Public Relations and Crisis Management in Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki and University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Enugu

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Abstract

This study examined public relations and crisis management in University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital Enugu and Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki. The study was premised on one theoretical perspectives - the Two Way Symmetric Model. Survey research method was employed. The population of the study was 10,122 from where a sample of 331 was drawn using Taro Yamane formula to establish the sample size. Out of 331 copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents in both UNTH and FETHA, 323 were returned and used for the analysis. One hypothesis were formulated and tested. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count, percentage and inferential statistics of multiple regression analysis. The findings of this study show that public relations and crisis management strategies in UNTH and FETHA have significant effects on staff performance. The study recommends that a public relations strategy should be developed within the context of the organisation's vision, mission, corporate culture, policies and continuously engage stakeholders in dialogue, mediation, sensitization programe and negotiation with the aim of resolving industrial disputes, management and staff union disputes.

Keywords: Public Relations, Strategies, Employees, Performance, Teaching hospitals

introduction

Public relations, which is the art of gaining the goodwill and support of the publics of organisations, has arguably enabled organisations all over the world to maximize profit (Donald and Treadwell, 2005). These organisations now go all out to explain their policies and strategies, ideas and prospects to the public through public relations outfits. In so doing, they make the public have a sense of belonging and interest in the said organisations. Nwosu (1992 p28) cited in Ekunalago (2002) notes that public relations is a two-way traffic, serving the public and the institution as well. To these institutions, public relations creates a favourable image for organisations. It modifies or changes the way people see an institution to a favourable one by explaining and mobilizing public opinions and views to the advantage of the institution.

In order to manage the public image and stakeholder relationships of companies and organisations, public relations practitioners employ a variety of strategies – media relations which include media releases, social media accounts, media events, backgrounders, fact sheets, flyers, pamphlets, annual reports, newsletters, and other materials. *Through consistent messages an* organisation is more likely to be known and looked upon favourably by key stakeholders, Another public relations strategy to manage Crisis Management is dialogue, mediation and negotiation etc. Organisations that effectively plan for crisis can better anticipate when a crisis hits, and therefore can lessen the damage of a crisis. Crisis management is public relations responsibility.

Public relations is a key strategic enabler in today's highly competitive business environment. Well-articulated Public relations strategies will always provide a good working strategy aimed at improving the company's image to the public. Public relations strategy is seen to be the outcome of a strategic thinking process by senior management through the public relations department/ unit. Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki and University Teaching Hospital Enugu public relations unit are not left out in this strategic

thinking process. They always employ Public Relations strategies for Crisis Management during Ebola and Lassa Fever outbreaks

Coombs (2007) synthesised several definitions and perspectives of the term "crisis" and defined it as "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organisation's performance and generate negative outcomes." There are three key elements to this definition. First, a crisis is a perception. Even if an organisation does not believe that a crisis exists, ultimately the public's perception is the reality of the situation, and if the stakeholders believe a crisis exists, then a crisis exists (Seeger, 2006; Coombs, 2007). Penrose (2000) studied the role of perception and concluded that the public's perception of the crisis is a critical element in crisis planning and will affect crisis outcomes. Secondly, while a crisis is unpredictable, it is not unexpected (Coombs, 2007; Cloudman and Hallahan, 2006). Organisations that effectively plan for crisis can better anticipate when a crisis hits, and therefore can lessen the damage of a crisis.

Statement of the Problem

The problem prompting this study to be carried out is that there is an alleged breach in the internal communication mechanism in these hospitals, FETHA AND UNTH . Staff scarcely gets information in good time, which often lead their workers to embark on industrial actions from time to time, the most recent one was November 2019 . Such climate does not augur well for serious and meaningful institutions like University Teaching Hospital, Enugu and Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki. Public relations strategies in public organisations, such as UNTH and FETHA hospitals are supposed to harmonize the various interests of all stake holders, in the health sector as well as those of the consumers of health services. Studies have shown that public relations strategies have been widely deployed as a tool for building good corporate image and information management in the corporate business world such as (Nakra, 2000; Ogbuehi, 2012; Uduji, 2013); and in managing strike actions and general information in tertiary educational institutions (Aikins and Adu-Oppong, 2015; Okwumba, 2015). Not much is known about the practice of public relations in Nigerian tertiary health institutions. This lacuna is what this study seeks to fill by assessing public relations strategies and employees' performance in University Teaching Hospitals, University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital and Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. Assess the effects of Public Relations and crisis management in UNTH and FETHA.
2. Determine the solution to Public Relations and crisis management in UNTH and FETHA

Research Questions

This study was guided by two research questions.

