

## **Communication Competence Among Managers In Government Sectors In Perak Tengah District, Perak**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on factors that contribute to communication competence that includes knowledge, skills and behavior. Besides that this study also aims to identify whether the respondents apply Communication Competency at their workplace.

Communication competence is the demonstration of communication knowledge through the appropriate use of communication skills (Lailawati Mohd Salleh, 2011).

The respondents are managers working at Government sectors, at the District of Perak Tengah which consist of 17 government organizations. These respondents were chosen because the researchers want to understand the managers' communication competencies as a personal trait, as well as, organizational need and excellence. The study has revealed that majority of the respondents did apply knowledge, skill and behavior in their communication especially in dealing with clients, subordinates and their staff.

**Keywords:** Communication Competence, Knowledge, Skill, Behavior

## INTRODUCTION

Communication underlies the effectiveness of coordinating exchange activities, developing strong relationships, which results in improved performance (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Nevin, 1995). Without effective inter-organizational communications, learning among partners is diminished and the long-run effectiveness of the relationship may be damaged (Griffith, 2002). Viewing communications as the key to organizational excellence is not new. As early as 1938 Chester Barnard, in his now-famous work, "The Functions of the Executives," described communication as a primary responsibility of executives in developing and maintaining the system of communication. Research since then has linked organizational communication to managerial effectiveness, the integration of work units across organizational satisfaction, innovation, adaptability, creativity and overall organizational effectiveness.

Today's organizations need people who can speak well, listen, write, persuade others, demonstrate interpersonal skills, gather information, and exhibit small-group problem-solving expertise. Stephen Littlejohn and David Jabush (1982) have proposed a particularly useful definition of communication competency for the organizational setting. They suggested that communication competency is "the ability and willingness of an individual to participate responsibly in a transaction in such a way as to maximize the outcomes of shared meanings." In other words, communication competency involves our personal willingness and ability to communicate so that our meanings are understood and we understand the meanings of others.

Frahm (2005) concluded that development of "softskills" remains of paramount importance in the management development literature. Accordingly, managers are urged to develop communication skills to minimize occurrences of workplace sabotage and develop competencies in inspirational communication. Unfortunately, not many managers comprehend it and even less of them actually learn how to communicate effectively. The process of learning to communicate primarily starts with managers realizing that communication is a key-element to the successful administration. Therefore, there was a need to identify the skills, knowledge and behavior in communication among government managers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Katherine, Miller (2003) identifies five features she believes are possessed by all organizations: two or more people (a social collectivity), goals, coordinating activity, structure and environmental embeddedness. The process we call organizing is accomplished through human communication as individuals seek to bring order out of chaos and establish entities for purposeful activities (Shockley-Zalabak, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to explore the application of communication competence among managers at Government Sectors in Perak Tengah District, Perak.

## **Research Objectives**

The research objectives were:

1. To identify the skills of the managers.
2. To determine the knowledge of the managers.
3. To understand the behavior of the managers.

## **Research Questions**

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the topic involved. Therefore, by formulating research questions, it enabled the researchers to identify the main focus of the research. Based on the objectives, the research questions were as follows:

1. What are the managers' skills in communication competence.
2. What are the managers' knowledge in communication competence.
3. What are the managers' behavior in communication competence.

## **Significance of the Study**

**The findings of the study would contribute to:**

Contributions towards the Body of Knowledge

This study was beneficial in understanding communication competence towards a better performance. Organizational communication competencies require effectiveness in complex and changing environments where diverse group of people join in purposeful activity. It also contributes to the body of knowledge in the area of communication competence specifically in Government sectors.

Contribution to Society

This study provided benefits to managers, who would be able to improve their communication styles. Organizational communication is best understood as an ongoing process without distinct beginnings and ends. The process included patterns of interactions that develop among organizational members and those external to the organizations and how these interactions shaped organizations.

Contributions to the Organization

Organizational communication inclusive of organizing, decision making, planning, controlling and coordinating. Organizational communication is the symbolic behavior of individuals and organizations that when, interpreted, affects all organizational activities.

This study was only focused to managers at Government Sectors of Perak Tengah District, Perak as it relates to communication competence. As such, the findings was limited in its generalizability to the group who participated in this study.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were defined in the context which they were used in this research study:

## **Communication Competence**

Stephen Littlejohn and David Jabusch (1982) have proposed a useful definition of communication competency for the organizational setting. They suggested that communication competency is the ability and willingness of an individual to participate responsibly in a transaction in such a way as to maximize the outcomes of shared meanings.

