UNDERSTANDING EMOTION AS A COMMUNICATION BARRIER AMONG EXECUTIVES IN CORPORATE ORGANIZATION TOWARDS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Muhammad Firdaus Daud [1]
Ahmad Syakir Salman Salleh @ Abdul Latif [2]
Ku Nurul Atiqah Ku Ahamad[3]
Muhammad Azril Izuan Ramlan[4]
Mohamed Shafiq Mohamed Ayub[5]

Universiti Teknologi Mara, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies. Specialization: Interpersonal Communication

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Abstract: *This research is conducted using qualitative method in understanding the deeper meaning of emotion as a communication barrier. A conceptual framework has been developed to understand these communication barriers on a deeper level and they are categorized into four dimensions which are, 1) socialization between employees, 2) competition between employees, 3) collaboration between employees, 4) proper communication in resolving conflict. To achieve these objectives, a total of 5 informants have been interviewed using in-depth interview method. The informants are chosen among the executives working in Sime Darby Bhd as the organization is a conglomerate consisting of multiracial employees and they are selected using purposive sampling. The location of this study is the headquarter of Sime Darby Bhd, situated in Jalan Raja Laut, Kuala Lumpur. The findings of this current research conclude that the factors such as avoidance, collaboration and compromise as laid out by the past researcher could not be categorized as the factor that cause communication barriers in Sime Darby Bhd.*

Keywords: Communication Barriers, Emotion, Avoidance, Collaboration, Compromise
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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to understand language barrier towards effective communication among executives working in Sime Darby Bhd. Ford and Chan (2002) state that effective communication is a two-way information processing practice which involves one party sending a message that can easily be understood by the receiver party. Effective communication is not just about a matter of exchanging information. It is also referring to the understanding and accepting the emotion and meanings that lies behind the information. In addition, effective communication can also be said like a two-way street. It is not only how one conveys an information in order for it to be understood and acknowledged by somebody in correctly to the way he has envisioned, it is also how a person attends to obtain full connotation of what is trying to be conveyed hence making the other person feel that he is heard and understood, and this concept is also applied in organizational communication. In organizations, effective communication is used by employees to enable the transfer of information which leads to higher profit and commercial success. In emotional barriers, the factors that could cause ineffective communication include 1.) avoidance, 2.) competition, 3.) collaboration, and 4.) compromise.

The contents of this paper are structured as follows. First, an explanation on the dimension communications barriers are briefly described. Second, the theories that are used in this study brought into highlight and how they are relevant in this study. Thirdly, the method of how this study was conducted is presented. Then, the results of this study are discussed. Last but not least, the researcher concludes on the findings of this study.

Communication Barriers

Broecker (2006) demarcates barriers in communication to be all types of hindrances that takes place during a communication process between two people and disturbing the process of information transfer which leads to misinterpretation and misunderstanding of a message. The chronological dimensions and the incoherence in communications are the indications that communication barriers exist.

In other words, communication barriers or barriers of communication are the aspects and factors that prevent effective communication to take place as information is not being able to be conveyed properly. Disturbances in the flow of information and the creation of problems to comprehend and understand a certain message are known as communication barriers. According to Hutchings (2005) communication barriers can be demarcated as hindrance and obstacle in a workplace that thwart effective interchange of ideas or thoughts. In the opinion of Larsson, Bentsson, Henriksson, & Sparks (1998) barriers of communication are the factors, causes or and problems that appear in the process of communication between two parties which leads to confusion and miscommunication.

Emotion as Communication Barrier

Druskat and Wolff (2001) have comprehensively studied and researched the importance of team relationship. The type of knowledge and information that is shared between team members or colleagues depends on the level of familiarity among them. Cox, (2002) states that the concept of emotion is often associated and defined in terms of deviating from an organization's original goal. Each organization and management have their desire and goal

which needs to be achieved, however employees with negative emotion tend to deviate from achieving the goal. Emotional states that are unproductive should be avoided and kept short (Orgland, 2002). In organization where the management is being changed, the employees find it intimidating and not comfortable to work with the new management. This is seen as an emotional barrier as the employees would not listen attentively to the management and hence preventing effective communication to take place. According to Dimaggio and Powel, (2000); Fligstein, (2004) individual positive emotions are extremely important when working in an organization in order to improve learning development. This is because, employees who have negative emotions tend not to learn from other and reject the information or knowledge that is trying to be conveyed to them. These employees normally develop their negative emotions when they are are required to work with people whom they are not familiar with or a new management. This is the result of the comfort zone that they have created when working with their previous colleagues or management. Another emotional barrier that could be present in organization is due to the adoption of competitive surrounding, thus creating competitive behavior between employees, as mentioned by Schein, (2000). The feelings of mistrust will develop thus creating a barrier for the sharing of information. According to Dodgson (2003) and Huber (2006), organizations need specific departments and teams that are effective and able to cooperate with one another in order to improve its operation level. Beeby & Booth (2000), Jarillo & Stevenson (2007) stated that information transfer is less effective when it is being communicated between people who are not familiar or close with one another because of high uncertainty level. According to Seo (2003) the action of being irrational is closely related and always associated with negative emotions. Such emotions often become the factor and causes of problems that prevent an implementation of change because the person is unable to think rationally.

