

Competence of Communication : a Prerequisite for Efficient Management

Stephen Jikong

▶ **To cite this version:**

Stephen Jikong. Competence of Communication : a Prerequisite for Efficient Management. Alizés : Revue angliciste de La Réunion, 2005, 25-26, pp.213-228. hal-02344083

HAL Id: hal-02344083
https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02344083

Submitted on 3 Nov 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Competence of Communication: a Prerequisite for Efficient Management

For any economic undertaking to achieve its goal, several factors have to be taken into consideration. Of the possible factors the quality of human resources is the most crucial.

Over the years, African countries have taken loans and received aid from the developed countries and international financial institutions. The finances so obtained have been invested in various enterprises, yet, today, Africa is on her knees in spite of the fabulous sums invested. Research has proved that the major cause of the economic catastrophe is the poor quality of the human resources employed to manage the enterprises.

The public sector incarnated by the government of every country in Africa is in control of the training schemes for all citizens. It is therefore the duty of every government to provide the economic sector with the appropriate human resources. Thus, the key of a dynamic African economy is in the hands of the public sector. This means that if the African economy is to be redynamised, particular attention should be focussed on human resources, from the perspective of education.

So far, governments have laid emphasis on the literacy of their citizens or their acquisition of skills to enable them to perform in economic undertakings. The result of these educational policies have been negative in the economic domain. This is because the natural man has been rendered literate and he has also acquired other skills that can help him ruin any enterprise in a very crafty manner.

Time has come for the public sector in African countries to shift their focus to ethical education if they want their economies to bloom. Once ethical education is added to the other aspects, the individual moves from the world of literate and skilful animals to that of rational and considerate human beings.

In this paper I intend to clarify this point by discussing it from the perspective of competence of communication. This approach shows clearly that from the way human beings communicate

with each other or with the environment it is possible to discover their educational inadequacies through their communicative incompetence. Because a person that is completely educated is supposed to be competent in communication.

The concept of competence of communication has been discussed by many scholars who are generally in agreement. Zaleznik and Moment (1954) have discussed this concept from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory. From their viewpoint the depth of understanding of character, its manifestation in interpersonal reactions, and its determinants provide a basis for intelligent observation and behaviour in interpersonal settings. The major working assumptions of psychoanalytic theory serve as a guide to the analysis of interpersonal interactions.

The modes of interpersonal behaviour can be placed within the general framework of ego psychology – more specifically, within the theory of character formation – in terms of instinctual processes, inner conflict and development, ego development, and the defensive functions of the ego. These authors have illustrated their point through the freudian psychoanalytic theory.

Freud called the primitive, instinctual part of the mind, the basic source of energy that activates the personality, the ID. The ID is dominated by the pleasure principle; it seeks immediate discharge of psychic energy in the form of wish fulfilment. "But common sense observation shows that in the mind of the normal adult, behaviour appears to be governed by rational processes of thinking, planning, and acting in accordance with notions of environmental conditions. This side of man's behaviour is the work of the Ego."

The Ego is said to be the executive apparatus of the mind. One of its functions is to stand between the ID and the outer world. The healthy ego ultimately serves the pleasure principle or provides for instinctual gratification. But it functions in such a way so as to avoid harm to the organism, on the one hand, and to the environment on the other. The healthy ego attempts to formulate and carry out behaviour that simultaneously fulfils a variety of needs with the minimum expenditure of energy. The healthy ego assumes control of the psychic energy, limits it, and uses it for constructive work and rewarding human relationships. ID gratifications are thus assured

along with constructive outcomes for society. Thus he who behaves in this way is said to be competent in communication.

