

Customer's negative perception of ZESCO had telling consequences on the corporation. First and foremost because of mistrust, customers were reluctant to pay their bills. Therefore, revenue collection slumped with customers owing the Corporation K130 billion forcing ZESCO to overdraw its account by K8 billion. This led to borrowing from the bank to keep in business. To enhance credibility of the organisation, raise more funding and generally improve public perception the Corporation embarked on an integrated marketing communication program by way of advertising. The objectives set were to create awareness and interest in the benefits of electricity, educate customers on the correct use of electricity, create awareness of the ZESCO product and service offerings, to improve customer understanding of Tariffs and energy charges, and to launch Corporate Marketing campaign whose aim is to position ZESCO as a model citizen and build and strengthen the new Corporate Identity.

Any organisation can employ communication to raise awareness on various issues about their welfare and that of their customer or interest groups. Among other forms of communication, publishing of brochures can be used by organisations. In the past ZESCO has produced several brochures covering topics such as lowering electricity bills, the lottery and the environment, three on safety measures and precautions and one on poisonous chemicals.

A brochure was also published on how bills are calculated. It became apparent that customers lacked this information thus making it difficult for them to understand how bills are arrived at.

2.6.7 Quality of Service Delivery and Communication

Organisations providing goods or services such as electricity as is the case with ZESCO should pay attention to complaints raised against them and ensure that the complaints are taken care of. Once a good relationship is created between customer and organisation, positive contribution towards service improvement can also be attained.

ZESCO has established eight customer service centres in Lusaka. These centres play the important role of interface between the corporation and the customers. These centres avail the customer the opportunity to lodge in complaints and have them solved. Thus, there is daily interaction between the service provider and the customer. This allows the corporation the opportunity to monitor customer satisfaction through the frontline officers. The customer is further given the chance to make suggestions to management.

Kotler and Roberto (1989) acknowledge the significance of interaction between the service provider and the customer. They accentuate the continuous monitoring of customer satisfaction. Customers can do this by making suggestions to the service provider.

Organisations that understand the importance of customer satisfaction ensure that there are proper systems in place to record customer complaints, track the progress of these complaints and guarantee that action is taken to address the underlying issues to help ensure that the problems don't keep re-occurring.

2.6.8 Public Relations in Organisations

The Occupational Outlook Handbook (2002-03 editions) states that an organisation's reputation, profitability, and even its continued existence can depend on the degree to which its targeted "publics" support its goals and policies. This means that the major role of public relations is to build and maintain positive relations with the public.

Public relations are the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics. (ZESCO document 2001)

Parelkar (2003) says 'Public Relations' in common parlance means the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between any organisation and its 'publics'. Otherwise referred to as stakeholders, these

'publics' comprise groups of people whose support is critical to the successful working of an organisation.

The PR office in ZESCO, informs the general public, interest groups, and stockholders of the organisations policies, activities, and accomplishments. It prepares press releases and contacts people in the media who might print or broadcast their material. Sometimes the subject is the organisation's policies towards its employees or its role in the community. Usually the subject is a public issue, such as energy or the environment.

Communication is very important for ZESCO Ltd. This communication includes both communications within the Organisation as well as interaction of the Organisation with the rest of the society. Public relations come in especially when the Organisation has to interact with the rest of the society. In fact, public relations are the face of the Organisation to the society. Vittal (2001) says the primary function of public relations is communication and more effective the communication, the better. This being the age of communication, namely the age of information technology, the Public Relations Office in ZESCO has to use the various means of communication, both in print media and in the electronic media.

Communication as a major function of public relations has amongst its objectives to communicate the organisations' objectives, its roles, and its performance and so on.

In the past ZESCO has delivered printed notices of intention to disconnect supply on premises, giving customers seven days in which to meet their obligation before eventual disconnection. However, recently, ZESCO has used the print and electronic media to inform its customers of its intention to disconnect following customer's failure to meet their monthly obligations.

2.6.9. The Image and the Organisation

Organisations just like individuals can be said to have three identities: what they are, what they think they are and what others think they are. Gopalakrishnan (2000). It is

important for ZESCO to know what its 'image' is, so that it could take corrective steps in terms of its own objectives.

As regards organisations, we identify two kinds of 'images'- one that prevails within the organisation and another that prevails outside, embracing various sections of the public otherwise known as 'stakeholders'. The internal image fundamentally relate to perceptions about the organisations held by employees/executives in the case of businesses and perceptions held by leaders/members/office-bearers in the case of non-commercial organisations.

The external image, embraces perceptions about the corporation prevailing among customers/consumers, suppliers of products and services to the corporation, shareholders, government authorities, media and the community.

The image can be positive, negative and even neutral. The image of ZESCO may be positive with its customers, but still negative with their employees. Consequently, the image requires to be assessed with every audience, say employees, suppliers, customers, shareholders, general public, media, regulatory authorities, etc. For instance, the image of ZESCO as regards suppliers has been negative since the last three years. ZESCO was unable to pay suppliers on time in the past hence suppliers will only deliver upon payment. ZESCO's financial power to pay on time was negatively affected by the slowed privatization process of ZCCM, which owed ZESCO tremendous amounts of money. Presently, ZESCO is rebuilding its image with suppliers by clearing all local debts (which has been achieved) and by not only assuring but also ensuring prompt payments to suppliers.

Srinivasan (2000) calls attention to the value of image audit especially in the designing of both external and internal communication strategies of organisations. Before ZESCO communicates either internally to its own employees or to stakeholders, it should know what the internal stakeholders think about the organisation. For example, there could be widespread dissatisfaction among

employees of ZESCO. Management might attribute this to unattractive wages and keep on increasing its wage bill as a remedy thus raising costs without yielding results, if the root causes of dissatisfaction lie in other factors such as lack of faith in the fairness of decision-makers in the corporation, or lack of awareness of the business goals or long-term vision of ZESCO among the employees.

2.6.10 Role of Mass Communication

ZESCO, large organisation with huge customer base can utilize mass communication vehicles to send messages to its customers. These messages can be sent via campaigns, press releases and advertising. The messages can be designed solely to generate good relations between ZESCO and its customers. However, to accomplish ZESCO's objectives, the messages should be clear, succinct and direct. This is supported by Sillars (1998), when he asserts that:

Communication business must be clear, concise
And direct, otherwise time and money will be
Wasted while those on the receiving end try to
Understand what is being said. (Sillars, 1988:3)

Should the target group fail to understand the message then the message must be changed. This is so because a misunderstood message is equal to waste of money and time. The importance of customer feedback cannot be overemphasized if successful and effective future communication is to be ensured. According to Delozier (1976) management should look for customer feedback so as to re-examine the message and perhaps correct it.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

3.0 Theories and Concepts

This chapter discusses important theories and concepts significant for any argument on communication. In addition, information relevant to issues on communication that will enable us see how far communication theories/concepts are applicable to ZESCO Ltd in relation to its communication approaches within itself internally as an organisation and externally to its customers will be analysed.

The focus of discussion being the effectiveness of internal and external communication approaches of ZESCO as a public utility, demands that the terms organisation, public relations and image are discussed and defined.

3.1 Communication

Definitions of the term communication abound. There probably as many varied definitions as there are scholars on the subject. This is because the study of communication is not a precise science and people disagree on the definition as well as on the nature of communication. As a result various definitions of communication have evolved over a period of time while the act of communication itself is as old as man: and has from time in memorial been a salient feature of the human race. However, it must be noted that the report does not by any means prescribe any particular definition but exclusively exposes the varied definitions in order to bring to the fore the diversity of thought on the subject. It also suffices to point out that our concern is particularly with human communication.

As earlier pointed out many writers have defined communication in varied ways. Let us now look at definitions of scholars as quoted in Infant et al. (1997:6;21). Stevens (1950) suggests that communication is the discriminatory response of an

organism to a stimulus. Dance (1967) defines communication as the eliciting of a response through verbal symbols while Berelson and Steiner (1964) view communication as the transmission of information, ideas, emotion, skills etc. Berlo (1960) posits that human communication is a conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and ideas are expressed in verbal and nonverbal messages. It is dynamic, continuous, irreversible, interactive, and contextual. Miller (1966) brings to the fore the notion of a source (sender) and receiver(s) when he suggests that communication has its central interest those behavioral situations in which a source transmits a message to receiver(s) with the conscious intent to affect the latter's behavior.

Ludlow (2000: 2) defines communication as a personal process that involves the transfer of information and also involves some behavioural input. He further adds that communication does not exist without people taking some form of action. It has everything to do with relationships between people.

Another contribution to the understanding of the concept of communication is that of Kunczik (1992: 5). According to this scholar, communication is not only the fundamental prerequisite to human life and social order but it is also the fundamental social process infusing all aspects of social life.

Kunczik further maintains that communication is very vital in our lives. We cannot do without it. The author lays highlights the fact that we exist because communication is possible and consequently all that we see and have has been made possible because of communication.

Communication has also been portrayed as a process in which those taking part create and share information with one another in order to arrive at mutual understanding. Rogers appears to share this view with other scholars when he posits that depending on the understanding of issues that are shared or communicated, communication can be used to converge or to diverge people .Rogers (1995: 5)

When human beings work symbols to stimulate meaning in other humans, then communication is said to take place. Infante et al. (1997: 8) explain this by accentuating the point that there is a purpose for communicating. Persons do not just communicate from without; they do so in order to derive some meaning from the process of communication. Infante et al also agree the communication is only attainable by socialising with others. Participants in the act of communication internalise the information that is being communicated/transmitted to them.

Lastly, Kasoma (1994: 400-419) posits that communication is the sharing of human life experience and the environment between persons.

It is clear from the varied definitions of communication presented that the various scholars have failed to agree on a single definition of communication. However, it is clear that the symbolic nature of communication is one characteristic of the subject that several communication theorists agree on. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this report, the definition of Infante et al has been chosen because of the following;

- It recognises the sender of the message who creates and encodes the message.
- It recognises the receiver of the message who receives, decodes and interprets it before giving a feedback.
- It has addressed the issue of intentionality by viewing communication as planned behaviour.
- Communication is presented as a transactional process which takes into account both content and relationship aspects.

3.1.1 Function and Contexts of Communication

Communication is a fundamental social process which is deeply integrated into society and when it is studied, people and society are studied (Schramm, 1967). Communication responds to the same needs in all societies be they pre-industrial or modern societies. Peck (1964) notes that in the event of a great occurrence threatening society; for instance, the occurrence arouses a storm of communication, in the same manner when a society is making an important public decision, like electing a president, or holding a referendum, the channels of communication overflow.

Scholars in communication theory generally agree with the notion of communication being contextual. However, to borrow the definition from Infante et al. (1997), communication context is a type of situation in which communication takes place. Consequently, in one situation communication will have different characteristics than in another. The number of contexts within which communication takes place is detailed by Infante et al as follows:

Interpersonal communication - The sharing of information between two people.

Small group communication - This is communication involving several people sharing information within a group.

Organisational communication- The sharing of information occurring within and between organisations. This includes individuals in organisations sharing information.

Public communication - A speaker addressing a large audience.

Mass communication - This is mediated by electronic or print media.

Intercultural communication - The sharing of the environment between people of different cultures.

Family communication - The sharing of information that occurs between family members.

Health communication - Involves health care providers and

health care receivers sharing information.

Political communication - Communication involving the governing part of our society.

Some scholars have in addition referred to channels or media of communication. Rogers (1995: 18) defines a channel of communication as the means by which messages get from one individual to another. The author also discusses communication media and refers to mass media channels that are all the means of transmitting messages that require a mass medium like radio, television, newspapers, etc., also interpersonal channels that entail face to face exchange between two or more individuals.

Although communication takes place in varied contexts, the basic elements in its process remain the same and namely these are:

Sender/Encoder/Speaker – The person who is initiator of the communication process.

Receiver/Decoder/Listener – The person who is receiver of an encoded message which he/she attempts to decode.

Message - Encoded thought transmitted by sender.

Channel - Physical means through/via, which the message is conveyed.

Feedback – Reaction or response to message transmitted by sender.

The above discussed contexts and channels of communication are applicable to ZESCO and can in fact form a vital part of its communication as an organisation.

However, prior to discussing the same in detail, it is salient to briefly discuss the concepts of social system and organisation as we did with communication.

3.2 The Social System

Communication is part of our everyday lives, occurring within a system to which participants of the communication process belong – a social system. Luhmann (1982: 26) refers to social systems as being self-referential systems based on meaningful communication. They use communication to constitute and interconnect the events (actions), which build up the systems.

Society is the encompassing social system, which includes all communications and constitutes meaningful horizons for further communication: society makes communications between other social systems possible.

Rogers (1995) defines the social system as:

A set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal. The members at units of a social system maybe individuals; informed groups, organisations, and/or subsystems. (Rogers 1995:23)

Going by the above definition, one notes that communication cannot be studied in isolation. This notion is backed Burton when he states that:

Communication must therefore be studied in relation to the system within which it operates and by which it is influenced. Without communication no system can function efficiently. It is communication that connects the parts and keeps the complex whole together(Burton, 1980: 5).

Within the system, there exists internal systems whose purpose is to connect them with others. For example, ZESCO as an organisation and a system it has a communication system that provides it with information needed.

Typical of such systems is the communication system which supplies information necessary to maintain the organisation and its operations (Hodge and Johnson 1970: 8)

3.2.1 A System

What is a system? The Encarta encyclopaedia (1997) defines a system as a group of interacting elements forming a whole. Infante et al. (1997) term a system as a set of interdependent units, which work together to adapt a changing environment. For the purpose of this study we will adopt the later definition for it brings out the mutual dependence of units working together to attain a common goal. In addition Infante et al. identify an organisation as a type of a system. This is appropriately applicable to ZESCO it being an organisation and a type of a system.

3.2.2 Organisation

Just as was the case with communication, definitions of what an organisation is, abound. Infante et al. (1997) see an organisation as a hierarchically organised group of people, so large personal relationships with every member of the group is unlikely. In an organisation lines of communication are arranged and controlled for the effective operation of a group. People work together in a structural and coordinated manner. The accomplishment of a common purpose is the prime aim of the group. Interdependence is a feature in organisations and this requires coordination and in turn communication. The absence of communication translates into absence of coordination.

