



**“COMMAND WITHOUT DEBASEMENT”:  
SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVED INTRA-FORCE  
RELATIONS IN NIGERIA POLICE FORCE THROUGH  
EXCELLENCE PUBLIC RELATIONS**

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**Abstract:**

This paper highlights the imperative of effective intra-relations within the Nigerian Police Force. Most discourses of public relations in relation to the Nigeria Police Force focus more on the external publics with less interest on the internal public. Being a hierarchical organization characterized by top-down communication expressed in form chain of command, it assumes that the police force has no use for symmetrical communication which is the hallmark of Grunig's excellence theory of public relations. However, this study proves otherwise, that excellent public relations can be practiced in the force when members of the organization especially the superiors realize and operationalize the habit of commanding without debasing their subordinates. In doing this, the status of intra-force relations of the Nigeria police force will be greatly improved.

**Keywords:** intra-relations, policing, public relations

**1. Introduction**

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) like in other nations of the world, is an agency of the government charged with the responsibility of enforcing laws within the society. According to Madubuikwe-Ekwe & Obayemi (2019), one of the basic responsibilities of the government in all societies is to ensure the safety of life and property of its citizens. Similarly, the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria echoes this same sentiment in Section 14(2) (b), where it states that “*the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.*” The police force, thus exist in Nigeria based on this law, and for the fact that security of the land is assured when government maintains an effective policing system. According to Ifeanyichukwu (2016), the Nigeria Police is primarily vested with the responsibility of conventional policing and internal policing.

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They provide support for other paramilitary bodies including the Nigeria Prison, Immigration, Customs services, and they also perform military duties within and outside the country as directed. Specifically, their statutory functions include:

- Prevention and detection of crime;
- Apprehension of offenders;
- Preservation of law and order;
- Protection of life and property;
- Enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are charged;
- Military duties within or outside Nigeria as may be required of them.

It is important to note that for the police to effectively discharge their statutory duties, they must retain a very functional public relations structure. In other words, to project the social services dimension of the duties of the police, the late Kam Selem, former Inspector-General of Police (1966-1975) formally established the Force Public Relations Department as a statutory function of the Force and expanded its services to states Commands (Johnson, J., & T., 2013). Expectedly the Nigeria Police Public Relations Department (NPPRD) is uniformly structured and situated in all police commands and formations across the country. Johnson, J., & T. (2013) further elaborated the basic functions of the Nigeria Public Relations Department to include:

*“Performing communication tasks such as publishing the list of wanted persons, missing persons, stolen vehicles, dark spots, security tips and organizes press briefings to parade arrested criminal suspects. It also issues press releases and bulletins, writes feature articles, publishes photographs and advertisements through the press and electronic media to keep the public constantly informed of police activities. It also organizes public lectures and produces informative materials such as posters, flyers, and booklets to inform and educate the public about police activities. The Department is also responsible for producing police calendars, diary, greeting cards, magazine, and newsletter.”*

Hence in a nutshell, the NPPRD has the prime focus of maintaining positive image of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) in eyes of the public. From the above listed responsibilities of NPPRD, it may be easily inferred that NPF is interested in public optics. The job of policing warrants running constant interface with the people; assuring them of their safety and keeping them abreast of security situation within their environment. These people whom the police must build mutual relationship with are their publics upon whom in view of Cutlip, Center, & Broom (2000), their success or failure depends on. With reference to publics, every organization retains an internal and external public relation. The internal publics of NPF are officers and men of the force, while the external publics are all people in the society who are policed. However, going through extant literatures on public relations in Nigeria Police Force, it is evident that the public relations structure obtained, rarely focus on internal publics not many efforts on the external publics. In other words, the Force pay more attention to its relations with the external publics, while leaving intra-force relations among its internal publics less

attended to. The thrust of this paper is to suggest how intra-force relations within NPF can be firmed up through excellence theory of public relations.

## **2. The Imperative of Effective Intra-Force Relations**

Internal public in the field of public relations refers to those who work and have a role in an organization such as employees, management, and their family members. In addition, it also refers to the union that lives and thrives in a company or organization (Gani, 2016). There is often a tendency among some organization leaders to focus more on the external publics whom they assume are more important than the internal public. However, it is only factual that without the internal public to remedy the demands of the external publics, the failure of the organization is assured.

Like every other organization, intra-force relations are paramount to superlative performances of force members. To maintain this relationship among force members, effective internal communication is germane. Kenney (1956, p.547) submitted that *"internal communication has to do with decision making, a step in the administrative process which is often ignored and poorly performed. Common practice is to order plans into effect without any consideration of the way they can be brought to influence the behaviour of individual members of the group."* As an integral part of any success-bound organization, internal communication accounts for the social process through which, given an ideal circumstance, the police executives influence and are in turn influenced by subordinate officers. However, the way communication occurs between members of a department (police force) is rather common knowledge. Most communications follow either the formal lines of authority reflected in the departmental organizational chart, or informal channels, which are the unplanned channels of communication operating alongside but apart from the formal structure (Kenney, 1956).

