



**Environmental Management:
Communication and Conflict during Environmental Inspection: A Case
Study of Uppsala Municipality (Sweden)**

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**Master Thesis
Environmental Communication and Management
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences**

Uppsala, 2010

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

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Title: Environmental Management: Communication and Conflict during
Environmental Inspection: A Case Study of Uppsala Municipality (Sweden)

Keywords: Environmental protection, Power, Environmental inspectors, Economic
Operators, Communication, Conflict, Trust

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Program: Environmental Communication and Management; 60 ECTS

Course: Practice and Thesis Work in Environmental Communication and Management,
EX0409; 15 ECTS

Paper: Master Thesis in Environmental Communication and Management, 15 ECTS/15
hp Advanced (D) Level, Uppsala, 2010

Abstract

To avert environmental degradation, the governments of most nations have put in place environmental regulations to ensure sustainable development. But environmental laws can not solve the problem alone; communication is an important tool in ensuring environmental regulation and avoiding conflict during the process of environmental inspection. The aim of this paper was to study the role of communication in environmental inspection. Interviews were used as the principle method for data collection.

Results obtained revealed that lack of communication led to conflict between the environmental inspectors and the economic operators. Strategies were used by both the inspectors and their clients to avoid conflict or to avoid misunderstanding escalating in to conflict. It was also revealed that the clients saw the inspectors as having power of sanctioning them, and that trust existed between the inspectors and their clients. One other finding was that environmental inspections made use of participatory approach. This ensured that the opinions of both the inspectors and their clients were taken in to account during inspection thus making it possible for the exploration of both parties' perspectives.

Keywords: environmental protection, power, environmental inspectors, communication, conflict, trust

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Elfrida Yang and son Ransom Yang for allowing me stay away from them during my study period.

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1.0 Introduction

The combination of industrial development and population increase all over the world has led to an increase in the demand for resources thus putting more pressure on the earth's natural resources. In this light, environmental management is a priority to most Governments of the world because without environmental security, there will be no social security. Environmental degradation will often have adverse economic effects which may in turn lead to social problems like conflicts and even migration.

If the environment is to remain healthy then land degradation must be avoided, biodiversity must be conserved, ecological services such as watersheds, estuaries and the global atmosphere should be maintained. Also agrochemicals and fossil fuel should be wisely used to avoid human health impact, effects on the ecosystems and overdependence or overexploitation of finite resources should be checked (Leal, 2000). Those who believe the environment deserves to be healthy believe it can only be achieved through a cooperative action (Daniels, & Walker, 1997). This means that it is the responsibility of both the government and citizens of a country to ensure that the environment is protected. Environmental security is assumed to be maintained as long as pollution, whether domestic or from abroad stays within the maximum assimilation capacity of the country (Sprinz in Glasbergen, 1995), and a healthy and balance ecosystem ensured. However policies to ensure sustainable use of the environment often generate conflict of interest. Such conflicts of interest or disputes occur among governmental organizations, between public authorities, private interest groups; environmental movements and even between individuals. According to Glasbergen, (1995) the fact that environmental policy can provoke such conflict may be attributed largely to decision making procedures in our society. While I agree with his idea, I argue further that some environmental conflicts arise due to lack of proper communication between the various environmental stakeholders. This is because there are cases of conflict emanating not from the policy or policy procedures, but from the way and manner these laws are communicated to the concerned parties and how those who are supposed to exploit the law to mitigate environmental degradation communicate back to the supervisory authorities. In fact this thesis explores the role of communication in environmental management

1.1 The problem

In Sweden, just as in other countries of the world, environmental laws are applicable to all citizens and economic operators considered to be engaged in activities that are detrimental to the environment. However it is clear that those who are mostly affected by the laws are economic operators. Economic operators in this thesis are considered to be people who are engaged in activities which are assumed to create change in the environment and because of these changes, they are objects for inspection. Therefore those considered economic operators are business persons, farmers and those who introduce pollutant to the environment.

In communicating environmental issues, there is no immediate benefit to be obtained rather the information might be appealing for measures that involve trouble or cost. Businesses are out to maximise profits and regulating them means limiting their means of having profits or spending more money to enforce the environmental laws. In Sweden, economic operators pay taxes for environmental inspection. Yet there are some environmental issues that are fully not accepted even by scientist. For instance NASA's¹ announcement some years back that atmospheric scientist had once more again underestimated the pace and extent of ozone depletion (Leggett, 2008). The issue at stake is how to communicate to those who do not believe some of the environmental problems at the moment yet must succumb to the laws without conflict. Thus one of the questions begging to be addressed in this study is how environmental inspectors inspire economic operators through communication to ensure a healthy environment without conflict since conflict of interest is one of the fallouts of environmental protection.

