

## **Linking team work with performance in organizations: An assessment of the value of *esprit de corps* in a broadcast newsroom**

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**Abstract:** *The goal of this study was to identify an empirical strategy, which can appropriately and uniformly propel workers to maximize their potentials towards the full realization of the goals of their organizations. The study adopted the survey research method with questionnaire as the instrument for data gathering. Copies of the questionnaire, which were administered on newsroom personnel in different broadcast stations in Abuja, a major broadcasting centre in Nigeria, were retrieved and analysed. The theory of Total Quality Management (TQM) upon which the study was anchored helped to illuminate the findings that by emphasizing the value of teamwork and the importance of collaboration to a work force, effective managers simultaneously put the spotlight on the importance of individual contributions. This is particularly significant for a broadcast news outfit whose inseparable functions rest heavily on interdependent structures. Based on this, the paper calls on radio and television news managers to always premise the management of their newsrooms on the aggregation of the total quality contributions of their collective staff to the goals of their organizations*

**Keywords:** *Assessment, Broadcast newsroom, Performance, Value, Teamwork.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Every broadcast station requires a set of operatives to play different roles towards the achievement of its goals. As a result, an operational area such as the Programmes Department in a radio or television station would have to rely on producers and production services personnel to collaborate to achieve the production of among other things, drama and entertainment content. In the Technical area, engineers, technicians and maintenance personnel have to interact and quite often brainstorm to achieve smooth transmission of broadcast content. In the News Department, a critical segment of operatives consist of those who are responsible for the station's news functions. They include reporters who gather news items, the production team, which repackages news reports for transmission and news presenters who cast the news. In addition, the department has a team of ancillary staff to provide support services. Among this group are news directors, camera operators, drivers, typists etc. The functions of all the groups are inter-related and virtually inseparable. For this reason, interactions between and among the members are frequent especially as many of the operatives are multi-talented and are often assigned to carry out multifarious duties. Many reporters now personally present their news reports just as many of them are similarly put on the newscasters' roster to cast any of the day's bulletins. A reporter can be asked to handle newsgathering events today, only to be placed the next day, on the production desk to repackage reports. In order to be fully part of a news bulletin, newscasters in many stations now double as members of the production team. The reasoning is that working together can be quite fruitful, as it can help both the department and the staff. The beauty of the newsroom in particular, is the inseparable nature of assignments, which makes it possible to get assisted by other functionaries.

Through working together, workers develop a sense of belonging inherent in the principle of what is known in management thought as '*esprit de corps*' in the newsroom. In the process, some operatives get to learn several useful things and gather ample information from their colleagues including social issues such as membership of workers' unions. Against this background, it is useful to investigate the extent to which the value of *esprit de corps* can facilitate improved personnel efficiency for increased productivity that would in turn confer effectiveness on organizations

### **II. Contextual problem**

On its face value, teamwork looks like a panacea for solving all organizational hitches that can obstruct excellent performance of workers in an organization. There is doubt if the situation is for real. Whereas working together as a team can engender a combined force of action that can easily achieve a goal, the subject also has its negatives. For example, it is capable of encouraging truancy by some members of a team because when they are absent, some colleagues in line with team spirit may help to cover-up for such absentees. There are many

other possible disadvantages of team work. First, because an outfit is not likely to have enough facilities to the point that every facility will be available at one per person, the need arises for common use of what is available which can put pressure on a staff to hurriedly complete his lot to make room for others to start theirs. This is capable of reducing the value of individual output. Team output too could be reduced as a consequence of the contributions of the less skilful members of a team. Also, dedicated workers are often overworked as their groups plead with them to do much in the interest of the group. There is also the tendency for members who don't do same work to be uniformly rewarded as members of a group thereby making it hard to know which members are talented and which are lazy. With all these possibilities, examining the value of esprit de corps in an organization becomes a valuable study. It is probably more germane for entities like a broadcast newsroom where inseparable functions rest heavily on interdependent structures.

To aid this study, the following research questions were formulated

1. Can esprit de corps propel workers to increase their productivity?
2. To what extent can esprit de corps in a broadcast newsroom improve the efficiency of workers?
3. What contribution can esprit de corps make to the organizational effectiveness of a broadcast news outfit?

