manage organizations effectively. Whereas many organizations use the suggestion box to elicit information from their publics, others use diverse covert and overt means to gather their information. This study however, was an attempt to investigate how the use of suggestion box has been instrumental to the effective management of information in Nigeria Banking Industry. To address this issue empirically, 17 commercial banks operating within Enugu State, Nigeria were used as the target population for corporate organizations while 170 staff of the various banks constituted the respondents. The objective of this paper was to ascertain, among others whether the use of suggestion box has facilitated corporate organizational decision-making process and whether the use of suggestion box has increased corporate organizational effectiveness. Four research hypotheses were formulated and statistically tested using Chi-square decision rule. The study highlighted the benefits of suggestion box and challenges facing the future of the instrument. With a table value of 21.01 at 0.05 levels of significance and calculated value greater than table value, the decision rule was upheld for each of the hypotheses. Consequently, the study found out the indispensability of the use of suggestion box in the effective management of corporate organizations.

Keywords: Corporate organization, decision making, effective management, information gathering, suggestion box.

I. INTRODUCTION

Information has been identified as an indispensable tool in contemporary business management. Effective management of any business no doubt, is based on the quantity and quality of information available to the organization. Basically, organizations that can source for quality information and are ready to utilize it appropriately have the chances of succeeding and overcoming the teeming challenges in the current global competitive business environment than those that negligibly do not have value for information. No wonder, almost every corporate organization in the contemporary business age makes extra efforts to source for vital information to enhance their managerial capability, facilitate decision making and increase overall organizational effectiveness. According to Black [1], most problems in human nature emanate from either lack of information and communication or inadequate information and communication. Their solutions also lie in effective two-way communication rooted in truth and full information.

Lack of information or the insufficiency of it has been the bane of many corporate organizations. Even when it is available, in some cases lack of two-way communication thereof constitutes hindrances or organizational bottlenecks which at times lead to poor decision-making and industrial disharmony. From Black's position, information has to be true and adequate for it to serve as a tool for organizational decision-making and managerial effectiveness. Basically, information elicits communication which is an essential tool to societal-cum-organizational development. Ndolo and Udeze [2], analogically posit that information is the muscle, the ligament and the sinew of any society, especially democratic societies. This assertion holds sway when we note that corporate organizations management styles are somehow akin to democratic leadership styles. According to them, communication acts as the fulcrum upon which an organization revolves. Literature equally has it that there exist a positive relationship between an organization's communication patterns and its overall success and effectiveness. Consequently, communication is metaphorically referred to as follows:

- *the lifeblood of the organization;*
- *the glue that ties the system together;*
- *the oil that smoothens the organization's functions;*

- *the thread that ties the system together;*
- *the force that pervades the organization;*
- *the binding agent that cements all relationship; and*
- *the organizational embalming fluid.*

There is no gain saying the fact that to communicate effectively, organizations need information which is the reason for the establishment of information units by corporate organizations. In agreement to this postulation, Nwodu [3] is of the view that meaningful development must thrive towards bettering the lot of man in the society and this development has to be communication-driven based on quality information management.

Information management is the process of collecting focused business ideas, developing the ideas into implementable concepts, evaluating and selecting the top concepts, and measuring performance, which is communicated appropriately to those that will make use of it. According to the findings of Imaginatik Research [4], a USA-research-based information management consortium, the overall process of information management adds the following features to the traditional box approach: general idea gathering, management support for the process, but not necessarily the idea themselves. The focus is almost entirely cost reduction and process improvement. Focusing idea gathering on timely business topics, together with senior management support for the ideas and process, companies use idea management for a broad range of goals including revenue generation, new product and service development, process improvement and cost reduction. In an increasing knowledge-based economy, Ewurum [5] writes, “pin-pointing the factors that shape the ability of organizations to produce influential ideas and innovation has for long been central issue for organizational studies.” Taking away communication from the organization simply portends that the strength and life of the organization are deliberately washed away.

