Communication Satisfaction among Academic Staff in Malaysian Public Universities

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ABSTRACT

Communication satisfaction is of dominant position in any organization as it contributes to the effectiveness and success of an organization. The communication satisfaction of an organization may affect the atmosphere in the organization which either encourages or hinders horizontal, upward or downward communication among the employees. In organizations with defensive climates, employees have the tendency to abstain from communicating their needs, as they become very cautious in making statements, and may have low level of motivation. Organizations with understanding atmospheres inspire active participation, healthy exchange of information and constructive problems resolves. The objective of the present study is to investigate the major hindrances and problems of communication satisfaction among academic staff of Malaysian public universities and its impact on management function and organizational communication. This study is expected to investigate communication satisfaction among academics with supervisory role in the respective university. It aims to determine the patterns of communication system in universities, to analyze various challenges to the communication and to suggest ways of improving communication system. This research study would foster the knowledge and understanding of improving of communication satisfaction in academic organizations particularly tertiary institutions and would help improve productivity and harmonious working environment adopt better process and programs in order to overcome.

Keywords: Communication Satisfaction, Organizational Communication, Academic Staff, Management Function
JEL Classifications: D8, I2

1. INTRODUCTION

Research on communication in the workplace has often focused on interpersonal relationships that include the process of forming and maintaining relationships Postmes (2003). Previous theorists and scholars have focused their research on organizational communication based on the sender or transmitter of the message or information, which later changed to focus on the receiver. According to Winska (2010) found that between 1950 and 1970 much of the research focused on vertical hierarchy, the downward and top-down communication. Also, much of the research in the area of organizational communication, supervisor-subordinate communication, or internal communication have mainly been focused on the supervisors' or employers' communication and communication skills, as opposed to subordinates' or employees' communication competence or communication competence of both supervisor and subordinate as seen from both perspectives.

As in 2004, universities in South Africa has experienced a process of transformation because of the national government's broader plan to transform higher education to rectify the past imbalances by using resources more effectively and creating a new landscape for institutions of higher education in South Africa (Profile, 2009/10:4). This thing ensured that all South Africans receive quality and world-class education within the context of a global economy. The merger and absorption process of universities has augmented the crucial role of effective communication on all levels. "Organisation" is defined as a goal-oriented, social entity with deliberately structured activity systems with an identifiable

boundary Daft (2013), Argyle (1969. p. 272) puts more emphasis on an organisation's hierarchy and communication.

According to a recent interview with Mr. Abdul Halim bin Abdul Rahman (Registrar) at the University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (one of the technical university in Malaysia) "Downward Communication is practicing in a satisfactory way. As they had planning to make goals yearly and send to each faculty and also they meet with the staff of the university once in the start of the year to evaluate their progress and told them about future plans. They also conduct meeting with faculty heads once in a two months to get review about working plans, and also to get feedback from them, either the projects going good or have some trouble to solve them".

According to Abdul Haleem, they developed the evidence-based internal communication: Evidence-based practice include meeting with faculty heads. The university also has an online service for academic staff for feedback and this software called SCAT. As the trust level of employees are not advanced so they hesitate to be in the limelight with their name and designation. As he said, that employees hesitate to use this software for feedback or suggestion. Earlier he said that "they also try to meet staff personally in an informal way to get their reviews about work-related matters". So in the university, they are not practicing two-way communication. Several structures and policies need to be followed to ensure the effectiveness of internal communication such as employers ensuring that employees receive copies of strategies, plans, missions, and goals to be reached. Besides that, Howard (2000) states that, employers need to make face-to-face communications with the internal publics to maintain their effective internal communication. It is in fact that the backbone of their internal communications programs. Moreover, it could help managers to develop a positive working relationship with their employees, as it offers for an enhanced two-way communication.