### **III. Extant studies on esprit de corps**

Henri Fayol, arguably the father of modern management was probably the first theorist to draw attention to the significance of the term 'esprit de corps' by listing it among his famous 14 principles of management (Wren, Bedeian and Breeze 2002). The term is generally understood to mean the promotion of team spirit to build harmony, cohesion and unity within an organization. Citing a recent research by 'Cornerstone On Demand' a-US based learning and talent management solutions provider, Cutler (2014) says 38 percent of workers feel there is not enough collaboration in the workplace. Perhaps this explains why many scholars have shown ample interest in throwing light on the meaning and nature of esprit de corps. Looking at it from a philosophical viewpoint, Grosz (2008) suggests that the concept represents a show of loyalty and attachment to a group with which one identifies. Pathak (2013) recalls that esprit de corps is a French term which translates into 'group spirit' capable of provoking a feeling of belongingness among those in the group such that each of them contributes to the achievement of the organisational goal. This sense of togetherness helps the employees to perform with greater efficiency and positive attitude towards the work. But then, it has to be recognized that the concept has its positive and negative sides. While it develops a feeling of belongingness among workers and propels each of them to perform well, there is the necessary consequence of losing all the listed positive features on account of any violation of the principle of esprit de corps.

On his part, Scanty (2001, p5) equates the term esprit de corps with teamwork, which he defines "as a cooperative process that allows ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results." This viewpoint is informed by the belief that if members of a group can generate sufficient esprit de corps to identify with and believe in the operation of the group, then there is a cycle in which the individuals within the group can potentially be better motivated to perform the assigned functions even well beyond expectation. What this suggests is that teamwork is a great benefit to an organization but Half (2017) says individual members of a working group can also enjoy a set of benefits. The first is that teamwork allows team members ample opportunity to maximize their potentials arising from a satisfying sense of belonging. The second is that by emphasizing the value of teamwork and the importance of collaboration, effective managers simultaneously put the spotlight on the importance of individual contributions. In order to coordinate the individual and corporate goals, Green (2017) recommends that managers should endeavour to fuel an atmosphere of inspiration and collaboration instead of relying much on management by guidelines and restrictions. Green's rationale is that dishing out executive orders is not necessarily the most important factors for shaping a workplace environment that is conducive to innovative thinking, high performance and accelerated productivity.

This is significant because some operatives understand a message more easily only when it is transmitted to them by their peers - an advantage that crosswise or horizontal communication possesses. Such lateral flow of communication, which is usually informal, offers operatives the opportunity of benefitting from communication directly without official bottlenecks and inhibitions. Indeed, lateral communication can easily diffuse the frustration, which the rigid, structural and formal communication generates between departments, sections and units in organizations. Formal communication tends to make each of these groupings function in isolation thereby losing the opportunity to subordinate individual and group interests to that of the organization as one entity. This is a gap, which crosswise communication can automatically bridge and open more doors to team work, and collaboration.

It would appear that the above suggestions are applicable to virtually every organization in Nigeria and elsewhere. In a study of Anambra Motor Manufacturing Company Limited (ANAMMCO), EMENITE and NIGER GAS, Anichebe and Agu (2015, p208) found several deficiencies in the way Nigerian organizations mechanically apply the classical management principle to the running of their organizations. The scholars therefore recommended that workers will be more motivated to perform in a conducive work environment.

Based on this, they made a number of recommendations to assist organizations to achieve the objectives of effective and efficient productivity. Among them are that organizations must understand, accommodate, embrace and promote people dynamics (nature, needs, values, motivations and general cultural political environmental differences); they must review periodically their rules, regulations and manuals to ensure current trends in the business environment; and finally, that organizations should allow for initiative, innovations and workers participation in decision making.

Uzuegbu and Nnadozie (2015) arrived at the same conclusion in their study of the application of classical management principles to the running of Libraries and Information Centres. They argued that esprit de corps was an imperative in the existence of an organisation, which resulted from the coming together of men and women under a collective interest. The scholars reminded Library managers of the age-long saying that 'united we stand, divided we fall' which they insist is applicable to libraries and information centres. They therefore urged managers to ensure that a typical library organisation is characterized by staff unity and co-operation.