1. What are the effects of Public Relations and Crisis Management in UNTH and FETHA ?
2. How can the solutions to Public Relations and Crisis Management in UNTH and FETHA be determined?

Research Hypotheses

Only one hypothesis is used for testing of hypothesis

Public relations and crisis management in UNTH and FETHA have no significant effects on staff performance.

An Overview of Public Relations

According to Jefkins (1992) public relations is concerned with human relations. This implies that PR is concerned about Individual's corporate organisation and institution. In this modern society that is getting more sophisticated in nature and undergoing different kinds of changes, the public relations have a great role to play.Normally, people would want to appear good and honest before their fellow men. This

is also applicable to organisations and institutions. To buttress this point, Okoro (1999) notes that image smaking business is not a chance affair. This means that public relations activities are done consciously.

Okoro (1992) views public relations as a continuing process by which an industry tries to secure the goodwill and understanding of its various public.To buttress this point, Nweke (2001:42) noted that a genuine PR practice is not a use and dump affair, but a continuous programme of activity of an organisation consistently carried over a long period of time to secure the understanding and goodwill of its publics.

Nwosu (1992) stating the objectives of public relations state that if is the purpose and duty of public relations to interpret the policies, activities and plans of any organisation". This means that public relations informs the public so as to gain understanding, favourable behavior towards the organisation as well as analyzing public opinion and attitudes of the publics in order to help the organisation known what steps to take in charging or reinforcing such opinions and attitudes.

Okafor (2002:47) state that "among the major important developments of twentieth century are the growth, recognition and acceptance of public relations as a vital communication link and a useful tool in the hands of the government and organisation managers in all modern society". He attributed the reason for this new development to the increase in all types of private and public business including social and political organisations.

One of the institutions that witnessed a greater development in public relations is the hospital. In the past years, aggressive and intensive campaigns on health have been maintained by different regimes in the country. A lot of these campaigns were tailored for the sensitizing of the masses using the teaching hospitals as a tool. The masses were cautioned to take full advantages of programmes like War Against Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Another area of concentration is the campaign on the expanded programme on Immunization (EPI) which is aimed at immunizing babies and children against the six killer diseases, in order to reduce the infant mortality rate. Breast feeding is another area of the healthcare delivery that attracts campaigns. Mothers all over the world are being educated on the need to feed their babies on natural, rich and nutritious milk.

The campaign against fake, adulterated and expired drugs is another. This has helped to ensure people safety from the hands of quacks and cheats whose activities are detrimental to public health. As a matter of fact, the success of all these campaigns could be attributed to the growth and development of public relations units in our medical institutions. This means that public relations and human welfare are interwoven, as a result of one cannot do without the other.

Another development in public relations is the recognition of the" publics" as an important set of people for the success or failure of any organisation or institution. This means that hospital administrator who maintain cordial co-operation with the public relations units are usually assured of access to the community, through public relation. The publics have a right to information about its hospital facilities and services such right to information does not just crop up from a vacuum. It is definitely through the public relations unit that the concerned publics get to know what goes in and out of the hospital.

It is the public relation's unit obligation to supply or disseminate the information accurately, promptly and willingly. Okoro (1999:25) notes the publics of the university teaching hospital are as follows" patients (out patients and admitted patients), university authority, medical doctors, consultant/registrars, resident/house officers, chief medical director, technologist, medical outfits, contractors, medical students, alumni, relations of patients, blood donors, federal and state governments.

A hospital especially one established with public fund is meant for the treatment of the bulk of citizenry. The individual's opinion of the hospital may depend on who has to deal with whom. The image however, could be made or married, according to how people are being treated in the hospital, public relations should inform the public so as to gain understanding and favorable behavior towards the hospital management. In the same vein, public relations help to analyze public opinion and attitude of the public in order to help the hospital management to know what steps to take in charging and reinforcing such opinions and attitudes.

Public relations play a prominent role in every organisation, which precisely wants to survive and thrive further. An institution like the university teaching hospital should work hard in hand with public relations units. Assuming charges are made against them on issues of crisis in their health care services, it is the work of the public relations units to ensure that they are normally resolved. The University of Teaching Hospital always faces the problem of industrial action (strike) could it be that there is a communication gap between the management and its publics. To fill in this communication gab, pattern (1962:4) cited in Nweke (2001) notes that the release of quarterly journals and conducting programmes in post graduate education in medicine as regard to healthcare delivery is necessary.