1.2 Objective of the study:

To study the role of and pre-conditions for communication in environmental inspection

Specific Objectives:

- How do inspectors and economic operators perceive communication during environmental inspection?
- What criteria do the inspectors and economic operators use when they are evaluating the communication between them?
- How do the environmental inspectors see the economic operators (their clients)? And how do the clients see the environmental inspectors?

¹ National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is the unit of the USA federal government charged with operating the nation's space exploration and aeronautics programs

1.3 Structure of thesis

The thesis is divided into four main parts. The first part gives the introduction, the problem statement and the objective of the study. The next section describes our understanding of the concepts of conflict and communication to clarify our particular use of the concept. The methods used in the study are presented in part three then followed by the main part of the thesis that presents and discusses the result, which brings the thesis to a conclusion.

2.0 Concepts

In this thesis, conflict and communication concepts are used to analyse and to have a better understanding of the interaction between the Environmental inspectors and the economic operators. Let's start with the concept of conflict.

2.1 Conflict

There exist several definitions for conflict but for the purpose of this work, I will use two of them. Conflict according to Sidaway (2005) is an emotive word implying struggle between opposing ideas and interests, confrontation, protest and violence. Hallgren (2003) defines conflict as social interaction during which the participating actors' trust in the interactive situation decreases. According to Hallgren (2003), to trust an interactive situation means that an actor: 1) thinks he/she knows how his/her action will be interpreted by the other, 2) thinks he /she knows how to interpret the actions of the other. Since the concept of trust is very central to this study, it is important to define it. In addition to Hallgren (2003) meaning of trust during conflict, trust is also considered in this write up as believing or accepting what the inspectors tell their clients and what the clients tell the inspectors they have done or will do after an inspection. From the above definition, trust is considered in two ways; 1) trust the environmental inspections have for their clients and trust the clients have for the inspectors. 2) Trust in an interactive situation as defined by Hallgren (2003). If the trust both parties have for each other is not respected or decreases, then conflict is bound to arise.

Conflicts occur on many levels such as interpersonal, intercultural, group or organisational (Daniels and Walker 1997). I consider intercultural conflict as ethnic conflict and interpersonal, group or organisational conflicts as social conflict, which of course is the type of conflict this thesis dwells on. Conflict varies according to the scale. Some conflicts are simple while others are complex because they include many parties and history. Conflicts may be in and among families, neighbours, communities, states and nations. One of such common conflicts is environmental conflict which is considered to arise when one or more

parties involved in the decision-making process disagree about an action that has potential to have an impact upon the environment (Daniels and Walker 1997). For Gleditsch (1997) where at least one of the parties perceives ecological values as something worth fighting for it is an environmental conflict however where neither of the parties expresses concern over ecological values and they consider social obligations as motives for fighting over control, access, or use of natural resources, then the conflict can be classified simply as a resource dispute (Gleditsch, 1997)

Conflicts can be either violent or nonviolent. However, this paper focuses on non violent conflicts but it is important to differentiate between violent and nonviolent conflict. By violent conflicts, I mean conflicts that lead to destruction of resources, properties and even the death of people. While nonviolent conflicts are conflicts that misunderstanding between the parties concerned does not escalate to the level of destruction or killings.

The likely models of conflicts that may arise as the Environmental Inspectors carry on their duties are conflicts from misunderstanding between the inspectors and the economic operators, from their competing interests and from their opposing beliefs. Sidaway (2005) on the dimension of conflicts sees beliefs as the differences over what is right and what is wrong or how the world should be. Misunderstanding can occur as a result of personal emotions, poor communication or lack of information, relevance of information and interpretation or access to information. Misunderstanding can also arise due to procedures such as the types of decision-making and the fairness of their outcomes. The competing interest of the various environmental stakeholders is considered very central to the analysis of conflict in this thesis. This is because the environmental inspectors and the economic operators have two opposing interest. While the inspectors speak for the environment through the environmental laws and consequently ensuring its protection, the economic operators on the other side discharge substances considered dangerous to the environment, with more concern on profit maximizing and the expansion of their businesses. With such opposing interest, it is likely that conflicts of interest arise during environmental routine inspections.

Conflict had been recognised by many writers as having a dynamic nature. In its simplest form, events can be seen to spiral out of control because what starts as a simple problem increase in complexity with the deterioration of communication and relationship (Sidaway, 2005). This deterioration may occur sometimes rapidly and at times over a long period of time. Conflicts occur in various phases. The first phase is the latent phase where a conflict begins to take shape with differences between the conflicting parties becoming clearly defined as positions are harden and people begin to take sides.. The second phase is the escalation

phase where the conflict grows worse and each side increases its demands and its sense of grievances swells. Next is the active phase which is characterised by perceptions distortion and mistrust between the conflicting parties (Sidaway, 2005).

