

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ZESCO AND ITS CUSTOMERS

**By
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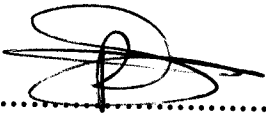
**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Communication for
Development offered by the Department of Mass Communication, The University of Zambia**

April 2003

DECLARATION

I declare that this Practical Attachment Report has not been submitted for a Degree in this or any other University.

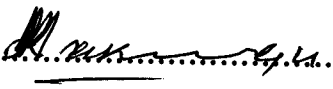
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ABSTRACT

This report is based on the experiences and findings of the student while on attachment at ZESCO. Though not exhaustive it attempts to identify some of the major problems, analyse root causes and offer solutions to the most crucial and pressing problems that have affected or contributed to ZESCO's ability to communicate effectively and deliver better quality customer service.

The student found that the new billing system (CIS) introduced in 1998, was not adequately marketed to ZESCO customers externally and to ZESCO staff themselves. The result was that most customers did not comprehend the new billing system and thus they rose against ZESCO with much hostility. The student noted that the root cause of the problems ZESCO has experienced have been due to the inability to effectively communicate both externally and internally, issues of importance. It is for this reason that the author especially recommends, paramount to all other issues, the regular conducting of communication audits to assess the effectiveness of ZESCO's communications to both its internal and external customers. Such action will not only save ZESCO from being misunderstood over and over again by its customers but also go a long way in improving its internal communication which until then left much to be desired.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I thank my Lord God Almighty for bringing me to the point no one else could have ever brought me to, and He deserves all the praise.

Sincere gratitude go to the Late Prof. Francis Kasoma for his inspiration and guidance from the time I began the long journey he could not finish with me; in quest of a Masters Degree in communication for development. May the Lord rest his soul in eternal peace. I am equally grateful to Mr. K Makungu for taking over Prof. Kasoma's unfinished supervisory work. His invaluable and necessary comments in my scripts have guided me to this final report. The lecturing team of the Masters programme namely Mr. F. Muzyamba and Mr. B. Nkunika deserve special mention for their knowledge, encouragement and support provided to me.

My gratefulness is also extended to ZESCO Management and Mrs. B.M.H. Mwaanga, for having made it possible for me to study for and complete this degree. To my dear friend Idani Lichilo I say thank you for the critics and invaluable advice.

Finally, I would like to thank all those individuals not mentioned but whom in one way or another helped me through the MCD programme.

R. L. Sampa

The University of Zambia

Dedication

To: My wife Regina, my children; Chanda, Chongo and Kangwa for being always understanding, loving, supportive and encouraging throughout my study even though at times it meant denying you, my family the attention deserved.

List of Abbreviations/Acronyms

AMR	Automated Meter Reading
BIS	Business Information System
CEC	Copperbelt Energy Company
CIS	Customer Information System
DDACC	Direct Debit and Credit Clearance
ERB	Energy Regulation Board
ESCOM	Electricity Supply Company of Malawi
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
G&T	Generation and Transmission
HR	Human Resource
MCD	Masters Communication for Development
NCC	National Control Centre
NESAWU	National Energy Sector and Allied Workers Union
PA	Practical Attachment
PP	Project Proposal
PR	Public Relations
SC	State Counsel
UNIP	United Independence Party
UR	Un metered Residential
VAT	Value Added Tax
VAX	Old Billing Virtual Memory System
Y&R	Young and Rubicum
ZCCM	Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines
ZEAWU	Zambia Electricity and Allied Workers Union
ZESA	Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority
ZRA	Zambia Revenue Authority

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Chapter 1

Background

1. Master in Communication for Development (MCD) Attachment

The reader of this report is accorded the necessary background to the attachment; among others, problems and objectives, terms of reference of the attachment and a literature review of what other scholars' findings are as regards organisational communication with particular reference to ZESCO Limited Lusaka.

The Masters programme in Communication for Development (MCD) requires the student to be attached to an institution, which has a base in development activities. The attachment facilitated an on-the spot reflection of what goes on at ZESCO as regards development communication. The problems that the organisation faces and what measures could be put in place to improve, maintain or better the communication were practically met head-on by the attachee during the period from December 2002 to March 2002. This was the period when the attachee was at ZESCO Limited for purposes of compiling the report.

The attachee had a daily experience of being part of the ZESCO Limited work force, fusing with the staff and gathering the information needed for the report. Although in the beginning the attachee faced difficulties as the days went on mingling and fusing into the system became much easier. During the period of attachment, the attachee was able to interact with many members of staff.

As will be brought out in the chapters of the report, the operations of ZESCO Limited will be confined to the case in Lusaka, mostly Customer Service and Marketing.

General information

This section aids a reader not acquainted with Zambia, and its background, the prospect to have an insight of the country, its geographical position, resources,

education, languages, and above all the policy and structure of ZESCO Limited, the institution's role, influence and history.