According to Lesner [6] communication transverses every aspect of human relations and endeavours. He is of the opinion that in the context of development, communication is sine-qua-non for healthy interaction between change agents and change targets. This is why he insists that communication system is both index and agent of change in a total social system. Although communication can play all these important roles, it has remained one of the least applied and least recognized variables in the development equation of modern organizations. It therefore follows that there is a strong link between communication and development. The link can also, apart from being an agent of social change, engender corporate development. Okenwa [7], reinforces this view when he argued that communication is central to the process of development to the extent that the dependence of one on the other has virtually been taken for granted. It is based on the strength of the apparent misapplication, and sometimes utter neglect of communication that this study emanated.

Since information brings about communication which invariably leads to change in action or programme, Nwuneli [8], was of the view that it is desirable that in any social development campaign, individuals from the target population should be induced to initiate, execute and evaluate both the strategy and content of the information for the social action programme. One way of doing this, in most cases has been through the use of suggestion box or information box in corporate organizations. For a firm’s customers to show implicit loyalty, according to Nnabuko [9], the firm must make a concrete commitment to satisfying their needs and wants. This is necessary because, given the high cost of acquiring new customers; organizations have stepped up efforts to keep existing customers, especially the most profitable ones. These efforts, among many others include the use of the suggestion box to capture customers’ complaints by ascertaining when the customers are not satisfied with the services offered or the need to open up new avenues of service.

Several organizations have identified the necessity and usefulness of suggestion box as their channel of communication and relationship management. This nonetheless has improved both information generation/dissemination as well as customers relationship management of these organisations.

“Suggestion box is defined *“as a device for obtaining additional comments, questions, and requests. In its most basic and traditional form, it is a receptacle with an opening, not unlike an offering box or voting box. The box is used for collecting slips of paper with input from customers and patrons of a particular organization. Suggestion boxes may also exist internally, that is within an organization as means for garnering employee input. Whereas some organizations refer to the box as suggestion box, some others refer to it by some other names, may be based on what they have in mind for instituting it. Based on this, names like opinion box, complaint box, information box, service failure box, and customer relations box, among many others suffice”* (Heinz Company USA).

As a suggestion box, it could be used to elicit information from the employees to the employer or from the general public on how best to manage the organization, improve customer relations, improve services or facilitate staff welfare needs. In all of these, the pertinent question to ask is how effective has the use of the suggestion box in addressing this plethora of needs and in enhancing the operational and managerial efforts of contemporary corporate organizations. Most corporate managers may not see the importance of information provision to the organization by the internal and external publics as vital for effective management that could

enhance quality services and customer relations. Some that eventually embrace this all-important tool may not see the interface with these publics as an indispensable instrument for their survival. Notwithstanding, information enhances and strengthens communication, hence down playing the use of suggestion box tantamount to negating a two-way communication.

1. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the contributions of suggestion box to the corporate organizations information management with a view to finding out how it has enhanced managerial effectiveness and organizational efficiency. Specifically, the study will;

1. investigate whether the use of suggestion box has enabled the management of information gathering in contemporary corporate organizations.
2. investigate whether the use of suggestion box has been instrumental to enhancing client/organizational relations.
3. examine if suggestion box has played a key role in organizational decision-making process.
4. ascertain whether the use of suggestion box has increased corporate organizational effectiveness.

II. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In line with the objectives of the study, four corresponding hypotheses were formulated to further help guide the study as follows:

1. The use of suggestion box has enabled the management of information gathering in contemporary corporate organizations.
2. The use of suggestion box has been instrumental to enhancing client/organizational relations.
3. Suggestion box has played a key role in corporate organizational decision-making process.
4. The use of suggestion box has increased corporate organizational effectiveness.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The research design employed in this study was descriptive survey method. The design enabled the researchers to collect detailed and factual information from the respondents, using the questionnaire as their data collection instrument. The research was domiciled in the banking industry hence the commercial banks within the Enugu Study are constitute the target population of the study. The January 4, 2006 commercial bank consolidation in Nigeria left the industry with a total of 25 operational commercial banks. With further merger and reconsolidation, some of the banks fused into others leaving the banking industry with a total of 18 banks operating in the commercial sector as follows: Access Bank, Diamond Bank, Eco Bank, Enterprise Bank, First City Monument Bank, Fidelity Bank, First Bank, Fin Bank, Guaranty Trust Bank, Key Stone Bank, Main Street Bank, Stanbic-IBTC Bank, Sterling Bank, Skye Bank, United Bank of Africa, Union Bank, Unity Bank and Zenith Bank. In Enugu urban area comprising Enugu East, Enugu North and Enugu South Local Government Areas, a total of 17 of the consolidated banks operate within the area.

Each of the banks operates a minimum of two branches in the Enugu urban area though there are over fifty (50) branches of different banks operating in the study area. However, two branches of each of the banks were randomly selected for the study, giving us a total of 34 branches. Consequent upon the average number of senior personnel that would provide the needed information for our study, five staff members of each of the 34 branches were randomly selected. This gave a total number of one hundred and seventy (170) respondents for the 34 banks. The staff cut across different status cadre, managers, marketers, tellers/cashiers, customer care units, secretarial/legal units and technical staff.

IV. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

The instrument used for data collection in this study was questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in two parts, A and B. While Part A sought information on the respondent's background and experience in the banking industry, Part B consisted of twelve (12) questions elicited responses from the respondents as the variables being examined in the study. The researchers through the help of some research assistants distributed one hundred and seventy (170) copies of the questionnaire while one hundred and sixty-eight (168) copies were retrieved. This number formed the basis for the overall data analysis.

V. REVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

Empirical studies relating to the topic under study show a dearth of materials. However, the Internet and few available literatures in related fields helped significantly. Historically, the concept of suggestion box thrives on the old principle of the simple idea box which is aligned to current and future business needs. The suggestion box had a history going back over a hundred years. The first recorded suggestion programme, according to Robinson and Stern [10], was implemented in 1770 by the British Navy. They realized the need

for a process for listening to every individual in the organization, without fear of reprisal. At that time, the mere mention of an idea that contradicted a captain's or admiral's opinion was likely to be punished by hanging.

In 1892 NCR became the first US Company to implement a company-wide suggestion program. The concept was the 'hundred-headed brain', developed by John Patterson, who was as at then the Chief Executive Officer of the organization. He realized early in his business career that employees had valuable ideas but that management structures tended to prevent these ideas from spreading through the company. He also realized that employees complained that there was no point giving ideas to their supervisors as the best ideas were stolen, and the worst ideas used as a pretext for their dismissal.

According to Turrell [11] of the Imaginatik Research, suggestion boxes became popular in the manufacturing sector during and after the Second World War. They became part of the total quality movement and an integral part of cost, safety and quality improvement initiatives over the following fifty years. They are still the mainstay of corporate suggestion programs, be they physical boxes or virtual boxes on company intranet web sites. However, variations of the types of suggestion box abound. This include "the paper feedback forms which can be sent via postal mail, such as the "We value your input" or "How was the service today?", cards found in some restaurants; solicitations to provide comments over the telephone, such as a voluntary survey at the end of a transaction with a call center, or even an invitation on a printed store receipt to call and complete a customer satisfaction survey (sometimes offered with a product discount); or the placement of feedback forms on an institution's website or even the physical box type where customers are expected to drop their comments, observations or suggestions written/printed on paper" Wikipedia [12], the Free Encyclopedia. This goes to ascertain that suggestion box, as technology has shown in the recent times need not be physical box alone. There are web-based suggestion boxes as well as web-based opinion pools.