After the active stage, if both or one of the parties are not happy with the state of things, they may decide that ending the conflict is a way out though without loss of face. At this stage, negotiation begins with the introduction of a third party to mediate. This is done usually in the form of settlements which involve compromise, at times with bitter arguments over what the compromises will be (Glasbergen, 1995). Where negotiations are not possible or yield no fruits, then the issue can be handed to the courts for final decision making. In this case the court plays the role of an arbitrator with any opposition from the final decision been addressed only by a higher court. This phase is what many called conflict management or resolution.

According to Max Weber in Sidaway (2005), conflicts are endemic in social life, buttressing the argument of Daniels and Walker (1997) that conflicts do not occur in a vacuum. The more reason why Deutsch (1973) stresses that conflict as social interaction occurs in an authentic setting with power having a role to play. Thus Max Weber clearly points out that power among groups and individuals in the society is differentially distributed, and that environmental order or better still social order is achieved in any society through rules and commands issued by more powerful persons to less powerful persons and enforced through sanction with the help of communication. Power here is considered as the possession of control and influence over the other person.

When analysing the empirical data, attention will be paid to what the environmental inspectors and the economic operators say about; how conflicts lead to lack of trust and the lack of trust during conflict situations. How abuse of trust may result to misunderstanding. How the various parties behave during the interactive process is also analysed. Also the study looks at situations where power avoids and creates conflict during environmental inspection and communication during conflict situations.

2.2 Communication

The theory of communication in this thesis is analysed under oral communication (verbal), communication in writing and non verbal communication (body language). An environmental inspector has to possess communication skills in order to discuss inspection findings which may be negative in a way that does not cause or escalate in to conflict. What we say, how we

say it and what we are doing when we say it will determine the effectiveness of a communication. Effective communication need to focus on verbal and non-verbal skills.

Looking at non-verbal communication, when one is not actually talking, or perhaps not doing anything, you are still communicating hence when you attempt to avoid speaking, you are still expressing nonverbals in communication (Griffin 1997). A handshake that is non aggressive and eye contact when you introduce yourself is a way to make good impression. When you smile while communicating, gives the feeling to the other party that you are friendly. When communicating a violation, the manner you stand and observe should not be intimidating to the other party (De Jong, 2002). Nodding of the head indicates concentration to the other party. A good communicator is a good listener therefore a part of effective communication is listening (Hunter, 1995). Listening attentively during communication is a powerful skill and a way of being with people. A keen observation of the other party's non-verbal behaviour as you listen is also important because it reveals a lot to help in the avoidance of misunderstanding which may lead to conflict. In situations where communication by writing is the best way, the communicator's message must be simple and understandable to the target (receiver) for easy interpretation and comprehension. The message should be simple and understandable because the communicator is not there to explain should the receiver have some misunderstanding on the content of the message. Difficult and or technical terms should be avoided as much as possible because it may lead to misinterpretation of the content of the message.

With respect to verbal communication, Searle (1969) points out that in order to understand language, one must understand the speaker's intention and that since language is intentional behaviour, it should be treated like a form of action. Consequently he refers to statements as speech acts. Speech act is considered as the basic unit of language used to express meaning. Griffin (1997) affirms that verbal communication consists of content and relationship. Content refers to "what" is actually said, while the "relationship" is how it is said. Therefore in the case of environmental inspectors and economic operators, if the content is the environmental laws then the relationship is how the inspectors communicate the laws to the economic operators and how the economic operators communicate back to the inspectors.

Van Eemeren et al, (1996) sees argument as a verbal activity, aimed at increasing or decreasing the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader with the use of ordinary language. People use words and sentences to argue to state or to deny a fact during arguments. Nonverbal communication, for instance facial expression is accompanied with verbal communication in argumentation and can play an important role in judging the

emotional state of people as they communicate. Therefore observation of the other partner as you communicate is very important during communication process. Also important, is the feed-back you get when you communicate because it is through the feed-back that one can judge if the content of the message has been well understood or misinterpreted.

When analysing the data, attention will be paid on how the environmental inspectors and their clients talked about power and communication, look if they are able to identify narratives about misunderstanding and conflict, The way the parties communicate during environmental inspection and also the differences in communication between big and small companies will be of interest during analysis of data.

3.0 Materials and Methods

3.1 Materials

The study was done in Uppsala the fourth biggest city in Sweden. It has a population of about 200,000 inhabitants with eight environment/health inspectors and ten environmental inspectors. Those who took part in the study included environmental inspectors and economic operators. In all ten persons were interviewed; three Environmental Inspectors and seven Economic Operators. After making contacts with the Inspectors through the Uppsala Commune (council) Environmental Unit, I was passed on to the economic operators by the Inspectors. Doors opened for me because I was introduced by the Inspectors to the various people I interviewed. Hence I was considered by them as one of the environmental stakeholder (Bernard, 2000).