Massie (1979) defines organisation as “a structure and process by which a cooperative group of human beings allocates its tasks among its members, identifies

relationships and integrates its activities towards common objectives” (Massie, 1979:67).

According to Barnard (1962) an organisation is an integrated aggregate of actions and interactions having continuity in time. The material of organisation is therefore personal services, i.e. actions contributing to its purpose. Schein (1976) as quoted by Butler (1986) says the following about an organisation:

An organisation is the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some explicit purpose of goal, through division of labour and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility.
(Schein 1976:9)

Butler (1986) defends Schein’s definition of an organisation for the reason that it brings into focus the element of hierarchy as an essential part of organisation. Rogers (1995) also refers to this element of hierarchy when he defines an organisation as:

a stable system of individuals who work together to achieve common goals through a hierarchy of ranks and a division of labour.
(Rogers, 1995: 376)

Rogers (1995) makes clear that organisations are built to handle large – scale regular tasks through a regularised pattern of human relationships. He further goes on to say that their stability i.e. organisations, arises from the relatively high degree of structure that is imposed on communication patterns. They are formally set up to accomplish specific goals.

The border between organisation and system in terms of definition seems somewhat indistinct. Nevertheless, the concept of organisation as defined by Infante et al shall be used for the purposes of our report.

3.3 Organisational Communication

Thus far it has been established that communication forms an integral part of the overall activities of any organisation. No positive development of any sort can take place without communication playing a critical role. Consequently, communication will occur in varied contexts and, its effective use determines the progress or stagnation.

Many a school of thought has various views on what organisational communication is. However, Infante et al. (1997) gives a comprehensive definition of organisational communication as:

Exchanging messages to stimulate meaning within and between organisations and other environments. Organisational communication involves one to one communication (such as communication between superiors and subordinates), small group communications (meetings, for example), public communication (including public speeches by a chief executive officer), and mass communication (press releases, company newsletters, new product announcements using teleconferencing, perhaps even internal corporate television programmes) Each of these forms of communication may occur between members of the same organisation, or between organisations to coordinate behaviour with each other or with their environment (customers, the government or competitors). (Infante et al., 1997: 323)

Essentially the ultimate success or failure of an organisation is dependent on communication. Therefore, communication must depict the personality of ZESCO to its internal and external audiences.

According to Foltz (1985) organisational communication is the exchange of information, ideas and feelings. He further goes on to argue that the key to gaining support for organisational objectives, policies and programmes is to serve the

organisation's audiences, knowing what they want and how they prefer to get it. Foltz also notes that it is impossible to group audiences into a single group constituting the same interests and similar information needs because they come from varied environments and have equally diverse backgrounds and points of view.

It is of paramount importance for an organisation to paint a clear picture of itself and its views to its many diversified audiences, be it to the general public, customers (and potential ones), suppliers, government officials, its own employees, etc., and the organisation must listen to their views and comments. Organisational communication must take into account the audience needs and interests as well as the media for communication. The media for communication should comprehensively include informal media, "upward" media and other "downward" media as well as employee publications. By "upward" media we mean all creative channels involved in affording employees means of expressing their sought opinions, thereby giving them the opportunity to comment on or question anything related to the organisation and their own jobs. By "downward" media we mean downward communication beyond the employee publication i.e. a number of other print media used to communicate downward.

Print media can be used to communicate both up and downward. This can be in the form of letters, bulletin boards, posters, etc. Computers, audio-visual materials can also be used for downward communications. However, it must be noted that the above mentioned should all be part of a deliberately worked out programme of communication activities involving both lower and higher ranking employees. It is imperative that the programme of communication activities has the support from the top for organisational communication is the responsibility of line management and, as the top manager, the chief executive officer should support and be involved with the objective-setting process for communication.

Foltz (1985) identifies and lists 12 potential communication objectives in an organisation as follows:

1. Establish a formal programme of regular communication with all employees.
2. Establish one regular channel of downward printed communication to all employees to inform them about all aspects of issues pertinent to the company and industry to be distributed once a week.
3. Issue a publication that will permit more in-depth coverage of internal and external issues. Distribute to all employees and other appropriate and audiences on bimonthly or quarterly basis.
4. Issue a special management publication that will address the special needs of managers.
5. Emphasize subjects that relate to corporate objectives. The subjects will include competition, government regulation, marketing plans, productivity, pay and benefits.
6. Hold regular meetings between management and employees. Encourage questions from and discussion with employees on problems, and opportunities, and explanations of how employees fit into the bigger picture.
7. Give the employees an annual state-of-the-business review, of corporate as well as local matters.
8. Encourage supervisors to meet regularly with employees to discuss issues, problems and opportunities. Ideally, specific communication responsibilities should be written into supervisory position descriptions.
9. Communicate information about the organisation to employees no later than it is distributed to outside news media.
10. Install methods and procedures that encourage employees to ask questions, such as telephone hotlines and “speak up” programme.
11. Conduct surveys every other year to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication programme and to determine audience needs and interests.
12. Re-examine these objectives annually to be sure they are in line with organisational objectives. (Foltz, 1985:7-8)

3.3.1 Corporate Communication

Grunig (1992) proposes that corporate communications can be thought of as evolving in three general stages based on the ultimate goal of the communication effort.

Stage One. The goal is “publicity,” or simply getting positive exposure for the corporation. Publicity is a one-way process emphasizing the placement of “positive stories” in print and broadcast media as effectively and efficiently as possible. Any concerns about authenticity or the welfare of the audience are placed below concerns for positive coverage.

Stage Two. The goal is persuasion. This stage emerges as organisations such as ZESCO begin “listening” to their audiences and stakeholders through focus groups, Questionnaires and telephone polling. Using this information, communication efforts are filtered and targeted in systematic campaigns. Information gathering and analysis is used to sway public opinion and behaviour toward pre-existing goals. The overall effort is still one-way, or asymmetrical.

In Stage Three the purpose is mutual benefit. Two-way communication increases and becomes more open. Eventually, ZESCO opens its decision-making to stakeholder input such as government. Communication becomes a medium for finding common ground and building strategies of mutual gain for the organisation and stakeholders alike. An example of this is the on going commercialisation of ZESCO an alternative survival strategy to privatisation, born out of two way communication between ZESCO and Government the major stakeholder. Grunig refers to this stage as “symmetrical two-way communication.”

Even though the above three phases have developed over time, they symbolize models of thought and practice in present-day communications management. Research cited by Grunig indicates that organisations operating at Stage Three enjoy stronger internal and external support than organisations operating at any other stage.

3.4 Link between Effective Organisational Operations and Communication

In view of the fact that the report focuses on the effectiveness of the rapport between ZESCO and its customers through organisational communication; it is of importance to discuss some theories that are likely to have an influence on effective communication between ZESCO and its customers. Theories such as: Cultivation Theory, Independent Mindedness and Diffusion Theory.

3.4.1 Cultivation Theory

The cultivation theory sometimes referred to, as the cultivation hypothesis or cultivation analysis was an approach developed by Professor George Gerbner. The theory asserts that our view of reality is influenced by television (TV). The cultivation theory posits that repeated exposure to consistent media portrayals and themes will influence or have bearing on our perception of items. These items are portrayed in the directions of the media portrayals. Moreover, TV has acquired a central place in society.

McQuail and Windhal note that the cultivation theory presents television as 'not a window on or reflection of the world, but a world in itself (1993:100). They further state that persistent exposure leads to the adoption of a consensual view of society.

Those who watch increasing amounts of television are
predicated to show increasing deviance of beliefs about
reality away from the known picture of the social world
and towards 'television' picture of the world.

(McQuail and Windhal 1993:101)

According to Severin et al (1991), TV has become a key member of the family, telling most of the stories, most of the time. Cultivation theorists argue that television has long-term effects, which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant.

Cultivation research avoids the artificiality of laboratory experiments- it is based on normal viewing over a long period. The theory has been tested extensively by numerous empirical studies based on the relationships between TV viewing habits and audience beliefs and behaviour. In one research Gerbner discovered that heavy TV viewers often gave answers that were close to the way the world was portrayed on TV. In addition, most heavy viewers were unaware of any influence of television viewing on their attitudes and values. Cultivation theorists argue that heavy viewing leads viewers (even among high educational/high income groups) to have more heterogeneous or divergent opinions). The cultivation effect of television viewing is one of 'levelling' or 'homogenizing' opinion.

In view of the cultivation theory, ZESCO can employ TV to promote its image in order to win support or favour from customers. The relationship between ZESCO and its customers can only be improved by promoting the organisation's image to levels appreciated by the target audiences. Some ways of doing this is via the media such as TV as well as print media and radio.

3.4.2 Diffusion Theory

Diffusion is a communication theory synonymous with Everett Rogers. Diffusion as defined by Rogers (1962) is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. The distinctive characteristic of this genre of communication is that it is primarily focused on the dissemination of new ideas. The fundamental attributes of diffusion process, as presented by Rogers (1995) is the information exchange through which one individual communicates a new idea to one or several others. In its basic form the process involves (1) an innovation , (2) an individual or other unit of adoption that has the knowledge of the innovation or experience with using it, (3) another individual or other unit that does not yet have experience with innovation, and (4) a communication channel connecting the two units (Rogers 1995).

Although the theory appears to deal more with inter-personal relations, the relevance of some elements of diffusion theory to ZESCO will be discussed in a later chapter of this report for instance the notion of homophily. Homophily is a commonly held notion regarding human communication. It holds that the transfer of ideas takes place most frequently between individuals who are similar or homophilous. (Rogers 1995)

The sameness is based on certain attributes such as beliefs, education, social status, etc. In circumstances where by an individual has a choice on which to interact with among any one of a number of other individuals, there is a strong likelihood to choose one who is similar. Communication with people who are clearly different may create cognitive dissonance.

3.4.3 Independent-Mindedness Theory

This theory is about the tendency of persons to have their own thoughts and opinions rather than passively accept the opinions of others and to express and advocate those personal views. (Infante et al. 1997:32)

The Independent-mindedness theory can lead to individual development, improved performance and also to high self esteem. Such development would lead to overall improved organisational performance. The theory examines effective communication from two angles:

1. It predicts that employees prefer supervisors who give subordinates freedom of expression and affirm subordinates' self-concept, and
2. It predicts that employees who are treated this way by their supervisors will benefit the organisation because they will be more productive, more satisfied with their jobs, and more committed to the organisation (Infante et al. 1997:326)

The independent-mindedness theory, assumes that the values that are held by the society should be reflected in the work place. Individuals and organisations are

treated as part of a larger cultural system. Therefore, the organisations must reflect the larger culture of its workers. When this is done the organisation is managed effectively. In turn a good relationship would exist between workers and management in an organisation.

Though the theory of independent-mindedness is focused on the superior-subordinate communication, it is of importance to recognize the theory of independent-mindedness in relation to organisational communication when discussing interpersonal communication.

This theory can be applied to the ZESCO customer service centres. In these centres the customer service officers have to reflect the values held by the society if they are to serve and provide customer satisfaction effectively. The individual front office persons are part of a larger cultural system. This theory is also applicable to the customer service centre environment where superior-subordinate communication is much in evidence. Effective communication in the centres can be examined from the two angles presented by Infante et al. (1997:326).

3.4.4 Social Marketing Theory

Social marketing theory is a combination of theoretical perspectives and a set of marketing techniques. Social Marketing has been defined as:

The design, implementation, and control of
programs seeking to increase the acceptability
of a social idea or practice in a target group.
(Kotler, 1975)

The theory uses concepts of market segmentation, consumer research, and idea configuration, communication, facilitation, incentives, an exchange theory to maximise target group response. (Kotler, 1975)

In social marketing the intervention is developed from a solid base of communication and social-psychological theories: marketing techniques are used to supplement message development and programme implementation. (Wallack, 1990).

According to Solomon (1989) the social marketing theory is based on the “marketing philosophy” that persons will adopt new behaviours or ideas if they feel that something of value is exchanged between that person and the social marketer. Therefore, one of the goals of a social marketer should be to meet consumer needs and wants. The ‘something’ can be a tangible product (i.e. oral contraceptive) or an idea (i.e., notion of family planning) or both.

Chapman et al. (1993) hold the assumption that well-honed and demonstrably effective techniques from commercial business sector can successfully and efficiently be applied to advance social causes. The techniques referred to include the five “Ps” – product, price, place, promotion and positioning. The product refers to the behaviour (i.e. eating low fat foods) or idea (i.e. eat five fruits and vegetables a day for better health) that the audience need to accept. A product line refers to the variety in which the product can be promoted (i.e. drink fruit juice instead of eating a banana) to attain the goal of adoption of the product.

The price of the product refers to the monetary as well as the non-monetary cost of a product. These non-monetary costs include psychological, social, or convenience costs. For example, the promotion of low fat diet may not only require buying higher priced low fat products but also increase difficulty in obtaining such products; preparing them and making them part of a new lifestyle. A reduction in these costs greatly increases the chances that a new idea/product will be adopted. The place refers to the distribution sites of the product. The greater the number of distribution sites and the more convenient and appropriate the places where the product can be found the better the chance that awareness and use of the product is facilitated. Promotion of a product refers to the ways in which the audience is made aware of the product, such as use of advertisements, direct marketing and other avenues.

In the promotion of a product social marketing campaigns rely on the interaction between mass media and interpersonal channels for increasing awareness and facilitating change. Positioning refers to the psychological “image” of the product. For example, the promotion of a low fat diet can be “positioned” as a healthy way to a “slimmer” body, or, a way to reduce the chances of getting health disease or certain type of cancer. The promotion of prepaid meters can be positioned as a cost efficient way of using electricity, or, a way of being in control of electricity usage in the home thus increasing spending money for other household needs.

Organisations, especially those that are utility service providers can employ the social marketing concepts to ensure both customer satisfaction and effective communication for identification of needs and wants of consumers is main key to successful marketing of ideas and behaviours. Related to social marketing is the notion of “edu-entertainment”. This refers to the use of traditional entertainment (i.e. soap operas, songs, theatre) for educational purposes. The goal of social marketing is to build a long-term relationship between an organisation and its different audiences.