6.1 Benefits of suggestion box

Suggestion box has several benefits, amongst which are the provisions of some degree of detachment (complete anonymity) from the person or service that a customer may be critiquing. This nonetheless yields more frank and open feedback, thereby providing greater opportunities for obtaining accurate market research data and improving customer relations. The internal routing of comment within an organization may also provide those without direct contact with customers a realistic appraisal of the quality of customer care being given. Sengputa [13] agrees with this benefit when he says that the suggestion box can assist the organization because of the need to consult and communicate clearly and truthfully between the customer and the organization. This two-way communication at times increases networking towards cordial employee/employer relations. The external routing of responses to receive suggestions, such as posting responses to questions and requests on a physical or virtual bulletin board, may also help educate consumers and improve a company's image and customer loyalty.

Gathering employee comments with a suggestion box can also be fruitful, especially in an organisation with a corporate culture that adheres to a "shoot the messenger" mentality. However, as with the use of anonymous suggestion forms from the public, allowing unsigned comments may sacrifice accountability and make the feedback system prone to abuse. The effectiveness of such communication makes nonsense of effective running of the organization. In this line, Ojoh and Chyke [14], assert that the effectiveness of communication is very central to the stability, well being, peace, progress and performance of organizations. According to them, organizations depends on effective communication to perform all their functions including planning, directing, controlling, decision-making and the execution of decisions and goals. However, such information should be accurate, verifiable, relevant, complete and timely.

Suggestion box provides an interactive suggestion system for users to submit insightful suggestions for improvement to any company they care about. Didiugwu and Nworgu [15] agree that suggestion box promotes client/customer relationship because it enlivens the strategic partnership between the organization and those who need their services. However, Nwaizugbo and Nnabuko [16], Awaeze and Nkoli [17] were of the opinion that it is not the industry practice, but the customers themselves that should be the basis for determining the service requirement. This position no doubt, is one benefit the suggestion box serves in contemporary corporate organizations. Users can make suggestions from the suggestion box, website or via a mobile interface. The suggestion box dashboard allows them to track the status of their suggestions in real time as they travel through the review and implementation cycle.

The suggestion box widget allows companies to add a sleek user interface for collecting actionable ideas to their site, which they can use to manage and share suggestions throughout the organization. Suggestion boxes are often quick to implement as they require relatively little infrastructure and pre-planning. Web-based suggestion programs, typically a web-based form to collect ideas, can be created at low cost. They allow a wide range of employees to make their contributions, especially if they do not have access to computers. Boxes can be placed in production facilities and in retail outlets, providing a cost-effective means of collecting paper-based suggestions.

Unfortunately, although the benefits are numerous, they are often tending to be outweighed by the disadvantages. The boxes may not be emptied for long periods of time, and the initial novelty of the box can wane leading to disuse of the system. A research study, carried out by the SIRC with 50 companies in the UK between 1996 and 1998 found that the majority of programs failed to meet initial expectations, and the study recommended that programs should be closed down for a period of time in order to re-invigorate the system and workforce.

6.2 Challenges and critique of the suggestion box

Most people have some experiences of suggestion boxes from customer-centric boxes in retail outlets to the classic employee suggestion box. The boxes provide some benefits in their ability to capture ideas from anyone in the organization. However there are many issues: individuals going to drop their comments may be seen by others and hence be branded enemies of the organization by lesser minds. Sometimes, clients may not be sincere with their comments, hence offering deceptive suggestions and comments. Also they may need some incentives to motivate them to offer suggestions or contributions to the organization. Again they will want to be safe in the knowledge that both they – and their ideas – will be treated fairly. Unfortunately, these challenges lead to outright failure of many programmes or produce less than spectacular results.

Most suggestion boxes are not open for sharing, and ideas are only visible to the evaluation committee. Web-based suggestion boxes are sometimes open for browsing and comment, but regularly fail to attract the attention of employees. There is usually no search functionality and the turnaround time for ideas can be many months. Organizations, at times due to non-implementation of earlier suggestions by management tend to negligently downplay the suggestion box. At times contributors’ ideas rot away in the box. The small format paper forms to put down your idea do not encourage a lot of thought. There is also no focus to idea gathering, which can make the purpose of the box obviously discouraging. Again people can refrain from contributing, if they perceive it as a complaint box rather than a ‘new idea’ box. Consequently, it may not be uncommon that at times, some of the suggestions and comments may be biased or tented with ideas that could not help the organization wriggle its head out of the competitive waters it may be passing through.

