



Enhancing Commitment Through Intra-Organizational Communication: A Comparative Study of Manufacturing Organizations in Malaysia

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Abstract. Intra-organizational communication is pivotal in enhancing employee commitment, particularly within the diverse landscape of Malaysian manufacturing organizations. This paper aims to uncover the strategies of intra-organizational communication in enhancing employees' commitment in the context of manufacturing organizations in Malaysia. A pilot study was conducted involving four managers from both local and foreign organizations to obtain preliminary insights and refine the developed instruments. Qualitative data was collected from five large-scale manufacturing organizations, which includes two local and three foreign organizations. Of the three foreign organizations, two of them are of eastern and one of western origin. Fourteen managers from these organizations participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. The raw data was transcribed using "meaning for meaning" transcription and subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed strategies of intra-organizational communication commonly practiced by the informants. Furthermore, this study clarifies and substantiates the elaborations which supports efforts to enhance commitment in manufacturing organizations through specific types of intra-organizational communication strategies. The local companies preferred the strategy of 'underscore and explore' and 'identify and reply' in their efforts to enhance their intra-organizational communication. The companies of eastern origin preferred the 'tell and sell' and 'underscore and explore' strategies, while the companies of western origin preferred the 'tell and sell' and 'identify and reply' intra-organizational communication strategies. These results sheds light on the nuances and overlapping of intra-organizational strategies used by the three distinct continents.

Keywords: Communication, Commitment, Manufacturing, Organization.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

Intra-organizational communication plays a crucial role in enhancing employee commitment [22], especially within the diverse landscape of Malaysian manufacturing organizations [23]. The study of intra-organizational communication and its role in organizational development has a rich history. From the recognition of the untapped value of face-to-face communication—one of the main contributors being Grabner and Rosenberg's study [7]—to the current challenges of information overload and technological resistance fuelled by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and breakthroughs in quantum computing, organizational communication, and, more specifically, intra-organizational communication, provide critical theoretical and practical insights into the inner workings of an organization. Max Weber's formalization of bureaucracy [27], Edgar Schein's theory on organizational culture [24], and the concept of Institutional Isomorphism as developed by DiMaggio and Powell [4] illustrate how scholars have sought to deepen our understanding of organizations. This pursuit remains as crucial as recent developments in quantum computing, such as Microsoft's Majorana 1 [21].

Hence, in this study, we will try to explore factors influencing employee's commitment within the context of an organization. The industrial sector in Malaysia, characterized by a mix of local and foreign investors, presents a unique opportunity to examine intra-organizational communication strategies that enhance employee commitment. This paper aims to explain the strategies of intra-organizational communication across local, Eastern, and Western manufacturing organizations in Malaysia, providing insights into how different intra-organizational communication practices can affect employee's commitment.

Though the importance of intra-organizational communication is emphasized in practice, its theoretical framework is not yet well developed as stated in a study by Verčič [26]. He further argues that very little attention is paid to intra-organizational communication by public relations scholars and is viewed as a part of an organization's strategic communication function by practitioners. This gap in conceptualization and practice between scholars and practitioners creates a situation where it might not always be clear on how to measure the effectiveness of intra-organizational communication strategies.

A study by Zerfass [28] had defined internal communication from a strategic perspective as 'communication between an organization's strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, strengthen a sense of belonging to it, increase awareness of the dynamic environment in which the organization operates, and enhance focus to the overall mission of the organization.

Furthermore, in Van Rossenberg et al. [25], we found that they had defined employee commitment as a psychological attachment of workers to their workplace. In the

study they had stated that the commitment stands in connection to various positive outcome to the organizations and to the employees themselves. Highly committed employees tend to have lower turnover rates, tend to be more satisfied with their job, more motivated to perform task given to them and less prone to making errors. This connection however, according to the authors is heavily moderated to various factors such as leadership style, motivation and communication style.

2 Literature Review

Effective intra-organizational communication is essential for organizational success [5], [8]. It has been proven as a method to improve internal relationships as well as communication between employees and the management team [14]. However, if poorly managed, it can pose a risk to the organization [26], [23].

Employee commitment is a well-studied area in organizational behaviour [20], with communication recognized as a key determinant [25]. Various models, such as the Social Exchange Theory and the Organizational Support Theory, suggest that effective communication can enhance perceived organizational support, leading to higher employee commitment. The importance of employee commitment and communication is also highlighted in the findings of several studies conducted in the USA, Europe, the Middle East, and Malaysia [1], [15], [16], [18].

The positive correlation between employee commitment and organizational success has been captured in a study that found organizations with a high level of employee commitment stand a greater chance of success [3]. The critical importance of employee commitment in an organization is based on the belief that the best process innovation ideas come from the people doing the job [12].