The businesses that participated in the study included companies that employed one to two persons which are considered small businesses, to businesses that employed about thirty-five people or more considered as big businesses in the study. Thus the personnel of the following businesses were interviewed; waste recycling company, gravel-excavation Company, supermarket, petrol station, truck Transportation Company, farmer and vehicle repairing company. Why the above environmental stakeholders were chosen for the study was because their activities introduce salient by-products that if not properly controlled, will adversely affect the environment. Therefore selection was done on the basis that those selected were able to supply the required information (Otite, 1994) since they were the target group.

3.2 Methods

Methods used during the study included interviews and observation

3.2.1 Interviews

In order to have an insight of the role of communication in environmental management/control, interviews were used as the core instrument for data collection. The interviews were semi-structured that consisted of a list of topics for discussion. Most of the questions were open in order to enable the respondents to explore them in their own ways. However some questions that were provoked by the interviewees were asked in a manner that needed a 'closed response'. Though the questions were formulated ahead of the interviews and written on paper, the interviewer did not stick to them not only because it will be in contrast with the nature of semi-structured interview ((Bernard, 2000) but also to explore interesting statements from the interviewees. The exploration led the researcher to discover not only the themes and topics which interviewees saw as important, but how they thought about and described them (Nichols 1991). In this way, many interesting revelations were obtained which were very enriching to the study.

Two types of questionnaires were constructed during the study, one for the Environmental Inspectors and the other for economic operators. The reason why two questionnaires were designed was because the researcher wanted to get the viewpoints of both parties. By comparing what the Environmental Inspectors said and what the economic operators said, one will be certain of the validity of the study ((Alvesson et al, 2000). How the researcher went about this was by asking the same questions to both the Environmental Inspectors and the economic operators. One of such questions asked to both parties was if the economic operators are consulted before an environmental law is made since they are very important stakeholders on environmental issues and also how communication between the inspectors and the economic operators takes place.

The interviews were face to face with some questions overlapping as already indicated above and others just for particular stakeholders. Examples of questions asked the Environmental inspectors were; -can you remember any situation you were faced with conflict and handled the conflict successfully? What happened? How did you communicate to the conflicting parties? What do you think is difficult in environmental inspection? Have you ever had difficult situations as you exercise your duty? While example of questions asked to the economic operators were; what has ever happened during inspection that made you felt bad? Can you remember any situation you were faced with conflict? What happened? How did you communicate to the environmental inspectors (conflicting parties)?

Interviews for Environmental inspectors lasted averagely for 50 minutes while those for economic operators lasted averagely for 35 minutes. During each interview, notes were taken and a tape recorder was used to record each conversation. In the evenings of same day of interview, notes taken were rewritten and recorded interviews transcribed.

3.2.2 Observation

Observation was also a method for data collection because during the interviews, the interviewees showed reports and letters from either sides for a better understanding of how communication takes place between the Environmental Inspectors and the Economic operators. It must be mentioned that on the other hand, language was a problem to fully explore the reports and letters. However some of them were translated and others needed no translation because they were clear demonstrations. For instance drawings on where a particular object should not be found were marked with an “X”.

4.0 Results and discussion

Qualitative method was used for the data analysis. During analysis of the data, emerging themes like trust, power, communication, conflict and participation were categorized and discussed as results.

4.1 Trust

From the study both the environmental inspectors and their clients trusted each other as attested by those interviewed. The environmental inspectors said the clients trust the information they give and the clients also affirmed to that though at times they (clients) disagree with what the inspectors say. This too was confirmed by the environmental inspectors that at times they could make mistakes. Trust within their interaction was not only limited to the laws but also their actions during inspection as stated by one of the inspectors.

“When we do inspections and find out that there are some things that have not been done or well done, we tell them to do those things within a time limit depending on the effects it will have on the environment. They normally say yes and some of them do it. But the worst types of people are those who accept they will do it and do absolutely nothing even up to the next inspection period.

Another environmental inspector said

“Before we go for inspection, we inform them about two weeks before we come. I write a letter about what we are going to do when I am at the place”

The former and latter quotations expresses some degree of trust the environmental inspectors give to their clients because by informing a client some weeks before inspection is enough prove of trust that the client is doing what the law expects of him/her and the inspector will be there just to facilitate the process. However the former quotation brings to question the trust that the inspectors bestow on some of the clients. This is because even after inspections some of the clients do not do what has been recommended by the inspectors for as long as the next inspection period despite haven accepted to do it.

From the above, it is clear that trust is very important during their interaction. While the inspectors trust the client of what he/she says, the client on their part trust the environmental inspector on the interpretation of the law and what they say is required of them (clients) to do. The inspectors and their clients also trust they know what to expect from each other during inspection (Hallgren, 2003) since the inspectors send notification letters to the clients before they come for inspection. These letters prepares the clients because it informs them on how the inspection will be thus both parties trust they know what will be expected of them hence they trust the interaction during the inspection process. In as much as this trust exists, there is likely to be no misunderstanding between them but when one of the parties distrusts the other or does not trust the interactive situation then there is likely to be misunderstanding between them which may lead to conflict.