1.1 Zambia

Zambia is a landlocked country in south Africa, bounded on the north by Zaire and Tanzania; on the east by Malawi; on the southeast by Mozambique; on the south by Zimbabwe, Botswana, and the Caprivi Strip of Namibia; and on the west by Angola. The area is 752,614 sq. km (290,586sq. miles). Zambia's capital and largest city is Lusaka.

Most of Zambia is high plateau with a flat or gently rising and falling terrain. Zambia's terrain elevations average between 1100 and 1400 m (about 3500 and 4500ft). Mountains in the northeast reach 2164m (7100ft). Major rivers are the Zambezi in the west and the Luangwa in the east; and the Luapula and Chambeshi, in the north. A vast swampy region surrounds Lake Bangweulu, in the north. Lake Kariba is a large resevoir formed by Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River.

Although lying within the Tropic Zone, much of Zambia enjoys a pleasant subtropical climate because of the high altitude. The average temperature in Lusaka during July, the coldest month of the year, is 16 degrees Celsius (61 Fahrenheit); the hottest month, January, has an average temperature of 21 degrees Celsius (70 Fahrenheit). Annual rainfall ranges from 750 mm (30 in) in the south to 1300 (51) in the north. Nearly all of the rain falls between November and April.

Zambia's population is estimated at 10.2 million according to the 2000 census. About 85 percent of the population lives in rural areas with the urban locations accommodating about 45 percent. The major focus of national activity is along the line of rail that extends south from the copper belt, through Lusaka, to the Victoria Falls. Large areas in the north, east and west are relatively less developed.

1.2 Natural resources

Most of the country has savanna-type vegetation—grasslands interspersed with trees. Teak forests are in the southwest. Animals include elephants, lions, rhinoceroses, and several varieties of antelope. Of awe-inspiring importance are the rich mineral veins of the country's copper belt. The belt extends down into Zambia from southern Zaire and contains major deposits of copper, cobalt, and other minerals. Zambia also has substantial hydroelectric potential. The Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River is the country's main power source. Zambia shares the Kariba system with Zimbabwe. Other stations on the Lunsemfwa and Mulungushi rivers serve Kabwe. Installations have also been built on the Kafue River. In the early 1990s the total installed electricity-generating capacity was about 2.8 million kilowatts. The yearly output was some 12 billion kilowatt-hours, nearly all of which was produced by hydroelectric plants.

1.3 Education

School attendance has increased significantly since Zambia's independence in 1964. In the early 1990s about 1.5 million pupils were enrolled in primary schools. In the late 1980s about 161,300 pupils were enrolled in secondary schools; vocational and teacher-training schools and 8000 pupils; and the University of Zambia (founded in 1965), at Lusaka, had about 7400 students.

1.4 Economy

Zambia's wealth is based largely on mining in the rich copper belt, and downturns in copper prices have harshly damaging economic consequences. Some processing and manufacturing has been started since independence, and during the 1970s attempts were made to diversify agriculture and to make the country self-sufficient in food. In the early 1990s the estimated annual national budget showed about \$665 million in revenue and \$767 million in expenditure.

Zambia's economy has been in decline for more than a decade, with falling imports and a growing foreign debt. Economic difficulties stem from a chronically depressed level of copper production and ineffective economic policies. The high inflation rate has also added to Zambia's economic woes in recent years.

The labour force is employed in a variety of occupations, including agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and construction; and transport and services. Major industries include copper mining and processing, transport, construction, foodstuffs, beverages, chemicals, textiles and export commodities are copper, zinc, cobalt, lead, and tobacco. .

1.5 People and Language

Zambia's population, predominantly rural, is made up of more than 70 Bantu-speaking ethnic groups. Most groups are small; the largest are the Bemba, Nyanja, Tonga, Lozi, Kaonde, Luvale and Lunda peoples. Languages spoken in order of predominance are English (official) and about 73 indigenous languages. Ethnically, the society of Zambia includes the following groups of people: African 98.7%, European 1.1%, and other 0.2%. Some tribes are small, and only two have enough people to constitute at least 10% of the population. Most Zambians are subsistence farmers. The country also has a small but economically important Asian population, most of whom are Indians. Almost half of the country is urban.

About 72% of the people of Zambia are Christian; many of them adhere to independent churches, which combine elements of Christianity and African religions. Most of the remainder follow traditional religions. Between 24 to 49% you have Muslim and Hindus.

1.6 Government

Zambia was the first British territory to become a republic immediately upon attaining independence. The constitution that was publicized on August 25, 1973 annulled the original 1964 constitution. The new constitution and the national Elections that followed in December 1973 were the final steps in achieving what was called a 'one party participatory democracy'.

The 1973 constitution provided for a strong president and a unicameral national assembly. The Central Committee of the United National Independence Party (UNIP), the sole legal party in Zambia, formulated National Policy. The cabinet executed the Central Committees policy.