In a global context, there are extensive studies of academics in higher education. There is a lack of literature exploring the states of communication satisfaction and its relationships with other attitudinal and behavioral variables among Malaysian higher education institutions' academic staff, particularly in public universities describe by Mohammed Noor (2010). Many researchers have argued that personal characteristics of academics such as gender, age and marital status, and working environments such as government and organisational policy, workloads, compensation system, collegial relationships, and work-life balance, have long been significant variables of academics' communication satisfaction (Ch'ng et al., 2010; Ghazi et al., 2010; Küskü, 2003; Morris et al., 2004; Okpara, 2006; Oshagbemi, 1997a; Oshagbemi, 1997b; Rahman, 1997; Rogers et al., 1994; Saad, 1992; Saiyadain, 1996; Santhapparaj and Syed, 2005; Toker, 2011; Villanueva and Djurkovic, 2009).

According to Abdullah and Antony (2012) It is fruitful to measure the effectiveness of internal communication. Generally, internal communication has been ignored by some Malaysian organizations. Top management personnel see the concept of internal communication as a lower priority task than external communication such as marketing and publicity. One of the Gallup (2013) research shows that the engagement among workers is holding steadily at 30%. It shows that seven in 10 employees are either checked out or actively hostile toward their employers. As stated by Cellier and Laine (2014) s in their report that the engagement problem exists at top universities as well. Therefore, the role of academic staff is crucial in developing a pool of professionally educated and trained manpower for nation. The nature of educational and research environments requires effective internal communication as a strategic tool for organizational communication success Khamis and Khalilah (2014). In academic organizations or higher education institutes serve a great number of individuals from diverse backgrounds and roles.

This study is to explore the hindrance of communication satisfaction in universities' context. The purpose of exploring this study is to finding elements hindering communication satisfaction in organization in academic staff of Malaysian universities. The variables that are major problems that impact on means of communication satisfaction in organization, challenges in communication including: Poor communication skills to Top management and employees, changes in technologies, leakage (untrusty way) of employees information to unauthorized person, insufficient confidence, competence among employees and top management at work place, workload pressure, role ambiguity, performance pressure and various ways for improvements.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following conceptual model guided the conduction of this research study (Figure 1).

The core concept of this study framework reveals communication process. According to Coffman (2004. p. 1), a "snapshot" of the current communication processes in an organisation, and is formative in that it "points to areas in which the organisation can strengthen its performance".

2.1. Organisational Change
According to Muller et al. (2006. p. 520), Change, is a process resulting in differences of varying level in an organisation. It happens continuously, in different form, in all organisations. However, academic staff needs to be aware of these changes as they might influence them personally or professionally, so the effective informing of employees becomes a challenge. Jooste (2009. p. 372) states that effective communication is essential if effective change is to occur in the organisation. Employees must be informed about the reasons for the change, but circulating this information through e-mails only is not enough. It will require a lot of face-to-face communication to get employees involved in the change process.

2.2. Organisational Achievements/Failures
Organizational staff have a right to be familiar with their organisation is performance. The organisation should be communicated to employees about performance in an honest and transparent manner both strong and weak points. Procedures to measure performance such as the SWOT Strengths, Weaknesses,

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Figure 2: The communication process model
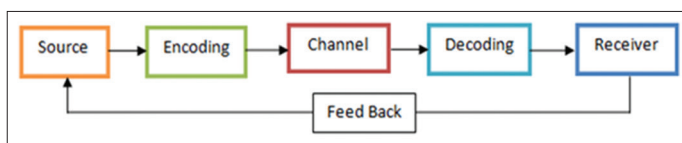
Source: Robbins (2003)

Opportunities and Threats) analysis, a method that measures internal environmental strengths and weaknesses and external environmental opportunities and threats can be consumed to this end Jooste (2010. p. 109).

2.3. Communication Climate Dimension

Climate refers to communication both organizationally and personally. It refers to the perception of communication, including the satisfaction of personal and organizational communication Downs and Hazen (1977. p. 72; Jones (2006. p. 41). Features essential in an ultimate communication climate include: Supportiveness, participative decision making, expectation, confidence and credibility, openness and high performance goals Meintjes and Steyn (2006. p. 159).

Communication within an organisation must be helpful and interesting to its employees. Dolamo (2008. p. 42) states that in order for subordinates to provide a good service they need to be informed by the leader, on a consultation basis, about the service they are providing and the needs they are facing. Information should be clear and readily available for the subordinates to make informed decisions. Leaders have a wide range of choices in providing more and better information, such as utilising electronic and printed media for example Dolamo (2008. p. 43). In order to feel part of organization employees have to aware of the goals and objectives. Organisational identification refers to the extent to which communication in an organisation makes the employee identify with it or feel a vital part of it.