3.4.5 Theory-Persuasion

Persuasion can be defined as the act of influencing a person to make a desirable choice. It is a concept that is probably as old as mankind. It seems predictable that people will try to influence other people, even their closest friends and family members. For centuries people must have operated on the basis of intuition and common sense in their attempts to persuade. (Severin, 1991: 147)

ZESCO can employ the theory of persuasion if it is to communicate effectively, in its public education effort to influence the behaviour of its customers as regards for example, encouraging customers to conserve energy or pay bills on time. This can be achieved by using bill inserts, brochures, advertisements, special events etc. to persuade people to pay bills and conserve energy. Severin puts it in plain words that persuasion is in-born and states that whatever angle is looked at, a number of persuasive strategies have to be employed in the process of persuasion.

There are twelve types of persuasive strategies. These are the appeals that are employed in order to sell our goods and services. The appeals are as follows:

- (a) Appeal to Ethics (Ethos): This appeal is used to share values, beliefs, and experiences. It also conveys a sense of fairness and shows values of being well informed.
- (b) Appeal to Emotions: This appeal uses vivid descriptions, concrete specific as well as figurative languages.
- (c) Appeal to Reason: Analogy is used in this appeal. It also explains cause and effect, creates a definition and it also uses testimonies.
- (d) Appeal to Authority: This appeal takes advantage of authority figures who help a lot in terms of credibility.
- (e) Appeal to Personal Fulfilment: This appeal is usually used in developmental matters and it calls for being very imaginative.
- (f) Appeal to the Bandwagon effect: This appeal is used to persuade people to buy by creating an impression that what is being sold is meant for every one.
- (g) Appeal to Family Values/Nostalgia: People do value marriage; therefore values of family life are stressed here.
- (h) Appeal to Fear of Rejection: This appeal is exploited to dismiss the fear of being rejected.
- (i) Appeal to Sexual Success: In this appeal, men and women are used as sexual objects.
- (j) Appeal to Reinforcement of Listener's Ego: This appeal is used to sell goods and services of high quality.
- (k) Appeal to Prestige: This kind of strategy is used to persuade people by provoking them to have goods and services, which are regarded as prestigious.
- (l) Appeal to Value of Quality: This appeal reinforces one's ego and at the same time convinces the listener that the product being sold is worth the price.

The theory of persuasion is important to ZESCO for the corporation can use persuasion to change or neutralise hostile opinions, crystallise latent opinions and positive attitudes and conserve favourable opinions.

3.5 Public Relations

Although Public Relations (PR) has a relatively brief history of less than a hundred years, it has been defined in many widely differing ways. According to Grunig (2001) public relations is an important management function which helps to balance the self interests of the organisation with the interests of people who are affected by the organisation or who have the power to affect the organisation – people that Grunig calls “publics”. Expressed otherwise public relations are the management of communication involving an organisation and its publics, to include customers, employees, stakeholders and the general community.

The earliest definitions of Public Relations emphasized the roles of the Press Agency and publicity, major grown. As public relations began to be distinguished and used by more organisations, its definition tended to be lengthy often describing what PR does than what it is. However, in 1988 the Public Relations Society of America, through its Assembly, formally adopted a definition of PR, which has become most accepted and widely used:

Public relations helps an organisation and its

Publics adapt mutually to each other.

(Public Relations Society of America 1988)

In this definition, the fundamental functions of research, planning, communications dialogue and evaluation are implied. The key words are ‘organisation’ and ‘publics’, which recognises that all organisations have multiple publics from which they must acquire consent and support. An organisation’s reputation, profitability, and even its continued existence can depend on the degree to which its targeted ‘publics’ support its goals and policies (Occupational Outlook Handbook 2002-03).: Besides telling the organisation’s story PR also has the vital task of understanding the attitudes and

concerns of consumers, employees and various other groups. An organisation such as ZESCO should use PR as a tool for establishing and maintaining cooperative relationships with representatives of community, consumer, employee, and public interest groups and with representatives from print and broadcast journalism.

Public relations should not be mistaken for advertising or marketing, even though the said functions are frequently used in public relations programmes and vice versa. Often the meaning of public relations is confused with selling, marketing, promotion or publicity.

ZESCO defines public relations as the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and full information. Furthermore, it is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics. Alternatively referred to as stakeholders, these 'publics' comprise groups of people whose support is critical to the successful working of an organisation. Therefore, public relations are a strategic management tool that helps in getting attention and shaping public opinion.

In public relations are included ongoing activities that ensure the organisation has a strong public image. These activities also incorporate helping the public to comprehend the organisation and its products. Habitually, as perhaps earlier mentioned public relations are conducted through the media that is, newspapers, television, magazines, etc. (www.mapnp.org/library/pblc-rel.htm). Besides being seen as one of the primary activities contained in promotions PR is also said to be Management of Reputation.

3.5.1 Image

The word image is derived from the Latin image ("Picture," "semblance," or "likeness"), an image is a representation of what is perceived, registration on the mind of an object or scene (Grolier Multimedia Encyclopaedia, 2000). In physics the

term image means a 'reflection'. However, when we use image in our context of Public Relations, 'perception' or 'total awareness' tends to be more appropriate.

Srinivasan (2000) says, organisations just like in the case of individuals, have three identities: what they are, what they think they are and what others think they are. More often than not, these three identities do not coincide. However, it is in the interest of the organisation concerned to know what its 'image' is, so that it can take corrective steps in terms of its objectives.

The 'images' that prevail within an organisation such as ZESCO are of two sorts – one that exists within the organisation and another that exists outside, embracing diverse sections of the public that could be described collectively as stakeholders.

The internal image is one that relates to perceptions about the organisation held by employees/executives. On the other hand, the external image, in the case of a business organisation embraces the perceptions about the organisation prevailing among customers/consumers, suppliers of products and services to the organisation, shareholders, government authorities, media and the community located around specific factories/complexes, (The Hindu, India's National Newspaper – 26 April 2000)

The vitality of communication for life itself cannot be over emphasised. This communication includes both communications within the Organisation as well as interaction of the Organisation with the rest of the society. Public Relations come into play especially when the Organisation has to interact with the rest of the society.

ZESCO's corporate image is the picture that its audiences have of it. It will be determined by all ZESCO's actions. The problem that ZESCO may face is that different audiences will interpret a message in different ways. This makes the management of the corporate image an on going task. The corporate image is supported by PR. Public Relations, manages the communications between an

organisation and its publics, continuously and consistently works to deliver an organisation's key messages and logo to the market place. Through press releases, news letters, advertising and other programmes, public relations works to create and communicate corporate identity.

The next chapter discusses the experiences of the student during the attachment.

Chapter 4

Personal Experiences

4.0 Location of the Attachment and Facilities

The student's place of attachment was at a Customer Service Centre located at the Kabwata (Southern) Regional Offices of ZESCO Ltd. It must be noted that there are eight customer service centres spread around Lusaka. However, the location of the Kabwata Customer Service Centre at the Regional Offices makes the Centre unique in comparison to the other seven centres. This is so because the centre is in direct contact with other departments such as those of Metering, Billing, Faults, Operations and Maintenance. These are all vital departments as regards the delivery of quality customer service. Furthermore, the Regional Office has a customer base of approximately 35000. This customer base is composed of the low, middle and high-income population from the various townships and thus made the Kabwata Customer Service Centre suitable for the student's practical attachment.

The Kabwata Regional Office houses the region's Operation and Maintenance team headed by the Regional Manager. The Billing and Metering sections form one department headed by a Regional Accountant. There is also the Faults department led by the faults duty manager who coordinates the management of faults such as outages 24/7. A centre manager heads the Customer Service Centre, which is the interface between the Corporation and its customers. Being the interface between the Corporation and its customers, it carries out the following activities: Frontline Desk functions of New Applications, Fault Reporting, Complaints and Query Handling, Money Collection. Resolution of billing queries and Customer Account management are other tasks carried out by the centres.

Payment of bills by Customers is decentralized, this means that Customers are able to pay for their electricity bill in any of the widely spread ZESCO Customer Service Centres, regardless of where they are or live. Customers may pay their electricity bills by cash, cheques and by debiting their bank accounts and crediting their ZESCO

Accounts. The available payment facilities presently include, Prepayment, Cash payments, cheque payments and Direct Debit and Credit Clearing Service (DDACC). DDACC is a recently introduced payment facility that allows customers with Kwacha bank accounts to reduce on queuing up to pay their bills. Through the Customer Service Centres ZESCO's also operates a flexible payment method, known as a Cash planner payment commitment plan, which allows customers with arrears and are unable to settle at time of disconnection to pay within three months. Customers may sign the payment commitment plan even before they are threatened with disconnection.

Customer Services also deals with customers that wish to apply for power supply as well as deal with any act of dissatisfaction on the part of the customer, and Complaints are attended to in the shortest time possible.

4.1 Orientation and Expectations

The Practical Attachment (PA) begun on a slow note as the student had to wait for the formalities such as the writing of the acceptance letter to be dispensed with by the Human Resource Development and Placement Office. This process took approximately ten days. However, during this period the student was already making observations. It must be mentioned that the presence of the student in the Customer Service functions and Directory was by no means conspicuous. This can be explained by the fact that though this student was on attachment, he was also an employee of ZESCO Ltd in the Customer Service Directory. Hence, the student was not new to the work environment and thus needed no introduction to other members of staff in the various departments visited.

As the writer was seen more as an employee in a supervisory position than as a student, he was expected to be involved in most of the duties and activities of customer service. This involved the managing of a quality and cost effective customer service centre, embracing all aspects of quality customer service and building a positive image of ZESCO Ltd.

The main tasks of the Centre Manager were:

- a) Processing all customer transactions and queries.
- b) Operating account payment services that is queue-free.
- c) Ensuring that all functions in the customer service centre are carried out in accordance with ZESCO Ltd. Guidelines and procedures.
- d) Developing effective relations with all customer groups within the region and fellow workmates.
- e) Ensuring that productivity levels on all customer service activities continue to improve.
- f) Reviewing customer complaints regarding bills/invoices, meter readings and Consumption patterns
- g) Arranging for investigation of complaints.
- h) Recommending for corrective actions with the appropriate authority.
- h) Monitoring and overseeing all activities associated with customer/staff
- i) Preparing monthly report of work performed in the customer service centre.

4.2 Working Hours

The student's working hours were tied to the operations of the Customer Service Centre. This meant that the student like the centre staff would report at 07:45 hours and knock-off at 17:00 hours Monday to Friday, breaking off for 1 hour lunch at 12:45 hours. During times of disconnections (very busy time) the student would often miss lunch and work beyond 17:00 hours mostly to attend to customers awaiting reconnection following payments. It must also be noted that the student hardly ever took the one-hour lunch break. More often than not the influx of customers needing to see the Centre Manager, tended to increase during the given time for lunch as this seemed to be the ideal time for working customers to visit the centre. The centre would also open on Saturdays from 08:00 hours to 13:00 hours.

4.3 Office Accommodation

The student had a well-furnished office to himself for the entire period of the attachment and assumed all the earlier mentioned duties of a Centre Manager. The office was equipped with a networked and Internet connected computer, telephone fax all necessary tools for communication, a fridge stocked with refreshments for possible visitors, and air-conditioned.

4.4 Relationship with members of staff

The student related very well not only with the Customer Service Staff but also with staff from the various earlier mentioned departments. The members of staff in the Customer Service Centre were seven in total inclusive of the student. The number of staff encouraged the reliance on interpersonal communication to be used most of the time. The role of supervisor demanded the student to hold meetings with staff twice in a month. This allowed for the sharing of experiences encountered during the course of duty to be shared amongst staff as well as the exchange of ideas to improve office operations. Problems encountered during the course of duty were also discussed as well as any changes of procedures in relation to work.

The members of staff from the centre and other departments freely interacted with the student. The student was also frequently in contact with other customer service centres within Lusaka and also with the overall overseer of all the centres i.e. the Customer Service Manager.

4.5 Interaction with Customers

On a daily basis the student interacted with customers as most sought the overall centre supervisor's intervention in most problems they encountered. Most problems brought to the attention of the student involved prolonged outages as a result of vandalised transformers, perceived delay in reconnecting customers following disconnection for non payment, apparent wrong billing and the corporation's seemingly delayed response to customer query. It must be mentioned that at most times a lot of tact was required on the student's part when dealing with such queries

as some customers could be quite aggressive in their approach. The student interacted with all kinds of customers such as government officials, diplomats, politicians, medium and high density residents etc. The experience was quite challenging at times as the customers could be rather personal and abusive as they vented their anger and displeasure at ZESCO. The student at times exercised great patience, tolerance and touches of humour in order to avoid seemingly “life and death” situations as he interacted with often annoyed customers.

4.6 Transport

The Customer Service Centres have at least one vehicle assigned to them. The few that do not have transport, share a vehicle by way of coordinating their programmes in a manner that facilitates sharing. Kabwata Customer Service Centre being one of the Centres with a large customer base had a vehicle to itself. This vehicle was used for the daily activities of banking the centres daily revenue collections and also to attend to certain customer queries that required site visits. An officer would be assigned to investigate the status of a meter at customer premises or in the case of a block of flats to identify the meter belonging to a particular customer.

The overall control of the vehicle was the responsibility of the Centre Manager. The driver would log each trip made and at the end of the month write a report indicating the mileage and the fuel consumption of that month.

Access to transport made the delivery of customer service more manageable. However, when it came to the Faults Department transport was not enough to cater for the large customer base. At the peak of outages only two Land Rovers would be readily available while two others would be in the garage for servicing at any one time making it quite challenging to promptly respond to customer demands.

In the next chapter the student will look at the problems in Customer Service and the attempts to solve them.

