

LEADERS COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN TQM IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract: *There are ample established evidences on leadership as a critical success factors of TQM implementation and as mentioned by many authors is leadership, communication is proven to be the key skill for leaders. With the right communication skills being practiced by leaders, the team members or subordinates will be motivated to support and achieve the organization's target. In addition, their commitment and cooperation will enhance the quality and productivity of the organization. Based on the findings from in-depth interviews conducted with 14 managers in various position, whom are from five manufacturing organizations in Malaysia, two of which are local organizations, two eastern and one representing western organization. The study concluded that, there is one main practice of communication applied by all organization, which is regulative function of communication practices. The second most practices is management function and followed by integrative-task oriented function. And, in most of these organizations, the functions are blend together with persuasive function. In conclusion, the communication practiced by leaders pertaining TQM implementation in manufacturing organizations who address the reasons of implementation, explanation of procedures with a blend of leadership persuasive skills will enhance the success of TQM implementation.*

Keywords: *Leadership, Communication, TQM implementation*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the communication practices for leaders in Total Quality Management (TQM) of local, western and eastern manufacturing companies in Malaysia. The aim is to provide a significant insights of communication practices by the companies from the three continent who have been successfully implemented TQM.

The effective communication practices between sources and receivers are believed to be the core of TQM, both internally and externally (Tazkov & Mitreva, 2014). This core will generate and improve commitment, motivation, teamwork, leadership and almost in all critical success factors

of TQM need communication to convey messages. These critical success factors of TQM, supported by effective communication practices through people, procedures and systems in the organization will enhance organizations' total quality management success (Nofal, Omain and Zairi, 2005).

One of the reasons organizations are looking forward to improving quality is because of the global competition and economic crisis that organizations are facing. Therefore, TQM philosophy is on the high rank of the management agenda in the attempt to make more profit through product quality improvements, cost reductions and without sidelining customer and employees' satisfaction (Koilkuntha, Patyal & Ekkuluri, (2012). However, most of the studies revealed that the quality management initiatives end-up demanding huge amounts of effort from the management to just gain support and commitment from their subordinates (Pambreni, et al., 2019; Johnson & Kleiner, 2013; Kumar, Choisine, de Grobois & Kumar, 2009; Pinho, 2008). This raises the issue of whether TQM and its success factors have any relationship or should include communication as one of the critical success factors. In the context of management, many scholars such as Polat (2011), stressed that the process of management to produce quality work and improvements must start with leadership, commitment and involvement of the top management, to create organizational culture that suits the quality initiatives, defining quality values and goals and providing necessary resources and infrastructure to support the quality system. And, in order to practice those elements successfully, effective communications should be a part of the processes. Similarly, Catalin, Bogdan & Dimitrie (2014), suggested that in order to achieve TQM, it is necessary for the organizations to be aware of seven issues, including one of it is the issue related to organizational communication such as the attitudes of the managers themselves, which is to encourage communication and getting honest feedback, and also to use communication tools or the right mediums of communication in stimulating, educating and development of staff. This statement shows the importance of communications to support TQM implementation and there are elements of communication embedded but does not explain further on how communications should play their roles.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

TQM

Juran (1989) in his TQM concept stated that "Quality is fitness for use". Further in his Juran's ten steps to quality, he includes communication at number eight of his ten steps. Whilst, Crosby (1992) clearly mentioned that leaders should encourage employees to communicate to management especially pertaining the obstacles they face in the way of attaining their quality improvement goals. In defining TQM, the definition by Kehoe (1996) is much related to this study. He defines TQM as, "involving everyone and all aspects of an organization in continuous improvement through teamwork". This definition implicitly spelt out the importance of communication in order for TQM to be successful. In terms of indirect benefit to employees, TQM offers each employees the opportunity to participate, contribute and develop a sense of ownership. In order to get the result, senior management must provide a vision by identifying what they want to achieve. This should be communicated throughout the organization. Appropriate planning on how to disseminate and receive messages are necessary to the work force to better understand the processes in order to do their job successfully.

Communication Practice

Discussing about communication practices, Naknoi (2012) emphasized that communication is a tool to generate knowledge and understanding of organization's members in preparation for the acceptance of changes to the structure or operations, inside and outside of organizations. Furthermore, through communication, employees get information about their jobs, organizations, environment and others. Communication helps to motivate, engage, share of identities, and build the trust and culture of organizations all of which are very important in supporting the development of the organizations (Usman, 2019). Therefore, communication is one of the most important elements in organizations (Karanges, E., 2015; Harris and Nelson, 2008). In terms of organizational communication definition, Deetz (2001) explained two approaches on how organizational communication had been defined. First, is the most common approach where internal organizational communication is defined as a phenomenon that exists in organizations, and views organization as a container in which the communication processes happen. The second approach sees communication as a way to describe and explain organizations. In this approach, communication plays as a central process through which employees share information, create relationships, make sense or meaning and construct organizational culture and value. This study adopted the second approach of Deetz (2001), where communication plays as a central process through which employees share information, create relationships, make sense or meaning of the messages and help construct the organizational culture. All these are the practice of communication that combines the elements of communication, people (source and receiver), messages (in this case is the TQM messages), meaning, practice and purpose of the communication activities.