The study by Uzuegbu and Nnadozie and that of Anichebe and Agu are slightly different from this study in the sense that unlike this study, which is concerned about only the essence of unity and teamwork in organizations, the other studies have tended to combine all aspects of motivation and staff welfare. Whether or not workers are united, each of them cannot be equally remunerated. Therefore disparities in salaries and allowances if not well managed can adversely affect the degree of harmony among them. Indeed, providing benefits to all workers could make it hard for those who are hard working to have a sense of belonging with others and wholeheartedly fraternize with lazy workers. The point therefore is that irrespective of the level of harmony, unity and peace among workers, equal pay for equal work is more likely to give to workers a high feeling of fairness and equity in the system than esprit de corps.

Based on these studies, one is tempted to believe that broadcast operations can similarly benefit from esprit de corps, more so as it has already been found useful in the related field of theatre management. According to Nwanaju (2008), running a theatre derives great benefits from esprit de corps principle which he interpreted to mean unity of purpose.

#### **IV Theoretical framework**

This study is anchored on an all-time process improvement theory known as Total Quality Management (TQM), which is strategic for the management of service providing entities. According to Bon and Mustafab (2013) TQM is an integral part of the extensive theory of management, which has its links with legendary theorists like Walter Shewhart and Edward Deming. It is also a base for new dimensions such as 'ISO 9000', 'Lean manufacturing', and 'Six Sigma'. TQM is an approach, which can propel each worker to add value through his own performance to his organization. It is quite appropriate for a study such as this, which seeks to examine the influence of esprit de corps on worker behaviour. It is true that where there is harmony and team spirit in an organization, workers are likely to develop a sense of belonging to a group as well as a feeling of ownership that can help the organization make progress. But for such workers that climb on esprit de corps to develop a high sense of responsibility towards organizational effectiveness, there are certain conditions, which TQM proponents elucidate (Tari, 2005; Al-Ibrahim, 2014). Among them are:

- a. The organization must discretely select multi-talented operatives who can excellently perform more than their primary functions
- b. Clear and unambiguous expectations for them must be well defined
- c. There must be a focus on the exact strength of each operative and;
- d. The organization must be prepared to help each operative to fit rightly into the system

The direct implication of these components of TQM is that esprit de corps among workers is just one step towards organizational effectiveness. In other words, the success of a broadcast news outfit would depend not only on the degree of harmony among the workers but the ability of such harmonious team members to add value to the viability of the newsroom. Put differently, reporters, producers and casters who are well disposed to one another must in addition be multi-talented such that they can perform other allied duties different from their primary functions in the department. The news managers on their part must endeavour to effectively communicate to their workers, the nature of their assignments and how they are expected to handle such assignments. Each worker ought to be deployed on the basis of his area of strength and those who are unable to meet their targets should be helped to fit t rightly into the system before being left alone to face his assigned tasks. This would be more obvious when it is realized that in today's digital age, which greatly impacts on broadcasting, effective collaboration is best achieved if the newsroom is transformed into a digital workplace. This presupposes that news managers would arrange to provide in their newsrooms, such systems as well as interactive and digital tools that can facilitate collaborative performance.

## V. Methodology

The study employed the descriptive quantitative survey with questionnaire as the data-gathering instrument. A sample of 90 participants was drawn from six broadcast newsrooms of radio and television stations in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city, which apart from Lagos is the highest media, centre in the country. This was made up of 15 operatives per station consisting of reporters, producers, newscasters, computer designers and camera operators. To ensure that every area of activity in a typical newsroom was represented, news managers who assisted the researcher to distribute and retrieve copies of the questionnaire appreciated the decision to select not less than 2 respondents from each area. Respondents were requested to answer questions concerning the level of harmony and teamwork in the newsroom. They were also to indicate their perceptions of the influence, which such traits of esprit de corps have had on 3 areas namely: a). Increased productivity of broadcast content, b) improved personnel efficiency of all news operatives and c) organizational effectiveness of news departments in the stations. In all, only 2 copies of the questionnaire could not be retrieved from respondents who hurriedly travelled out to cover an international event making it possible for the study to analyze 88copies of the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using simple quantification and percentages.