Chapter 5

PROBLEMS IN CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THEM

5.0. The Role of Customer Service

5.0.1 Background

The early 1990s were characterized by a liberalised economy and political dispensation. In response to the new environment ZESCO underwent significant changes in a major way. The Corporation was transformed from being production oriented to being customer focused and market driven. The enactment of the new electricity act of 1995 deregulated the electricity industry. Thus the need for ZESCO to get closer to customers and provide high quality electricity supply and service became a necessity if the corporation was to stand the competition from any would be electricity utility entrants.

By way of introducing a new corporate identity, a critical part to any organisation's marketing programme and the cornerstone on which all corporate communication programmes are based; ZESCO enforced change.

5.0.2 Customer Service Directorate

The Customer Service Directorate in ZESCO was created as a result of the corporation's goal of "Customer focus". During a period of ten years, ZESCO's customer base had rapidly increased from around 100,000 in 1993 to circa 270,000 in 2001. In view of the rapidly growing customer base, it became increasingly clear that the corporation was not paying as much attention to the customer and the commercial side of the business as it was to its technical side.

Consequently, the corporation's lack of focus as regards customer service led to very dissatisfied customers. The unresolved number of customer queries and complaints

augmented. ZESCO's performance in the commercial area was without doubt unsatisfactory.

Thus the Customer Service Directorate was formed. Its principle role is to look after and carry out the commercial activities of the corporation and also to be the interface between the corporation and the customer.

5.0.3 Customer Base and Electricity Accessibility

It was mentioned in the earlier chapters that ZESCO is wholly owned by the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) and as such it is one of Governments major development tools. It is GRZ's intention to increase the population's access to electricity from the current 20% to 50% within the next five years. Thus ZESCO has embarked on a massive electrification drive expected to increase the customer base which is presently circa three hundred thousand to over five hundred thousand.

5.1 Customer Service Functions

Customer Service activities involve frontline desk functions such as receipt of applications for new connections, metering, meter reading, billing, bill delivery, revenue collection and customer management. Customer management specifically involves handling complaints and queries, faults management, change of account/premises and also the segmentation of customers by tariff, preference etc.

5.2 Credit Management

Under credit management is the Power Cut Department. This is a specially designed department used by the credit management team as a tool to collect revenue from customers who fail to pay their bills promptly that is by the stipulated date. Under normal circumstances a seven day notice is given to the customer and if the notice is ignored then the Power Cut Team moves in and disconnects supply.

Depending on the amount the customer owes the corporation, a forty-eight (48) hour notice may be given as well. However, before supply is disconnected, the power cut consultants advise customers to switch off all their appliances before disconnection.

Once a customer is disconnected they are required to pay a minimum of 75 % of the total bill plus penalties before reconnection.

Following payment of 75% and penalties, reconnection is done within 48 hours and the remaining 25% must be paid within three months. Usually it is bills that are more than two months old that receive disconnection notices.

5.3 Customer Service Problems

ZESCO as a corporation has gone through difficult times in the area of Customer Service. Early, 1998, a new Customer Information Billing System (CIS) was introduced. This coincided with the sharp increase of tariff rates never experienced before as the Electricity industry endured the first jolts of a liberalised economy. The nations overall economy across the nation declined as inflation rose. Simultaneously, the buying power for most business units and households experienced a down ward steep as the Kwacha value depreciated. The repercussions of a liberalised economy were great as the nation further experienced widespread job losses as industry's production capacity dwindled and some cases companies simply shut down. Against this harsh milieu, and inevitable globalisation, customers became much more aware of their rights and began demanding for a better service from utilities at world class standards but at the lowest possible cost. Unfortunately, the newly introduced billing system was not adequately marketed to ZESCO customers externally nor was it internally promoted to ZESCO staff themselves before it was eventually introduced. Consequently, most customers do not comprehend the billing system and have often risen against ZESCO blaming it literally for all their economic ills, perceived or real.

In its efforts to correct this situation ZESCO has made attempts to identify major problems, in order of priority. ZESCO has also made attempts to analyse the root

causes and offer solutions to the most critical and pressing problems that have affected the corporation's ability to deliver a better quality customer service.

5.3.1 CIS- Billing

At the time of introducing the CIS billing system to replace the then existing VAX-Virtual Memory System of billing the data in the earlier system had aged. This meant the held information on customers was unreliable. One concern was that some customer premises connected to power might not even been on the billing roll. Hence, it was important that an attempt was made to capture customer data accurately from the preamble to guarantee the integrity of the new CIS system.

The process of implementing the CIS system was very slow from the commencement of data collection in 1994. Because of the delayed implementation; important information such as customer details, premises data, metering/transformer records which were subject to change on a day to day basis had significantly been altered by the time the same was exploited. As a result the system started off with unreliable, redundant or duplicate data in many cases. Furthermore, meters/transformers have been changed at Customer premises without timely and adequate feed back into the system.

This has in turn affected ZESCO's ability to recover outstanding debt. The task of debt reduction is ever made awesome due to the fact that customers are suspicious, and are in most cases convinced that they are being overcharged. Coupled with this is the bad response time to customer's complaints queries and requests.

Despite the consequences of the organisation and co-ordination issues, the current CIS bears most responsibility for the debt situation.

As mentioned above, the difficult period in customer service coincided with the time of economic mayhem. Thus, a lot of customers have been shifting from one place to another at a rapid rate. And in the process customers have not always been willing to

register their movements with ZESCO by filling in the necessary “Cessation-of-Supply” or “Application-for-Supply” forms.

This is a starting point of much inconvenience to new customers who find themselves with huge outstanding bills accrued by previous occupants on newly acquired premises/properties. To escape this reality, some customers open new accounts (under different names) without formally ceasing or closing the old one. Subsequently, a situation whereby duplicate accounts/bills are delivered to one and the same premises is created. This partly due to the fact that the system is not made aware of the closure and opening of respective accounts.

5.3.2 Metering and Fixed Consumption Charges

Ever since the early eighties, a situation has continued whereby customers on newly installed electricity supply have been connected without any meters being installed at their delivery point. This was in the past, mainly due to foreign exchange problems that prevailed at the time. In other cases faulty meters were not being replaced as speedily as the occurrence of such cropped up.

Therefore, towards the late nineties when the CIS was being introduced, ZESCO had a huge backlog of meters to install at premises of new customers as well as at premises where replacement of faulty meters was required. The corporation is to date battling with this backlog which affects approximately ninety percent plus of the residential tariff category customers. These customers are mostly in shanty townships and are usually of low-income bracket. In the past people in the townships where often connected to supply without much planning.

This category of customers were and are still catered for by the provision of an Un-metered Residential (UR) tariff category upon which they are billed using pre-determined (constant) units of consumption periodically. This has its disadvantages. When the occupants of the premises temporarily vacate for short or long periods, ZESCO continues sending bills to those customers, as in most cases the information

may not always reach ZESCO on time. This is the foundation of numerous complaints that result in forcing billing officers to spend a long time annulling and correcting such bills. The effect of such problems is colossal. ZESCO suffers considerable losses from un-refunded Government Tax and VAT previously calculated by ZRA. The time and man hours lost from the tedious exercise of reversing these bills, has a negative impact on the billing cycle whereas the consequential customer dissatisfaction remains immeasurable.

5.3.3 Customer Dissatisfaction

As households experienced worsened economic realities, customers have learnt to compare their bills with the 'the next door neighbour'. In the event of un-metered customers making a comparison between their bill and that of metered customers, a serious anomaly is detected as in most cases the measured consumption is far much less than the fixed consumption charged.

This leads customers to accuse ZESCO of conniving with other customers to reduce the bill whilst seeking financial cure by stealing from others. On occasions following customer complaint, a meter technologist is sent out to install a meter. However, the communication regarding the changed meter status of particular premises does not often take place. Thus, as far as billing is concerned the customer may continue to be billed on fixed consumption charge for some time until a complaint is yet again registered. This would necessitate rebilling of that account for the period when there was a lapse.

Faults, and maintenance works are a source of customer grief in certain areas where customers are on un-metered tariff. During prolonged outages whereby customers remain off supply, the billing system does not readily detect. Hence, affected customers feel that ZESCO is insensitive to their plight because following the lengthy time it has taken to restore power supply, ZESCO further 'lumps' the customer with a bill for the full month in question.

However, some customers especially in shanty towns have benefited from the absence of meters on their premises. They have actually become illegal distributors of power to neighbours. In some cases small-scale industries have developed that consume more power than the assigned fixed charge. Some small scale factories actually draw free power because of under-assessment since they have never been metered from inception.

Following a critical shortage of Poly-phase meters, a custom came up whereby customers on three phase supply would be connected utilizing three single-phase meters to measure energy consumption on each phase. However, the design of the CIS system is such that it can only handle a maximum of only two meters i.e. one in the energy (kWh) category and the other one for power (kVA). In order to arrive at a total reading to be entered onto the representative fictitious meter in the CIS system, the assigned meter reader has to total up the three separate readings from each meter. The likelihood of additional errors is very high. In addition, it is difficult for the customer to compare readings at their premises to those on the generated bill. Especially that the load set up is unbalanced, one of the meters will usually clock earlier than the other. In the event that one of the meters clocks through 9999... and then back through 0, the summation of the three separate readings will predictably always be lower than the prior registered reading. The end result of all this is an unusually large consumption for the billing period in which this phenomenon occurs. Furthermore, it is not easy to detect when any of the single-phase meters become faulty which results in ZESCO incurring losses.

Wrong counter definitions in the system are another often encountered problem. This comes about when the number of counter digits in the CIS system differs from that in the field as a result of unregistered changes at the customer's premises. A similar occurrence to the above will take place every time the meter in the field or in the CIS clocks because the two will always clock through zero at different times.

Power Cut as a department is to say the least, infamous. Customers have often accused its personnel of being rude, lacking understanding and overzealous in carrying out their work. The language used in disconnection notices is often perceived as offensive. The seven days grace period, time in which customers are expected to pay whatever is outstanding is deemed insufficient. Most customers are of the view that what is of paramount importance is not the clearing of their debt which is deemed economically impossible but the paying of whatever amount towards their colossal debt. Customers only find a disconnection justifiable if their account is not serviced at all. However, if amounts though minimal are periodically paid then Power Cut should not disconnect. Customers seem not to acknowledge that the act of disconnecting is determined by the age of the debt on a particular account.

5.3.4 Efforts to Improve Customer Service

In April 2000 the ZESCO management board responded to the continued customer dissatisfaction by launching the Customer Services Improvement Plan under the theme Quality 2000. The plan's focus was essentially on those elements that needed to be in place in order to project a good image to the ZESCO stakeholders.

The purpose of Quality 2000 was to project the image of ZESCO as a company which is clearly focused on an integrated and co-ordinated approach to Customer Services Improvements. It also aimed at creating a Brand Image which was to automatically translate into a positive reaction from both internal (ZESCO employees) and external (customers, GRZ, financiers, .etc) stakeholders. This was a positioning strategy to improve the customer services and was intended to ensure that the ethos of Customer Services became the hallmark of the Corporation. The Brand title Quality 2000 was to be applied consistently across all ZESCO communications all focussing on the Customer Services Improvement.

The Customer Services Improvement Plan identified Billing/Meter Reading operational procedures and customer services interface as some of the most crucial concerns. Immediate attention and focus was Customer Services operations and

Billing because of the frequent complaints regarding the slowness of the process of customer query handling and also the slow and seemingly chaotic response to handling Billing Queries. In order to meet the corporate challenge of a more accurate Billing system, the meter reading procedures were identified as needing re-engineering.

The expected results of the above actions taken were to resolve the billing problems arising from the introduction of the CIS in 1998, gain customer confidence in the ZESCO bills and ultimately persuade them to pay and lastly, to improve cash flow.

For the above to be achieved it meant bringing the billing cycle to current and thus improve on the correctness of the customer bills. Consequently, the following issues had to be tackled:

1. Streamlining the Meter Reading process through introduction and enforcement of zone implementation on the ground.
2. Streamlining of the Data entry and Processing
3. Managing the change-over from old to new practices
4. Follow-up to ensure adherence to new policy and guidelines on billing procedures to guaranteeing that the corporation derived maximum benefit from newly implemented measure
5. Making additional improvements on the CIS system
6. Bring the bill delivery up to date
7. Improvement on the credit management system and the Power-Cut (electricity disconnection) process through a co-ordination of relevant departments.

Following the execution of the above mentioned measures the whole billing cycle has since been shortened. Furthermore, the billing has since July 2000 been current and the corporation is able to dispatch bills to all customers by the 21st of each month.

Under the same theme of Quality 2000, certain activities with focus on the customer service centres were undertaken to effect improvements. In order to install a common vision and approach to Customer Services Management, weekly meetings with customer service staff were introduced. In addition, Customer Services Interface Networking with other relevant departments such as Credit Management, Power Cut Division, Operations & Maintenance, Planning and Construction to motivate and install a common goal to satisfying customer's needs was set up.

In acknowledgment of the vital role that efficient data capture and handling can play in tracking the resolution and monitoring performance for Customer queries, an attempt has been made to computerise customer queries. This allows for tracking of such customer queries like faults and billing complaints. Full implementation has allowed the corporation to monitor performance and efficiency of various Business Units in their provision of services to the customer.

With the above measures in place ZESCO employees have been guided to move in one direction that is towards meeting customer expectations.

5.4 Business Information System Project

As a result of the problematic historical background of the corporation in relation to customer service outlaid above, the need for management to take positive action has become imperative. Consequently, management has decided to overhaul the current Customer Information System (CIS) and replace it with another namely; the Business Information System (BIS).

It is believed that in order to attain financial viability, and to increase return on investment on its assets on behalf of the stakeholders, it is of the essence that ZESCO management and personnel at all levels of the organisation as well as customers are availed necessary information in timely and appropriate form. To achieve this ambition, it is necessary to have properly engineered business work flow processing and appropriate information systems in place for these are essential leverage tools.