According to Downs and Adrian (2004. p. 140), organisational information makes employees feel that they are "a vital part of the organisation".

According to Muller et al. (2006. p. 518) state that attitude is an internal, emotional opinion a person has towards people, things, actions and behaviour. The attitudes of employees at an organisation must be basically healthy. If the attitudes of employees are not healthy it might imply that there are certain barriers hampering the free flow of information. One such a barrier could be difference in status between members of a group when employees at different levels of the hierarchy need to communicate with one another. Van Staden et al. (2002. p. 23) state that "with a positive and relaxed attitude" towards the communication process and one another, "this barrier can be overcome and valuable insights gained" from one another.

2.4. Supervisory Communication Dimension

Supervisory communication refers to both the upward and downward communication that subordinates experience with their supervisors. The level of satisfaction professionals experience during supervisory communication depends on aspects such as the extent to which the supervisor is open to ideas, listens and pays attention to the employee, trusts the employee and offers guidance to solve job-related problems. These aspects should be investigated in an audit as means of improving supervisory communication Jones (2006. p. 38).

Openness indicates the extent to which the supervisor is open to new ideas, and it links to the element of trust. Robbins (2003. p. 75) view openness as the extent to which a person can be relied on to be truthful when issues of trust are at stake. What constitutes open communication? According to Muller et al. (2006. p. 532), open communication is the sharing of all types of information throughout the organisation, across functional and hierarchical levels. In other words, in a situation of mutual trust and open

communication, the supervisor can confidently be open to new ideas of colleagues and subordinates.

Attention According to Meintjes and Steyn (2006. p. 159), attention refers to the extent to which the supervisor listens and pays attention to the employee. Van Staden et al. (2002. p. 15) state that employees in an organisation have specific internal communication needs. These needs include direct and personal contact with superiors, an understanding of the job and the organisation, being informed about issues related to the job at all times, and an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

Trust refers to the extent to which the supervisor trusts the employee and vice versa. Honesty, according to Robbins (2003. p. 258), is absolutely essential in leadership and underlies the key dimensions of trust: Integrity, competence, loyalty and openness (Robbins 2003. p. 75). Leaders must be worthy of the trust of their followers; once the followers are assured of this trustworthiness, they will willingly follow the leader. "Knowledge-based trust" is the most prominent type of trust that exists in organisations and is based upon a history of interaction with someone, and knowing someone well enough to make a prediction on their probable behaviour Robbins (2003. p. 259). Kreitner and Kinicki (2007. p. 352) highlight communication as one of the six guidelines for building and maintaining trust in relationships between managers and employees. This guideline (communication) embraces aspects such as telling the truth, keeping employees informed and providing accurate feedback.

Guidance refers to the extent to which the supervisor offers guidance for solving job-related problems. Employees are faced with many job-related problems on a daily basis which require the insight of the manager. The employee needs regular guidance from management on how to handle challenges in the employee's job Jones (2006. p. 10). Active staff participation in the decision-making process can lead to stability in the organisation.

2.5. Subordinate Communication Dimension

Subordinate communication talks about to the upward and downward communication that supervisor with their subordinates. Supervisors build up the confidence in their subordinates to start upward communication, and in turn the vice versa approachability of subordinates to downward communication, thus showing that subordinates trust their managers enough to communicate openly with them.

Downward communication refers to the level to which employees are quick to respond to communication directed down to them by their managers. Muller et al. (2006. p. 303-305) describe communication patterns from the perspective of the manager, addressing issues such as who is talking to whom, what is said, how it is said, and who is listening (or not listening). Communicating with a group is different from communicating with an individual, in the sense that the aspects of group size, competition, sophistication, organisation and structure become more important in communication with a group.