Indeed, public relations practitioners advocate reputation management more than professionals in any other field. According to Hutton et al (2001), "… major international public relations agencies have embraced the concept of reputation management in varying degrees.

Today, the public relations profession is focusing a great deal of attention on how public relations strategies can produce a positive *return on investment* (ROI) (Grunig, 2006). While it is difficult to place a monetary value on relationships with publics, in practice there are numerous examples of how good relationships have reduced the cost of litigation and negative publicity; gained from lobbying towards favourable regulation or legislation; or increased revenue through the sale of products and services to relevant stakeholders (Grunig, 2006). The extensive research currently being conducted on relationships may, in time, demonstrate relationships as the most important intangible asset to an organisation, thus reinforcing the value, and ROI, public relations provides (Bayon and Bauer, 2002; Crosby and Johnson, 2004; Grunig, 2006).

Relationships provide a means for evaluating for evaluating both the long- and short-term contributions of public relations programs and of the overall function to organiational effectiveness (Hon and Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2004; Ki and Hon, 2007); through the measurement of such factors as trust, control, mutuality, satisfaction and commitment as key components of high quality relationships and the organisation's reputation. Such factors are essential for organisations working within both favourable and unfavourable operating environments.

Public Relations and Crisis Management

Crisis management is public relations responsibility - that is, handling situations in which public awareness of a particular issue may dramatically and negatively impact the organisation's ability to achieve its goals. For instance, when drought was rampant in Kenya, Red Cross Society embarked on providing food items and clothing to the affected people. There was also a programme entitled "Kenyans for Kenya" whereby Kenyan donated money, food and clothing to the Red Cross. It was later discovered that maize that was imported from South Africa had aflatoxins and hence harmful for human consumption. The toxins were discovered after maize had been distributed to a large number of people. The general public tainted the society's name as corrupt and "not putting the poor people's interest at heart." The public relations team had to ensure that the general public did not thereafter automatically associate Red Cross Society with the infected maize. Other public relations activities include lobbying, advertising management about public issues and planning community events.

There have been countless public relations crises in the past and there are five steps that should be executed in order to properly manage a crisis. First, the organisation in crisis should be prompt,

addressing the public immediately following the discovery of the crisis. Second, the organisation in question should maintain honesty because the public is more willing to forgive an honest mistake than a calculated lie. Third, it is important to be informative because the media as well as the public will create their own rumors if no information is given to them by the organisation in crisis.

Rumors can cause significantly more damage to the organisation than the truth. Next, it is important to be concerned and show the public you care because people will be more forgiving if it is clear that the organisation cares about the victims of the crisis. Finally, maintain two-way relationships. This is important because the organisation can learn a lot about the status of public opinion by listening. These five steps are necessary in order to manage any crisis public relations. With that having been said, each crisis situation is unique and therefore, requires a tailored response. There are six types of responses and they range on a continuum from defensive to accommodative. First, organisations can attack the accuser attempting to eliminate the attacker's credibility.

Second, organisations can us denial claiming that no crisis exists. The third response is justification where the organisation claims no serious damage was done or that the victim was at fault. Fourth, the organisation can use ingratiation to appease the public, such as giving away coupons. Next, organisations can use corrective action to right their wrongs. Finally, the organisation can give a full apology asking for forgiveness for their mistake. All six responses have been used in the past with varying results. If chosen properly, one of the six responses can help mitigate damage.

Ogbuoshi (2011,p.169-171), identify the following as Public relations strategies used in resolving crises. They include:

i. Negotiation
ii. Mediation
iii. Inquiry
iv. Conciliation
v. Arbitration
vi. Mass media
vii. Public opinion
viii. Propaganda devices

In his analysis, the above scholar noted that: "Negotiation is the simplest and the most effective Public relations strategy used in resolving crises. It consists basically of discussions between both parties in dispute and their allies with a view to reconciling divergent opinions or views or at least, understanding the differing positions of the stakeholders. The parties involved decide amongst themselves how best to resolve their difference… although, involves discussions, arguments and counter arguments, targeted towards resolving the conflict "(Ogbuoshi, 2011: 169).

Methodology

The researcher applied survey design through which a selected sample from the calculated population of the study were solicited to respond to well- structured questionnaire based on the problem of the study. The population for this study was drawn from the total staff population of University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital Enugu and Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki. UNTH has staff strength of 4,802 while FETHA has 5,320 staff strength, thus, giving a total of 10,122 as the population. The following Units/Departments were also randomly selected in the teaching hospitals that were selected. FETHA and UNTH, eight (8) departments/units were selected, they include: Public Relations Unit, Revenue, General Out Patient Department (GOPD), Microbiology, Admin, Physiotherapy, Radiology and Records.