Therefore, management is to embark on implementing the BIS Project which will have several objectives namely:

1. To implement an information system that can support the increased customer and asset base.
2. To encourage further customer growth, retain loyalty and thus increase revenue from existing customers.
3. Leveraging information and Data by maximising efficient and effective utilisation of available information resources and thus bettering the Return on Investment (ROI) in the short run.
4. To acquire and install an integrated Business Information System, which will be an Enterprise Solution that seamlessly integrates information across all the following major Information Systems (IS) platforms or applications.
5. To ensure timely delivery of accurate bills to customers
6. To introduce suitable modern work processes in the customer service area so as to improve overall service delivery and customer interaction.
7. To acquire an information system that is secure and able to protect the investment of Stakeholders whilst making it possible for audited reports to be published using the same system.

5.4.1 Components of the Business Information System

The BIS will consist of the following components which will be implemented in phases as follows:

1. Phase A
 - Customer Relations Management and Billing (CRM/CIS)
 - Accounting and Financial Management Information System (AFMIS)
2. Phase B
 - Payroll/Human Resources Information System (PHRIS)
 - Integrated Stock Management and Procurement System (SMS)

3. Phase C

- Plant/Equipment Maintenance System and Asset Management System.
- Fleet Management System (FMS)

4. Phase D

- Establish Management Information System and Enterprise Business Intelligence tools (MIS/EBI)

Once the implementation has been completed over a period of up to three years beginning end 2003 as envisaged, it is anticipate that the following will have been attained:

- i) By billing its customers accurately and timely, ZESCO expects to increase its revenue collections resulting in increased cash flow in the corporation.
- ii) Improved Credit/Revenue Management systems will result in positively improved, key performance indicators (KPI) such as Debtor Days.
- iii) The overall quality and efficiency of customer service will improve resulting in improved corporate image and better customer relations.
- iv) The improved Finance and Accounting systems will result in better accounting for corporation assets and result in qualified audited accounts.

5.4.2 Customer Relationship Management and Billing (CRM)

Presently, this is what is known as the CIS. The existing Customer Information System (CIS) together with the Accounting and Finance Management Information System (AFMIS) constitute the core systems of ZESCO's current information system.

The goal of the BIS Project under this component is the complete replacement of the CIS software and associated hardware. The new system should include enhanced features that are expected of a truly modern CIS and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system that can support ZESCO management to face customer service challenges in liberalised market.

The CRM and Billing system will offer new features such as a true CRM interface system to satisfy requirements of the Customer Service operations interface so as to allow for satisfactory interaction with customers. It will also incorporate a customer care and query tracking system, a faults management module, Billing and Invoicing system, Works Order Planning and Processing tools, an Automated Meter Reading (AMR) interface option and lastly, flexible tools for establishing Work Flows according to the Best Industry Practice currently obtaining.

The BIS should go a long way as regards improving the flow of communication in the corporation. Having said so, let us now look at the communication policy of the corporation.

5.5 Communication Strategy

5.5.1 Communication Policy Statement

As already mentioned in earlier chapter, ZESCO is composed of six directorates each with its own functions and people. However, management recognises that these directorates make up the whole and thus one organisation. Hence, management is committed to treating employees fairly in accordance with the following principles:

1. Everyone is to be given full, honest and timely information on how the organisation is performing and what its plans are for the future.
2. Management values the input of all staff and encourages people to become involved in the organisation through the communication and participation process.
3. Management will listen and respond to the views, ideas and concerns of staff.

By thoroughly following the above, management is certain that a climate of trust and cooperation will prevail within the organisation and thus support the growth and success of the establishment.

The objectives of the communication policy are:

- (i) to encourage involvement and commitment to the success of the organisation,
- (ii) to ensure that everybody in the organisation understands the organisations objectives and plans,
- (iii) to update the employees on how ZESCO is performing,
- (iv) to provide a network of effective channels which are supposed to ensure communication gaps do not occur,
- (v) to ensure that good communication are an essential feature of the way management runs the organisation,
- (vi) to support involvement and empowerment initiatives.

5.6 Methods of Communication

5.6.1 Directorate Meetings

Directorate meetings are regular meetings held by various directorates. These meetings mainly look at directorate issues, in relation to the organisations goals and objectives. The objective of theses meetings is to provide a two way forum where performance; plans; problems; projects etc, are discussed with the aim of creating and understanding and ownership of the issues.

The frequency in terms of holding these meetings is decided by respective directorates; however the minimum is once a month.

5.6.2 Business Brief

Business brief is part of directorate meetings. The brief covers information from the Board/Corporate Meeting/ and the Managing Director's Office. The purpose of the business brief is to ensure an awareness and understanding of the relevant, critical issues that have impact on the organisation. These are meant to be held monthly

5.6.3 Employee Relations Bulletin

The Employee Relations Bulletin is supposed to be issued to all supervisors/line managers. The bulletin is meant to cover items of interest to employee relations area such as Agreement; status of Negotiations; and participation. The bulletin is meant to be factual rather than subjective. This publication is under the charge of the Human Resource Directorate, as regards its preparation and production. Although it is to be published monthly, it has been rather irregular and has not been produced for a number of years now.

5.6.4 News Letter

As a communication channel the News Letter is a tool to aid the development and support of the new culture in the organisation. The focus is on business issues, with emphasis on innovation, achievements, team-working, performance, customer relation, best practice, etc. The magazine is meant to be a quarterly publication. Though in the past attempts to produce the News Letter were initially fruitful, in the recent past the publication has failed despite the well meant intentions of management. News Letter publication is the responsibility of the Communications Department whose sometimes vigorous attempts to revive this publication have been in vain. Consequently, employees have often depended on rumours which have proved to be a reliable information source on any issue.

5.6.5 Organisational Annual Report

The organisational annual report is about the “state of the organisation” and thus covers performance in the previous year, trends, achievements, challenges; etc,. It gives an overall picture of how the organisation is doing and what developments and strategies are employed currently and for the future. Although this publication has been regular very few employees have access to it or are aware of its existence. It is prepared by the Company Secretary together with the Communications Department.

In combination with the annual report, a presentation of the main outcome is made by the Directors and Senior Managers. The session concentrates on the annual results, business strategy and includes a question and answer session.

5.6.6 Suggestion Box

This is an upward communication channel that should help the organisation hear grievances, identify trends and receive important feedback. The Suggestion Box should provide every employee with the opportunity to write anonymously to a speak-up- co-ordinator who gets the question to the right person and tracks the response through a formal procedure. Despite the Suggestion Box being present as rule at most strategic points in ZESCO buildings, it has not served the intended purpose. The Speak up Co-ordinator is unknown. However, anonymous correspondence does reach the Managing Directors Office by other means other than through the suggestion box.

5.6.7 Individual Communication

Management realises that certain issues such as individual performance, training and development plans, etc., cannot be handled within a team or group forum. Therefore, management recognises that individual communication must continue to be a fundamental part of the communication process. This is on-going.

5.6.8 Notice Boards

The Notice Board continues to be used as a downward one-way channel of communication; however its effectiveness depends on how well it is managed on an on-going basis. Presently, it occurs that memos are placed on Notice Boards at the Head Quarters but not on some remote location boards. As a result employees, who don't frequent the Head Quarters Notice Boards, will miss vital information communicated by management. On such occasions the grape vine tends to be the source of mostly reliable news though at times distorted depending on the source.

Management pledges to carry out regular audits to ensure that the communication process is working. Whether these are carried out as often as intended cannot be confirmed. The objective of the communication audit is to measure the following:

- The effectiveness of the communication process in terms of its operation, content and style.
- The impact and understanding of the content and information that is communicated.

ZESCO sets targets based on the current position and intends to measure its performance on a going basis.

5.6.9 Communication Responsibilities

The Managing Director and Directors lead the way by demonstrating through action their commitment to effective communications. They also input to the communication process on a regular basis through the newsletter, business brief, annual report, annual presentation and other appropriate means. However, the real situation is that the often used communication channels have been the annual report, business brief and term presentations.

It is the responsibility of Senior, Regional and Area Managers and Heads of Department to ensure that structured methods of communication exist within their locations. They also ensure that these methods enable the achievement of the corporate objectives as well as their own local objectives.

The Communication Department is responsible for monitoring the overall effectiveness of the communication system in line with the best practice. In addition the communication department arranges the compilation and issuance of the various bulletins, newsletters etc., and co-ordinates the speak-up programme suggestion box.

Line Managers are responsible for communicating with and getting feedback from their staff. They ensure that their teams understand the organisation and its business direction and how this relates to their department. Line Managers also report on the level of understanding and acceptance by staff to the next level of Management. If good communications are to be maintained and feedback acted upon, it is crucial that Line Managers accept these levels of responsibilities.

Each and every employee in the organisation has a responsibility of making internal communications effective through expressing their views, ideas and concerns about the way the organisation does its business and also by playing a part in continuous improvement.

All the six directorates have the responsibility to appoint a person to be in charge of communication. If this is done, then the appointed person does little to be noticed or identified. The chosen communications person from each of the directorates is supposed to liaise with the communications department and gathers feedback in the respective directorate which should be submitted to the communications department. The person also ensures that all happenings in the directorate are reported to the communications department for dissemination to other directorates. However, it suffices to mention that this very principle of communications procedure is far divorced from the prevailing actuality.

5.7 Communications and Public Relations Policy

ZESCO's communications and public relations policy document is drawn up to provide guidelines on communication issues dealing with the major stake holders.

Being a government owned institution, all issues of policy including informing the Cabinet, Parliament, the Press and public are the responsibility of the Minister of Energy and Water Development. Consequently, staff are not, under any circumstances permitted to make public statements on any matter whatsoever, other

than explaining operational faults to customers and warning them of pending outages wherever they may be.

Members of staff may not make a public statement nor issue press statements to both local and foreign media on subjects such as Policies, Tariffs, Regional-Co-operation, major new construction of Power Stations and transmission lines, and rural electrification.

The following is ZESCO's policy on press statements:

- (i) The Managing Director is authorised to issue informative press releases on a regular basis on relevant issues and on items raised by the press and other media from time to time.
- (ii) Area, Regional, and Divisional Managers are authorised to release public statements on power interruptions and faults, and, to clarify operational problems.
- (iii) All other public statements and press interviews should be given by the Managing Director.

5.7.1. Public Relations Policy

ZESCO is aware that the implementation of a good public relations policy ultimately ensures good Human Relations with all employees and major stakeholders. ZESCO endeavours to foster good relations with customers, suppliers, financiers and stakeholders.

It is demanded and expected of all managers to be aware of and react to problems of ZESCO's major stakeholders.

It is the duty of communication and Public Relations staff to assist management in closing the gaps between management's knowledge based on experience and access to information, and what the public believe sometimes wrongly, without the benefit of

this knowledge. They must also make efforts to earn the trust of both management and the public. In executing this policy, ZESCO places emphasis on dealing with individual relations. ZESCO expects Public Relations to appreciate the value of and pursue with patience and tenacity a policy of good human relations, frank communications and constructive involvement in the community. In the 2001 ZESCO demonstrated community involvement by lighting up the streets of Kabwata and Nationalist Road in an effort to fight crime. During the same year ZESCO refurbished the Northmead Police Post and built a car park. ZESCO has also been known to give financial assistance to organisations concerned with the well-being of society.

5.7.2 Public Relations Channels

The communications and public relations staff use various media to communicate their objectives such as:

5.7.3 National Media.

This involves the use of newspapers, radio and television. These media have proved powerful in communicating a crisis or normal situation. Press statements, interviews with top executives are channels of the media used.

5.7.4. House Journals

House Journals supplement the national media in communicating internally as well as externally. For the House Journals to be effective in mainstream communications, they must be frequent, flexible and not hampered by red tape when it comes to approving stories.

House journals may be in the form of internal circulars, newsletters, news flashes and magazine. In the past newsletters were frequent. However, in the recent past the most often used form of house journal is the internal circular. In the past as far back as the late 1980s and early 1990s newsletters were frequently produced as well as magazines. One reason given for the popularity of the internal circular in terms of use is that it is cheaper to produce and takes little time. To inform the public about the

services and products the corporation has to offer, flyers are produced. Flyers on how to use electricity economically and those on DDACC the corporation's latest product can be found in the Customer Service Centres.

5.7.5. Exhibitions and Displays

Exhibitions and Displays serve to communicate the corporation's services and products to the public. Their success depends on standards and presentations. The corporation ensures that it is represented at all trade fairs and commercial shows for these serve as suitable venues for exhibits and displays.

5.7.6. Talk Forums

Talk forums provide open discussions with major stakeholders and management on issues of current importance. An example of such is discussions on tariff adjustments or reviews.

5.8 Public Address Systems

The corporation communicates externally through telephones, mobile address systems, bill boards, video programmes and radios. The outside public is communicated to on issues such as employment notices, requests for suppliers, shut down notices, power interruption apologies, contracts, tariff reviews and company messages.

5.9 Advertising – External

All external advertising for the corporation is done through the Communications Department with the approval of the Director in the requesting directorate and the Managing Director, before placement in the press. However, placement of adverts is at the discretion of management with advice from the Communications Department. Adverts may not be placed in all newspapers.

Regional and Area Managers channel their adverts through their Divisional Managers to the Communications Department. This is only possible with the full consent of the respective Director. All directorates budget for advertising.

5.9.1 Shutdown Notices

These are normally done on radio and television. Adverts of this nature are sometimes done through the Public address System in addition to written notices to customers. The Communications Department design adverts which are channelled through the Divisional Manager who ensures that the respective departments have the adverts which are then sent to customers.

Shutdown notices are also placed in the daily newspapers. For press adverts, requests for placement should be received by the Communications Department not less than ten (10) days before the actual outage and are placed in the press seven (7) days before actual outage and are placed on Smalls page.

5.9.2 Internal Adverts

Internal notices and announcements are done through the Communications Department in liaison with the requesting department.

5.9.3 Bill Boards

Standard bill boards are put up at all ZESCO offices throughout the country. The specifications and messages are provided by the Marketing Department.

Advertising (promotional) bill boards are put at key areas of the towns and cities, e.g., airports, major roads, town centres hotels etc.

In executing its public relations policy, ZESCO makes certain that in the process it does not engage in actions that may injure or offend feelings of its intended audience. The next chapter will discuss the students input and findings.