In accordance with the intention to formalize UNIP supremacy in the new system, the constitution stipulated that the sole candidate in elections for the office of president was the person selected to be president of UNIP by the party's general conference.

In December 1990, at the end of a year of agitation that included riots in the capital and a coup attempt, President Kaunda signed legislation ending UNIP's monopoly on power. In response to growing popular demand for multi-party democracy and after lengthy, difficult negotiations between the Kaunda Government and the opposition groups, Zambia enacted a new constitution in August 1991. The constitution enlarged the National Assembly from 136 members to maximum of 158 members, established an electoral commission, and allowed for more than one presidential candidate. In addition, candidates no longer had to be members of UNIP. Under the present constitution, the president is elected directly by universal suffrage and may serve a maximum of two five-year terms.

The National Assembly is comprised of 150 directly elected members, up to 8 presidential appointed members, and a speaker. Zambia is divided into nine provinces, each administered by an appointed minister.

The current head of state is President Levy Mwanawasa SC. He is the third Head of State since the country got independence from Britain in 1964.

1.7 ZESCO Limited

ZESCO Limited first came into existence in 1969 as Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation Limited, a Company registered under the Companies Ordinance by guarantee.

The electricity utility operated under the Companies Ordinance by guarantee for nearly twenty years before the Board, by way of a Court Order of August 1988

moved a motion to have the Corporation changed into a Company Limited by shares.

On October 10th 1988 the Registration of Incorporation was issued and the nominal capital authorized at the date of registration was and remains K400,00.00 divided into K200,000.00 ordinary shares of K2.00 each.

The change from a company Limited by guarantee to that Limited by shares enabled the Corporation to declare profit for a company Limited by guarantee is by law not supposed to make profit. Presently, the Companies Act oversees ZESCO Limited's operations.

Following a resolution at a General Meeting held in 1994, the name of Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation Limited was changed to ZESCO Limited.

Government wholly owns ZESCO Limited. The relationship between Government and ZESCO Limited is defined in the Performance Contract signed in 1996 by both parties. The Performance Contract defines the commercialization concerns and other operational benchmarks for ZESCO Limited over the contract period of three (3) years.

The Memorandum of Association embodies the objectives for which the Corporation was established. Of these objectives, the most important ones are the following:

- To generate, acquire, transmit, transport and convert electricity
- Acquire, operate, control and manage undertakings for the generation of supply of electricity.
- To act as a public undertaking as defined by and for all purposes of the Electricity Act and of every statutory modification or re-enactment thereof for the time being in force
- To supply electricity to any such undertaking as aforesaid or to any other person, Corporation, Authority, Board or Government.

1.8 Structure of ZESCO Limited

ZESCO is overseen by a Board of Directors, which is appointed by Government. The Board comprises members from varied walks of life to ensure wide consultation and participation of the private sector.

1.8.1 The Managing Director

ZESCO has a new Managing Director. He runs the day - to - day Management and Administration of the Corporation and is vested with the responsibility and authority to ensure that ZESCO Limited runs profitably as a business, which is customer focused.

The Managing Director is helped to discharge his functions by a Management Board team comprising of Directors who run different Directorates whose main functions and operations are stated hereafter. These are as follows:-

1. Generation and Transmission/ Power Rehabilitation Project.
2. Distribution and Supply
3. Customer Services
4. Engineering Development
5. Corporate Development
6. Finance
7. Human Resources

Following the coming of the new MD the structure of ZESCO Limited has undergone some changes. The number of directorates has been reduced from nine to seven. The Audit Services is no longer a directorate on its own but falls under Finance while Secretarial and Admin. Services functions are now under Human Resource Directorate. Power Rehabilitation Project is now part of Generation and Transmission. The Directorate of Distribution and Customer Service have been split into two separate Directorates namely, Customer Service and Distribution and Supply

Directorates. The changes are in view of scaling down the previous top-heavy management structure.

1.8.2 Directorates

1.8.2.1 Generation and Transmission

The Generation and Transmission (G&T) Directorate is responsible for the generation of power at Kafue Gorge, Victoria Falls and small hydro power stations (Lusiwasi, Chishimba Falls, Musonda Falls and Lunzua) and for the bulk transfer of the power thus generated from the power stations to the load areas through use of high voltage transmission lines. The two bulk supply customers for G&T are the Copperbelt Energy Corporation (CEC) who in turn supplies the mines, and ZESCO's Distribution and Supply Directorate.

The primary function of the directorate is to operate and maintain the existing power stations and transmission infrastructure including the associated National Control Centre (NCC).

1.8.2.2 Finance

This directorate is responsible for management of most beneficial working capital cash flows including sourcing of financing opportunities to guarantee ZESCO's viability. It is accountable for accounting services and control, monitoring of expenditure and observance to budgets. Finance instigates periodic asset re-evaluation and it is also accountable for credit collection.