Continuing with the analysis of the Freudian theory and how it can apply in the area of healthy interpersonal relationship, Zaleznik and Moment said the third agency of the mind is the superego. It carries out the prohibitive functions. It controls aggressive energy that has been turned inward and can act punitively to create a sense of guilt. It plays an important role in the compulsive character structure. The internalized prohibitions of the superego censure the wishes of the ID and maintain the reaction formations of the ego. If the individual wishes to express aggression and hate toward rivals or substitute objects, the superego stands ready to punish and to influence the ego to covert its wish into the opposite: instead of hate, the individual may show tenderness.

These authors have pointed out that the ego develops through experiences in formal education and the superego develops through experiences with authority figures other than parents. But we can add that parents often serve as authority figures whenever they prohibit their siblings from behaving in certain unacceptable ways. Religion, ethics and morality are said to play an important role in the formation of the superego, especially during childhood. These are facts to be considered seriously by the public sector when drawing up educational programmes.

To attain the realm of competence in communication the individual has to work towards it consciously until certain reactions to stimuli become automatically positive. Scholars have handled the concept of communicative competence also from the perspective of the obedience of societal and situational norms. In his contribution to this viewpoint Goffman said,

> When in the presence of others, the individual is guided by a special set of rules, which have here been called situational proprieties. Upon examination, these rules prove to govern the allocation of the individual involvement within the situation, as expressed through conventionalized idioms of behavioral clues. (1963: 243)

Schegloff in Gumperz and Hymes (1972: 346) feels that one can be competent in communication if one considers the rights and obligations of each participant. Thus he says:

> What one can say to anyone, and how one must deal with anyone with whom one speaks, may imply fundamental assumptions about the rights and obligations mutually felt by members of a society.

Continuing on the note of basic assumptions required for appropriate communication, Cushman, Valentinsen and Dietrich in their paper, 'A Rules Theory of Interpersonal Relationships' in Frank (1982: 44-47) have pointed out that effective interpersonal communication seems to be characterized by at least five qualities: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness and equality. Openness refers to the communicator's willingness to open up to the other people with whom he is interacting and to react honestly to incoming stimuli. To empathize with another individual implies feeling like that person, to be in that person's shoes, as it were. If we are able to empathize with people we are then in a position to understand where they are coming from, where they are now and where they are going.

When there is supportiveness in interpersonal relationships, it means there is an atmosphere of tolerance which allows the interactants to reveal themselves in a meaningful way by expressing themselves fully.

Positiveness in interpersonal communication refers to a certain positive regard for oneself and the other participants as well as for the whole situation. There is inequality in virtually every communicative event, but when Cushman et al. recommend the spirit of equality for effective communication, they mean that there should be a tacit recognition that both parties are valuable and wortwhile human beings and that each has something important to contribute. We will conclude the discussion on this topic by echoing Clifford Geertz in Fishman:

> Like the forms of etiquette generally, the pattrens of linguistic (communicative) etiquette modulate, regularize, and smoothen the

> process of social interaction into an alus, unvarying flow of quiet, emotionally tranquilizing propriety. (1968: 289)

He requests us to emulate the Japanese example of communication:

> It has already been pointed out how etiquette patterns, including language, tend to be regarded by the Japanese as a kind of emotional capital which may be invested in putting others at ease. Politeness is something one directs towards others; one surrounds the other with a wall of behavioral formality which projects the stability of his inner life. Etiquette is a wall built around one's inner feelings, but it is paradoxically always a wall someone else builds, at least in part. (289)

If one succeeds in surrounding the other "with a wall of behavioral formality which protects the stability of his inner life", then one is competent in communication.

From the discussion of communicative competence above, certain pertinent points can be selected to serve as bases for the discussion of efficient management which is the key to the redynamisation of the African economy.

The Freudian analysis of the human mind exposes three parts: the ID, the EGO, and the SUPEREGO. Each of these egos manifests itself during interpersonal interactions. The ID is associated with behaviour patterns that are deemed irrational whereas the EGO is responsible for actions that are said to be rational. The SUPEREGO is the force that controls the impulses of the ID to manifest frequently. A weak SUPEREGO gives room to the ID to manifest itself frequently. The superego is said to be formed by authorities. Mention can be made of laws and other norms that regulate behaviour patterns in a given society as well as various prohibitions from various sources. The superego crystalizes in a person in the form of a strong CONSCIENCE. But a pompous superego acquired from a pompous authority can be a hindrance in management.