Few years later, De Ridder (2003) stated that the first goal of organizational communication should be to inform the employees about their tasks and about the policies and other issues of the organization. The second goal is for communication to be used as a means to create a community within the organization. Therefore, organizational communication can be defined as an activity to provide information and to create a community spirit. From the organizational communication context, the way individuals operate and interact with each other is becoming more and more important in contributing to the success of an organization. Having an understanding of the significance of this interaction in meeting organizational goals is a major key in today's management approach such as TQM. Top level management to down line employees will need to communicate effectively with each other to ensure that the organizational goals are achieved and to ensure their existence in the organization. (Barrett, 2002; Ocasio, et al., 2015).

Leadership communication

The importance of the role of top management and their leadership in quality management is emphasized over and over again in the literature covering implementation case studies and the writings of quality gurus (Gozukara et al., 2017; Fatemi et al., 2016; Ockland, 2000; Deming, 1986). From creating vision and mission, translate it into understandable instructions through excellent execution, guided by interrelated values and concepts, driven by customers demand, are all very much dependent on the leaders' communication skills. Given the importance of the role of leaders, it is not surprising to find that, in all quality awards, leadership issues are not only placed at the top of the list criteria but it is also emphasized in the other criteria as necessary to make a quality implementation successful. Communication allows leaders to co-ordinate, collaborate, discuss, to make important decisions that affect more than one individual in organization. Whatever changes faced by an organization, effective communication will always

be the glue that binds together different functions, groups and individuals into a unified whole (Okeneye, et al., 2014). Thus, effective communication is an essential ingredient for all types of organizations including organizations in manufacturing sectors.

The information given by the organization about the changes should address the reasons to change, and the worries employees initially will have. The information given by the organization usually comes from the management as the sender, and with the employees as the receiver of information. In this case, organizational communication is a mean to provide information. It will not only involve the sender and the receiver, but also the message and the channel in which the message is transformed. In a study on a leading five-star hotel in Malaysia, Zulhamri & Antony (2012), concluded that the practice of internal communication has been the crucial element to achieve a high efficiency in staff's attitude through the sharing of information. In the past, research by Robson & Tourish, (2005), among other things concluded that, the absence of adequate information upward, may blind managers to the full problems that the organization are facing. Therefore, the function of communication in organization is very important.

METHOD

In order to find out the practice of communication in organization, a qualitative research method using in-depth interviews and observations is suitable to be used to understand how internal communication has been practiced in the selected organizations (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014; Kalla, 2005). Therefore, semi-structured in-depth interviews in this study were concentrated on the major issues that relate to the problems under study and supplemented with non-participant observations to validate the findings of in-depth interview. Thus, it will provide detailed insights of the issues. For the practice of leadership communication in the organization regarding TQM implementation, informants were asked to describe their ways and experiences in disseminating messages to their subordinates. The data were derived from a purposive sampling comprising of middle and upper level managers in charge of disseminating TQM related messages. Profiling the informants, most of them were males with at least a degree holder and the minimum of three years' experience in the post until 20 years of experience. The table showed the number of credible informants participated in the data collection process.

Table 1: The number of organizations, informants, in-depth interviews and observations for actual study

No	Organization's origin	No. of interviews	Job title	Year in managerial position
1	Local	3	HR Manager	15
2	Local		Quality Manager	6
3	Local		Communication Executive	3
4	Local	4	Senior HR Manager	20
5	Local		Production Manager	6
6	Local		Quality Manager	8
7	Local		HR Executive	5
8	Western	3	General Manager	18

9	Western		Production Manager	10
10	Western		Quality Manager	6
11	Eastern	2	Production Manager	20
12	Eastern		HR Manager	10
13	Eastern	2	HR Manager	15
14	Eastern		Quality Manager	10

FINDINGS

Practice of Communication in Local, Western and Eastern Manufacturing Companies in Malaysia

This part presents about the practices of communication in leadership. Leadership communications between superiors and subordinates are believed to enhance job satisfaction among employees in all organizations across continents; local, eastern and western organizations. Leadership communications practices in all of the organizations were also found associated with the feeling of trust of subordinates with the superiors and this will result in them contributing more ideas for the organizations' improvements. Furthermore, when their ideas be heard, accepted and applied, the employees will be more loyal to the organizations. Most of the leaders across organizations in this study believed that, the most crucial part that they have to communicate to their subordinates are pertaining to the new initiatives of the organizations such as TQM implementation. This finding is parallel to Karanges, et al. (2015) & Madlock (2008) on the influence of internal communication and leadership.