Receptiveness to evaluation, suggestions and criticism refers to the extent to which employees are receptive to such communications

from management and vice versa. Because of the sensitive nature of evaluation, suggestions and criticism, managers should approach this task with caution. According to Jooste (2009. p. 235), two-way communication between employees and their supervisors creates a platform where opinions can be exchanged, and there is openness to criticism. This is not where it should stop; managers must be confident enough, according to Jooste (2009. p. 235), to communicate the views of employees (academic staff) under their leadership to top-level management without hesitation. It is important that these employees shall be up-to-date about the results of the communication with top-level management.

Upward communication refers in general to messages which flow from subordinates to superiors. Upward communication is initiated to ask questions, provide information and feedback and to voice opinions or make suggestions Jones (2006. p. 16). Accurate upward communication thus refers to the extent to which employees feel responsible for initiating such communication. It is often the case that if upward communication flow issues are present in an organisation, there will also be issues with downward communication.

Lower-level employees often distort information they convey up the chain of command, and this phenomenon is usually the case with people that have a high achievement drive Jones (2006. p. 16). Subordinates tend to convey only the information that shows them in the most favorable light. Information can also be viewed as power, and relinquishing information can imply a loss in power. Subordinates tend to "hoard as much information as possible for as long as possible" before they send it up the hierarchy Jones (2006. p. 16).

2.6. Media Quality Dimension

Media quality refers to the employees' reactions to several important communication methods, formats and channels Downs and Hazen (1977. p. 72). Assessment criteria pertaining to the media quality dimension on a communication audit will make reference to the degree to which meetings are organised, written directives and reports are clear and concise and the amount of communication received satisfactory Downs and Adrian (2004. p. 54); Jones (2006. p. 42).

Meetings in an organisation occur when "two or more people gather to discuss and resolve issues of common interest" Jooste (2010. p. 100). An organisation is dependent on formal meetings for the smooth running of its day-to-day operations. These meetings should be well organised and it is the extent to which these meetings are organised that is going to determine how successful they are. Meetings are "one of the most effective communication tools of the work environment" Jooste (2010. p. 100), where ideas can be stimulated, plans of action generated, teamwork encouraged, guidance provided, employees empowered and productivity improved. According to Jooste (2009. p. 402) "Effective meetings also ensure the continuous flow of information to all level in the organization".

Written directives the medium in which organisations distribute their information to internal and external destinations could have

a huge impact on the effectiveness of such information. It is the receiver that needs to make sense out of the intended message and interpret it as the correct intention of the sender. Thus the correctness of organisational media is essential. The correct medium should be used for the specific purpose intended; for example, a memorandum is used as a formal form of communication inside a nursing unit or for communication between the nursing unit and departments. The telephone or e-mail communication should be used in cases where information is required urgently Meyer et al. (2009. p. 270). Written communication in the form of directives and reports in an organisation must be clear and concise. Grammatical errors should be avoided. Messages should contain the gist of the matter but not be so brief as to create more questions than answers Meyer et al. (2009. p. 267).

Amount of communication the amount of information the employee receives from the manager is closely aligned with communication overload, and must involve a precise process. Employees can easily feel overwhelmed by too much information – regardless of whether this information is applicable to their work situation or not. It is the responsibility of the manager to provide employees with correct and up-to-date information that is relevant and applicable to their work situation, but the manager should not restrict the flow of information that could stimulate growth and creativity.

3. LITERATURE

According to Robbins (2003. p. 284) before communication can take place, a purpose, expressed as a message to be conveyed is needed. The author explains that the message passes between a source (the sender) and a receiver. The message is encoded (converted to a symbolic form) and passed by way of some medium (channel) to the receiver, who retranslates (decodes) the message initiated by the sender. The result is the transference of meaning from one person to another Robbins, (2003. p. 284).

The model, illustrated in Figure 2, is referred to as the linear model of the communication process Fielding, (2006). This model depicts communication as a system that involves an interrelated and interdependent set of elements working together for a specific purpose. There are seven elements in the linear model as illustrated in figure, namely, (1) the communication source; (2) encoding; (3) the message; (4) the channel; (5) decoding; (6) the receiver; and (7) feedback (Fielding, 2006; Robbins, 2003).