In an enterprise the management can be evaluated using the psychoanalytic approach to arrive at the degree of efficiency of the

enterprise. When we talk of management we are referring to the art of directing the execution, application or conduct of public affairs or persons in keeping with prescribed rules intended to make the enterprise successful. An enterprise in the broadest sense, according to Webster's New International Dictionary, is an undertaking which involves activity, courage, energy; a venture. The word enterprise is used in this paper to include the government apparatus, and all private, parapublic and public ventures or undertakings because communicative competence is required in each of these contexts.

It is possible to observe the management of an enterprise and discover that it is controlled by the ID, especially in a developing country like Cameroon. For instance, it is said that the ID represents the primitive instinctual parts of the mind. It is the basis source of energy that activates the personality. It is dominated by the pleasure principle and seeks the immediate discharge of psychic energy in the form of wish fulfilment.

The characteristics of the ID are those of the natural man who is full of emotions and greed and is capable of acting irrationally in several contexts. If communicative habits are observed among some members of the management of enterprises in Cameroon, it will be realized that many of the habits stem from the ID.

The public service, for instance, is an enterprise with its rules and regulations, and specific goals. The public servants all manage the public service, each one with specific duties to perform. Experience has shown that many of the public servants have a long way to go to evolve from the ID to the EGO.

Public servants solve various problems for the public. To solve the problems the public servants come into contact with the public or with the files of the public. The fundamental communicative act between a public servant and a member of the public is greeting. How often do Cameroon public servants greet or respond to greetings with politeness from the members of the public who come to their offices for one reason or another? The ignorance of the ID makes them feel self-conceited and refuse to receive greeting, thereby making the user of the public service feel hurt. Sometimes certain public servants condescend and respond arrogantly to greet-

ings, creating the same negative feeling in the user, or ask questions such as, "What do you want?" as a form of greeting.

It is at times very difficult for some public service users to be received by some public servants. The users have to wait for hours before being received with arrogance and insolence. This indicates that the public servants are controlled by the ID that does not care about the importance of time and the negative effect time wasted has on other aspects of society. It has been pointed out that,

> Most organisations or cultures develop informal tolerance ranges for lateness; to keep a person waiting beyond the tolerance limit is a subtle way of insulting him. (Goldhaber: 1974 157)

Time is very important as a factor to control communication. Just as certain public servants ignorantly make users wait, others make files wait. No enterprise can succeed if the method of handling files is not simplified to economise time. In Cameroon many workers and businessmen have complained about the snail speed used to treat various files.

I remember a foreigner who wanted to invest in tourism in Cameroon, then he came to find out the formalities. After two weeks he could not be satisfied because of the slow pace taken to serve him. He left and vowed never to return because business cannot thrive in a society that does not respect time, as he said.

The ID manifests itself in the careless way certain public servants handle files. Many a times there have been complaints of missing official papers or whole files. The importance of files and the cost of a complete file are ignored by many public servants. It is worth noting that in management no piece of paper is too small. Any piece of paper on which something is written contains a message which was well thought of and formulated by the author, consequently it deserves careful preservation.

One of the characteristics of the ID is greed. Because the worker or public servant wants to satisfy his own urges, he does everything to extort money from those asking for services they deserve from him. This is a current practice in Cameroon. For instance, a cashier's duty is to give cash to a person who has a cash voucher in

exchange for it. But in Cameroon today, the ID in the cashiers has grown too powerful and overshadowed the Ego and the Superego to crab 30, 40, or 50% of the cash meant for the owner of the voucher. The greed has pushed many public workers to embezzle public funds using many complicated methods. In this same vein many private, parapublic and public enterprises have been rendered bankrupt by greedy and instinctive persons.