Theories

Semiotic Theory

This is the theory which explains about the production and interpretation of words, signs and meaning for effective communication. Its general and basic concept is that communication happens when one person produces certain sign or words that gives meaning and related to the other signs which produced by the receiver. The signs have complex meaning and relationship between one another primarily relations of contrast and subordination such as members in organization and even community. The signs or words are produced between two parties that can mutually understand what is trying to be shared or conveyed (Baudrillard & Poster, 1998)

This theory is applicable to this research as it explains about how people process the information that are conveyed to them. It is also used in organization by employees in order for them to make sense of the information that is shared between them. If they fail to understand the content of information or message that is trying to be delivered, then the communication between them can be considered as ineffective. This is because effective communication can only take place when both parties (encoder and decoder) are able to share information between them and able to respond accordingly.

The Feedback Loop Model

The concept of semiotic theory is supported by a communication model designed by Wilbur Schramms. Schramms was the founder of the basic communication model which gives lives to other communication models. In 1954, he developed a communication model which explains about how a message is being encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver. He proposed that this process is scripted in a basic human interaction and it is reciprocal between two people who are communicating with one another. Below is the communication model that was illustrated by Schramms.
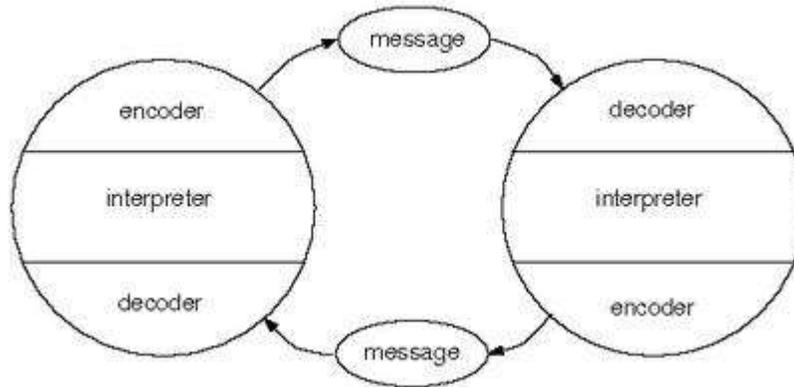

Figure 1: Feedback Loop Model by Wilbur Schramm

This model compliments semantic theory as it explains about the communication process. The message is first transferred from the first speaker and conveyed the receiver. This step is known as encoding. After that the receiver decodes or tries to understand the message and responds to it. This creates a complete circular communication, or in other words, effective communication. However, if communication barriers exist, the circular communication process might not be able to be completed as the receiver fail to decode the message or information that is trying to be conveyed by the first speaker.

Methodology

In-depth interviews took place between April and May 2018. The five executives that were interviewed were carefully selected by the researcher and they all are permanent employees with a minimum of two years of working experience with the organization. The researcher decided to choose and focus on the main office or the head quarter of Sime Darby which is located in Jalan Raja Laut, Kuala Lumpur, as the location for this research because the main office of Sime Darby acts as the main communicator which communicates and conveys information to all of its five divisions, namely, Plantation, Property, Motors, Energy & Utilities, and Industrial. First, the researcher wrote a letter to the Head of Human Resource in Sime Darby to seek for permission to conduct interview with the employees within the organization. With the permission of interviewees, a digital recorder was used to record the conversations, which helped the researcher to conduct the interview smoothly and efficiently. All interviews were undertaken at the interviewees' places of work. The interviews were conducted in English and/or Malay - depending on which language the interviewees preferred. During the interviews, a set of questions was used to guide the conversation and, importantly,

the researcher also posed probing or follow-up questions to stimulate the conversation on the topics discussed. After the interview, the researcher transcribed all the interview data.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data of this study were also analysed using the thematic approach. Data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim based on the recording. The next step was categorising the data into few key themes and then the data were analysed according to themes.