## VI. Findings and discussions

### Research question 1: Can esprit de corps propel workers to increase their productivity?

One of the main issues which respondents were requested to address was whether affection for each other within a group can put pressure on a worker to hurriedly execute his assignment to give room to others to use the same facility.

**Table 1: Increased productivity**

S/N	Response	Agree	%	Neutral	%	Disagree	%	Remarks
A	Team work pressures staff to complete his job, so others can start theirs	26	29.5	14	15.9	48	54.5	Rejected
B	Members work hard to beat others in the group	24	27.3	18	20.4	46	52.3	Rejected
C	Dedicated workers often get overworked	42	47.4	08	09.1	38	43.2	Accepted

As column A of Table 1 shows, majority of the respondents, that is, 54.5% disagree with the suggestion that team spirit can put pressure on a worker to hurriedly complete his work so that a colleague can have a chance to use the shared facility. Another set of 26 respondents that is 29.5% think it can happen while only 14 respondents making 15.9% are undecided on the issue. With inadequate resources, workers have to jointly use same tools such as transportation, recorders or cameras which could indeed put pressure on some to give way rather prematurely for others to also have opportunity to do theirs. This could happen especially with television reporters but with multitasking, which is fast becoming a popular phenomenon, reporters and cameramen may not have too much to share. In the case of radio, reporters can use their mobile phones to record much needed sound bites for their reports. The position of respondents that such a problem is rare these days appears rational. The same is true of column B in which it was suggested that in the interest of loyalty to a group, its workers could get involved in competition to beat others. That is not a problem to worry about because the goal of each reporter is to get his report into the day's major news bulletin. Until such a burden is achieved, a reporter is not likely to remember his group. Therefore, 46 respondents, that is 52.3% got it right in rejecting the suggestion. In Table 1(C), majority of the respondents know as of fact that managers have a tendency of giving more assignments to well-known hard working achievers. This seems to justify the long-time prescription of the famous Theory X and Y by Douglas McGregor that a good motivating strategy is to reward lazy and hardworking operatives differently. The summary of the point made in Table 1 is that although esprit de corps exists in a broadcast newsroom, it hardly operates in ensuring increased productivity in the system.

### Research question 2: To what extent can esprit de corps in a broadcast newsroom improve the efficiency of workers?

Against the backdrop of the commonly held opinion that teamwork and harmony in a group can inspire its members to confidently work for the good of the group, this study sought to determine the influence of esprit de corps on the quality of performance of newsroom operatives. Table 2 details the findings.

**Table 2. Improved personnel efficiency**

S/N	Response	Agree	%	Neutral	%	Disagree	%	Remarks
A	Because of inseparable assignments workers help each other	30	34.1	28	31.8	30	34.1	Equal
B	Group interest influence high worker performance	42	47.7	10	11.4	36	40.9	Accepted
C	Dedicated workers get overworked in the group interest	44	50	06	6.8	38	43.2	Accepted

On whether newsroom mates help each other on account of the inseparable nature of their assignments, those who accepted and those who rejected were equal. 30 respondents representing 34.1% agreed with the statement while the same number and ratio disagreed. What the equal response suggests is that although workers appreciate the need to help each other but it is not done by everyone perhaps due to pressure or personal challenges. Going by the saying that ‘silence is consent’, it is not irrational to say that there are more believers in helping each other because as many as 28 that is 31.8% of the respondents who were silent in their responses can be added to those who agree. The main point of relevance to this study can be seen in column B of the same Table 2 where it was clearly demonstrated that esprit de corps propels qualitative performance. This is what can be deduced from the acceptance by 42 respondents that in order not to be seen as dragging the team down, each member seeks to perform well. But in item C of the same Table, a large number of 38 respondents, that is, 43.2% chose to reject the view that dedicated workers get overworked in the interest of the group. What this seems to suggest is that dedication to duty may be beyond group interest. It is possible that issues such as working for promotion may have played a strategic role.