4.2 Power

In order to explore the question on how the environmental inspectors see their clients and vice versa, the issue of how power is distributed among them was looked into. During the study, it was revealed that there exists power asymmetry between both parties. The environmental inspectors have powers to decide on what ever to do should an economic operator fail to follow the environmental law. The powers range from recommendation to the powers that be for financial penalties, to the closure of the business. During some inspections, the fact that the inspectors have the power makes the decision process to be dominated by them because at times even if the client puts up a stiff genuine resistance over a proposal from the inspector, he/she will finally submit to those of the inspectors for fear of punishment or critical inspections as explained by some economic operators interviewed;

“The inspectors may say things I know that is wrong, but I cannot say it is wrong because they may look after other things.” He continued “I was once annoyed with the inspectors but did not prove to them for fear that they may make things difficult for me during inspections”.

Another economic operator interviewed had this to say concerning power;

“If we do not do what we are asked to do, we will be punished or they may close the company. We accept because it is easier to do it than face the problems that may arise from failure to do it. Whether you accept what the inspectors want or not it is good to avoid any problem by doing it”.

From the two quotations, the economic operators distrusted what the inspectors said yet they preferred to follow the instructions because they trusted that failure to do what they have been asked to do will lead to sanction. On the other hand, the economic operator who remained silent for fear of what happens distrusted the interactive situation because he did not know how his action will be interpreted during the interactive process by the inspector (Hallgren, 2003).

Still on the issue of power, a farmer on his part said

“I do not agree to some of the EU laws but one must do what they say otherwise you receive no money from the EU and Swedish government. Some of the things the inspectors say are good for the environment but some have very little impact which I do not agree yet I must accept because the law says so”.

Another interviewee in a summarised form said; “Uppsala Commune, (because the environmental inspectors come from the Uppsala Commune) we are afraid of them because they have the powers to sanction us if we do not do what the law expects us to do so we make sure that before they come, everything is in order”.

From the above quotations, one can say that though the inspectors and their clients normally dialogue, there exist power asymmetries between them and interestingly, the economic operators know the type of power the inspectors can exercise on them. Their knowledge on the powers the inspectors have over them shapes the way they communicate to the inspectors and vice versa. The above quotations also supports what Weber in Sidaway, (2005) states on the role of power --“Social order is achieved in any society through roles and commands issued by more powerful persons to less powerful persons and enforced through sanctions”. The powers that the inspectors have is to enable them achieve their goal. However Environmental courts have been established for the economic operators to seek clarification or appeal decisions from the inspectors if they are not satisfied with them. By making it

possible for the clients to appeal decisions of the inspectors if not satisfied, the powers of the inspectors are being checked by the environmental court. The presence of this court has ensured a level playing ground for both parties and also influenced their interaction and communication because the inspectors know that if they abuse the power conferred on them, the clients will seek redress in the Environmental court.

From the first quotation, a part of the fact that the economic operator was afraid of the powers of the inspector, he also was struggling to avoid conflict. At that particular moment in time, there existed differences between him and the environmental inspector. However, having differences with the inspector did not mean he had conflict with him since differences themselves do not constitute conflict between people. What is important when differences arise between people is how the differences are handled (Glasl, 1999). The economic operator decided to handle the differences in a tactful way when he avoided harsh confrontation, suppressed his feelings and retreated to isolation by accommodating all that the inspector said (Daniels and Walker, 1997). He did all these because he was afraid that if the differences advanced to a conflict, he could destroy his relationship with the inspector which could be very detrimental to his business.

Apart of the power to make decisions, the economic operators perceived the inspector as having power over the agenda during environmental inspection. Both the inspectors and their clients confirmed that the inspector is the one who notifies the economic operator of an inspection and also on the agenda of the inspection. This means that the inspector has the power to decide what to talk about during inspection and what not to.

The environmental inspectors on the other hand perceived most of the economic operators as being environmental friendly. In fact all the economic operators interviewed during the study accepted the environment needs to be protected for the future generation. However the inspectors saw some of their clients as not willing to abide to some of the environmental laws but instead preferred to pay penalties. The environmental inspectors will need to bring up good communication strategies that will persuade such economic operators to change their attitudes.

4.3 Communication during environmental inspection

In looking at the communication between the inspectors and their clients during inspections, an analysis will be made on the way the parties communicate, how they handle conflicts, avoid conflict and how conflicts generate during inspection processes. Let's start first with conflict generation.

4.3.1 Lack of communication and conflict generation

A situation of conflict arose according to one of the inspectors when a client failed to bring his report on time. The inspector said the law spells it out that before 31st of March each year, economic operators using refrigerants and other substances dangerous to the environment should report to them on how they control the amounts of the substances. Those who do not respect the law are sanctioned. One of the clients did not respect the law and was punished by the inspector despite the fact that the client sought the intervention of the inspector's boss and also gave a reason for the lateness with the report. The inspector punished the client because there was lack of communication between them before the dateline as explained by the inspector's quotation below;

“This year the same client called the environmental office just before the last day and said I will delay with the report because the consultant has not done the work. He asked me if he could have a chance to do the report latter and I accepted”.