Recently, one of the dishonest civil servants wanted to extort money from another civil servant whose file he was following, so he presented the following bills,

Typing of draft twice	2,000
Typing of project thrice	3,000
One stencil	1,000
Photocopying	1,000
Total	*7,000*

This imaginary bill was accepted by the owner of the file because he was afraid of arguing since by so doing the whole file could be declared missing.

If one's behaviour patterns are not governed by the ID, how is it possible that a trained banker can give loans up to emptying the capital of the bank?

Competence of communication is to be manifested, not only towards public property and persons foreign to the enterprise, but also among all the workers in an enterprise. This is very pertinent because smooth communication among members makes for optimum efficiency. Unfortunately in Cameroon, interpersonal communication among members of an enterprise still leaves much to be desired.

As stated above, "What one can say to anyone, and how one must deal with anyone with whom one speaks, may imply fundamental assumptions about the rights and obligations mutually felt by members of a society". This statement by Schegloff summarizes the spirit that has to govern communication among members of a given society. What stands out clearly is the concept of "fundamental assumptions about the rights and obligations mutually felt by members of a society."

In Cameroon this principle is ignored by most of those who are placed in pompous superegos which ignore the principle of mutual respect in interpersonal interactions. So they shout at their subordinates unnecessarily and look low on them, thereby discouraging them. When this happens there is animosity between the boss and the subordinates resulting in the poor functioning of the enterprise.

Obviously, the subordinate is obliged to respect his boss because the relationship is asymmetrical but he expects the boss to treat him with dignity because he has a right to decent treatment. Many of the subordinates in enterprises are conscious of the type of treatment they expect from their bosses, so when the expectations are violated by a pompous superego, there is breakdown in communication and relationships become strained.

In the Ministry of the Public Service and Administrative Reforms, an Assistant Chief of Service had an over bossy attitude towards all those in his service. In a year he gave 19 queries to 6 of the agents under him and moved from the position of a boss to that of an enemy. His service could no longer function as it was supposed to. Most of his queries were not responded to. If some agents responded, they did so in the most insolent manner possible. In reply to one of his queries, one agent castigated him as follows,

> Il a été suggéré d'humaniser l'administration. Je ne pense pas que traiter un collaborateur de bête de somme sans respect pour sa personne ou le considérer comme un robot soit humain. Je donne le meilleur de moi-même pour le bon fonctionnement du service et ceci en consentant des sacrifices physiques avec tous les risques que cela comporte pour ma santé et les résultats sont là. Pourtant en retour je ne reçois que disgrâce. A quoi ça sert de lutter pour la libération des hommes si on les méprise assez pour leur bourrer le crâne ? Nous servons l'Administration et non des individus, cependant nous travaillons avec les individus.
>
> « Lorsqu'on veut noyer son chien, on l'accuse de la rage », mais surtout il faut retenir qu'on a toujours besoin d'un plus petit que soi. Aussi, sans toutefois me résigner, je ne saurais m'opposer à une sanction que prendrait la hiérarchie à mon encontre mais seulement faut-il qu'elle ait été prise en toute justice et équité et que je la mérite.

This indicates that most workers expect to be communicated to with respect because they are human beings not beasts of burden. In a similar vein another subordinate replied to another query in the following words,

> I am reminded for what you did to me in 1989. I am also ashamed of how things are going on in this service. You seem not to like people who are straightforward and truthful. I want to remind you that I am not the only one who complains against you. In fact, if not of the chief of service, everybody would have asked to go to a different service. I wish to humbly say that I would not take part in your misdemeanor. My person has been tarnished and misrepresented by the false allegation you metted at me. When you rail insults at me, they mean nothing to you, instead you tell exaggerated lies not only on my case but also about others. If you do fear GOD as I do, please stop being hypocritical in the way you deal with your subordinates.