## **Skills**

The ability to analyze organizational situations accurately and to initiate and consume organizational messages effectively (Shockley-Zalabak, 2006).

## **Knowledge**

The ability to understand the organizational communication environment. Knowledge is the learning of theory and principles (Shockley-Zalabak, 2006).

## **Behavior**

Way of treating others; manners (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 1990). Malay leaders and managers who wish to win the hearts and minds of their subordinates are expected to role model their behavior based on the cultural and religious values of their subordinates (Asma, 1990).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following literatures were used to support the research which includes, describing how three variable; behavior, knowledge and skill can influence the communication competency in an organization.

Communication competence can be defined as the ability to choose a communication behavior that is both appropriate and effective for a certain circumstances. According to Spitzberg & Cupach (1984), there are three major components in the component model which best describe communication competency which includes knowledge, skills and motivation. In each part of the component requires that a communicator be able to recognize what communication practice is appropriate (knowledge), have the ability to perform that practice (skill) and want to communicate in an affective and appropriate manner (behavior/motivation) (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995). Hence, in order to be competent communicator, an individual must be able to recognize which skills are necessary in a particular situation and in return, would lead managers to be highly motivated to use those skills.

Castaneda and Nahavandi (1991) suggested that subordinates who perceive their supervisors' behaviors to exhibit both relationship orientation and task orientation behavior being the most satisfied. When managers communicate effectively, their followers experience greater levels of satisfaction.

Communication competence is the demonstration of communication knowledge through the appropriate use of communication skills (Lailawati, 2008).

According to Holladay and Coombs (1993), leadership is a behavior enacted through communication. Cupach (1981) further stated, “Competent interaction can be viewed as a form of interpersonal influence, in which an individual is faced with the task of fulfilling communicative functions and goals while maintaining conversational and interpersonal norms.

Salacuse (2007) indicated that as a result of changing work environments in which employees are more educated and intelligent than past generations, managers are now required to lead by negotiation. Specifically, Salacuse noted that in order for managers to persuade people to follow their vision, they need to communicate effectively by appealing to the interests of the followers.

Generally speaking, a competent communicator is one who has “knowledge of appropriate communication patterns in a given situation and the ability to use the knowledge” (Cooley & Roach 1984). Communication competence is also the capability to decide a communication behavior that is suitable and effective to be used in any circumstances or situation. Normally, competence can be considered ability or a set of behaviors. However, according to Spitzberg (1986), any given behavior maybe competent in one situation and incompetent to others. Therefore, competence cannot inhere in the behavior itself, it must instead be viewed as social evaluation of behavior.

In the Malaysian context, Asma (1996) has earlier recommended that managers who want to get respected and loyalty from their subordinates are suggested to be a good role model in term of their skills and behaviors based on the cultural and values of their subordinates.

In a study of communication competencies in Thai organizations, Nongluck & Fredric (1999) found that in Thai organizations, individuals also place a very high value on a person’s ability to speak in a gentle, calm and thoughtful manner, display a smiling and pleasant face and friendly attitude and use specific respectful pronouns in addressing persons of higher status.

## DATA ANALYSIS

All the data was analysed using the Statistical Package in the Social Science Software (SPSS) version 20.0. The data were analysed for descriptive statistics median, mean, mode, frequencies and percentage after the entire questionnaires had been collected from the respondents.

### Demographic Information of Respondents

**Table 1.1:** Gender (n = 35)

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	15	42.9
Female	20	57.1
Total	35	100.0

Table 1.1 showed that 57.1% of respondents were female and 42.9% were male.

**Table 1.2: Age (n = 35)**

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-25	2	5.7
26-35	15	42.9
36-45	4	11.4
46-56	14	40
57 and above	0	0
Total	35	100.0

Table 1.2 indicated the age of respondents. Most respondents were between 26-35 years old (42.9%), followed by 40.0% of the respondents in the age group of 46-56 years old, respondents between the age 36-45 years old were 11.4%, respondents between 18-25 years old (5.7%). Finally, there are no respondents were between 57 and above years old.

**Table 1.3: Years of Service (n = 35)**

Years of service	Frequency	Percent
< 1	3	8.6
1-3	5	14.3
4-6	4	11.4
7-10	4	11.4
>10	19	54.3
Total	35	100.0

Table 1.3 showed that 54.3% of the respondents have been more than 10 years of service. This is followed by 14.3% of the respondents were in the service for 1 – 3 years, while respondents who have been in service for 4 – 6 years of service (11.4%). The same percentage from respondents were 7 - 10 years of service and only 8.6% respondents were less than a year of service.