1.8.2.3 Engineering Development

This directorate consists of two departments, the Transmission Development Department and the Distribution Development Department. The summary functions of the former are as follows:

- Development of corporation's transmission infrastructure of voltage greater than 33Kv
- General modification of the transmission infrastructure outside the scope PRP

- The department also participates in the regional Southern African Power Pool planning activities on behalf of ZESCO.

For any would be customer of ZESCO the Distribution Development Department is the point of entry. The department carries out planning of new projects from 33Kv downwards. The projects may be internally driven or externally driven. Projects more to do with expansion and reinforcement of the system are internally driven while those which are a result of customer demands are externally driven.

1.8.2.4 Human Resources

In terms of business the human resource function is by and large not judged to be part of the core business of Generation and Transmission and Distribution of electricity. However, the HR function undoubtedly continues to be one of the most important tools of production. Without HR the growth of any activity in the organisation of companies cannot exist. Therefore, the Human Resources Directory is responsible for: Acquisition or hiring, utilization, retention and development of manpower.

1.8.2.5 Distribution And Supply

This directorate is in charge of the operation and maintenance of the distribution system throughout the country. It ensures the availability of supply to ZESCO's customers. Being at the helm of undertaking electrification projects to connect customers it is also responsible for System Development and Business Growth.

The Distribution System embraces the main network from the national grid and detached networks fed from stand-alone diesel power stations. The directorate also sources power from ESCOM (Malawi) to Lundazi District and ZESA (Zimbabwe) to supply Siavonga District.

1.8.2.6 Company Secretary

The Company Secretary is responsible for guaranteeing Corporate Governance that is about good Management style based on transparency, accountability, and ethical

conduct. The directorate is also responsible for the administration of the company such as obligations under the Companies Act, Cap. 388 drafting of contracts, negotiations and signing of the same. It is also in charge of processing claims against defaulters and debtors, acquires or disposes of property and registration of mortgages, conveyance of property and defends the corporation in court in various cases. Last but not least, it provides legal advice and opinion to Management and the Board of Directors.

1.8.2.7 Customer Service

Customer Services Directorate was born out of the Corporation's stated goal of Customer focus. In the last decade, ZESCO's customer base has rapidly swelled from around 100,000 in 1993 to approximately 270,000 customers in 2001. With a growing customer base, it has become more and more unmistakable that the company has not been focusing as much on the customer and commercial side of the business as compared to the attention it has paid to its technical side.

Government is determined to raise access to electricity from the present 20% to 50% of the population. Consequently ZESCO plans for a massive electrification drive that will increase the customer base to over 500,000 customers over the next five years.

The role of this directorate is that of custodian of commercial activities of the corporation. In addition it is the interface between the company and the customer.

The foremost activities under the directorate are:

- The Frontline Desk Functions of New Applications, Fault Reporting, Marketing, Complaints and Query Handling, Money Collection, and handling of special/urgent customer requests.
- Billing and Meter Reading, Bill Delivery, Credit Management, Resolution of billing queries and Customer Account Management.
- The functions of New Services Connections, Meter Inspection and Replacement, Reduction of Non Technical Losses.
- The development, provision and operation of Information Technology Services.

In terms of structure the Directorate is headed by a Director, two Divisional Customer Service Managers – one for the Northern half of Zambia i.e. Copperbelt, NorthWestern, Luapula and Northern Provinces; the other for the Southern half of Zambia i.e. Central, Eastern, Lusaka, Southern and Western Provinces, and a Senior Manager responsible for Information Technology Development and Operations in the Company.

1.8.3 Mission Statement

ZESCO is guided by its mission statement of profitably and competitively supplying uninterrupted electricity at the correct voltage to the satisfaction of its customers.