The reply to the first query was four typed pages while the second one was six typed pages. In both replies, the subordinates make the point that though they are subordinates and, consequently, do menial jobs and earn less, they are human beings and deserve respect.

They are reminding bosses that time has come for them to adopt communicative habits that are based on reciprocal respect because when a subordinate is considered as a human being in spite of his low job and salary, he is motivated and he can work harder and more conscientiously and the enterprise is bound to improve.

Sometimes some subordinates feel insulted when they are shouted at or corrected harshly in the presence of persons that are foreign to the business, so bosses should be conscious of their communicative habits towards their subordinates if they want their enterprise to achieve the goals for which they were created.

The subordinates also need to be educated to become competent in communication in order to improve their relationships with their bosses and colleagues, then create a conducive atmosphere for better performance. Just as they need to be respected as human be-

ings they should be taught professional ethics which will help them communicate appropriately when they are performing their professional duties. This step is necessary because the workers in enterprises have different backgrounds, some of which interfere with professional ethics to create malaise in the enterprise. A number of examples will make this point clearer.

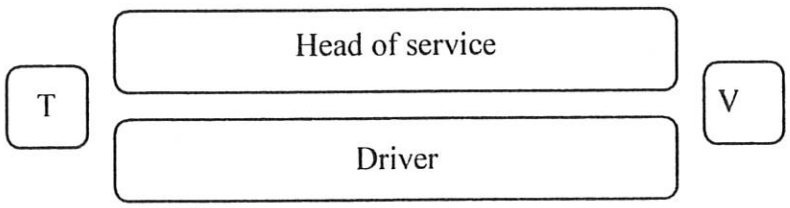
> **Setting**: a Ministry
> **Participants**: a female head of service, a driver, head of Administrative Services
> **Event**: The Head of Administrative Services selects a driver from the pool to drive the female head of service who is to go on an official mission. The driver refuses to drive a woman on any mission. He is obliged to go and he obeys very reluctantly. He drives according to his own speed and does not speak to the head of service. When they arrive, he drops her and disappears with the vehicle and returns very late after the head of service has been waiting for long. He does not explain why he went away, drives the head of service back still at his own speed.
> (The female Head of Service was informant).

There is nothing surprising about the driver's attitude if we know that he was raised in the Muslim culture where the woman's place is in the fence and not in an office. Moreover, the woman in the Muslim culture can leave the fence only at night and when this happens, she does not even have to be in the company of men. Thus, there is virtually a complete severence of contact between the male and female sexes in this culture. Men do all the work outside the house. They do the farm work and the trading and other outdoor activities while the ladies remain in the fence and perform the household chores. When a woman is speaking to her husband or another male she bows down or, in certain cases, kneels down. From the foregoing we notice that the males are given absolute respect by the females in Muslim culture.

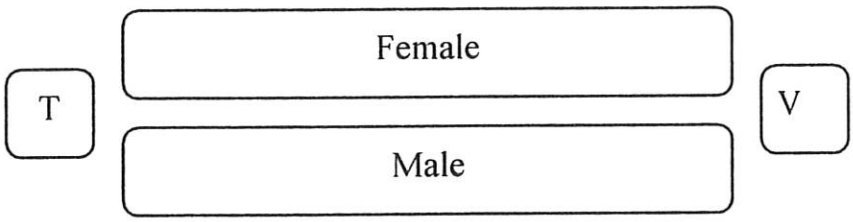
Now, a driver, who has grown in this society, finds himself under the authority of a woman in the civil service and he cannot digest it. He is acting like a male in his tradition to a female. He does

not take the administrative set up as the guiding principle but he adopts a male attitude in order to minimize the female.