CHAPTER 6

STUDENTS INPUT AND FINDINGS

6.0 Purpose of Student's Attachment

One of the requirements of the MCD programme is that the student is attached to an institution of their choice. As mentioned in this report elsewhere, the student's attachment was intended to examine the institutional structure of Customer Service, its operations, and the internal and external communication system in ZESCO. In addition the attachment would look at the aims, goals and objectives of customer service, the extent to which communication enhances them and the form and role of this communication utilised to achieve them.

The student was able to observe, participate in various activities and also make suggestions where possible.

6.1 Student's Assignments

During attachment the student was designated the position of Customer Service Centre Manager. The position meant being in charge of routine activities of the Customer Service Centre. Consequently, the student was able to contribute where necessary or possible to improvements in communication and other routine administrative procedures by suggesting changes founded on current academic thinking.

The student had an opportunity to be part of the committee assigned to come up with a product that would make it easier for customers to pay their electricity bills. Apart from the student, the committee comprised the Marketing Manager, Principal Engineer IT, Litigation Manager and a Chief Accountant.

In this regard, the student formed part of a team charged with studying the feasibility of ZESCO Customers paying their bills through banks. A tour of four banks was

conducted and comprehensive discussions held with banks to determine their capacity to handle ZESCO customers if they were to start paying their bills through the institutions.

The assignment was particularly interesting for apart from identifying the banks to implement the Direct Debit and Credit Clearance, various payment options were studied. Following the various banks confirmation of their participation the committee had to design an awareness campaign to be carried out. The campaign had to highlight the customer benefits that this payment mode had to offer such as exemption from disconnection once on part of scheme, budgeting made easy, offer of personalized service and no time wasted queuing.

The student also had the opportunity to be part of a team made up of persons from other departments which for several weeks was tasked to search for ways in which ZESCO could improve its commercial viability and performance. This was rather challenging for it entailed coming up with functional specifications that would lead to the installation of a future enterprise-wide Integrated Business Information System (BIS) solution which would in turn enable ZESCO achieve world class best practice operations.

6.2 Student's Input During Meetings

The student was invited to a number of management and staff meetings that occurred during the attachment. Being manager of a centre at the time he was also able to call staff meetings to discuss communication issues with the staff he supervised. This experience enabled the student to participate wholly in decision making and to contribute by way of suggestions of academic nature. Considering that communication schools of thought consider meetings as one of several methods of communicating, such forum provided the student an opportunity to register some input.

Towards the end of the attachment the student was allowed to attend as an observer a Top Management Quarterly Meeting which brought together managers from Regions

and Divisions country wide. This quarterly meeting of top management is another means of communication employed a great deal.

6.3 Student's Suggestions on Selected Issues

The student had the occasion to discuss with the Public Relations Manager, Marketing Manager, the Customer Service Manager and the Industrial Relations Manager on issues linked to the attachment themes. The open and amicable atmosphere in which these discussions were held permitted the student to make suggestions on matters of interest and also to seek explanation. In addition the student was able to observe persons from other departments and make suggestions. The observations and suggestions made will be discussed below.

6.3.1 Public Relations

The student had a fruitful discussion with the Public Relations manager on issues related to both external and internal communication being fully aware that communication forms an integral part of any organisation, for no development is likely to take place in the absence of communication playing a critical role.

The Public Relations (PR) Manager was of the view that the office had become more accessible as compared to the past. Since the year 2002 the office has made deliberate effort to meet customers in order to get their views on how if at all the corporation was failing and what could be done to improve. The Corporation employed communication methods such as the staging of forums affording interaction with customers. These forums that allow for direct feedback from customers are held quarterly.

Through discussion the student learnt that ZESCO had embarked on an awareness campaign to fight the frequent vandalism of transformers and cables. A series of programmes, in conjunction with the Police and the Community highlighting the scourge of vandalism and how communities with the help of the police can abate it have been produced. The public's response has been positive. This has been noted by

the frequency of reports and information volunteered by public individuals. These reports and information have led to the arrest of culprits.

Communities from areas such as Matero, Chelston, and Chilenje together with ZESCO have formed drama groups to perform plays on vandalism in a manner that reaches the targeted audience. As observed in Occupational Outlook Handbook (2002-03) an organisation's reputation, profitability, and even its continued existence can depend on the degree to which its targeted 'publics' support its goals and policies.

The PR Manager felt that interface with the press has created awareness with the community. The rapport between the Press and ZESCO has greatly improved and mass media has proved to be a reliable public information tool. In addition to pamphlets Agricultural and Trade Fair Shows have been used to launch products and a Web Site had been created for ZESCO.

The student had observed the political nature of the ZESCO's image and sought comments on the same from the PR Manager. The manager acknowledged this observation and attributed it the high degree of political interference especially during the years between 1998 and 2000. However, it was learnt that a deliberate policy had now been put in place to reverse the political image of ZESCO.

This image is being reversed by ZESCO availing itself to the public by releasing information by request and by the corporation making itself visible to the public through the media. An observation was made that there was much more emphasis on external public relations presently than in the past which is good. However, the same could not be said as regards internal communication. The point was acknowledged. PR Management was of the view that little effective internal communication was taking place and as a result employees were expressing quiet anxiety. At the time, employees even at senior level were dependent on the Press for information. The student suggested the enhancement of communication from the top to the bottom.

According to Grunig (2001) Public Relations should be the management of communication involving an organisation and its publics which not only includes customers, stakeholders and the general community but also employees. The use of a publication such as newsletter was suggested. The publication of the news letter should involve an editorial board of members selected by employees themselves. Not only should the newsletter be used to release official information from management to employees but also for bottom up communication. It should be a platform that would allow employees to express their views on how the corporation is running. Employees would contribute articles that concern them to the news letter, the student suggested. It was learnt that in the past a publication existed however it came to an abrupt end in inexplicable circumstances.

6.3.2 Marketing Department

The student observed that although public relations and marketing are related and expected to work hand in hand this was apparently not the case despite the difference between the two being fuzzy. Firstly, the two departments Public Relations and Marketing do not belong to the same Directorate. The former belongs to the Human Resource Directorate while the later to Customer Service. The Marketing Manager was of the view that marketing was responsible for external communication while internal communication was the responsibility of Public Relations. In terms of hierarchy, the Public Relations Manager was of higher grade than the Marketing Manager. Both managers were advised to consider merging the two departments under one umbrella. The student was of the view that the relations between the two departments were strained.

In chapter three we saw that PR should not be mistaken for advertising or marketing even though the said functions are frequently used in public relations programmes and vice versa. Over and over again PR is confused with selling, marketing, promotion or publicity.

PR is defined as the management function that creates, develops, and carries out policies and programmes to influence public opinion or public reaction about an idea, product or service in the case of ZESCO. The field of PR includes advertising, publicity, promotional activities and press contact. On the other hand Marketing concentrates first and foremost on consumers or buyers, determining their needs and desires, educating them with regard to the availability of products or services and to important service features, developing strategies to persuade them to buy or pay and lastly, enhancing their satisfaction with a purchase or service. Having said so, it is important to note that PR and Marketing must coexist in the organisation so as to create the climate in which all selling functions occur.

In order not to confuse marketing with PR and vice versa the student suggested the outlining of responsibilities or tasks such as product promotion and market research to be dealt with by marketing. Once this is done, then confusion between the two would be lessened.

The student was of the impression that in the past ZESCO had under-marketed the earlier mentioned Customer Information System (CIS) and the discernible sensitivity to the plight of the public. Hence the student suggesting that perhaps someone from the marketing department should be attached specifically to investigate, pursue and communicate issues of importance to the customers. In this way ZESCO could avoid being misunderstood repeatedly by its customers and also avail the customer a positive glimpse of some aspects of the organisation.

6.3.3 Customer Service

Discussions with the Customer Service Manager revealed that to date there is no Customer Charter of Standards that should serve as a guide on what customers should expect as agreed standards of ZESCO customer service operations. Therefore, the student suggested that ZESCO should come up with service quality measurement tools and conduct customer satisfaction surveys.

It was also noted that communication between customer service and marketing needed to be strengthened. It was evidenced that sometimes marketing would communicate to customers by way of placing adverts in the press without first communicating to frontline staff. This resulted in embarrassing situations when customers approached centres for more information.

The student had observed that the Faults Department staff lacked proper telephone etiquettes when responding to customer calls made to report an outage or low voltage on the system. In addition, new front line members of staff were also in need of some training in order for them to deal better with customers. It was suggested that a Work Shop be organised to train both groups. The Customer Service Manager responded positively to the suggestion. Following further discussion, the Customer Service Manager asked the student to organise the Work Shop.

The Work Shop was designed and conducted by the student. The participants responded well to the workshop and demanded for more training of such nature in future.

6.3.4 Publications

The student noted that much literature available apart from memoranda in ZESCO, is that which is aimed at external audiences. Publications that are meant for internal circulation mostly end up at higher managerial level and are hardly disseminated to the lower ranks. The student suggested to the Industrial Relations manager to make available written documents such as the quarterly published Performance Reports to be availed to employees. The manager acknowledged this point and agreed with the observation that because of the absence of such communication between top and bottom an atmosphere of secrecy existed. Certain information was classified as sensitive but it was not known if this was by design or not as there is no known policy of gate keeping in place that management has determined.

Most employees are aware that every year top management is involved in the formation of the corporation's business plan. Top management and line managers come together to research and brainstorm to come up with a business plan for the coming financial year. However, once the Business Plan is produced it is not filtered down to employees by the Business Planning Office. The student suggested that workshops be held perhaps through out the country to explain the plan and expectations of implementers. Thus allowing for feedback for example, possible hindrances to the business plan.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the input and suggestions made by the student, during his Practical Attachment. The student also attempted to encourage the use of effective organisational communication. As Bacal (1988) posits, participants in the communication should have appropriate skills and understanding to communicate well. Secondly, effective communication requires an environment that supports effective communication i.e. a climate of trust, openness, reinforcement of good communication practices and share responsibility for making communication effective. Lastly, a deliberate effort on the part of both management and staff is necessary if effective communication is to develop and take place.

The chapter that follows discusses the findings.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

7.0 Findings and Experiences

In this chapter the findings and experiences of the student during the practical attachment are discussed. Furthermore, an attempt to relate the findings to the conceptual framework is made. The findings give a synopsis of an assessment of internal and external communication of ZESCO as an organisation. The assessment is founded on responses from respondents who were interviewed and those who responded to questionnaires.

7.1 Assessment of ZESCO's External Communication

Customer service centres have since their inception, helped to improve communication between ZESCO and its customers. Most of the customers who responded to the questionnaire rated the flow of information between them and ZESCO as being fairly good.

7.1.1 Information on billing

Out of a total sample of 106 customers, 58.8% found the billing system easy to follow while 41.1% did not find the bill easy to understand. 71.4% of customers that found the bill difficult to understand attributed the difficulty to the way the bill is calculated while 28.5 % found the presentation of the bill as the reason for the difficulty in understanding. In terms of the level of education 35.2% of these customers were of college diploma level while 8.8% had at least reached grade 12.

Most customers had a better understanding of the bill when it was explained to them by a fellow customer while 35.3% understood the bill better after reading brochures on bill calculation produced by ZESCO.

From the above it can be deduced that in this area, those brochures produced in the past particularly the one produced on “how bills are calculated” has yielded some positive results by way of bringing about awareness of how bills are calculated.

7.1.2 Customer Queries

In general customer complaints are recorded on special query forms on which the action taken or referral details are tabulated and where possible follow-ups are conducted. A Customer Service Centre should ideally and practically handle all customer queries of any customer, wherever the customer is living in Lusaka. Practice however shows that the concept is not always applicable.

Response to billing queries takes a long time to be resolved, especially in cases of rebilling, adjustments or amendments to a particular bill. It was also noted that while much effort is put in ensuring that customer queries are resolved, if customers do not come forward to get responses ZESCO rarely responds in writing or on phone. It was found that 47.10% of Customers rated ZESCO’s responsiveness to them as fairly good and 26.4% as fairly bad. This was attributed to the fact that no response guidelines exist. This also applies to queries concerning the connection of new supply, customers often make their own follow-ups as there are equally no response guidelines.

Queries in relation to billing are often to do with assessments, wrong bill, duplicate account, wrong name/account, information on bill not matching with information at customer premises, swapped readings especially where flats are concerned as meters are not labelled, customers disconnected but still being billed, vacant house but being billed, customers being charged on fixed even when they had lost supply due to a transformer fault or any other, customers not able to understand their bills and calculations, abnormal billing etc.

In view of the problems that customers have with ZESCO, the interaction between Customer Service Officers and customers was assessed. The assessment established

that 64.7% of Customers lodging complaints through the customer service centres found officers in terms how they were handled, to be fairly good while 20.5% rated the officers as very good. In terms of satisfaction following being attended to, 58.8% were satisfied. However, 41% of these customers come back to complain on the same query of these customers 23.5% come back to complain to the same officer. The frequency distribution of customers segmented by area showed 50% of customers coming from medium density areas, 14.7% from high density and 35.3% from low density areas.

7.1.3 Faults Management

The management of faults is not made any easier considering that the department is not computerized to monitor the restoration and duration of supply loss. Partly due to the age of the distribution network or system frequent outages especially during the rain season are experienced. Other anomalies such as low and at times high voltage occur. Delayed response in restoring power is common, 26.4% of respondents found the corporation's responsiveness to be fairly bad. Consequently, power failure complaints compete with billing queries in terms of the nature of complaints brought to the attention of the corporation. The delayed response is attributed to the lack of materials/proper tools, transport break-downs, faults not dispatched to field officers, lack of follow-ups by the Duty manager. Furthermore, customers are often not given feedback on the likely duration of fault.

7.1.4 Customer Information System

Recovery of the outstanding debt is one of ZESCO's main concerns. However, the reduction of the debt is facing two problems:

1. Customers suspect and are convinced that they are being overcharged. Not to mention the not so good response time to customer complaint queries and requests.

2. Apart from organisation and co-ordination issues, the current CIS (Customer Information System) as mentioned in Chapter Five has a major responsibility over the debt situation.