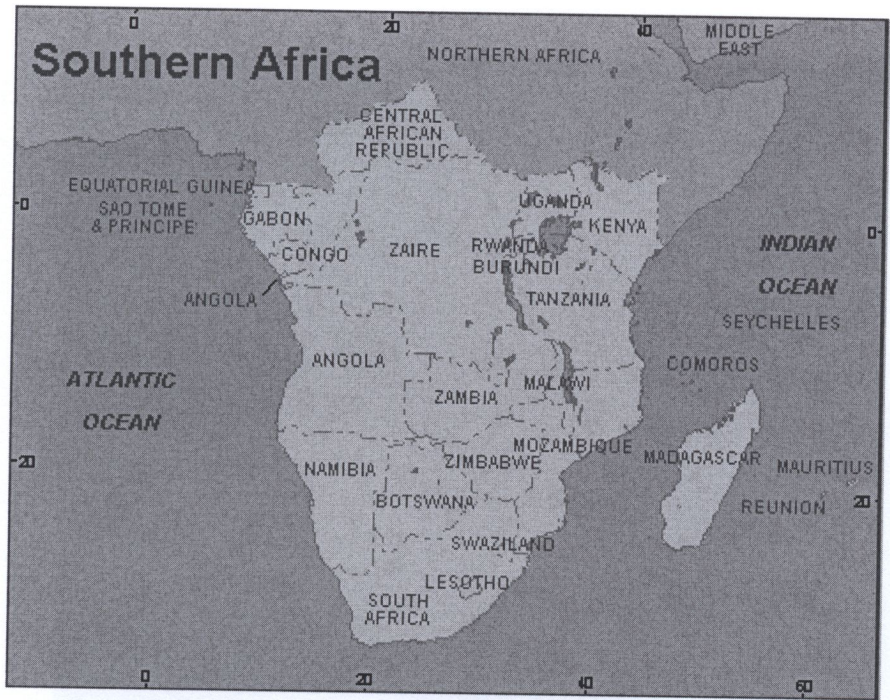
1.8.4 Strategy

The Corporations strategy is to run ZESCO as a profitable business that is customer focused.

1.8.5 Vision

ZESCO's vision is "To be better than London Electricity Company"

Figure 1: Map of Southern Africa, showing the position of Zambia



Chapter 2

Scope of Attachment

2.0 General outline

Most organisations, be they public or private understand the importance of Strategic Communication with customers and/or stakeholders. For this reason Marketing and communication specialists are employed to produce communication plans for external use. For the private sector that means more income; in the public sector it means better public relations, and better use of government services through customer information.

Breakdown in communication can lead to management problems for an organisation. It is important for an organisation to keep in touch with its interest groups explaining its operations, with regard to provision of goods or services. When such communication takes place, an understanding is created which in turn leads to good relationship between the organisation and its interest groups. Furthermore, it is an organisations responsibility to get the views of its interest groups.

As a service provider ZESCO Ltd needs to collect revenue. Unfortunately, this is one area in which the corporation has not done well. As a result the corporation has not done well. As a result the corporation's financial base has been weak. Customers have not been paying in full. ZESCO has been forced to borrow to keep the business going and thus in debt. Consequently, ZESCO Ltd is faced with possible privatization.

Better communication leads organisations to achieve objectives such as getting customers and making sales, greater employee loyalty and productivity, clarity of organisational goals and better employer/employee relations.

Clear communication is crucial to the health of any organisation. Just as the human body relies on its nervous system to communicate the brain's instructions on when to laugh or cry; ZESCO relies on effective organisational communication to aid the accomplishment of the corporation's objectives.

2.1 Framework of practical attachment

The task of the practical attachment was to look into the various problems facing the Corporation, including those related to communication.

The key rationale was to reveal the manner in which ZESCO disseminates information within and outside the corporation. In these tough times, better communication with external customers and better performance from employees (internal customers) is ever more crucial to success and profitability. Zambia is a country experiencing economic difficulties. In addition ZESCO is beset with vandalism attacks on its installations; the majority of its customers struggle to service their debt to the corporation resulting in low revenue collections. Uncertainty over ZESCO continuing to operate as a government owned institution as it faces privatization continues to hang in the air. It is believed in certain sectors that the corporation's monopolistic nature as regards domestic supply of electricity is responsible for its inefficiency and insensitivity to the plight of the customers cry for lower tariffs. Billing system continues to be a source of concern to the customer as confidence in the institutions ability to run efficiently to the customer's satisfaction is ever in question resulting in confidence erosion

The student was actively involved in the activities of the university for a period of four months, between 1st December 2002 and 31st March 2003. He was fully involved in the activities of the **Customer Service Directorate**.

The student, through **Customer Service** sought to discover certain problems, which required urgent remedy, especially those related to communication and present them to management.

Furthermore, the attached wanted to make suggestions to the Corporation on how it could improve ZESCO's image if unsatisfactory and help to find ways of sustaining the corporation's image if found to be satisfactory.

2.2 Terms of reference

The student's center of attention was on the assessment of the following terms of reference as set out in the Project Proposal (PP):

- (a) The communication approaches employed in the past and present;
- (b) The image(s) ZESCO has created to the public arising from the communication approaches;
- (c) Whether the image (s) are satisfactory to ZESCO;
- (d) Whether the image (s) are satisfactory to the general public;
- (e) What should be done by ZESCO to improve its communication with the public in order to improve its image, if the image is found to be unsatisfactory or keep its image, if image is found to be satisfactory.

2.3 Justification

The writer's aim was to establish what communication approaches ZESCO Ltd has used in the past and is using presently to communicate to the public and within itself. It was important to find out more about the effectiveness of the communication process in terms of its operation, content and style.

The Master of Communication for Development (MCD) degree is a developmental programme. The main aim is to teach Communication Skills and Strategies which can be used to solve an organisation's communication problems, so as to bring about development.