The inspector gave his reason for accepting the request even though it was the same request he rejected last year that his client took the initiative to inform him before the last day. He argued further that by informing him before the last day suffices to say he is conscious of the fact that the environment has to be protected.

Conflict arose last year between the parties because they made different interpretations of the potential for flexibility in the system. The inspector was following the formal rules. The economic operator presented what he thought was good arguments for making an exception (“it was the consultant's fault, not mine”) and became frustrated when this argument was not considered by the inspector. While there was lack of flexibility on the part of the inspector, there was also lack of communication on the part of the economic operator because he failed to inform the inspector before the dateline. Thus lack of flexibility and communication resulted to misunderstanding that later generated into conflict. During the conflict, the client sought intervention from the inspector's boss either because he had lost trust in the inspector or because he did not trust the interaction with the inspector. Therefore he did not know what to expect from and how to influence the inspector so he tried to increase his trust by turning to the environmental inspector's boss, yet the boss failed to look at the issue from the client's perspective because he insisted that the decision holds. This year, the client had to avoid any misunderstandings between him and the inspector by communicating his problem well ahead of time to the inspector. The client's communication to the inspector in due time, resulted to

flexibility in the interpretation of the environmental rules by the inspector because he gave his client some time.

Another conflict incident occurred when sewage was identified that could contaminate drinking water in a neighbourhood of five households. One of them had identified the sewage problem and took help from a consultant. When the inspector was there, she found out that the other four neighbour's sewage systems were just as bad as the others' system. The inspector then suggested that the four take contact with the consultant that the first person already met because it might be cheaper for them. Unfortunately the consultant was not able to solve the problem. Since the consultant could not solve the sewage problem, misunderstanding between the inspector and the four persons arose because the inspector gave the idea of consulting the said consultant. This led to lack of trust for the inspector by her client. Why then did this misunderstanding escalate into a conflict? The inspector answered:

“It was me not being clear in my communication. The first person made a choice of a consultant which I then proposed to the other four and since they saw the consultant and me in the same place at the same time, they thought I was the one who had brought the consultant and persuaded them to accept him. I did not think they will interpret it in this way. I should have explained to the neighbours that the consultant is here because the first person brought him not me”.

The incident just explained brings to light the fact that one may act and his/her actions be interpreted in different ways during an interactive process. The inspector coincidentally sat with the consultant at the same place and time waiting for a meeting with her clients but the interpretation of her clients was that she knew him that is why she asked them all to consult him for the sewage problem. From the conflict situations explained above, it is obvious that lack of communication was the sole cause of the conflicts. The next situation to be discussed is how conflicts are avoided during environmental inspection.

4.3.2 Avoidance of conflict during environmental inspection

During the process of inspection, there is much interaction between the inspectors and their clients and so too much communication, both verbal and nonverbal. In most of the instances, the communication is face to face though letter writing and telephone calls are also frequently used. We will in this section discuss some strategies of avoiding conflict, and situations where conflicts were avoided during environmental inspection.

Avoiding conflict depends on how both parties communicate as explained by one of the inspectors;

“During inspections, if I discover that our differences are likely to escalate into conflict, I stop to argue with the client because I know it is useless and may lead to conflict. I try to end the meeting calmly and promise my client I will send him/her the report about what we had discussed, then he/she can take a look at it. If he/she is not satisfied with the report, then they can appeal to the environmental court”.

By avoiding further discussion, the inspector delayed what he was supposed to tell the client because he wanted to end the inspection session without conflict. Also by choosing to stop the face to face communication, the inspector assumed that communication through writing may limit the chances of their differences escalating into conflict.

As already mentioned above, how both parties communicate during inspection, will determine if conflict will arise or not. Such conflicts can be avoided depending on those involved in the interactive process and is contingent on what you say and how you say it as explained by one of the inspectors;

“If my client does not like what I say, I tell him/her I understand you do not like what I say but it is what the law says.” She continues: “if people are upset about what I say, it is important that I listen to what they say and show them I understand how they feel”.

Another inspector gave his opinion on how he tries to avoid conflict when his clients fail to respect environmental rules during inspection by stating that;

“You have to be stringent but when you understand that the client understands the law and there are some points he has followed and others he has not followed, or if you discover that the owner of the company does not even know what is expected of him, it does not help to be strict as it will instead result to conflict”.

One of the inspectors was in line with the above statement from her colleague when she said;

“Usually I am lenient and encourage them. If my clients have a good reason for not meeting the deadline, or not being able to meet up with a particular standard demanded by law, I give them some time. I tell them try to do this..., or that... before I come next time. I try to be reasonable. I can only go to extremes if I have given the person sometime”.