VI. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This study was aimed at examining the effectiveness of the application of suggestion box in the management of information in corporate organizations. Four hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study. The data generated were discretely analyzed using the Chi-square (χ^2) decision rule at 95% significant level or 0.05 error variance. The responses to the research hypotheses were based on 4-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree and Disagree. As said earlier out of the 170 copies of the questionnaire distributed, two were lost to mortality rate while 168 copies that were correctly filled were used for the analysis. The Chi-square decision rule states thus: accept the research hypothesis if the calculated value is greater than the table value, or do not accept the research hypothesis in the event of the table value being greater than the calculated value. The data were analyzed in the following four tables:

Hypothesis One: The use of suggestion box has enabled the management of information gathering in contemporary corporate organizations

Table 1: Chi-square analysis for data on hypothesis one

Responses	o	e	o-e	$(o-e)^2$	$\frac{\sum (o-e)^2}{e}$
Strongly Agree	45	42	3	9	0.21
Agree	70	42	28	784	18.67
Disagree	35	42	-7	49	0.17
Strongly Disagree	18	42	-24	576	13.71
TOTAL	168				$\chi^2 = 32.76$

Using the Chi-square formula of $\sum \frac{(o-e)^2}{e}$ the calculated χ^2 value is 32.76

- Where o = Observed frequency of values
 e = Expected frequency of values
 r = Number of rows in the table
 c = Number of columns in the table

Degree of Freedom (df) = (r – 1) (c – 1)
 (5 – 1) (4 – 1)
 4 x 3 = 12

Level of Significance = 5% (0.05).

Hence the table value at (12 (df) and 0.05 level of significance) = 21.01.

Decision: Since the calculated value of 32.76, is greater than the table value of 21.03, the research hypothesis is upheld in accordance with the decision rule. We therefore statistically infer that the use of suggestion box has enabled the management of information gathering in contemporary corporate organizations.

Hypothesis Two: The use of suggestion box has been instrumental in enhancing client/organizational relations

Table 2: Chi-square analysis for data on hypothesis two

Responses	o	e	o-e	(o-e) ²	$\frac{\sum (o-e)^2}{e}$
Strongly Agree	29	42	13	169	4.01
Agree	81	42	39	1521	36.21
Disagree	37	42	-4	-16	0.38
Strongly Disagree	21	42	-21	-441	10.50
TOTAL	168				$\chi^2 = 29.35$

Calculated Chi-square value = 29.35

Table value (at 12 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance) = 21.01.

Decision: The calculated value summed up to 29.35, while the table value remains constant at 21.01. Since the calculated value is greater than the table value, it holds that the research hypothesis be upheld in accordance with the decision rule. Consequent upon this we infer that the use of suggestion box has been instrumental in enhancing the relationship between organizations and their clients.

Hypothesis Three: Suggestion box has played a key role in corporate organizational decision-making.

Table 3: Chi-square analysis for data on hypothesis three

Responses	o	e	o-e	(o-e) ²	$\frac{\sum (o-e)^2}{e}$
Strongly Agree	38	42	-4	16	0.38
Agree	82	42	40	1600	38.09
Disagree	34	42	-8	64	1.53
Strongly Disagree	14	42	-28	-784	-18.72
TOTAL	168				$\chi^2 = 21.28$

Calculated Chi-square value = 21.28

Table value (at 12 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance) = 21.01.

Decision: The total of the calculated Chi-square value stood at 21.28 as against the table value of 21.01. Basically, since the calculated value is greater than the table value, it holds that the research hypothesis be upheld in accordance with the decision rule. Again, we infer that suggestion box has played a key role in corporate organizational decision making.