ZESCO Ltd was found suitable for the attachment it being one of the major government owned service providers in the country.

2.4 Methodology

The methods employed were those of document examination, participant observation and questionnaires. Data analysis was done qualitatively and quantitatively.

Questionnaires were administered to twenty ZESCO employees under customer service centres. One hundred and fifty (150) customers were administered with questionnaires. These were from different residential areas, namely high, medium and low-density areas. Fifty (50) were sampled from each area.

Un stratified random sampling was used to select the one hundred and fifty (150) customers from Matero, Kabwata Estates and Northmead residential areas. Purposive sampling was used to select the twenty (20) ZESCO employees.

The student examined availed documents such as minutes of meetings, Newsletters and official correspondence regarding activities engaged in by ZESCO and its customers.

The student was attached to a Customer Service Centre under the Directorate to which the Marketing Department also belongs. This enabled the student to fully participate in the day-to-day activities of both the customer service centre and the marketing department.

The student interviewed members of staff as well as other sources, randomly. At the same time the student attentively observed the Customer Service centre interface between ZESCO, and its interest groups, carry out its functions.

Below are the PA attachment questions:

- (a) To what degree does ZESCO diffuse and interchange information with and outside the Corporation?

- (b) What methods are employed by the Corporation when responding to complaints or views from various interest groups?
- (c) How does the corporation make known its activities as regards the service it provides?
- (d) What are the activities of marketing?

The above PA questions were addressed to different people in Customer Service. The questions provided guidance for the student in determining how the corporation was fairing in creating and affecting an effective communication system and the creation of rapport with its interest groups.

2.5 Limitations

A number of limitations were experienced. The initial stage of the PA was rather slow. It took some time before the student could officially begin the PA. The encounter with the Public Relations office in the early stages yielded little, as the Office was very busy with issues concerning the fight against privatization of the corporation. Customers were reluctant to answering the questionnaire. Some simply refused to answer. Others were hostile towards the exercise. The student had to exercise much tact to illicit corporation from respondents. Some members of staff in the chosen centres for the administration of the questionnaire did not appreciate the exercise.

2.6 Literature Review

There is limited data on communication in organisations in Zambia, especially communication information with specific reference to ZESCO. However, information on organisational communication in general is available on the internet and other sources.

2.6.1 Communication: The base upon which organisational administration must be built.

Communication means several things in different contexts. However, our focus is on human communication, which Borchers et al (1990) defines as the social interaction of human beings through messages. Hence, communication is very important for any organisation as it is used to send and receive messages. To borrow from Wilcox et al (1995:203) the goals of the communication process are to inform, persuade, motivate, or achieve mutual understanding.

Professional communication, moreover, particularly concerns interaction in the workplace, and in an organisation as a whole. It is part of the social and managerial process, it is also part of labour and human relations; and it is part of the process of motivating and influencing attitudes to work and to others.

According to Robert (1994) communication can be regarded as the foundation upon which organisations and administrations must be built. By virtue of ZESCO being an organisation the importance of communication as regards its operations cannot be over emphasized. Thus in the absence of communication within itself ZESCO cannot expect its operations to run smoothly. However, as most scholars agree, the success or failure to achieve communication goals depend on key factors; there being commitment and energy of top management and the willingness of other individuals to share their expertise and experience towards a common goal.

We spend our working lives involved in a complex web of communication, as senders or receivers of messages of varying degrees of complexity. Communication is a vital part of our lives. Nations attempt to communicate with other nations, often unsuccessfully (Lancaster and Withey, 1997). Whole industries are based on communicating. The image and identity of an organisation such as ZESCO is dependent on how it reflects its actual reality through visual images and the right choice of words (Argenti, 1994). Communication and the need to manage it effectively are important for ZESCO, it being an organisation that is trying to develop

a coherent image for itself. In order to communicate effectively with employees about health benefits for example, to convince stakeholders that the company is worth investing in, or just to get customers to buy products or services; it pays to use a coherent communication strategy to achieve these ends.

2.6.2 Organisational Communication

Bacal (1988) posits that effective organisational communication, regardless of the form it takes requires three things. First, all participants in the communication must have appropriate skills and understanding to communicate well. Communication is not a simple process and many people lack the required depth for understanding issues. Second, effective communication demands a climate of culture that supports effective communication. Most distinctively, this climate involves trust, openness, reinforcement of good communication practices, and shared responsibility for making communication effective. Third, effective communication needs attention. It doesn't just happen, but develops as a result of an intentional effort on the part of management and staff. Too often communication whether it is good or bad, is taken for granted.

Foltz (1985) refers to organisational communication as the vital link in the chain of events that is the process of managing a business. Communication is the single factor that will make ZESCO as an organisation viable, successful, effective, and enduring. This means that above anything else, the communications of ZESCO project its "personality" to its internal and external audiences.