Essential features with regard to customer management procedures that apparently do not work in the ZESCO CIS are the following:

(i) System update following meter installation in the field

The data base is not updated once the meter is physically installed in the field. Although the meter may be captured into the system, the CIS carries on computing the bill on a fixed amount.

(ii) Addition of labels on bills

When electricity tariffs are revised and a fixed charge introduced, the charge description is not printed on the bills. This results in customers seeing an amount for the fixed charge with no text to describe it. It takes the intervention of SIEMENS the experts of this particular software to change this.

(iii) Inconsistent balances in system

The system (CIS) handles two balances for each customer, the updated balance and the sum of transactions. The updated balance takes into account credits or debits operations that have been validated by the supervisor by way of running the control list. On the other hand, sum of transactions take into account all operations, validated or not.

When the “control list” programme i.e. the validation process is launched, the updated balance and the sum of transaction balance must be the same. However, in some cases for some an explained reason the two balances are different. Consequently, the amount to be paid as printed on the bill is different from the amount to be paid as appears on the payment receipt. The following is an example:

Amount due on the bill: K 40,000.00

No operations between the bill issue date and the date of payment.

Customer comes to pay: K 40,000.00

Amount due on the receipt: K 35,000.00

Customer's balance after payment: K – 5000.00

These kinds of problems are a starting place of numerous customer complaints and a loss of revenue for ZESCO. The resulting scenario is shattering in terms of ZESCO's public image. Afore mentioned problems, go a long way in determining the prevailing perceptions about the corporation. In chapter three, Srinivasan (2000) points out that it is in the interests of an organisation to know what its image is. The knowledge will help ZESCO to take corrective steps if it is to achieve its objectives.

7.1.5 Information flow between ZESCO and its customers

According to Infante et al. (1997), organisational communication involves the exchange of messages to stimulate meaning within and between organisations and their environment. Foltz (1985) argues that the key to gaining support for organisational objectives, policies and programmes is to serve the organisations customers, knowing what they want and how they prefer to get it. ZESCO has been doing this by organising forums which allow for interaction with its customers. Such interaction coupled with press interface, improves relations between the corporation and its customers as a result of the information flow.

However, it was revealed that 52.9% of customers rated their relationship between them and ZESCO to be fairly good while 32.5% found it to be fairly bad. The flow information between the corporation and its customers was rated by 47.3% of the sample as fairly good, 21% very good, and 18.42% as very bad. Most customers, about 79.4% felt ZESCO needed to improve its communication with its customers while 88.2% were of the view that the corporation gave them little chance to make suggestions to management. From the findings it can be seen that communication with the customers is an on going task that should be worked at if the concerns of the consumers are to be known and understood.

7.1.6 External Channels of communication

ZESCO being a large organisation with an equally large customer base has in the past and present used mass communication to send messages to its customers by way of campaigns, press releases and advertising. Employing an integrated marketing communication programme customers have been made aware of the benefits of electricity, educated on correct use of electricity. In addition, via the same means customers have been made aware of product and service offerings such as the Power Cut Win or Loose Lottery, Bill Buster Promotion and the Direct Debit and Credit Clearance product. As already mentioned in an earlier chapter, mass communication is mediated by electronic or print media (Infante et al., 1997)

7.1.6.1 Power Cut Win or Loose Lottery

The Power Cut Win or Lose Lottery was launched in 1999 at the Zambia International Trade Fair (Ndola). The lottery aimed at collecting money owed to the corporation by customers. The debt at the time was One Hundred and Thirty billion Kwacha (K130, 000,000,000.00). Previously the corporation has concentrated on disconnections, which had proved not to be a very effective way of collecting money. It was therefore realised that another strategy be introduced and management felt that offering incentives was the best alternative. Hence a package of incentives was introduced and these were; a car, 16 seat and 26 seat mini buses and other household goods, plus a 5% discount.

The lottery ran for six months. To qualify for entry into the draw, a customer had to clear all arrears plus the current bill. After doing so, a 5% discount was given and was either paid in cash to them or credited to their accounts.

For this exercise, television and radio were used for adverts, leaflets and brochures were distributed to all stations for onward distribution to customers. In addition, Road Shows with prizes displayed were conducted. Accompanying the display was the public address system and leaflets were again given to customers.

A letter to customers with a brochure attached, were sent out. Lastly, Newspaper vendors were also used to distribute some of the advertising materials across towns.

Talks were also held with Customer Service Officers to explain the objectives of the lottery, and what information to be given to customers when they came to settle their bills. Promotional materials were also given to the centres.

7.1.6.2 Bill Buster Promotion

In August 2001 ZESCO introduced a bill payment incentive program named Bill Buster. Young & Rubicam Lusaka conceived this program. The promotion's primary objectives were: the reduction of the then outstanding debtor's book, which stood at approximately \$70 million at the time, reduction of the average debtor's payment period from approximately 300 days, to approximately 45 days. Lastly, develop a 'culture of payment' among ZESCO customers.

The campaign was conducted on national basis, supported by an extensive media and PR campaign designed and managed by Y& R Lusaka. The previous program, 'Powercut- Win or Lose' was conducted with success. However, its shortcoming was its requirement for customers to settle outstanding accounts in full. As a result the Bill Buster was designed as a 'customer friendly' campaign making use of a scratch card mechanism that had the benefits of being interactive and enjoyable to use, resulting in wide consumer acceptance. It also had a perceived value to the general public. Bill Buster unlike the earlier promotion did not require the customer to pay the bill in full but allowed for payments as small as K20 000.

By July, 2001 retail customers alone owed ZESCO K245 billion. The monthly billing of retail customers at the time was K22 billion. Of this amount the Corporation was only able to collect K18 billion per month resulting in a deficit of K4 billion every month. In terms of payments the mines were not a problem following privatisation. However, of the K245 billion domestic customers categorized as residential customers owed ZESCO K140 billion. Commercial customers owed K55 billion. The

balance of K50 billion was owed by Maximum Demand Supply customers. It must be mentioned that in terms of debt collection MD customers were not considered to be a major problem. With this background it was easy to see that there was need for the corporation to introduce another strategy that would assuage the debt problem. Evidently there was need to generate action and payment. The Bill Buster promotion targeted residential customers with an average debt from K500000 to K1500000. The immediate objective being to motivate consumers so that they re-assessed their debt to ZESCO while making them feel that the problem of debt was solvable as they were directly motivated to pay their debt.

The Bill Buster promotion used the carrot and stick approach. The customer was offered very attractive, rewarding and credible incentives namely a scratch card. At the same time a highly effective and intensive PowerCut programme was implemented. The scratch card offered upon scratching the three panels on it; credits on the customers electricity account of up to K50000, the chance to win a mobile phone just buy paying ones electricity bill and the opportunity to begin paying ones bill (K500,000) or more and face immunity from the PowerCut Team for 60 days. Other prizes to be won were Bicycles, Shop rite vouchers, two plate cookers, toasters, fans, pressing irons, electric kettles and wall clocks. The prizes were divided into regions. For Lusaka and all towns on the line of rail, phones etc., were to be won. For rural towns a bicycle replaced the phone. Once the scratch card panels revealed three times the prize icon - the prize was won instantly. However, when the card revealed three "collect and bust your bill" icons, the customer was required to collect the card to gain a Red or Orange card

The Bill Buster mechanism encouraged regular payments. For every K20000 paid the customer received a Bill Buster Scratch Card which in turn offered the opportunity to win a cell phone or other great prizes; scratch for a credit or collect 25 cards that would earn the customer a Red Card. The Red Card was shown to the PowerCut team when it arrived, as evidence of having earned 60 days of immunity from disconnection. For a further payment of 25 cards within 30 days of the purchase of

the first card of the issue of the red card the customer earned an Orange Card. This orange card entitled the customer to a full write off on their bill. It also meant that the customer would have paid K1000 000 to their bill.

The psychology behind bill buster was that debtors would feel rewarded. Engaging the customer with scratch cards and rewards built user participation leading to high involvement. The promotion availed a payment plan that was accessible thus empowering and motivating the customer. The concept of the red card was a creatively powerful one- "Give the ZESCO PowerCut Team the Red Card" gave the customer a reason to pay and gave them positive and immediate reinforcement.

Although the promotion's principal target was the residential customer, two campaigns run side by side namely, the Bill buster Scratch Cards and the Bill buster Business incentive. The later was a commercial incentive targeting Commercial tariff and Maximum demand customers. The two customer categories received a 7 % instant discount on accounts paid in full. The incentive campaign ran in tandem with a vigorous PowerCut programme. In both campaigns the threat of the PowerCut Team was included in the messages.

The idea behind the campaign was to offer encouragement and hope to the customer, of finally getting the ZESCO bill finished. The campaign structure was in three phases. Phase one of the launch phase was mainly educational. The bill buster and discounts were introduced so that they were clearly understood by all. Phase two involved establishing credibility of the programme by way of publicising winners. This acted as a testimonial phase. Winners were portrayed as role models- "good citizens" as well as being rewarded by winning a phone and a credit just by paying the bill. "ZESCO is helping the customer- with a red card the customer has no reason to worry about the PowerCut Team.

After establishing buy-in and having issued many red cards, phase three of the campaign focused on urging customers to get the Orange card. Customers were

encouraged to bust their bill by collecting extra 25 cards to get their bill written off for good. Customers were continually reminded of the incentives to pay-the chance of winning credits and cell phones and food/commodity packs.

Through out the campaign Bill Buster was given a high profile in the media through a managed public relations campaign. The campaign had been shown as working. In addition programmes on TV and radio designed to paint ZESCO as a company that cares and rewards clients who pay their bills.

The Bill Buster promotion was a success in non - financial terms. There was 100% knowledge of the Bill Buster among ZESCO customers and all residential customers had paid under the Bill Buster promotion programme. Customers in arrears found the promotion helpful. Reason being that it eased the burden particularly after acquiring a red card. Customers who were current found it helpful in terms of winning prizes. Winning prizes had led many to go into credit. Customers who were in arrears by and large desired to bust the bill. Further more, a general desire among all customers to win the prizes on the scratch cards had been noted, the most valued being the cell phone.

A survey on the Bill Buster was conducted in October 2001, three months after the launch. The objective was to gauge the effectiveness of the promotion in non-financial terms. Questionnaires were distributed at the point of sell in the centres. There were answered and left on the counter. At each of the four Customer Service Centres in Lusaka 50 questionnaires were made available. 100 questionnaires were completed and the responses were based on the 100 randomly sampled. The survey showed there was 100% knowledge of the Bill Buster among ZESCO customers and all residential customers had paid under the Bill Buster promotion programme.

In view of the above it can be said that ZESCO employed the theory of social marketing in both above discussed campaigns. According to Solomon (1989) the theory of social marketing is based on the “marketing philosophy” that persons will

adopt new behaviours or ideas if they feel that something of value is exchanged between that person and the social marketer. In our case ZESCO is the social marketer exchanging something of value with its customers. In both its campaigns ZESCO employed social marketing concepts to ensure both customer satisfaction and effective communication for identifying the needs and wants of customers.

In the fight against vandalism of transformers ZESCO uses “edu-entertainment” that is using traditional entertainment drama and sketches another social marketing tool that helps to build a long term relationship between the corporation and its different audiences. It is important for ZESCO to paint a clear picture of itself and its views to its customers.

Severin (1991) defines persuasion and the act of influencing a person to make a desirable choice. ZESCO employed a number of persuasive strategies in the process of persuading customers to pay their bills. Both the PowerCut Win or Lose Lottery and the Bill Buster Promotions used persuasion strategies that appeal to ethics and personal fulfilment. The customers’ values, beliefs and experiences were shared and a sense of fairness was conveyed to them. In addition, personal fulfilment that comes with having paid ones bills was appealed to.

7.2 Assessment of Internal communication

Interviews held with employees and available written documentation show that there is much room for improvement as regards internal communication within the corporation. Management appears to concentrate more on external communication than it does on internal communication. Consequently, indications are that the flow of information is poor.

7.2.1 Communication between management and employees

Poor communication can lead to poor relationship between management and employees. This was the case in ZESCO following the disbandment of the Zambia Electricity and Allied Workers Union (ZEAWU) in 1998. For several months before

and after the creation of the National Energy Sector and Allied Workers Union tension existed between union represented staff and management. The tension became public as NESAWU President Peter Chupa criticised management for wasting company resources by launching the Bill Buster Promotion,(Times of Zambia, September 24 2001). Management hit back by urging the union not to discuss corporation issues in the Press but to follow the known channels of communication.

The union accuses management of depending on issuing memos as opposed to dialogue. More often than not management makes key decisions affecting union represented staff without first explaining the policy change matters with Union leadership. Thus communication between management and employees is usually of vertical nature i.e. top down flow of information never horizontal.

A case cited as poor communication was management's alleged ban of overtime payment. The Union leadership was unable to explain as a result of not being informed, that overtime payments had not been banned but rather restricted to authorization.

Most employees felt that policy issues are never explained by management but are left to individual employees to interpret depending on their own understanding. Most employees interviewed felt that ZESCO management did not regularly communicate to them on various issues concerning their welfare.

The majority of employees interviewed would like to be visited in their work place by management, so that management has the opportunity to see and hear for themselves the problems that they are facing. This would also allow management to follow any progress taking place. Unfortunately such visits were not taking place. Subsequently, most employees do not know what the current Managing Director looks like. Most friction between employees and management is resultant of poor communication. Communication between employees and management in ZESCO is usually by way of

memorandum. It was noted that many employees do not favour this form of communication.

Employees prefer to receive important news or information from immediate supervisors or managers face to face (Quality Magazine, 1993). They tend to trust their supervisors because he or she is a known quantity. Therefore, by virtue of management being an unknown quantity employee management communication is compromised.

7.2.2 Supervisor and subordinate communication

The flow of information and relationship between employees and their immediate supervisors was rated by 66.7% of the sample as fairly good and by 11% as very good, 5.5% rated it as very bad. The union leadership found middle management to be accessible. However, top management was found to be inaccessible by employees and also by the union leadership. This difficulty was attributed to the protectiveness by secretaries of these offices. According to 61% of the respondents, supervisors do give them a chance to make suggestions during the course of their daily duties and also in meetings. This good relationship between supervisors and subordinates is beneficial to ZESCO for increased distance among the different levels of management and the distribution of information may prevent the organisation from performing efficiently as posited by Huseman et al, (1990).