Robbins (2003. p. 285) explains that in the communication process, as shown in the previous figure, the source initiates a message by encoding a thought. The message may be in the form of a speech, a written message, a gesture, body language, for example, the flow of arms and an expression on a face. The message travels through a channel selected by the source to determine whether the use of a formal or informal channel. According to Robbins (2003. p. 285), official channels are established by the organization and transmit messages that are related to the professional activity of members. Other forms of messages, such as personal or social, follow the informal channels of the organization. The receiver is the object to which the message is addressed. However, before

the message can be received, the author notes that the symbols in the message must be translated into a form that can be understood by the receiver. This step is decoding the message. The last link in the communication process is a feedback loop. This next link is important in the communication process because it determines whether the settlement was reached.

4. COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

Communication satisfaction is defined by Downs and Adrian (2004) as "the personal satisfaction inherent in successfully communicating to someone or in successfully being communicated with" (p. 140). An employee who is well informed by their supervisor and organisation is more likely to understand their job requirements and expectations of their contribution to an organisation's success. According to Wood (2011, p222) satisfaction with communication climate is the employee's general response to the communication environment at organisational and personal levels. The communication climate includes the extent to which the communication in the organisation motivates employees to meet organisational goals, and initiates a healthy attitude toward communication in the organisation Downs and Adrian, (2004).

The satisfaction with supervisor communication refers to an employee's immediate supervisor, as it measures subordinates perceptions of how their supervisor is open to their ideas, and listens to problems as well as how adequately managers keep subordinates well informed (Downs and Adrian, 2004). The satisfaction with subordinate communication focuses on how well an employee initiates communication with their supervisor, and informs their supervisor of helpful information that is useful to the supervisor's needs. The satisfaction with media quality obtains the employees reactions to meetings, written communication and other important communication channels used with today's technological communication systems. This covers whether the amount of communication is adequate, well organised and clearly communicated to the employee Downs and Adrian, (2004).

The satisfaction with horizontal communication refers to the information shared through the organisational grapevine is accurate and free flowing. Horizontal communication is regarded as the informal transfer of information (Downs and Adrian, 2004). The satisfaction with management communication refers to broad information about the organisation as a whole. This communication dimension includes the employee being notified of changes, and other information concerning the organisations' financial situation or overall mission (Downs and Adrian, 2004).

The satisfaction with job-related communication includes the degree to which employees are adequately informed of information about their immediate work environment, departmental plans and personnel news. The degree to which an individual receives job-related communication makes them feel a vital part of the organization (Downs and Adrian, 2004).

The satisfaction with personal feed-back refers to the accuracy of information given to a subordinate about their performance

within the organisation, and how they are being judged and appraised by their supervisor. Personal feedback is one of the strongest dimensions because it is important for an employee to be informed of their progression within their job and how they are being appraised Downs and Adrian, (2004). Communication satisfaction was found to be strongly associated with measures of job satisfaction (Hoth, 1979) and a positive relationship between communication satisfaction and employee organisational commitment (Potvin, 1991).

Gregson (1990) stated communication satisfaction had been shown to influence the employee's level of job satisfaction, commitment, and work motivation. One major theme becomes apparent from a review of the prior research on the relationships among communication satisfaction, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. There is evidence of a strong positive relationship between employee perception of various aspects of communication, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, particularly regarding the superior-subordinate relationship.

4.1. Organizational Communication

Communication is "The process by which a person, group, or organization (the sender) transmits some type of information to another person, group, or organization (the receiver)" Greenberg and Baron (2008. p. 334). In an organization, members collect, send, and understand relevant data about the organization and the changes taking place within the organization Kreps (1990. p. 11-12). Through communication, the sender transmits a message to the receiver verbally or nonverbally.

In organizational performance lack of effective communication is one of the most obstructing factors for success Robbins et al. (2010. p. 288). However, communication is not simply about conveying a message but also involves an understanding of its meaning. It is cogent that an idea without effective communication and proper understanding is useless Robbins et al. (2010. p. 288). Flawless communication is when the receiver understands exactly what the sender wants to express. Truth is there are many causes confining perfect communication in an organization.