Findings

This section presents the results gathered from the in-depth interviews. Informants were five executives working in Sime Darby Bhd. Two key themes are highlighted and these are related to the communication barriers laid out in this study: (1) executives do not avoid associating with others; (2) competition between executives is a good thing; (3) collaboration between executives improve work performance; (4) proper communication is the best way to resolve conflict.

Categories and themes derived from In-depth interview with individual informants reflecting on emotional barrier in Sime Darby Bhd.

Categories	Themes Derived
Emotional Barrier	- The executives do not avoid associating with other employees - Competition between executives is a good thing - Collaboration between executives improve work performance - Proper communication is best way to resolve conflict
TOTAL	4

Key Theme 1: Executives Do Not Avoid Associating with Other Employees

Prior to the interview with the executives working in Sime Darby Bhd, the researcher has grouped their response for the third objective of the study which is to understand emotional barrier among corporate organization executives towards effective communication into four separate themes. The first theme is regarding the avoidance attitude amongst the executives and whether or not such attitude can lead into problems which may contribute to ineffective communication. Based on the interview, it is interesting to find that the executives are very

participative in whatever programs of activities that are being organized by the other team members or even the organization itself. They enjoy taking part in such activities because they are able to strengthen the bond between them, other than the fact that it also serves as an avenue for them to release from some stress. This is certainly something that is positive especially for the executives because it promotes effective communication between them as they have a sense of community not just towards their own team but to the organization itself.

> *...I have never missed any of the activities organized by my team. I just love to participate in whatever activities they have organized. The reason being is because I would like to show appreciation on their effort and hard work to pull it off and another reason is because it's so relaxing. At that time, we are all able to just have fun and forget about all the stress and work in the office and just have a good time.* (**Sime Darby 2, line 129 - 133**)

> *...I enjoy participating in the activities organized by them because during such activities, we all get to strengthen our bond and of course release whatever stress and burden that we carry from being cooped up in the office. It's fun to join such activity and I would never want to miss them because I know I my teammates always organize one hell of a "party" hahahaha. And plus, during such activity all of us get to know each other better and talk about things that are not related to work which is kind of good. It's really boring if we were to discuss about work all the times right.* (**Sime Darby 3, line 239 - 246**)

Key Theme 2: Competition Between Executives Is A Good Thing

The second theme that has been identified for the third objective after the interview with the informants is that the executives do enjoy a little healthy competition amongst them. Based on their responses, it could be said that the reason why reason why they simply enjoy a little competition is because it serves as one of the factors that drive them not to just be better than others and get rewarded for their efforts, but also because they get to enhance their learning curve. Without competition, their work performance would just remain at one point without any advancement. Through some competition and getting rewards, the executives have proven that they are able to push themselves to do better than they think they can perform. Even with such competition, they still practice good communication and knowledge transfer between one another as the information that they possess might be needed for the other executives to complete his task. Such emotional culture is certainly good for their career growth as they are willing to grow together not just as individuals but as a team.

> *...competition is never a bad thing. It's what drives people to outdo themselves and work harder to achieve something. So, I don't mind a little competition, even amongst my team. In fact, I always tell the junior executives to compete to be the best and give reward to them whenever I feel like they deserve it. As a senior executive such as I am, it's important for me to set a good role for them to follow because I want them know that they will be rewarded for all their hard work and effort for the company.* (**Sime Darby 4, line 359 - 364**)

> *...as for my team, we compete all the times specially to achieve the highest KPI. Getting the highest KPI means that you get a lot of bonus on annual basis so of*

*course we have to outperform other people. I mean don't you wanna earn more money? The bonus they give here is pretty damn good and for that, I don't mind a little healthy competition. (**Sime Darby 5, line 467 - 470**)*

Key Theme 3: Collaboration Between Executives Improve Work Performance

According to the findings from the interview with the informants, the researcher also finds it fascinating that collaboration between executives not just amongst team members but across departments and divisions of Sime Darby Bhd is widely appreciated and treasured by them. This denotes that the team work culture is greatly practiced and can effectively be accomplished by them. During the interview, the informants unanimously mentioned that they appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with other executives even those whom they have never met because they are able to exchange the knowledge between them and also able to specify their functions according to their own sets of skills and specialty. Since Sime Darby Bhd possesses five main divisions which are Plantation, Property, Motors, Energy & Utilities, and Industrial, there have been times where the executives from all five divisions have to work hand in hand to handle a huge project. Without proper collaboration and team work, the project could end up in a disaster but due to their professionalism and appreciation towards one another, all of the projects have been a success as a result from good communication, knowledge transfer and collaboration.