Thus, instead of maintaining the roles precribed by the administration that has employed both of them, the driver confuses or reverses the roles, thereby stalling the transaction. The participant roles that would have avoided animosity in the communicative event would have been:



But the driver has changed them to become:



in keeping with the Muslim culture thereby creating a problem within the service.

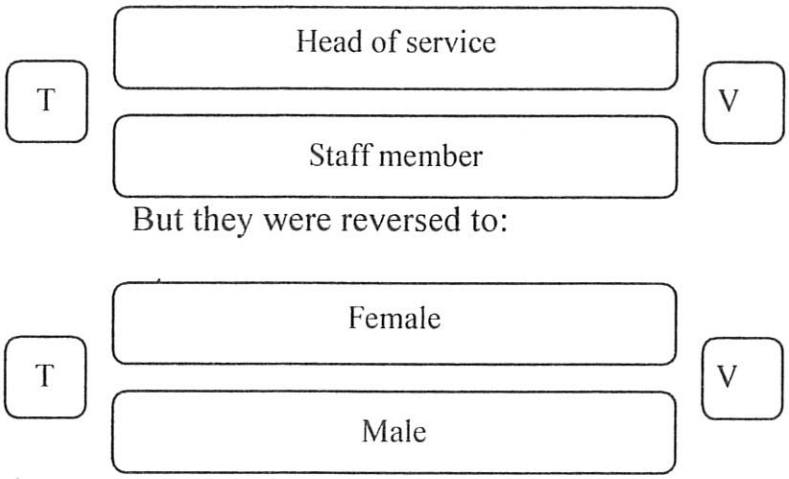
Setting: a corporation

Participants: a female head of service and a staff member

Event: The head of service sends the staff member on a mission to one of their business plants to control the financial operations. The staff member goes and accomplishes his task and returns, then submits a 9-page typed report to the head of service. After 30 minutes the report returns to the staff member with the comment, "The report is not deep enough". When the staff member reads this comment, he gets angry and writes a note to the head of service asking her whether she has even read the report and understood it in 30 minutes. Because of this, animosity is created between the staff member and his boss. Finally the staff member is dismissed.

(The staff member was the informant).

This event is another instance of male chauvinism within the wrong setting. There may be other factors that instigated the staff member to react so negatively. For example, the staff member is very intelligent and well qualified (I know him personally) and may believe that when he sits down to write something, he must be right, therefore, whoever says he is wrong must be wrong. But the fact that his critic is a woman cannot be ignored. He could have been upset by such a comment if the head of service was a man, but the degree of his anger would have been less. Here again, we should know that the staff member spent his childhood in a society in which there was separation of roles sexwise and quite often, the difficult tasks were performed by men. Now the staff member finds himself in a situation where roles have been reversed, but he wants to behave as though there has been no reversal of roles. This lack of appropriate definition of the situation created a strain in the transaction which eventually cost the staff member his job. The participants roles are:



If the staff member had defined the situation, he should have known that the head of service had been following up the activities of that business plant and had known much about it, but still wanted some precision on specific topics, and when the report came, most of t was familiar information and she could not get what she really expected. He should have then gone to the head of service to ask for more directives so as to return and look for the "deep" information. Furthermore, he did not have to write as a subordinate. Here is a case where the inappropriate channel has been used and it has stalled a

communicative event. This encounter manifests many errors which all stem from the confusion of roles. Not only is the channel inappropriate but the message as well is inappropriate. When we say the channel is inappropriate we mean that in Cameroon, if a subordinate has to comment on the instructions of the boss, he has to meet him and talk it over with him. He does not have to write a little note to his boss. The written channel asking for clarification from one's boss in this society is a mark of insolence. From these two examples we see the need to educate workers thoroughly.