Organisational communication means different and several things to different people. However, Foltz defines it as the exchange of information, ideas, and feelings. Others may confine the meaning to the transmission of information, or equate communication and media. However, these meanings are only fragments of a whole. All must be exploited effectively to promote the exchange process and set the tone for communication in an organisation.

With reference to organisations, communication can be said to have two primary responsibilities as stated by Foltz: (1) to support organisational objectives, policies and programs, and (2) to meet audience needs. The two afore mentioned responsibilities can be viewed as contradictory or mutually exclusive, but doing both jobs well.

The key to gaining support for organisational objectives, policies and programs is to serve the organisation's audiences—to know what information they want and how they prefer to get it. Even though the needs may never be met completely, people who feel they are important to an organisation will be much more likely to support it than those who believe that its “management doesn't care about what we think.”

2.6.3 Employee Communication

Poor communication is more often than not responsible for most friction between employees and management. Another reason for poor communication is that organisations persist in using forms of communication that employees do not favour. According to the Quality Magazine issue (1993) of the Total Quality Institute of Australia, surveys carried out all around the world have shown that employees prefer to receive important news or information from their immediate supervisor or manager, face to face. Employees do not want to read newsletters. They tend to trust their supervisors, reason being that he or she is a known quantity. The supervisor can relate information to the work place in a meaningful way, and can give and get answers to questions.

Frequently, it is believed that supervisors i.e. foremen, line managers are poor communicators. However, research has shown that giving them something meaningful to communicate enables them to communicate effectively with their team members. In addition, communicating direct with the workforce detracts from the importance and power of the supervisor and manager. Studies have also shown that employees' satisfaction with both job and employer are positively correlated to perceptions of the power of their supervisors. Furthermore, supervisors who know or

can find out what's going on in the organisation, and who can get information back up the management line and get appropriate action, are likely to have more satisfied and hopefully more productive teams.

Rodney Gray's studies (1996) show that regardless of how executives try, and how much money is dedicated towards the problem, organisations just don't seem to be able to communicate effectively with employees. This does not only apply to frontline employees but also to managers and executives who almost always find internal communications unsatisfactory. It is said employees are told things, only to deny shortly thereafter they were ever informed. As is the case in ZESCO, it's almost as though information goes "in one ear and out the other" except that much communication (i.e. official) to employees is in print, by way of memos.

Thomas C. Hunter (1985) says to attempt to communicate without a deep awareness of an audience's interests and attitudes, and everything else that goes into its makeup, is to attempt to communicate without a clear sense of direction.

The chance for communication to be fully effective under such circumstances is simply that – a chance- and the outcome can be worse than not communicating at all. Recipients of misdirected organisational communication can easily conclude, "They not only don't know what corner I'm coming out of, they don't even care."

When organisational communication conveys an evident lack of caring employees may begin to approach their work with far less enthusiasm- and a matching decrease in their performance and effectiveness. They may seek employment elsewhere. Customers may take their business to competitors who value them and show it. Probable customers may choose not to get involved with the organisation. Shareholders may transfer their investment to companies responsive to their particular needs and interests. ZESCO's customers may begin to regard the organisations as insensitive and unattractive. Such a view by customers would in turn contaminate all relations with whom ZESCO is concerned: employee, customer, community, financial and even government relations.

When employees sense a lack of concern on the part of the employer, for example, they can lose concern about producing a quality product. Consequently, customers soon discover they are purchasing defective products or paying for a service of poor quality than before. Should the lowering of work performance and product quality be widespread the company can encounter a sales decline that can lead to financial communities to no longer regard the company as an attractive investment. In the case of ZESCO poor quality product would result in frequent power supply interruptions and fluctuating voltage with minimum response in terms of rectifying the power outages. Consequently, an escalation of consumer complaints can lead to rising demands for stronger consumer protection laws from bodies such as the Energy Regulation Board. Meanwhile there can be a growing sense of awareness among the general public that ZESCO is not concerned about the quality of the service it provides. As a result, serious questions will be asked about the Company's sense of responsibility regarding other aspects of its operations

D'Aprix argues that poor communication confounds employees, making them skeptical and cynical, worsening their fears and thus making them resistant to change. He further states that effective communication is about achieving common understanding of and focus on what the organisation is trying to achieve in the workplace. 95% of most formal internal communication says D'Aprix is reactive: simply reporting what has happened, with no clear connection to the past or future.

2.6.4 Communication and Growth of Organisations

As an organisation grows, it is likely to experience communication problems. This is so because more personnel and management levels are added to the organisation as it undergoes development through planned expansion or major restructuring. Huseman et al. (1990) affirms that:

As an organisation grows, so do (sic) its
communication problems organisational
development through planned expansion

or consolidation may result in one or more levels being added to an organisation.

(Huseman et al. 1990:8)

ZESCO, in terms of organisational structure comprises several directories, divisions, regions, departments and many levels of management. It is presently undergoing restructuring which so far has resulted in the reduction of directories from nine to seven, the creation of the Copperbelt division and new departments.

