BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMUNICATION IN AN ORGANISATION: A CASE OF SELECTED MULTINATIONAL COMPANY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Communication effectiveness has been one of important factors in daily life covering workplaces, relationships, and all sorts of human interaction. As a workplace or even learning centres, any organisation shall need to practise good and effective communication, from within and outside organisation, to achieve its goals. Many researchers have developed and shared various theories, models and frameworks with regards to this topic of interest due to its cruciality to be achieved and practised. However, communication is a very broad subject and is affected by many internal and external factors. The internal and external factors may both refer to communication barriers, which could be a stimulus, a situation or even an object that may hinder or prohibit any part of a communication process making it harder for messages to be encoded and decoded precisely by parties involved. The purpose of this research is to investigate the factors influencing effective communication in an organisation. This research is a qualitative research that used questionnaires as the instrument for collection of data. The data was collected and viable at 77% out of 69 respondents which was derived from the total population of 90 elements. Sample selection was based on a non-probability approach. The data collected was then evaluated by using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) through which numerous tests were converged such as reliability test, normality test, frequency distribution, descriptive analysis and multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that organisational environment affects effective communication more than language and culture do.

Keywords: *Effective Communication, Organisation, Cultural Studies*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is the most important factor in everyday life especially at workplace, in relationship and trading. Communication has crucial impacts on any organisation. Organisational communication acts as a channel to flow information, resources, and even policies. Organisational communication research indeed has been conducted in both business management and communication field.

Several past studies had emphasised that effective communication can enhance organisational outcomes (Arab & Muneeb, 2019; Garnett, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2008; Pandey & Garnett, 2006) because communication may influence the perception and opinions about people, communities, organisations, governments, and even society. This research seeks to understand which part of communication that is affecting organisations, particularly in multinational companies.

Just like in human, communication is the bloodstream of an organisation. This means that nothing can be achieved from within, without effective communication. Seeing how crucial effective communication is, especially in an organisation, this research is keen to discover if a successful organisation like a multi national company is practising communication effectiveness or if otherwise, what factors influence its effectiveness in communication and how this organisation overcomes or avoids any sort of barriers or miscommunication among its human resources.

Malaysia, aspires to reach the status of developed nation by 2020, is in vital need of having people who are able to communicate effectively in order to compete on the global scale. However, there is not much emphasis on the factors that lead to the increase of communication effectiveness and to what extend it brings better performance of employees and organisations as a whole. Communication problems arise due to many reasons. Most of which are related to communication barriers.

The main barriers of communication, like language – the means by which communication takes place, and culture – the way of life, a set of shared values, attitude, goals and practices, can influence the outcomes in a workplace where people from different backgrounds work together (Hofstede, 1996). It seems reasonable to conclude that one of the most inhibiting forces to organisational effectiveness is a lack of effective communication (Lunenburg, 2010). Hence, there is an urgent need to conduct researches to see what kind of situation or environment that could hinder or influence effective communication in order to improve an organisation and whether it could later help the organisation to leverage such skill and advantage in reaching sustainability and overcome future hurdles and barriers.

Addressing all sides of communication effectiveness, this research would assist researchers to have better and deeper understanding on the related scope and practices towards enhanced communication process. Furthermore, it would help researches or readers to see clearly whether differences in language, culture or environment would have any impact or effects on communication. To ensure the effectiveness of the process of communication, it is crucial to overcome the barriers in any part of it. Therefore, this paper is intended to fill the gap by focusing on the theories and practices of communication and language, culture and organisational environment as some of the barriers could affect its effectiveness.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication has been deemed as a crucial element of human existence since the earliest times (Miulescu, 2014). Communication is defined as the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium. As for effective communication, it is a term which often replaces the expression of "communication effectiveness" (Gudykunst, 1993). Looking at how important a communication process is, generally in life, it has similar application as in an organisation.

2.1 Effective communication

In organisational context, nothing can be achieved without effectively communicating with employers, employees, clients, suppliers, and customers (Shonubi and Akintaro, 2016). Communication is also a way to increase commitment and to stimulate employees to achieve organisational goals (Kwon, & Ahn, 2018; Tsai, Chuang & Hsieh, 2009).