A total of three hundred and thirty one (331) respondent was selected using Taro Yamen formula, copies 331 of the questionnaire were distributed to the selected respondents of the study who formed the study sample size. At the end of administration and collection, three hundred and twenty three (323) copies of questionnaire duly filled by respondents were returned, coded and analysed.

Data collected were carefully assembled to ensure consistency, accuracy and completeness. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software version 20.0 employing appropriate statistical tools. Demographic variables were analyzed using percentage and frequency tables. However, the impact of the various public relations variables on the performance of the institutions were determine using simple regression analysis.

Data Presentation and Findings

Table 1: Multiple Regression Result of the effect of Public Relations and Crisis Management strategies in UNTH and FETHA

Variables name	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. level
Constant	0.713	0.296	2.414	**
Dialogue	0.515	0.055	9.300	*
Negotiation	-0.098	0.059	-1.653	***
Mediation	0.112	0.057	1.962	***
Advocacy and sensitization programmes	0.171	0.044	3.845	*
R	0.687 or 68.7%			
R^2	0.572 or 57.2%			
Adj. R^2	0.465 or 46.5			
Std. error of the estimate	0.77407			
F-statistic	71.016*			

Source: Oyeleke's.Field Survey, 2020
Note: *, ** and *** indicate significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels of probability respectively
NS indicates not significant.

To answer this research question, the responses of the respondents on the various public relations and crisis management strategies employ in the health institutions as outlined in the questionnaire were modeled as the independent variables while their responses on how these crisis management strategies have impacted on employees' performance was designated as the dependent variable. The result is presented in Table 1

The coefficients of dialogue (0.055), mediation (0.112) and advocacy and sensitization programmes (0.171) were positively related to employees' performance. Also, the entire independent variables were statistically significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels of probability respectively. This implies that these public relations and crisis management strategies have significant effect on employees' performance. The findings are in line with Raweh and Moses (2015) who wrote on "The effects of strategic Public relations in organisation performance". Also in the observation of Lisa T. F.(2004) who wrote on "The increasing role of public relations as a crisis management function: An empirical examination of communication restrategising efforts among destination organisation managers in the wake of 11th September, 2001" .

Table 2: Multiple Regression Result of the solutions to Public Relations and Crisis Management in UNTH and FETHA be determined

Variables name	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. level
Constant	0.207	0.221	0.938	**
Setting up special grievance committee	0.130	0.047	2.750	*
Setting up prevention protocol committe	-0.006	0.043	-0.136	NS

Mobilization of members	0.176	0.047	3.754	*
Media of Public Relations	0.580	0.041	14.286	*
R	0.770 or 77.0%			
R^2	0.592 or 59.2%			
Adj. R^2	0.587 or 58.7			
Std. error of the estimate	0.65756			
F-statistic	115.474*			

Source:Oyeleke's Field Survey, 2019
Note: *, and ** indicate significant at 1%, and 5% levels of probability respectively
NS indicates not significant.

The coefficients of Setting up special grievance committee (0.130), Mobilization of members

(0.176) and Media of Public Relations (0.580) were positively signed and statistically significant at 1% level of probability. This shows that these variables are important determinants of employees' performance which increase employees' performance.

The hypothesis formulated to guide the study were tested, using F – test, Public relations crisis management strategies in UNTH and FETHA have no significant effects on staff performance.
The F-statistics value as obtained from the regression model of the effect of public relations crisis management strategies in UNTH and FETHA on employees' performance was considered. Based on the result in Table 3, the F-statistic was 71.016, is greater than the F-critical value (2.70). Consequently, the alternate hypothesis was accepted that public relations crisis management strategies in UNTH and FETHA have significant effects on staff performance.

Conclusion

It can be said from the available statistics from the study that public relations crisis management strategies in UNTH and FETHA have significant impact on employees' performance. Dialogue, mediation, advocacy and sensitization programmes were positively related to employees' performance. This implies that the public relations and crisis management strategies have significant effect on employees' performance as evidence in their level of productivity

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made:
To create effective image management and crisis management teaching hospitals need to
1. Continuously engage stakeholders in dialogue, mediation, sensitization programe and negotiation with the aim of resolving industrial disputes, management and staff union disputes
2. Management of diseases outbreak in the bud before it develops into full crisis so as to improve employees' performance.
3. The study recommends that a public relations strategy should be developed within the context of the organisation's vision, mission, corporate culture and policies

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