**Table 1.4: Status (n = 35)**

Status	Frequency	Percent
Single	7	20.0
Married	28	80.0
Total	35	100.0

Table 1.4 indicated the status of respondents. Most respondents were married with 80.0 % and 20.0 % of the respondents were still single.

**Table 1.5:** Normality Results : Values of Skewness and Kurtosis (n = 35)

	Skewness	Kurtosis
Enjoy interacting with people from different background	-1.537	.418
Pretty sure of myself when interacting with other people from different background.	-.743	1.654
Always know what to say when interacting with people from different background.	.161	-.034
Very hard to talk on certain topic in front of certain people from different background.	.466	.858
Be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different background.	.408	.038
I am open to other subordinates questions.	-.598	.511
I am able to listen carefully to other subordinates	-.571	.893
I am proficient in choosing words and speaking with people	.272	-.106
I know my job responsibility towards community.	-1.254	1.095
I usually received info and use it appropriately.	-.936	1.504
I know where to go, who to ask and how to get info.	-1.102	2.0
I able to understand things going on in the org.	-.569	.610
I am my department responsibility.	-2.01	.559
I know the community perception towards my depart.	-1.270	.219
I am able to follow the change of command.	-.569	.610
I am able to explain clearly the job procedures	-.521	.078
I get upset easily when interacting with people.	.274	-1.412
I feel confident when interacting with people	-.164	.049
I am very open minded to people.	-.580	1.153
I am very observant when interacting with people.	-.139	.016
I try to obtain as much info as I can when interacting.	-.555	.444
I am able to speak thoughtfully and calmly.	-.149	-.149
I am able to speak in a friendly manner.	-.470	.067
I am able to speak or listen with smiling face.	-.945	1.715

In order to analyze the normality of the data, the Normality Test was conducted. According to Myers and Well (2002), most researchers commonly used statistical procedures based on the assumption that the data is sampled for normally distributed population; therefore it is helpful to have several ways of looking at possible violations of this assumption.

This study has been tested by using skewness and kurtosis values. Skewness and kurtosis values provide information about the distribution of scores for the group. The suitable skewness and kurtosis value are in the range of  $-/+2$ .

Table 1.1 indicated the values of skewness and kurtosis. It is found that the data was normally distributed whereby the values of skewness and kurtosis were shown to be in acceptable level ranging between  $-.200$  to  $1.9$ . None of the result were above or below  $-/+2$ .

Mean and standard deviation (n = 35)

RQ 1. What are the managers' skills in communication competence?

This research questions sought to identify the managers'skills in communication



competence. Result from this analysis shows that respondents enjoyed interacting with people from different background (overall  $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = .857$ ). Respondents are pretty sure of themselves when interacting with other people from different background ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .843$ ), respondents always know what to say when interacting with people from different background ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .701$ ), respondents are very hard to talk on certain topic in front of certain people from different background ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = .676$ ), respondents be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different background ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = .604$ ), respondents always open to other subordinates and staff questions uncertain about their task ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = .742$ ), respondents were able to listen carefully to other subordinates whenever possible, provide candid opinion to them ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = .707$ ), respondents were proficient in choosing words and speaking approach when dealing with the people in various positions and in different situations ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = .658$ ).

RQ 2. What are the managers' knowledge in communication competence?

This research sought to determine the managers' knowledge in communication competence. Result from this analysis shows that respondents know their job responsibilities ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = .867$ ), respondents usually receive information and use it appropriately ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = .765$ ), respondents know where to go, whom to ask and how to get the needed information ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = .707$ ), respondents are able to understand things going on in the organization very well ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .731$ ), respondents are able to explain things going on in the organization very well ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .825$ ), respondents know their departments' responsibility towards community ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = .987$ ), respondents know the community perception towards their department ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 1.011$ ), respondents were able to follow the chain of command in communication ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .731$ ), respondents were able to explain clearly the job procedures to my staff ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = .818$ ).

RQ 3. What are the managers' behavior in communication competency?

The respondents get upset easily when interacting with people from different background ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = .810$ ), respondents feel confident when interacting with people from different background ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .646$ ), respondents are very open-minded to people from different background ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .686$ ), respondents are very observant when interacting with people from different background ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = .701$ ), respondents try to obtain as much information as they can when interacting with people from different background ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .778$ ), respondents were able to speak thoughtfully and calmly even in a crisis ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = .765$ ), respondents were able to speak in a friendly manner even with someone they do not like ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = .796$ ), respondents able to speak or listen with a smiling face, makes eye contact and pays attention to the speaker ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $SD = .747$ ).



## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Communication competence is naturally necessary because people are endowed with different abilities and capabilities and Allah has made human beings to need one another. Communication competence is one of the key element in the success of the organization. It is the duty of all, especially in the organization, to work for, preserve and enhance, the unity, strength, integrity, tranquility and development of the members in the organization through human interaction, specifically communication competence. The following intepretation based on the findings sought to answer the research objectives as follows:

The results have proven that managers at government sectors in Perak Tengah District, Perak did apply knowledge, skill and behavior in their duties, and they did understand the importance of communication competency in their daily tasks.

### RO 1: To identify the skill factors of the managers

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
I enjoy interacting with people.	2.9	0	11.4	48.6	37.1
I am pretty sure of myself when interacting with people.	2.9	2.9	34.3	48.6	11.4
I always know what to say when Interacting with people.		5.7	48.6	40	5.7
I find it very hard to talk on certain topic in front of certain people.	14.3	62.9	20	2.9	0
I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people.	0	2.9	57.1	37.1	2.9
I am open to other subordinates Questions.	0	2.9	14.3	54.3	28.6
I am able to listen carefully to others subordinates.	0	2.9	14.3	60	22.9
I am proficient in choosing words and speaking approach when dealing with people.	0	2.9	48.6	42.9	5.7

This part of the study attempted to identify the skill factors of the managers. From the results, it was proven that the highest percentange is 62.9%. This percentage showed that the managers were able to communicate with other people.

In addition, it is also found that the managers are happy when interacting with people, with the percentage of 48.6% agreed to the statement. These managers are capable to listen carefully to other subordinates as the result found that 60% of the respondents were able to listen to others attentively.

The result did show that there were few managers felt that it was very hard to talk on certain topic in front of certain people with the reading of 2.9%. With the same percentage (2.9%) these group of managers had few difficulties in communication

– not able to open to other subordinates’ questions, not able to listen carefully to other subordinates, not proficient in choosing words and speaking when dealing with people.

**RO 2: To identify knowledge of the managers**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
I know my job responsibilities.	0	5.7	8.6	34.3	51.4
I usually received information and use it appropriately.	0	5.7	8.6	60	25.7
I know where to go, whom to ask and how to get the need info.	0	5.7	5.7	68.6	20
I am able to understand things going on in the organization very well.	0	5.7	22.9	60	11.4
I am able to explain things going on in the organization very well.	0	8.6	25.7	51.4	14.3
I know my departments responsibility towards community.	5.7	0	2.9	42.9	48.6
I know the community perception towards my department.	5.7	0	20	45.7	28.6
I am able to follow the change of command in communication	11.4	5.7	22.9	60	0
I am able to explain clearly the job procedures to my staff.	0	5.7	20	51.4	22.9

This part of the study attempted to identify knowledge of the managers. From the results, it was proven that most of the managers had the knowledge needed with 68.6% were able to get the information needed, 60% knew well in handling information appropriately and 60% of the managers were able to understand the work processes in their organization. In addition, 60% of the respondents were to follow the change of command in communication.

However, the result did show a small percentage of 11.4% of managers who failed to follow the change of command in communication. With the reading of 5.7% (strongly disagree), there were few managers who did not know their department responsibility towards the community and the communities’ perception towards their department.

**RO 3: To identify behaviors of the managers**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
I get upset easily when interacting with people in different background.	40	34.3	25.7	0	0
I feel confident when interacting with people from different background.	0	2.9	37.1	54.3	5.7
I am very open-minded to people from different background.	0	2.9	14.3	62.9	20
I am very observant when interacting with people.	0	2.9	31.4	54.3	11.4
I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people.	0	5.7	20	57.1	17.1
I am able to speak thoughtfully and calmly even in crisis.	0	5.7	34.3	48.6	11.4
I am able to speak in a friendly manner even with someone I do not like.	0	8.6	25.7	54.3	11.4
I am able to speak or listen with a smiling face, makes eye contact and pays attention to the speaker To express him/herself.	0	5.7	8.6	62.9	22.9

The association between behavior and communication competency was also supported by the result showed above. It was found that 62.9% of the managers were very open minded when dealing with people from different background and 54.3% of the managers were very observant when interacting with people. The same percentage have been showed in the table, where 54.3% of the managers were able to speak in a friendly manner even with someone they dislike. Quite a high percentage with 57.1% showed that managers tried to obtain as much information as they can when interacting with other people.

Nevertheless, the result did show there quite a great number of percentage where managers felt neutral towards some of the questions asked, as the details have been showed in the table above.

In the meantime, 2.9% managers still felt that they were not open minded to people for different background and they were not observant when interacting with people.

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