The practice of internal organizational communication covers on how leaders in an organization communicate to all employees in the organization. There are six types of communication practice in organizations as mentioned by Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey (2005), such as;

1. The integrative function of communication focuses on the coordination of task, assignment, activities or the integration of work units towards a common goal. This is also known as "task oriented".
2. The regulative function is involved with the communication that is used to communicate regulatory policies or message about maintenance of the organization. The practice of this function of communication is often not pleasant, but it is essential to the smooth operation of the organization.
3. The management function is directed to three objectives.
 - i. Getting employees to do what is needed
 - ii. Learn about personnel to know them better
 - iii. Establishing relationships
4. The persuasive function is about how superiors attempting to influence employees or their subordinates into performing their job-related task according to what had been asked, by not only issuing orders, but also at the same time building relationships between superiors

and subordinates.

5. Feedback function is the final step in the communication process. Feedback give us the opportunity to determine whether our communication had been successfully practiced. The ability to effectively receive and give feedback is crucial in organizational communication.
6. Lastly, the socialization function. This is the way organization members integrate themselves into the communication networks in the organization. This will determine whether an individual survives well or not in organization.

Therefore, to answer the research question regarding on how leaders practice their communication in organizations, the analysis of the multiple case studies had been done, which encompassed all six types of communication practices namely, integrative, regulative, management, persuasive, feedback and socialization.

Local

Both local companies practice basically regulative and persuasive function in their leadership communication. In practicing regulative function, information on policies, regulations and laws were communicated to employees. This message involve regulatory polices of TQM, quality policies, maintenance of the organization and keeping the organization on track. Another communication practice by leaders of local manufacturing organizations is the persuasive style of communication, mostly used indirectly during meetings or briefings with top management team. Both of the companies also believed that the top management are the right person to persuade employees. This is the ability to make others obey instructions, effectively influence and persuade others.

Eastern

On the other hand, both Eastern companies' leaders practice the management function the most in order to communicate about TQM to their employees to get them to perform their tasks and establish relationships, professionally and personally. The management type of communication practices were implemented for the objective of achieving their organizational goals and is believed to be effective in managing their employees especially towards TQM implementation. This management function blend together with persuasive function of communication will make the practice of communication more effective. Comparing between this two companies, the second eastern company is more work-to-rule as for the type of communication practice they adopted belonged to functional group such as management function, regulative and task oriented.

Western

When it comes to leadership, regulative communication function is the most practiced communication by the western organization. This western company applied effective communication where they blend few types of communication styles such as integrative-task oriented, management function and as well as regulative. In the observation made on their plants, researcher also detect and observed the persuasive style being used, where the managers were going around giving orders and at the same time building relationships. The persuasive function had been clearly applied although not mentioned during the in-depth interviews for data collection.

Table 2: Findings of communication practice by organizations based on continent

Organizations' Continent	Communication Practices
Local	Regulative function
	Persuasive function
Eastern	Regulative function
	Management function
	Integrative-Task oriented function
Western	Integrative-Task oriented function
	Management function
	Regulative function
	Persuasive function

CONCLUSION

The information given by the organization about the TQM implementation should address the reasons of implementation and clearly explain the procedures. If it is blend together with the persuasive skills of leaders to eliminate employees' worries and enhance motivation, the success of the implementation is likely to be improved. The effective practice of communication by the the leaders as the sender, and the employees as the receiver of information will enhance the success of TQM implementation. In this case, internal organizational communication as a mean to provide information will not only involve the sender and the receiver, but also the message and the channel in which the message is transformed. This finding is parallel to a study by Zulhamri & Antony (2012). They concluded that the practice of internal communication is one of the elements to achieve a high efficiency in staff's attitude through the sharing of information. Furthermore, the type of communication practiced in all local, eastern and western organization for leadership can be concluded as the regulative function of communication, where they mostly communicate regulatory policies or message about maintenance of the organization. The practice of this function of communication is often not pleasant, but it is essential to the smooth operation of the organization. In order to make this function runs well, persuasive function together with the management function could be blended together. Finally, as a suggestion there are still many aspects to fine-tune the study by breaking it down into more detailed closed-ended quantitative research method. This will enable many more respondents to participate in order to generalize and be tested quantitatively for the future research.

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