*...I have worked for so long and so I have collaborated with many people countless times, be it in a small and big project. Collaborating with other people is really good if everybody is doing their responsibilities accordingly within the given deadline and it makes things become smoother because more people are working together to achieve the same target. It's just like being in a team but with more number of people. When more employees are involved, that means you have more resources and more ideas and that is a really good thing to have. In fact, I also get the opportunity to work with other people with different set of skills which is a wonderful thing for me because I get to learn new things. (**Sime Darby 6, line 571 - 578**)*

*...collaborating with other people to achieve the same goal is nothing but a good thing. Why I'm saying this is because there are more brains and effort working together and maybe sometimes there are a few conflicts that might take place because of different opinion but as long as we try to stay professional and act like adults, I strongly believe that collaboration with other people is nothing but a positive thing. (**Sime Darby 2, line 147 - 151**)*

Key Theme 4: Proper Communication Is Best Way to Resolve Conflict

Based on the past research findings, it has been proven that conflict is one of the emotional barriers that hinders knowledge transfer between employees. The reason behind this is because conflict makes people argue with one another and the feeling of hatred takes over a person and at the end of the day they would just want to see one another to fail. This is certainly a negative attitude but as humans, sometimes such feelings cannot be avoided. Based on the interview with the informants, the researcher has managed to group the fourth theme for the third objective which is proper communication and being professional is the best way to overcome conflict between employees. When two people are in a conflict, they have a tendency not to speak to one another. Such behavior is what leads to ineffective communication as the process of effective communication would require people to communicate properly and exchange

knowledge or information between one another. Hence, communication is extremely essential in team work because without proper communication which results from conflict, the executives' work performance might be affected negatively.

> *...I used to have a lot of arguments with my team members. We disagree on things and we ended up not talking to one another. After working, I come to realize that if we have a conflict with another person, it's always best to confront and properly discuss to work things out. After all, we are working in the same office and we cannot avoid from one another. Good communication can always result in in something good. Just try to find an understanding between the two of you and insyaAllah, things will work out. There's no use in making enemy especially with people that you have to work with. (**Sime Darby 4, line 371 - 377**)*

> *...when two people have differences between and not talking to each other, their problem can never be resolved, right? Forgiving is one thing but forgetting is another. Yeah, I remember that quote from somewhere but at least by being able to forgive someone, you will be able to communicate with each other and just put aside your ego. We need each other to grow and no one in this world can live by himself. So, I think the best way to resolve a conflict is by talking to one another and try to find a commonness between the two of you. That way, we all can live happily and peacefully and get on with our lives better. (**Sime Darby 6, line 693 - 699**)*

It is interesting that the findings of this study have a different result from the past research findings. Based on the four themes for the third objective of this study, it is fascinating to see how employees have evolved in terms of their involvement with other colleagues. Past research findings have mentioned that employees tend to be individualistic and do not appreciate collaboration with other people. However, based on the interview with the informants, the result was rather astounding whereby the executives really enjoy engaging with other employees as well as collaborating with other employees, even with employees from a completely different division. Prior to that, collaboration and low level of avoidance between employees do not serve as a communication barrier in Sime Darby Bhd. Nevertheless, there are still past research findings that are still relevant and remain the same even after all these years. For example, employees still find that competition is something which ought to be practiced because it allows them to improve their learning curve and push themselves to be better. However, competition between colleagues need to be fair and square because otherwise it would give spark to hatred which will eventually leads to ineffective communication.

Conclusion
The researcher could summarize that this study has significantly improve the understanding on communication barriers namely office culture, language and emotional specifically in Sime Darby Bhd. The findings from past researcher findings could not be generalize to the organization or if not has become obsolete due to the advancement of technology which causes people to become more exposed to other culture and has affected working culture of the employees in Sime Darby Bhd. The findings of this study clearly show that one of the factors of communication barriers which is sharing of knowledge which was laid out by past researcher could is not applicable towards the employees working in the organization as they really practice good process of information and knowledge sharing with one another.

Past researchers have laid out that avoidance, collaboration, acceptance and the way people deal with problems are factors that could contribute to this type of barrier amongst employees. Based on the current research findings, due to the current practice of how the superior is trying to create and maintain good relationship in the their respective has definitely played significant role in diminishing all these elements as factors that could lead to communication barriers. As a matter of fact, the organization also constantly sends the executives to training to improve their soft skills and hence this has certainly affected the way they handle their emotional stress. Sime Darby Bhd. Has certainly done a great job in ensuring that emotional barrier that could happen between employees are well managed.

Acknowledgement

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