According to Conrad (1985), the functions of organizational communication can be summarized as the command function, the relational function, and the ambiguity-management function. The command function is that communication helps people to give and receive orders and then act on these orders. It allows interdependent members in the organization to coordinate to accomplish the overall organizational goals Conrad (1985. p. 7). The relational function of communication allows people to develop and maintain personal relationships with others in the organization Conrad (1985. p. 7-8). In addition, since the workgroup is the primary source for social interaction for many people, communication provides them with a way to express emotions and feelings and fulfill their social needs Scott and Mitchell (1976). The ambiguity-management function is that communication deals with and reduces the unclearness and uncertainty in organizations. People talk, interpret, and make sense of new situations so that everyone understands correctly.

As a result of better understanding of different situations, people can predict situations, make decisions, and direct their actions Kreps (1990. p. 11-13). Effective communication is essential for accomplishing tasks in organizations.

Satisfactory communication contributes to an organization's success, employee attitude and morale, and customer satisfaction (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011; Neves and Eisenberger, 2012; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Shore and Shore, 1995; Tsai, Chuang and Hsieh, 2009). Communication is a means to improve commitment and to stimulate employees to achieve organizational goals (Tsai, Chuang and Hsieh, 2009).

4.2. Evolving Organisational Structures on Internal Communication

The literature described prevailing traits applicable to internal communication, originating from the impact of progressing organisational structures Sliburyte, (2004); Stumpf, (2008); Quirke, (2008). The prime aspect is the modification in working patterns from the old, hierarchical, chain of command, vertical structure to something many commendations, more gradual in character, dynamic and horizontal as well as vertical analyze by Quirke (2008) and Sliburyte (2004). According to Sliburyte (2008. p. 193) is that the purpose of hierarchy is order, whereas the purpose of the new organisational form is to provide organisations that are welcoming cross-functional collaboration, and are gathering people and resources quickly to serve customer needs. However, Quirke (2008. p. 156) asserts that the flatter structures are devolving decision making to lower levels in the organisation, creating the need for more information to ensure high-quality decisions. The foregoing discussion clearly indicates a significant change in the traditional role of managers from being information owners and gatekeepers to employees possessing more information because of the evolving organisational structures. Therefore, it is clear that the direction of the modern organisation is set to become more collaborative and flatter in design and interactions as opposed to hierarchical and solitary.

An organisational structure is influencing the flow of information within organisations. A common inclination with more emphasis on open, two-way, and horizontal communication is becoming more prevalent as opposed to the traditional top-down and vertical communication pattern. This view is stressed by Sliburyte (2004) and D'Aprix (2005) who argue that in hierarchies, issues of status, power, rank and prerequisites often cloud the form and content of the upward communication. Because so many people aspire to higher-level positions in the organisation, there may be numerous agendas that affect and alter communication patterns. The authors assert that in particular, subordinates may be reluctant to communicate negative feedback, or to share information that reflects negatively on them and their work. However, Geijerstam (2000) in Sliburyte (2004. p. 190) argues that the success in creating effective internal communication depends on generating communicative leaders, where not only the top management takes responsibility but delegates it to senior, middle and line managers to facilitate a continuous dialogue with employees while defining critical problems, suggestions, and solutions.

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study serves as describe the role of communication satisfaction at the Malaysian universities' in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication in staff and organizationl improvement. Communication gaps can be shattering for any organizations in today's modest and fast situation. In the university setting, it can literally be a matter of future development of new generations. Internal communication practices that included sharing the organization's priorities and mission, vision and values with employees were identified in high performing organizations which demonstrated quality outcomes. As once engaging staff in the area of communications development differences in organizational performance and success in quality outcomes accrue (Robinson and Hayday, 2009).

Another constraint to this research is the narrow data available regarding internal communication satisfaction involvements. Without strong evidence to support internal communications interventions, more research may be require for find the core hindrance. As stated that companies who invest in effective communication strategies have higher engagement and organizational performance Wyatt, (2010). The development of a communication satisfaction tool for universities will be beneficial to evaluate internal communications. According to Quirke (2005) those organizations that build effective internal communications systems nurture enactment in work standards. It also necessary to know about universities staff communication strategies, implementation of internal communications practices and what are the significant impact on employee performance and organizational development. On the other hand also need to know how much problem faces in implementing communication strategies. As if the process of communication not develop or working, organization climate disturbs and also impact on overall organization.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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