Communication influences the perception and opinions about persons, communities, organizations, governments, and even society. Hence, this is the reason why it is important to study on how effectiveness can be achieved in communication and what are the barriers that could cause hindrance to it. This is because to be able to fully utilise something, like a skill, there is a need to understand the root cause of it as factors that could influence its utilisation.

Notwithstanding the cruciality of communication effectiveness, there are still many individuals who find it challenging in leveraging their communication skills and sometimes seem to have reached a stumbling block in their progress. They may sometimes struggle to convey their thoughts and ideas in an accurate manner, making it difficult to reach their full potential as a communicator, a manager, and a leader of others. Conclude we may, the art of communication cannot be overemphasized in any human organisation because it is the means by which people relate and work together. Just like the human blood stream, communication is indeed the bloodstream of an organisation. This means that nothing can be achieved in an organisation without effective communication (Shonubi and Akintaro, 2016).

2.2 Language

Language is the means by which communication takes place and allows us to build common meanings about the world (Arifin and Abuisaac, 2017). Language is a crucial element in effective communication because communication is mainly enabled through language (Ondondo, 2015). It is the use of language that has aided humans begin the method and concept of communicating. To add, language brings about a significant frame of reference and a relational context that can embody a person's identity (Ramlan et al., 2018).

Communication becomes tough in circumstances where people do not understand each other's language. Failure to communicate using a language is known as language barrier to communication. Language is the most common barrier that hinders communication and its effectiveness whereby it causes misinterpretations and misunderstandings (Agarwal, 2012). Language barriers often go hand in hand with cultural differences, bringing up additional problems and misunderstandings in the workplace (Fandrejewska, & Wasilik, 2018). Thus, language barriers can easily give adverse impact on the work performance because messages can easily be misconstrued (Ramlan et al., 2018).

Miscommunication may also happen even when two people speak the same language because different people have different communication style. The accents and dialect (use of words) of people between different places might also be different even if their language is the same (Agarwal, 2012). Notwithstanding the languages being technically similar in people using different dialects and accents, the meanings and interpretations of words could be different, thus leading to various kinds of conflicts.

Furthermore, the use of jargons act as a language barrier. Jargons are the technical words used in communication (Daud et al., 2017). It is usually different according to different professions, technical field or specialty of a person. For example, technical words used by doctors and lawyers are extremely different. If they start talking, both will hardly understand what the other is talking about. According to Jelani and Nordin (2019) and Ramesh and Tiwana (1999), some organisations in Malaysia also experience ineffective communication at workplace due to the use of certain jargon that is prominent. That causes failure to deliver a message and leads to miscommunication.

According to Lauring (2008), the major factor which causes misinterpretation and miscommunication between employees is language differences. This language difference has also been viewed as counterproductive especially in communication.

H1: There is a relationship between language and effective communication.

2.3 Culture

Culture is defined as a system of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that influences individual perceptions, preferences, and behaviours, and is one of the factors influencing employee's working performance in an organisation (Ramlan et al., 2018). In an organization, a broader culture difference will need a stronger control by managers of the organisation. If managers are somewhat unable to understand the cruciality of culture, it may lead to chaos within the organisation. Embarrassment, breaking of relationships, and more impacts on the business performance can be the results of not understanding cultural differences in organisations (Ghemawat & Reiche, 2011).

The distinction in nationalities and culture causes different working style within organisations. Determining the culture values of all employees is significant. Cultural values of employees will give impact to their working style by the means of body language, communication style, problem solving skill and time management. This is very crucial for managements to handle because work value that differs due to culture may affect an individual's performance and thus influences job satisfaction at a workplace (Matić, 2008 and Zaman et al., 2011).

In a research conducted by Ramlan et al. (2018), miscommunication, one of the barriers of effective communication, was found to be caused by cultural differences in body language and other behaviours because each culture has its own understanding for a particular course of action. Moreover, communication style is influenced by culture wherein different culture practises different attitudes, values and beliefs, which are among the things that often lead to misunderstandings.