It was made clear in chapter three that the independent mindedness theory foresees employees preferring supervisors who give subordinates freedom of expression and establish their self concept. Moreover, the theory predicts that when subordinates are given this freedom, they tend to be more satisfied with their occupation and become more committed to work.

Line managers in ZESCO must ensure that they afford their juniors freedom of expression. Given the freedom to express themselves and suggest ideas to their supervisors, subordinates are elated and their self esteem soars. In customer service centres meetings are held fortnightly. Hence members of staff are given an

opportunity to participate and contribute ideas that help in improving the daily operations of a particular centre. Being associated with one's working suggestion put in place means recognition and thus subordinates feel happy.

7.2.3 Internal Channels of communication

ZESCO relies on notices and memoranda to disseminate information to employees.

In many organisations memoranda are utilized in sending information to employees and in terms of reaching many employees at a time, memoranda prove to be effective.

In the past an attempt to use a marketing news letter to share information relevant to employees was made. The news letter's objective was to create a well informed workforce as regards corporate activities, direction and also to instil a sense of belonging and ownership. Employees were invited to participate in the creation of the news letter by encouraging them to contribute articles on various topics. However, the venture was not successful as employees were reluctant to contribute articles as sitting down to write an article was found to be time demanding. Employees favour meetings when it comes to issues pertaining to direction of the corporation, policy or employee welfare for instance. Some reasons given for the preference of meetings is that such forums provide employees the opportunity to ask questions where clarification is sought, and make suggestions. Meetings are advantageous in that they facilitate integrated and effective communication. In addition, meetings help to explain new policies, and consult all concerned on issues at hand, clear problems arising and misunderstandings.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

8.0 Conclusions

This chapter concludes on the findings and on the discussions had on ZESCO in the earlier chapters. Further more, the chapter makes recommendations that the student believes necessary if the difficulties faced by ZESCO are to be resolved. On the basis of what can be drawn from the findings and discussions, it can be declared that much has been achieved in terms of ZESCO attaining effective communication with its customers.

Achieving an above average level of service is not effortless and maintaining a competitive service edge against other service providers is even more challenging. Nevertheless, ZESCO's Directorate of Customer Service has made progress in terms of improving the way the corporation's commercial activities are carried out although this does not by any way mean that all is well. Hence, there is need for the corporation to ensure that all its activities related to the customer, are supported by conscious reinforcements such as regular communication, training and performance management. There are a number of issues discussed below, which need corrective or ameliorative action.

8.0.1 CIS/Billing

The CIS has from the start failed to answer the need for timely billing. The system is unable to operate in a multi user real-time environment. Moreover, it cannot handle the increase in customer base. Despite several attempts to remedy the situation, problems identified at the inauguration of the system are still present to date. Several Hardware upgrades have since been done on the system over the years to accommodate the software patches from the suppliers meant to try and make the CIS system usable. The Hardware system's designed capacity has long since been reached and improvements exhausted. In addition, an increase in Customer base and number of users accessing the system has exacerbated the problems already highlighted in the

earlier chapters. This has been a cause of long and unacceptable response times when accessing the system to deal with Customer Payments or queries leading to customer frustrations.

The CIS bill was initially not user friendly as to be easily understood by the customer who expected their payments to appear on the face of the bill. It was thought that ZESCO was not acknowledging receipt of customer payments. This matter has been the source of suspicion by the customers that the ZESCO billing “system” was chaotic.

8.0.2 Prepayment meters

The corporation has for a number of years done a practical trial run of the prepayment system. The concept of prepayment meters is much like the pre-paid telephone bills. Where it has been implemented such as in the Emmasdale residential area, indications are that it has been very successful.

This system advantages both the corporation and the customer. With the prepayment meter the customer is able to budget and are thus in control of their consumption. On the other hand, the corporation is advantaged in that it can reduce on Meter readers to employ making a huge saving, bill delivery as well as debtor days are minimised.

8.0.3 Customer change of premises

The conditions of supply as they relate to customer change of premises appear to be weak as there is no assurance that only bona-fide new customers can open new accounts. In view of the Energy Regulation Board (ERB) ruling Landlords are no longer accountable for out-standing bills left at their premises by previous tenants. There is no mechanism in place that ensures previous tenants who are at the same time customers in transit, pay any outstanding bills at earlier occupied premises. The customers do not carry their outstanding balances with them. Consequently, new occupants of premises with outstanding bills always cry foul when asked to pay for consumption of electricity they feel not responsible for. Currently, ZESCO does not

require a customer to declare appropriate identity for cross checking against accounts with pending balances to make sure that new customers on premises declare their old accounts before any new accounts is opened for them. The inability to tie down customers to payment of outstanding bills from previously occupied premises is a great cause of uncollected revenue.

8.0.4 Fixed consumption charge

There is a public outcry against fixed charges. ZESCO is unable to constantly meet the demand of meters by customers newly supplied with power at their respective delivery points mainly due to the high demand and foreign exchange difficulties in the past. The situation does not only affect new customers but also customers who happen to have faulty meters that are not replaced.

Un-metered customers fall under the Un-metered Residential (UR) tariff category and are thus billed using pre-determined (constant) units of consumption. As stated in an earlier chapter this method of billing is a cause of much customer dissatisfaction, partly because customers will always be billed regardless of consumption having taken place or not. The result of this situation is numerous customer complaints originating from the said circumstances. In some cases the fixed consumption charged is much less than the actual while in other cases it is higher. As a result, both the corporation and the customer do incur losses depending on the circumstances prevailing.

8.0.5 Vandalism of transformers

The corporation continues to incur substantial losses in financial terms as well as in form of equipment loss as a result of rampantly vandalised transformers. Oil which acts as a cooling agent in transformers is frequently drained by vandals from the equipment. In the absence of this oil, the transformer explodes and is thus damaged. To date, it is not as yet known for what use the oil is put to for the vandals to risk their lives in the process of extracting it.

ZESCO has put security measures in place to curb the scourge of transformer vandalism and awareness campaigns continue to be conducted. Nevertheless, the rate at which transformers are vandalised is still alarming.

8.0.6 Inadequate flow of information

While it can be appreciated that ZESCO continues to improve its external communication the same cannot be said of internal communication. Despite having a well outlined internal methods of communication and a policy these are not if at all exploited. For instance, the Employee Relations Bulletin which is supposed to be published monthly has not been issued for years. Management had circulated a memo informing all employees who had not benefited from the company house sell to apply for house loans to which the concerned party responded. However, there has been no feedback of any kind as to the progress in relation to the applications. The silence on the issue is so deafening as to cause anxiety among the employees who have had to rely on unconfirmed grapevine information in the absence of official information. The Employee Relations Bulletin would have taken care of the matter had it been in production

Employees have no easy access to the Organisational Annual Report. While the Suggestion Box which is meant to be a tool of upward communication has proved to be a complete failure.

Poor and insufficient flow of information between employees and management leaves much room for improvement in terms of good relationships. Such an environment is responsible for problems that otherwise could be avoided. As long as remedial measures are not taken ZESCO's existence as a quasi-government organisation will be threatened as the familiar call to privatise grows louder and louder.

It is the student's view that effective communication and sound Public Relations are valuable and intangible assets, key to the survival of ZESCO. This is because both the dynamics of communication vis a vis PR are interrelated. Good relations are helpful

in free flow of communication and the presence of effective communication builds the foundation for better Public Relations. Unlike machines, employees do not behave in a fixed way. Like all humans employees are dynamic and respond to treatment. Therefore, to obtain best results they expect good relations and clear communication. In this harsh economic environment, better communication with external customers and better performance from employees is crucial to the success and profitability of ZESCO.

8.1 Recommendations

In view of the preceding discussions, this student has the following recommendations that he hopes will help the corporation.

8.1.1 Communication Audit

Conducting a communication audit for an organisation such as ZESCO is an effective way to discover and examine what is working, what is not and what is missing in the existing communication programmes. ZESCO has a clearly defined communication policy. Nevertheless, a communication audit must be conducted from time to time in order for the ZESCO to assess and align its communication strategies, tactics, activities, programmes and publications. The audit should cover all key elements from initial planning, interviewing of top management, conducting focus groups to assessing employee perception and feedback, to the complete evaluation of organisational communication activities from memos, e-mails and meetings to print publication, electronic media and more. The result should be a powerful clear picture of the state of communication in ZESCO as the audit will highlight the areas of strength and pin point the areas that need improvement or overhauling.

8.1.2 Pre-Payment Meters

Considering the fact that pre-payment meters have been a success where tested, ZESCO should introduce pre-payment meters to more customers in areas other than Emmasdale. Pre-payment meters would also be ideal for customers living in far flung places such as farms which are difficult to reach during the rainy season.

8.1.3 Re-assessment of fixed consumption charge

Customer dissatisfaction as regards fixed charges demands immediate attention and response. ZESCO should make all efforts necessary to ensure that each and every customer is metered and that all faulty meters are replaced. In the absence of meters ZESCO should ensure that before a customer is given a fixed charge the electricity load of the customer is measured and where applicable the reading history is considered as a basis for assigning a fixed charge.

ZESCO should also introduce Automatic Stipulation of Assessed Readings for unread meters on premises

8.1.4 Acquisition of appropriate metering equipment

ZESCO should acquire appropriate poly-phase meters for three-phase supplies and do away with the custom of using three single phase meters.

8.1.5 Refine work-flow processing

The corporation that changes in dynamic customer data are captured accurately and timely in the system. The work flow processing must be filtered to take care of transparency, adequacy, relevance and accountability for different sections. The CIS can not operate efficiently without due diligence and accountability on the part of all units take account of technical e.g. Planning, Metering as well as billing etc.

8.1.6 Replacement of CIS

Since ZESCO plans to overhaul the current CIS and replace it with another namely; the BIS as mentioned in chapter five, it is important that the positive aspects and changes that will come with the new system are marketed by way of an aggressive customer awareness campaign. Lessons can be drawn from the past. It appears the CIS was under- marketed and obvious sensitivity to the plight of the public seemed lacking. The marketing department should be involved in pursuing and communicating issues of importance to the customers. In this way, ZESCO will avoid being misunderstood over and over again by its customers and it will also allow customers to have a glimpse into the positive aspects of the system.

8.1.7 Employee Newsletters

Management should consider reviving the Employee Relations Bulletin and the News Letter. These are vital communication tools that can be used to effectively communicate with employees and achieve corporation objectives. Using employee newsletters ZESCO will address internal problems and take advantage of opportunities. Management should use the newsletter to spread the organisation's philosophy or vision, announce policies or procedure, recognize special contributions by employees and report on changes in benefits packages etc.

8.1.8 Organisational Change

Often employees feel managers change their organisation simply on whim or management restructures a company because it does not know what else to do. They feel that way because no one explains the why, how, when, or who of organisational change. Employees feel threatened because change may mean loss of jobs, changes in comfortable jobs, or transfers to other locations.

ZESCO should use a newsletter to explain the issues and plans, and whether the changes mean a short-term or long-term dislocations. Management should use this channel of communication to address critical issues, provide necessary assurance or warning, and act as a forum of discussions.

8.1.9 Customer Service Training

With growing emphasis on customer service best practices, ZESCO should ensure that customer service training is an on going exercise that ensures the learning of better ways of handling customers and their complaints. Research has proved time and again that dealing with complaints effectively keeps customers loyal.

Time and again workshops should be held such that frontline staff is exposed to proven techniques of complaint management, and provided with updates. These workshops should also be used to reinforce positive employee attitudes toward

complaints, and to emphasize that everyone gains when customers get proper responses to their complaints.

8.1.10 Public Relations and Marketing

Currently Public Relations and Marketing in ZESCO are run as two separate entities belonging to two different directorates namely; Human Resources and Customer Service. These two departments should merge to form one. Marketing is a tool that PR can use for product promotion and market research so as to maximise effectively, internal and external communication.

Public Relations should not be used by ZESCO as a tool for fixing things for management or to be utilized to publish press releases. Instead the corporation should allow PR to play a leading role in areas such as crisis management, image audit, internal and external communication and event management.

8.1.11 Image

ZESCO's image may be generally positive with its customers, but still negative with its employees. Therefore, ZESCO needs to assess its image with every audience, including its employees, suppliers, customers, shareholders, general public, media, regulatory authorities etc. the corporation must from time to time carefully study its image and take suitable remedial measures to either establish or maintain a positive image. In other words, ZESCO should frequently "Image Audit".

8.2 Finale

This report has established that the ZESCO has faced numerous problems that have affected its efforts to deliver the desired level of service to its customers. In an effort to address its problems ZESCO management has in the past launched a number of programmes such as the Power Cut Win or Loose Lottery, Bill Buster Promotion and the Quality 2000 Customer Services Improvement Plan, all primarily in an effort to improve the effectiveness of its communication. The programmes fundamental reasons besides the need to improve the organisation's overall cash flow have been to

project the image of ZESCO as a company which is clearly focused on an integrated and co-ordinated approach to Customer Services.

Following the corporation's experience with the CIS, plans to replace the problematic system with a more efficient and user friendly BIS system aimed at creating a Brand Image which will automatically translate into a positive reactions from both internal(ZESCO employees) and external (customers, GRZ, financiers,...etc.) Stakeholders are under way.

The Quality 2000 was aimed at creating a Brand Image which would automatically translate into a positive reaction from both internal (ZESCO employees) and external (customers, GRZ, financiers, etc.) stakeholders.

The report has shown that a clearly outlined Communications and PR policy exists and that the efforts to improve external communication are on going. However, the corporation's internal communication leaves much room for improvement. This is partly because most of the focus has been on improving external communication. This student appreciates the importance of effective external communication but ZESCO can only attain desirable levels of effective communication with its customers by guaranteeing effective internal communication for this is the key to gaining support for all its organizational objectives, policies and programmes. Therefore, the need to regularly audit both internal and external communication to guarantee its effectiveness cannot be overemphasized.

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