It is obvious from the first of the three quotations above, that the inspector understood the plight of the client. By expressing her concern she provided empathy to her client which likely healed the pains she had discovered in her client through maybe his facial appearance and the way he spoke or acted. By providing this empathy, the misunderstanding is likely not to degenerate into a conflict because the client sees the inspector as sympathising with him

yet can do nothing because of the law (Glasl 1999). When the inspectors try to be lineate with their clients, they are struggling to avoid a situation where conflict may arise because their client sees them as interested just in their own needs met. Rosenberg (2005) explains this clearly that normally people will resist what is requested of them if they find out that those requesting it are only interested in meeting their own needs. Worth of mentioning in the quotations above is the fact that one of the inspectors expressed her request in a positive language when she said “I tell them try to do ‘this’ ..., or ‘that’.... before I come next time”. It is better to tell somebody what you want done to meet your needs than telling what you do not want (Rosenberg, 2005). Therefore positive statement like – try to do ‘this’ or ‘that’ before I come next time is preferable to the negative – ‘I do not want to see ‘this’ and ‘that’ again next time when I come’, because telling people what we do not want creates both resistance and confusion which may lead to conflict or deepen an existing one (Rosenberg, 2005).

An interesting situation of conflict that started even before the arrival of the inspector to the inspection scene was narrated by one of the inspectors.

“When the client saw me, he became furious and was shouting. I told him you are using a lot of force several times. I also told him that he should calm down so that we can discuss things in a good way because I have come to assist him in his efforts to protect the environment as he goes along with his business. He calmed down and offered me a cup of coffee”.

The inspector said she did not know what her client thought but she knew he was very angry when he saw her. The inspector did not know why he was annoyed when he sighted her but I think the reason can be found in the inspector’s quotation below

“During inspection, I do not go with power; I go as a person who happens to be an inspector. Those who follow the environmental rules have no problems when they see me. Those who are serious with their businesses and want to do things the right way which most of the people I meet want to do, see inspection as good advice”.

Could it be the client was furious because he had not prepared for the inspection and wanted to scare the inspector? By using a lot of force and shouting, was it the client’s communication strategy to do away with the inspector and avoid the inspection. Many questions can be asked but what is important is the manner in which the inspector calmed him down. She did not threaten him nor solicited for police intervention, but took herself as a normal person who happens to be an inspector and dialogued with her client to an extend that he offered her a cup of coffee. May be the client had the perception that the inspector was an enemy but the

communication style of the inspector changed the perception of the client and the perceived enemy (inspector) became a friend.

Still on the avoidance of conflict, one of the clients on his part said when the inspectors are not taking the right approach, he says nothing during inspecting. What he does is that he takes the inspector's proposals to the environmental officer of the company. The company's environmental officer can now discuss with the inspector. The dialogue between the two environmental officials certainly will be different from the dialogue between the inspector and the client for many reasons. One of the reasons is that the environmental officer and the inspector are knowledgeable on environmental issues, and have a common goal - to protect the environment. So whatever any of them say is respected and carefully examined by the other hence, conflict is mostly avoided in big companies with environmental officers than in smaller companies that are not able to afford the services of an environmental officer.

4.4 Communication and conflict within Big and small companies

The interviewed inspectors said that bigger companies have lesser conflicts compared to smaller companies. The reasons are that bigger companies have environmental officers who advice the company on environmental matters. When a protocol for instance is sent by the inspector to the client, the environmental officer of the company directs them on what to do and if any disagreement, the environmental officer and the inspector talk as colleagues in the same field and settle the differences amicable. Whereas in small companies, the client have little environmental knowledge and are likely to commit errors they might not know. This may lead to misunderstanding between them and the inspectors which if not carefully managed may lead to conflict. This explains why bigger companies with environmental officers hardly have conflicts compared to smaller companies with no environmental officer and lesser knowledge of the environment. One of the inspectors said normally they give more time to smaller companies and also pay more attention to them because they lack the knowledge but have the experience.

4.5 Participation during environmental inspection

It was revealed by both the inspectors and the economic operators interviewed that after each inspection, the inspector writes a report and sends it back to the client for review. Where the client disagrees, he/she points it out for corrections. By going through and giving comments, the inspector is able to judge from the feedback if the message sent is well understood or not.

In fact some economic operators confirmed that they had disagreed with the report of the inspectors and some changes were made. This implies they also contribute to the writing of the inspection reports. Hence it can be said that the inspection process is participatory. However one must question how participatory is the inspection process? Are the clients able to change major decisions of the inspectors or just very minute issues? Can expertise knowledge be changed in favour of local knowledge during inspection? This is certainly difficult because major decisions are taken based on the laws.