This evidence is also supported by Arifin and Abuisaac (2017), who found that body language is one the significant challenges faced by expatriates when dealing with locals. It shows that people of different cultures, mainly due to different races, really experience misinterpretation and misunderstanding when engaged in inter-cultural communication. Also mentioned in the research that the differences in communication was due to different context culture: the culture of the locals was high context culture compared to the expatriates, so some things remain untouched, thus making it harder to comprehend messages conveyed.

H2: There is a relationship between culture and effective communication.

2.4 Organisational Environment

Environment is one of the characteristics of an organisation and environmental setting can cause hindrance to the process of communication. It consists of managerial philosophy, multiple levels of hierarchy, and power or status relationships between senders and receivers (Guo & Sanchez, 2005). In any organisation, there shall be a particular managerial philosophy: a set of beliefs or rules used by managers to help them make decisions. Just by the name of it, "philosophy", we know that there are many layers to it notwithstanding how simple it may sound. Managerial philosophy can either promote or inhibit effective communication.

In accordance with Ivancevich et al. (2011), the term 'company' or 'organisational structure' brings means to the official pattern of relationship set between various divisions of a company, normally known as an organisational chart. When made compulsory that all communication follows the procedures or levels of command, it leads to lack of attention and concern towards employees which indicates a managerial philosophy that restricts communication flows. Moreover, when subordinates come across superintendents who fail to take action, they become reluctant to communicate upward later in the future, because they feel as if the communication is not taken seriously.

According to Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang (2014), the status of relationships or power can also have an impact towards the flow of a message. An unpleasant superintendent–subordinate relationship could inhibit the flow and even the content of information. Apart from that, an employee's previous experiences in the workplace may be the factor hindering open communication which resulted from the fear of negative sanctions. In simpler words, such relationship inhibits the subordinate from making reports regarding failures or problems arising in any working project.

Speaking of effective communication in an organisation, it commonly relates to the system designed in within the organisation. The problems with the system design are referred to its structures or systems. Agarwal (2012) elaborated it as an organisational structure which is unclear, which makes it confuse to recognise the person they should communicate with. Other examples could be the lack of supervision or training, inefficient or inappropriate information systems, and lack of clarity in responsibilities, making it hard for employees to know what is expected from them (Agarwal, 2012).

H3: There is a relationship between organisational environment and effective communication.
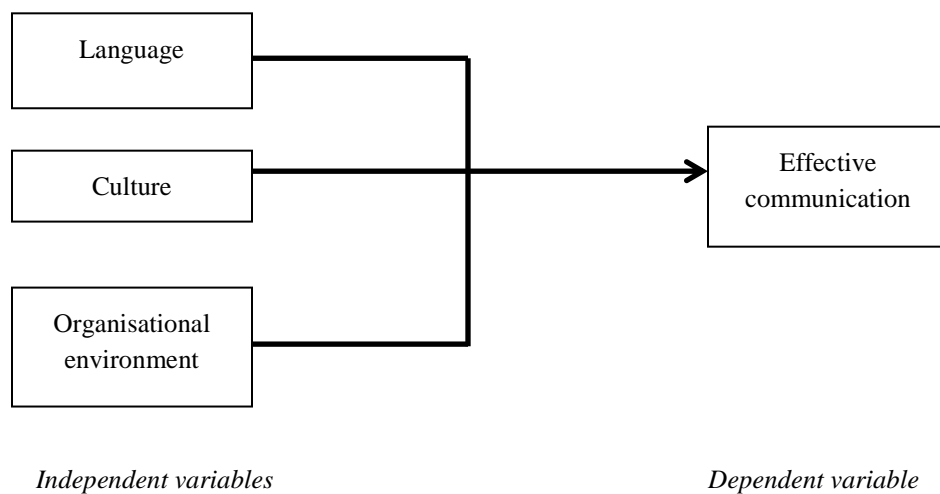

Independent variables   *Dependent variable*

Figure 1: Research Framework

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and sample

In this study, the referred population comprises of a total of 90 employees from one selected multinational company in Klang Valley, Malaysia. 73 questionnaires distributed to the respondents. However, 4 questionnaires were unable to be retrieved back, 3 of them were in paper form which the respondent failed to return and the other one was in Google form which the respondent failed to submit. The final responses were only 69.