From the foregoing discussion, we have pointed out that many things go wrong in enterprises due to incompetent communication because most communicators are guided either by their ID or their pompous SUPEREGO. How then can African economy bloom when the public servants who are supposed to be development catalysts wallow in instincts or their Ids? We recommend that everybody engaged in an enterprise should endeavor to be guided by the EGO in all sorts of transactions. With the intensive interpersonal transactions involved in the running of an enterprise, it is obligatory for those concerned to use their EGOs and realize that "etiquette patterns, including language, are a kind of emotional capital which has to be invested in putting others at ease, and that politeness is something one direst towards others and surrounds the other with a wall of behavioral formality which protects the stability of his inner life". If this principle is retained, then all public workers have to apply it when they are in contact with others. If one is polite to a person who has come to a public office to be served, the person will go satisfied even if a solution to his problem has not been found. It costs nothing to tell the a user,

Come in, please.
Sit down here.
What can I do for you? or
Can I help you? or
Can I be of service to you?

These few words have a magical effect on the addressee. If they are addressed to all who come to ask for services, certainly the enterprise will be solicited more and it will bloom. The EGO knows that time is money so, it urges the public to serve people fast, to

avoid making people wait for long before receiving them, to treat files carefully and rapidly. It stores files appropriately and has easy access to them when they are needed. It serves on the basis of "first come, first served." The EGO is rational, it has consideration for others. It is not greedy. It gives to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. In other words, it does not confiscate public funds, nor empty the coffers of the enterprise. It knows that the workers have needs to be met, so it pays them adequately and regularly. It pays attention to all aspects of the lives of workers - housing, insurance, health, etc. In so doing, the workers are encouraged to work more assiduously to improve the enterprise. The EGO knows that without the appropriate skills, the workers have nothing to offer, so it is the responsibility of the manager to train his personnel adequately to be able to meet the challenges of the business and produce positive results. The EGO knows that lack of accountability and control as well as retribution for misconduct works against any enterprise, so it makes them obligatory in any enterprise.

If the African economy has to be rendered dynamic the first step is for Africans to move from the dictates of the ID to those of the EGO and manifest this mental evolution through competent communication. The problem is how to move to the EGO. By reinforcing the control mechanism in the brain through:

1 - Intensive moral and civic education
2 - Intensive training in professional ethics
3 - Intensive training in required skills
4 - Intensive training in simple communicative habits
5 - Rewarding commendable habits
6 - Examplary chastisement of delinquent habits in workers

The government that is in control of the public sector has the duty of reforming her personnel who is holding the key to the economic recovery in Africa.

Dr. JIKONG Stephen Yeriwa [1]

---

[1] Senior lecturer, Department of English, University of Yaounde 1 (Camaroon).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cushman, Donald , P. Et al., 'A Rules Theory of Inter-personal Relationship' in *Human Communication Theory*, (Ed.) Dance Frank E.N., New York: Harper and Row Publisers.

Geertz, harold, 1968. 'Linguistic Etiquette' in *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, Fishman, Joshua (Ed.) The Hague: Mouton and Co.

Giglioli, Pier Paolo, 1972. 'Introduction' in *Language and Social Context*, Gioloili, Pier Paolo ed., London: Cos and Wyman Ltd.

Goffman, Erving, 1963. *Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*, New York: The Free Press of Clencoe.

_____, 1972. *Relations in Public*, New York: Harper and Row Inc.

_____, 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City, New York: An Anchor Book, Doubleday.

Gumperz J.J. and Dell Hymes (Eds.), 1972. *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hymes, Dell, 1996. *Language in Culture and Society*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.

_____, *1968.* 'The Ethnography of Speaking', in *Readings in the Sociology of Language*. (Ed.) Joshua Fishman, The Hague: Mouton and Co.

Jikong, S.Y., 1990. "Steps to Competent Interpersonal Communication" (Monograph), The University of Yaounde.

Schegloff, Emmanuel A., 1972. 'Squencing in Conversational Openings', in Gumperz and Hymes (Ed.), op.cit., 346-80.

Zaleznik, Abraham and Moment, David, 1964. The *Dynamics of Interpersonal Behaviour*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.