Hypothesis Four: The use of suggestion box has increased corporate organizational managerial effectiveness.

Table 4: Chi-square analysis for data on hypothesis four

Responses	o	e	o-e	(o-e) ²	$\frac{\sum (o-e)^2}{e}$
Strongly Agree	38	42	-4	16	0.38
Agree	79	42	37	1,369	32.59
Disagree	38	42	-4	16	0.38
Strongly Disagree	13	42	-29	841	20.02
TOTAL	168				$\chi^2 = 53.37$

Calculated Chi-square value = **53.37.**

Table value (at 12 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance) = 21.01.

Decision: The calculated value showed a total of 53.37, while the table value remains constant at 21.01. Again, the table shows a calculated value greater than the table value; hence the research hypothesis which states that the use of suggestion box has increased corporate organizational managerial effectiveness is upheld in accordance with the decision rule.

VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Responses to research hypothesis one showed that out of the 168 respondents, 115 either strongly agreed or ordinarily agreed that the use of suggestion box had been a means of generating information for corporate organizations in the contemporary business age. On the other hand, 53 disagreed or strongly disagreed to this proposal. This goes to show that many people today believe that information is important in the success of any organization. This could be why suggestion boxes are boldly displayed at strategic places in many corporate organizations, including banks. Hypothesis one is therefore apt in addressing this particular issue in the corporate existence of organizations. Hypothesis two sought to investigate the use of suggestion box as being an instrument in enhancing client/organizational relations. While 110 respondents agreed to this, 58 saw it from the opposite direction. It was found from the study that for any organization to relate adequately with its customers, host community and the general public, it must feel their pulse. One of the ways through which this could be done as identified by many of the respondents is the suggestion box. Furthermore, many of the banks accepted that suggestion boxes have been instrumental to ascertaining their rating before their publics as well as their services. Hypothesis three examined whether suggestion box has played a key role in corporate organizational decision-making process. Our investigation showed that 120 of the respondents agreed that it has been instrumental while 48 disagreed. Notwithstanding the number that disagreed, the majority of the respondents were of the belief that information helps management to plan policies, coordinate and control activities and carry out the welfare needs of the staff and customers, among very many others. Since the success of any organization as seen from the literature is based on the quantity and quality of information available to it, the findings from these hypotheses were quite informing, explanatory and useful.

The last hypothesis was anchored on investigating whether the use of suggestion box has increased organizational effectiveness at the managerial level. 117 of the respondents totally agreed to this submission while 51 disagreed. One basic element in the success story of any organization or individual is the ability to manage effectively. Without information, which the suggestion box often generates for an organization, the ability to manage effectively would be eroded. This is why, as observed, many banks in the area studied were happy that their customers do make use of the suggestion boxes. Although, it was found that some of the contents of the information supplied through the suggestion boxes are mostly complaints and constructive/destructive criticisms, yet management valued such inputs. Generally, the findings indicate that any corporate organization that is bent on corporate management through appropriately customer relationship should not undermine the contributions and benefits of the suggestion box.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Suggestion box has been identified as a contributory factor in the management of information in today's business arena. It is not enough to have them displayed in corporate organizations, it pays much more to employ them adequately and encourage staff and customers to make optimum use of them. This is necessary in order to instill a sense of belonging in all who have one thing or the other to do with the organization, and also to inculcate organizational pride in the members of staff whose suggestions may be valued by management. This means that nobody in the right senses will downplay or underestimate the benefits of the suggestion box in the contemporary global business. Customers' complaints which might be raised through the suggestion boxes could be adequately addressed as part of customers' relationship management. This, no doubt will go a long way in building a positive corporate image and reputation for an organization. Again, customers trust and loyalty for the organization would greatly be enhanced when it becomes obvious that the views expressed in the suggestion boxes are sufficiently considered, adequately addressed and judiciously used by the organization.

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