This study uses non-probability sampling in collecting data from the sample. Based on a certain limitation, quota sampling technique was chosen without affecting/interfering much of the accuracy of the result because all of the respondents were from the selected population.

3.2 Data collection and instruments

This research has chosen to use questionnaire. The variables in the questionnaire are in close-ended set of questions and analysed using statistically and numerically. The questionnaire formed was designed in both, Google form and paper form and distributed in accordance to the availability and preference of the approached employees as respondents. Some of the respondents, most of which personally in touch with the researcher, preferred the Google form as the link to it was able to be shared via mobile. On the other hand, the rest of the respondents answered the questionnaire in paper form as the researcher distributed them by hand.

The questionnaire prepared in this research consists of five sections and a total of 29 items altogether. Section A represents the Demographic questions to obtain respondents' profiles. It includes age, gender, race, years of working and job status. Section B comprises of questions regarding the dependent variable of this research in which is effective communication. Whereas, Section C, D and E represents questions pertaining the independent variables – Language, Culture and Organisational Environment, respectively. Section B to E were designed in the form of likert scale and all items were adapted from previous researches for instance, (Odine, 2015), (Suthers, 2017), Umuteme (2017), Daud et al. (2017), Ramlan et al. (2018), (Arifin, Abuisaac, 2017) and Proctor (2014).

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Reliability analysis

Table 1 shows the value of Cronbach's Alpha and proved that all items were reliable to present the particular variable in this research.

Table 1: Reliability analysis

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Effective communication	5	0.659
Language	8	0.668
Culture	7	0.876
Organisational environment	4	0.636

4.2 Demographic profile of respondents

Table 2 below shows the profile of respondents. The majority of the respondents were of the age 20-29 years old which is considered as the younger generation whilst the minority were those around 40-49 years old. Moreover, 60.9 percent of the data collected were from female respondents and 39.1 percent were from male respondents. Apart from that, most of the respondents were Malay, followed by Chinese and Indian and lastly "Others", which were international employees within the department. As for the job status, most of the employees are permanent workers and the rest are part-timers which included interns. It shows that majority of the respondents have experience as full-time employees thus having knowledge and experience regarding feedback obtained in this research which is effective communication. However, most of the respondents either already have 11-20 years of working experience or less than 5 years of working experience. Having most of the respondents being young, their experience in working is also the least as compared to the other groups of tenure. Overall, respondents' profiles vary and may thus have affected the outcome of this research.

Table 2: Respondents profile

Items		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Less than 29	29	42
	30-39	17	24.6
	40-49	11	15.9
	50 and above	12	17.4
Gender	Male	42	60.9
	Female	27	39.1
Race	Malay	54	78.3
	Chinese	7	10.1
	Indian	5	7.2
	Others	3	4.3
Job Status	Permanent	59	85.5
	Part Time	10	14.5
Working Experience	Less than 5 years	29	42
	5 to 10 years	10	14.5
	11-20 years	18	26.1
	20 years and above	12	17.4

4.3 Multiple regression analysis

This research used the regression analysis to test the model or relationship between independent and dependent variable. R-square value is important to indicate how many percent does the independent variables influence the dependent variable. Apart from that, the F-value is to check whether the overall regression model or framework of the research is fit and significant. Also, the beta coefficient refers to the significance of the relationship between each independent variable towards the dependent variable.

Table 3: Result of multiple regressions

Dependent variable: Effective communication		
Independent variables	Standardised Coefficient (BETA)	Sig.
Language	0.223	0.161
Culture	-0.098	0.521
Organisational environment	0.330	0.007
F value	0.453	0.006b
R square	0.173	

Based on the Table 3 above, it shows that the results show F-value of 4.530 with significant value of 0.006. This means that the model is statistically fit and significant. However, the value of R-square is low (0.173). Therefore, 17.3% is the percentage of how much the independent variables explain the dependent variable. The balance of 82.7% did not explain the dependent variable, and the researcher believes that it is may be due to other variables that should have been specifically included in this research to better

elaborate on the dependent variable. As for the significance of each variable towards the dependent variable, it has been analysed that only organisational environment significantly influences effective communication with a significant value of $p<0.01$ which valued at 0.007. Hence, an increase of organisational environment by 1% will increase the effective communication by 0.330.