**Research question 3:** What contribution can esprit de corps make to the organizational effectiveness of a broadcast news outfit?

In organizational management, there is probably no debate on whether issues such as division of labour and specialization are useful; there are also not many arguments that motivation packages to staff do influence them to get more committed to their functions. What does not appear easy to agree upon is whether increased productivity and improved efficiency would automatically make organizations effective. This is because productivity can increase without a guarantee that products would be qualitative. At the same time a seeming improvement in efficiency levels may not necessarily mean that production is optimum. If so, how best can organizational effectiveness be measured? Table 3 sought to do that.

**Table 3: Organizational effectiveness**

S/N	Response	Agree	%	Neutral	%	Disagree	%	Remarks
A	Helping absentees, encourages truancy	44	50	16	18.2	28	31.8	Accepted
B	Less skilful workers reduce teamwork Quality	36	40.9	08	09.1	44	50	Rejected
C	Teamwork is fruitful, it helps both department and staff	56	63.6	22	25	10	11.4	Accepted

In Table 3, it is easy to observe that many workers who may have developed a lukewarm attitude to work in the hope that colleagues would cover-up their absence are likely to have problems. With as high as 44 respondents, precisely 50% of the total number of respondents to the questionnaire rejecting the idea of helping absentees because it is capable of encouraging truancy, absentees would caution themselves. It is however possible that every absentee may not be a truant as some may have genuine reasons for their absence. This appears to explain why 28 respondents that is 31.8% are willing to help such absentees. It may surprise non-broadcasters to find that 44 respondents that is 50% rejected the statement that less skilful workers can reduce the quality of team work. The nature of broadcasting seems to justify the decision. A poorly done news report is not likely to find its way into a news bulletin let alone to be one of the major highlights which is the goal of every reporter. Besides, there is the inevitable obligation of the production desk to clean up any report that is poorly done. Similarly, with the current high level of competition in the media world, only auditioned and approved newscasters can be given a place in the news caster’s roster which means that less skilful workers would have little opportunity to reduce the quality of teamwork especially in grade A broadcast stations. The acceptance by a majority as huge as 56 respondents that is, 63% that team work is useful both to the staff and department refers to support by colleagues to facilitate success of team workers and not cover-ups. This concerns such cases as where a worker decides to provide his personal car for conveying a coverage crew to an assignment or a technical team to a transmitter site in the absence of an official vehicle. In addition, teamwork presupposes that all the workers were deliberately selected on the basis of individual strength and expertise. In

addition, broadcasting has in-built target setting device which tends to dissuade poor performance as such workers may not meet their targets. These considerations tend to portray workers as apostles of esprit de corps while in everyone's sub-consciousness, meeting organizational expectations is pivotal

## VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study established that by emphasizing the value of teamwork and the importance of collaboration to a work force, effective managers persuasively mobilize their workers to recognize the importance of individual contributions to the vitality of the newsroom. But the study was unable to lead evidence to prove that esprit de corps can on its own ensure the progress of a news outfit even though the principle was found to be valuable. Thus the principle is no doubt a dependent variable whose fortune depends on the state of other allied matters. For instance, the idea of encouraging workers to develop a sense of belonging to the group can only be effective if before it, other matters such as the selection of talented workers, effective division of labour that is premised on specialization are settled. In addition, there are certain fundamental or physiological issues such as basic needs of food, clothing, water and shelter which precede esprit de corps in the hierarchy of workers' needs. They must first be satisfied to create conducive room for team spirit to develop and endure. This is the job not of news operatives but their managers who ought to forecast, plan, organize, command, control and coordinate the system.

Based on the above observations, it is recommended that ample emphasis should be placed on the role of the manager in a newsroom environment to provide ample synergy between and among the various segments of the entity. Without such synergy which can only be achieved through the management of the links between the segments, a broadcast newsroom is not likely to remain in good business for long because rather than working together to achieve the same goal, the different operators may be distracted into territorial claims. Where that happens, a station can hardly develop esprit de corps or achieve unity of direction which can facilitate the attainment of goals.

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