Operationally, the police pattern of communication is designed around formal lines of authority reflected in its chain of commands. Therefore, it is adjudged to be a hierarchical organization in a strict sense. Writing on the website of University of St Thomas Minnesota, [www.stthomasonline.com](http://www.stthomasonline.com), a group known as University Alliance submitted that; much like the military, law enforcement agencies across the country for more than two centuries have employed a strict organizational ranking system – not designed to demean those in lower ranks, but to maintain discipline, further communication and allow for advancement.

Aside from communicating through chains of command, Kenney (1956, p. 550) opined that 'the police, as any other group are prone to develop a specialized language for use of their own particular group. The primary objective of the specialized language is to speed up communication between officers but may cause consternation for some members of the group and outsiders. For example, the term "burn" used by narcotics officers means exposing an informant so that he may no longer be used. The term is completely unfamiliar to most people, and not all policemen will recognize it. Differences

in background, education, and experiences of individuals also accounts for how members communicate within themselves.

### 3. Excellence Theory of Public Relations: An Overview

The Excellence theory is a general theory of public relations propounded in 1984 by a team of seven public relations academics led by Professor James Grunig. By its nature, the theory specifies how public relations make organizations more effective; how it is organized and managed when it contributes most to organizational effectiveness, the conditions in organizations and their environments that make organizations more effective, and how the monetary value of public relations can be determined (Grunig & White, 1992). Rhee (2004) noted that Grunig et al. believed that by helping organizations build relationships and by resolving conflicts between the organization and its strategic publics, public relations departments contribute to organizational effectiveness. As noted by J. E. Grunig (2009b), this general theory incorporates a number of middle-range theories of public relations, including theories of publics, public relations and strategic management, models of public relations, evaluation of public relations, employee communication, public relations roles, gender, diversity, power, activism, ethics and social responsibility, and global public relations.

Grunig & White (1992) sought to re-institutionalize and standardize the field of public relations through the birth of the excellence theory. Essentially, the excellence theory insists on two-way symmetrical communication pattern as the ideal way of relating in organizations. Clarifying these views, Grunig & Grunig (1992) contend that "*a symmetrical system of internal communication increased employees' satisfaction with their jobs and with the organization*". He explained that internal communication was generally not practiced unless organizations had a participative rather than authoritarian culture and a decentralized, less stratified (organic) structure rather than a centralized, stratified (mechanical) structure.

Two-way symmetrical communication hence takes the shape of a transmission in which both parties involved transmit information. This category of communication differs from the usual cycle of communication featuring a sender and receiver. This implies that two-way communication is not as simple as it may appear on face value. It is a kind of communication that aims to achieve mutual understanding between an organization and its stakeholders. The process should lead to changes in both the organization and the audience's position (Ruck 2011). Two-way communication was developed by James Grunig as a part of the four models of public relations. The models though called models of public relations, centred on methods of communication, thus reinforcing the critical essence of communication in public relations and every human venture in general. The four public relations models include:

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- **Press agency/publicity model** is a one-way type of communication process which uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audience to behave as the organization desires.
  - **Public Information model** is also a one-way communication process which uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to distribute organizational information. Under this model, public relations practitioner is often referred to as the journalist in residence.
  - **One-way asymmetrical model** is equally a one-way communication model, using persuasion and manipulation to influence audience to behave as the organization desires. Does not use research to find out how the public feels about the organization.
  - **Two-way symmetrical model** obviously is distinct from the other three mentioned models. It is two-way communication process. It seeks to use communication as tool to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its public. Windhal, Signitzer, & Olson, (1992) observed that; communication in this model is fully reciprocal and power relationships are balanced. The terms sender and receiver are not applicable in such communication process, where the goal is mutual understanding. In an organizational set up, the two-way symmetrical communication assumes that companies have an obligation to listen to the needs and opinions of their stakeholders to survive. Unlike in one way communication pattern, the intention here is to foster real relationship, to maintain flexibility and democratically attain the set goals of both the consumers and the organization.

By advocating total re-conceptualization based on the ten generic principles, the theory offers a new approach to the practice of public relations. Grunig (2009) enumerated the following as the ten generic principles:

- **Empowerment of public relations:** The chief communication officer is part of or has access to the dominant coalition or other coalitions of senior managers who make decisions in the organization.
- **Integrated communication function:** Excellent departments integrate all public relations functions into a single department or have a mechanism to coordinate the departments responsible for different communication activities.
- **A separate management function:** Many organizations splinter the public relations function by making it a supporting tool for other departments such as marketing, human resources, law, or finance. When the function is sublimated to other functions, it cannot move communication resources from one strategic public to another as it becomes important — as an integrated function can.
- **Headed by a strategic manager rather than a communication technician or an administrative manager who supervises technical services:** Technicians are essential to carry out day-to-day communication activities. However, excellent public relations units have at least one senior manager who directs public relations

programmes; or this direction will be provided by members of the dominant coalition who have no knowledge of public relations.