More often than not, organisations with many divisions and subdivision levels of administration or levels of management experience communication problems; transmission of information among the various management levels, which may be far apart, becomes complicated. ZESCO is no exception. Huseman et al. (1990), affirms this assertion:

Increased distance among the different levels of management and the distribution of information which in turn may prevent the organisation from performing efficiently.

(Huseman et al., 1990:8)

The notion that communication is the effective exchange of meaning or understanding applies to both formal and informal communication. It applies to communication up, down and across the organisation. Everyone in the organisation is accountable for the effectiveness of his or her own communication. This especially applies to those who manage others. The efficiency of any organisation depends on how well coordinated the efforts of the members are. Therefore, management should see to it that there is adequate flow of information among all the workers. Information flow between an organisation and its environment should be ensured.

It is important for any organisation to hold top-level meetings on regular basis. Regardless of the management structure at the top a coordinating executive team is a must, so that all supervisors can speak officially with the same managerial voice. The meetings can be held on a daily or weekly basis and may take the form of briefs between the managing director and his or her top executive. Such regular events could be used as a clearinghouse for all general management problems, external and internal of current significance.

2.6.5 Dependable information and Organisational Performance

An organisation needs to avail its managers with dependable information on organisational performance on time. The organisation needs to be committed to this goal. Unless something is a commercially sensitive matter it can be and is expected to be communicated in a complete, unambiguous and timely manner. Managers with access to reliable information will in turn make informed decisions that will make an organisation live up to the expectations of customers and interest groups. Management credibility and trust will only come with a demonstrated track record of truthful, open communication.

Gray (1993) says that most organisations undertaking quality improvement processes use a number of employee communication programs to let employees know what is required of them and to fortify the importance of quality. Especially popular are extravaganzas to launch quality, newsletters and videotapes.

Two years ago The Times of Zambia (2000) reported that, Kabwe residents had demanded government's involvement in the disconnection of power supply by ZESCO. This was because ZESCO had allegedly given them wrong bills. Apparently, the bills were three months behind. In addition, the residents of Kabwe pointed out the lack of meters on premises.

Hundreds of residents demanded that Government
intervenes in the disconnections being undertaken

by ZESCO power cut division from Lusaka. The residents complained that they were being given wrong bills because in some cases, they were not being given bills for more than three months. some houses did not have meters and wondered where the meter readers were getting the figures (Times of Zambia, Wed. July 26, 2000)

The Monitor (2000) reported that some Members of Parliament had called for the removal of ZESCO management because of its failure to live up to customer expectations. The MP's were quoted as saying:

Zambia Electricity Corporation (ZESCO) management has failed to live to the expectations of its customers and should be sacked. (The Monitor, Nov. 24-23, 2000)

ZESCO had undergone a very difficult period with regard to Customer Service for some time. In 1998, a new Customer Information and Billing System (CIS) had been introduced. At the same time tariff rates rose sharply like never before as the Electricity industry experienced the first shocks of a liberalized economy. The buying power for most households' and business units' income across the nation dwindled as inflation rose and Kwacha value depreciated rapidly (ZESCO documentation, 2000). Widespread job losses due to reduced production capacity in industry or even absolute shutdown of companies in some cases occurred. With the prevailing harsh environment, and inevitable globalization, customers became more aware of their rights and thus began demanding for a better service from utilities at world-class standards but at the lowest possible cost. Unfortunately, the newly introduced billing system had not adequately been marketed to ZESCO customers externally and to ZESCO staffs themselves before introduction. Consequently, customers who mostly

did not comprehend the new billing system, rose against ZESCO blaming it literally for all their economic woes, perceived or real.

2.6.6 Overcoming Barriers to Effective Communication

Communication is used by organisations to send information to customers.

Transmission of information works as tool for breaking barriers of resistance, and negative attitude, for instance on the part of customers. Nonetheless, to break barriers and negative attitude, skill in the presentation of information is required. The Courier posits that:

Using information to break down the barriers of resistance is not necessarily easy. For attitudes to be changed significantly, the information needs to be skillfully presented and those involved must devise a variety of ways to trigger the change.

(The Courier, July – Aug. 1998).

Towards the late 1990 management became increasingly aware of the Customers' negative perception of ZESCO. Customers had the following view of ZESCO:

The Corporation carried out indiscriminate tariff increases

1. Poor quality of supply and services i.e. low voltage, frequent loss of supply
2. Incorrect billing – customers believe that ZESCO gives estimated accounts rather than actual accounts
3. There is little communication with customers about tariffs, consumption patterns, safety and economic use of electricity.
4. Construction delays for new connections.
5. Arrogant attitude of staff.
6. Long waiting period for Electrification due to lack of Installation material e.g. meters.

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.