One more issue on participation to point out is the participation of the economic operators on the making of environmental laws. The study sought to know if they are consulted before new laws are made. Most of them accepted that they have representatives at the higher level that they think the government consults before making environmental laws. Yet this is still arguable because they did not show that they who are very important environmental stakeholders contribute their experiences to ensure good environmental laws. The fact that they were thinking is enough testimony that they are hardly consulted for their contributions hence where is the participation?

4.6 Dialogue as an element of good communication

During inspections, it was affirmed by all the interviewees that communication was in the form of a dialogue. In this light, the inspector makes the client to understand the role each of them plays in the process. The clients are made to understand that the inspectors are at the scene not only to control them but also that the inspectors are out to help them achieve the goal of protecting the environment while continuing with their businesses. The inspector can be considered as playing the role of a facilitator during inspection processes. There has been a change in the last ten years because what the inspectors do now, is making their clients to understand their responsibility rather than going to tell them what is wrong and what is right.

One of the inspectors pointed that before the last ten years, much energy was used on looking and pinpointing –this is right and this is wrong during inspection but now the inspectors are concentrating on the types of documentation, types of knowledge and how the clients have arranged their work around environmental problems in order to identify risk and make a plan for mitigating the risk. It is only after examining these issues that the inspectors go out to see if what the clients have said correlates with what they are doing. One of the economic operators confirmed the above claims of the inspector when he explained that the inspector during inspections may ask him how he has prepared for the new law and what he

has done to fulfil the law. It is after the explanation of the client that the inspector goes out to inspect. In the case where what the client says does not correlate to what he/she is doing, the inspector then indicates the areas to the client. After inspection, they sit and discuss about the inspection with each of the parties having equal chances to defend his or her ideas. In the above scenario both parties have avoided to play the game of who is right and who is wrong, as such a game is more likely to end up in conflict than peaceful resolution of the differences (Marshall, 2005). Instead both parties expressed their needs and understand the needs of the other and by so doing increase the trust among them thus enhancing good communication which necessitates the environmental protection goal to be achieved.

I called this a new paradigm in environmental inspection because it is no more about an inspector following his/her protocol point by point to discover faults and sanction the client, but it is about making sure the client understands his/her role in protecting the environment and what the inspectors expect of him/her in the future if he/she failed to meet the expected standard. Also there is a new paradigm in environmental inspection in Sweden because inspectors are no more manipulators but facilitators in ensuring environmental protection. Facilitation is considered as a process where the inspectors help their clients in protecting the environment, and is considered client-centred. As the inspectors help their clients, they also learn too in the process. This is opposed to manipulation which is considered as inspector-centred since the inspector is in charge (Pretty et al, 1995). Since the inspectors are in charge, the clients are more of information receivers than contributors during the inspection process.

5 Conclusion

Trust is very central during environmental inspection. The trust the inspectors and their clients have for each other has made the process of environmental inspection easier because both parties depend on each other for effective environmental protection through effective channels of communication. The study revealed that trust and conflict are interrelated because lack of trust resulted to conflict while conflict resulted to lack of trust. However some situations of distrust; be it what was said during inspection or distrust in the interactive process did not lead to conflict because those concerned used strategies of either staying silent, or leaving the scene of the inspection when they discovered there was misunderstanding between them.

There is asymmetric power relationship between the inspectors and their clients. Though this difference in power exists between the inspectors and their clients, the clients have the

right to appeal to any decisions they are not pleased from the inspectors. This mechanism to check the powers of the inspectors has facilitated the inspection process because a lot of communication takes place before the inspectors use the power they have on their clients. Where the inspectors have tried to persuade their clients to change their behaviour towards the environment to no avail, the use of power through sanction is inevitable. It can also be said that the clients have some degree of power because they have the right to modify the inspector's report when it is sent to them for review. In other words, the clients participate in the final report of the inspection but their level of participation is questionable because it is not certain they (clients) can alter significant issues in the report.

The study also revealed that lack of communication lead to conflict during environmental inspections and that both the inspectors and their clients acted in various ways to avoid misunderstanding or prevent misunderstanding escalating in to conflict. Such ways included moving away from the inspection scene, staying silent while the other speaks, showing empathy, the use of dialogue and the use of positive statements.

From the above findings, it can be recommended that for effective communication to take place, and for conflicts to be avoided, it is imperative for the inspector to remember that he/her is just a person and is meeting another person (client), instead of the inspector thinking that I am an inspector meeting a farmer or who ever, or I am an inspector and want you to listen to me because I have the powers to make your work difficult. In this light it will be a person to person communication and the dialogue will be fruitful because of the mutual respect for each other during the interactive process.

Since poor or lack of communication leads to misunderstanding which may further lead to conflict, how we communicate during inspection is very vital for the avoidance of conflict and in achieving the goals of the inspection. This is because it is only through good communication skills that if during inspection a client does not meet the required standard; the inspector makes him/her to understand that next time he/she has the chance to improve. If the inspector is able to persuade the client to embrace environmental protection despite their differences without any conflict then the inspector has succeeded in his/her communication

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