However, for the other two independent variables – language and culture, the results turned out to be insignificant at the value of 0.161 and 0.521 respectively, as they are not within $p<0.01$ or even $p<0.05$. Both variables also had low beta value with culture being the lowest at a negative value. This means that those two variables do not significantly influence the dependent variable, which is the effective communication, in this research.

This is due to several factors. For instance, the researchers believe that the organisational setting of this company itself, where its formal setting and working culture that are being practised by the employees, make them work in good and professional manner thus not being influenced by their own personal background, mainly their mother tongue language and their cultural orientation. In addition, almost all the respondents agreed that the official and formal setting of the organisation is English. All forms of communication, especially within the organisation is done in English, be it formal or informal. Hence, when it comes to the organisational communication, they make sure that it is effective and consistent among employees by disregarding any differences from hindering the communication process. Comparing to the study by Arifin & Abuisaac (2017), there might have been difference in the verdict because it was done among expatriates, whose language and cultural gap would be way bigger towards the locals. However, in this research, almost all the respondents were Malaysians who were different mainly just by their race.

Apart from that, the result of this research may not have been the same with past researches that had found culture as a communication barrier because when it comes to organisational communication, it may have been influenced more by the working culture and not the general cultural differentiation nor different cultural orientation. This evidence is also supported by Perttunen (2017), who stated that there was no significant problem with intercultural communication faced by the company that they studied, which means the results of this hypotheses vary according to organisations.

Meanwhile, for the organisational environment as the only variable influence the dependent variable, this is consistent with the previous studies done by Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang (2014) and Guo & Sanchez (2005). Essentially, having the right and appropriate environment in an organisation brings about a more effective communication process thus leading to a better and smoother performance of any activities done within and throughout the organisation. Thus, organisation needs to improve and enhance its environment, organisational structure and hierarchy as well as its managerial philosophy in order to achieve the optimum level of communication effectiveness that will eventually help to sustain and enhance its overall performance as a multinational corporate organisation. For instance, internal communication and the proper channel of communication between subordinate and superior need to be improved in order to enhance effective communication, especially in multinational corporations.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Communication is the key factor in the success of any organization (Agarwal, 2012). When it comes to effective communication, there are certain barriers that every organization faces. People often feel that communication is as easy and simple as it sounds. No doubt, but what makes it complex, difficult and frustrating are the barriers that come in its way.

All necessary steps had been taken in sole purpose of examining this research, and a rather detailed, valid

and reliable assessment was developed to analyse the variables, which include reliability analysis, frequency analysis and multiple regression analysis. Between all three independent variables, it was found that only organisational environment had influence on effective communication.

Being proven to have a significant relationship with effective communication, organisational environment shall be among the factors or barriers that should be looked thoroughly into when planning to improve or enhance its performance whenever it is regarded to communication. As what have been observed, the working environment in this organisation influences communication effectiveness in a way that the hierarchical structure within the organisation somewhat hinders a smooth flow of communication as it involves too many different levels of management to reach a decision.

It is common to all researches that there must be some loopholes which can be improved, leaving it crucial for the researcher to bring them forth for the future researchers to prepare better and avoid the same slip-ups. This is important to ensure a research of a better quality and more accurate findings. What is seen as a relevant suggestion for the future researchers is to look into other variables that can explain the dependent variable - effective communication, better.

One of them is the channels of communication used in an organisation or in general communication process. This is because, according to Muhamedi & Ariffin (2016), who studied the contribution of communication practices among employees and managers, the channels of communication are crucial in making sure an effective and successful communication to reach an objective, for instance, enhancing organisational performance.

Apart from that, the current independent variable, the culture, has been observed to be too subjective and broad that it did not manage to explain effective communication in an organisation. The researcher suggests that in future research, it should be narrowed down and closely related to the scope of study. For example, instead of using the general cultural differences, it may have been more appropriate to include working culture.

To conclude, adding and considering more factors will help researchers to gain a more accurate data and finding on what really gives significant effect to a dependent variable, which in this current research is the effective communication. The researcher hopes that the contents of this research, be it the limitations, scope or findings could give better insights to any academicians or researchers pertaining communication and any related fields of interest.

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