- **Involved in strategic management:** Public relations develops programmes to communicate with strategic publics, both external and internal, who are affected by the consequences of organizational decisions and behaviours and who either demand or deserve a voice in decisions that affect them—both before and after decisions are made.
- **Two-way and symmetrical communication:** Two-way, symmetrical public relation uses research, listening, and dialogue to manage conflict and to cultivate relationships with both internal and external strategic publics more than one-way and asymmetrical communication.
- **Diverse:** Effective organizations attempt to increase the diversity in the public relations function when the diversity in their environments increases. Excellent public relations include both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.
- **Ethical:** Public relations departments practice ethically and promote ethical and socially responsible organizational decisions and behaviours.

In view of (Ifeanyichukwu, 2016) communication under excellence theory is very vital and considered to be the key determinant of the excellence. Impliedly, an organization is making progress only when there exists symmetrical communication between it and its publics. Effective communication therefore is inseparable to excellence. When communication is appropriately exchanged and interests of all parties well negotiated and represented, attainment of organizational goals becomes certain and thus excellence is achieved.

Beyond propounding excellence theory as a better way of conceptualizing public relations, (Grunig & White, 1992) went further to present it as a theory with normative potential. This is to say that the excellence theory was adjudged fitting to be the ideal standard for global public relations practice. Similarly, (Brown, 1988) notes that while the positive aspects (its applicability) of excellence theory are hotly debated, it seems fairly evident that, at the onset at least, the theory was primarily normative. A normative theory of the public relations models must be rooted in worldview, or a given "*set of images and assumptions about the world*" (Kearney, 1984).

### **3.1 Achieving Strong Intra-Force Relations in Nigeria Police Force through Excellence Theory**

A comprehensive discourse on the concept of communication pattern in regimented organization like the police would be impossible without having an insight about police culture and its nature. The 1950s seminal study of William Westley was said to have ushered in the era of scholarly focus on police culture. These studies focused on the widely shared attitudes, values, and norms that serve to manage strains created by the nature of police work (i.e., the occupational street environment) and the punitive practices of police management and supervision (see Brown (1988); Crank (1998);

(Kappeler, Sluder, & Alpert (1998)). Supporting these scholarly views in a similar study, Paoline (2004) agreed that:

*"These attitudes, values, and norms include a distrust and suspiciousness of citizens and a prescription to assess people and situations in terms of their potential threat (i.e., maintaining the edge), a lay-low or cover-your-ass orientation to police work that would discourage the initiation of contacts with citizens and supervisors, a strong emphasis on the law enforcement elements of the police role, a we-versus-they attitude toward citizens, and the norm of loyalty to the peer group."*

Fundamentally, communication as a process involves a human as well as a technical aspect, and any attempt to develop or perfect a police communication system requires an adequate understanding of both these aspects. However, for the purpose of this paper, the author reviews communication from the context of intra-force relations and thus takes a different approach in the discourse of communication here.

Naturally, communication in regimented organizations like the NPF is usually top-down flowing through chains of command from the superiors to the junior members. Hence the common saying, obey the last order. Officially, the regimented organization has no democratic culture, rather through ranking system the junior officers serve at the pleasure of the senior officers. In a study which reviewed the intra-public relations status of the NPF, Ifeanyichukwu (2016) revealed that superior officers are often in the habit of oppressing and abusing their subordinates during the top-down communication. The junior officers have no problem taking orders from their senior; however, these commands can be effectively delivered without debasing the persons of the junior officers, and this is where a tending of excellence theory applies.

When proper attention is extended to the internal publics of NPF, programmes and educative exercises would be constantly held to improve the relationships among colleagues and thus aids them in discharging their duties efficiently. A senior and junior police officer in a beat can be friendly and civil while being mindful of their occupational boundaries. Just like in a family, being a father or mother does not warrant riding roughshod on the children who are the subordinates. The new and healthier way of parenting entails befriending the kids and by so doing gain their trust and confidence to open comfortably in moments of challenges, decisions, and confusion. With such atmosphere in the family, things run smoothly, and children genuinely respect their parents. It is important to note that today's junior officer eventually becomes the senior of tomorrow, and without proper orientation helped by persistent intense intra-force public relations campaign, there will be continual reoccurrence of toxicity among the NPF personnel. Programmes like inter-ranks sporting exercises, seminars and workshops on interpersonal communication, leadership trainings etc. are few instances of engagements which stands to promote solid intra-force relations.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is not enough to just arm police personnel; the mental comportment of the officers must be considered an essential priority which must not be toyed with. The mental disposition of the officers account for their performance and by extension the efficacy of the whole system. When orders are given in polite manners, a sense of belonging and prestige is formed, which in turn motivates the men towards satisfactory discharge of their duties.

Consequently, the position of the public relations officer must not be given to whoever the authority deems fit. Serious considerations must be given instead to professionals, whose efforts will certainly reflect positively on their outputs and help bind the force together as a family. Correct application of excellence theory in regimented organizations like the Nigeria Police Force will indeed encourage more professionalism in the discharge of police duties and essentially in securing the society effectively.

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#### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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