2.1 Employee Commitment and the JD-R Model

In this study the Jobs Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is used to guide our understanding of employee well-being and performance. The term 'JD-R' is an amalgamation of the term job demands and job resources. Job demands are the amount of effort demanded by the employer in terms of work hours, physical energy and mental energy exerted to accomplish the task. Too much would cause burnout, and too little would cause disengagement. The right amount of job demand would act as challenges and motivation for the employees. The support system which accompanies the employee in tackling job demands is job resources. Examples of job resources are employees are given a certain degree of autonomy and trust to complete the given task, given frequent and instant feedback on the work done, social support and opportunities for personal growth [13]. In this study, the JD-R model explained job demands and job resources in the context of intra-organizational communication to enhance employee commitment. The right intra-organizational communication strategies would boost employees' commitment to a given organizational objective.

Previous studies have often focused on a single cultural context or type of organization [19], [2]. However, this study's comparative approach, examining local, Eastern,

and Western organizations within the Malaysian manufacturing sector, allows for more understanding of how cultural and organizational contexts influence intra-organizational communication strategies.

3 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative thematic semi-structured interview, and a multi-case study approach conducted at multinational manufacturing organizations in Malaysia to explore intra-organizational communication strategies. According to Islam and Aldaihani [9] and Mariampolski [17], there are three factors to consider when deciding between employing a qualitative or quantitative research method. These three factors are the type of research questions addressed, the nature of the population being studied, and whether the study is exploratory or explanatory.

Based on these factors, this study employed a qualitative inquiry because it aims to answer the question of what intra-organizational communication strategies enhance commitment in manufacturing organizations. The data collected is based on interactions with managers and general managers, and the primary objective of the study is to explore and expand the current state of knowledge on intra-organizational communication in manufacturing organizations. A pilot study was conducted to refine the research instruments, involving four managers from both local and foreign organizations.

The actual study involved five large-scale manufacturing organizations: two local organizations and three foreign organizations, of which two are Eastern and one Western. Fourteen managers from these organizations participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The data was transcribed using "meaning for meaning" transcription, to ensure that the explanation of the communication strategies was accurately captured. Thematic analysis was then conducted to identify and compare the communication strategies employed by the organizations.

4 Findings

The thematic analysis revealed distinct preferences in communication strategies among the three groups of organizations:

Local Organizations

The local manufacturing organizations predominantly used the "underscore and explore" and "identify and reply" strategies. These strategies involve highlighting key messages and encouraging feedback, creating a two-way communication channel that fosters a sense of involvement and commitment among employees.

Eastern Organizations

The Eastern organizations preferred the "tell and sell" and "underscore and explore" strategies. The "tell and sell" approach focuses on persuading employees about the benefits of organizational goals, while the "underscore and explore" strategy provides room

for employees to discuss and internalize these goals, aligning their personal objectives with those of the organization.

Western Organizations

The Western organization primarily utilized the "tell and sell" and "identify and reply" strategies. The "tell and sell" strategy reflects a more top-down approach, where communication is used to reinforce organizational goals and expectations. However, the inclusion of the "identify and reply" strategy indicates an openness to employee feedback, albeit in a more structured and controlled manner.

These findings shed light on the overlapping and unique communication strategies employed by organizations from different cultural backgrounds and origin of the organization. The fact that the organization does not necessarily employ those from their respective background signifies the advantages of each strategy and conveys the idea that there is no one strategy which is always dominantly effective in all circumstances. The preference for certain strategies reflects underlying cultural values, such as collectivism in Eastern cultures and individualism in Western cultures [6], which in turn influence how communication is used to enhance employee commitment.

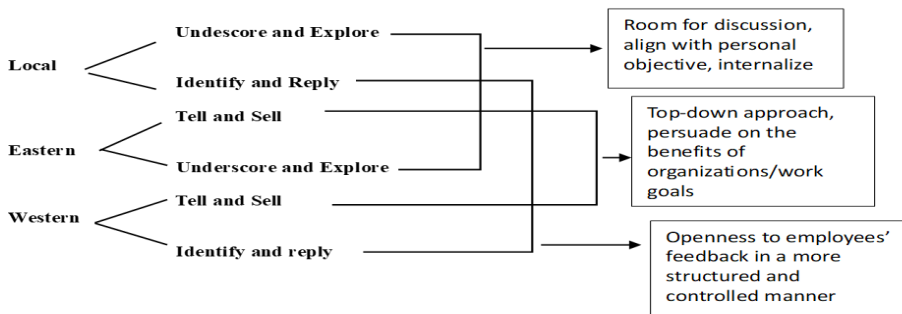


Fig. 1. Intra-Organizational Communication Strategies to Enhance Commitment in Manufacturing Organizations

5 Discussion

The results of this study highlight the importance of intra-organizational communication strategies in enhancing commitment. Local Malaysian organizations, influenced by a mix of traditional and modern management practices, tend to favour participative communication approaches. In contrast, Eastern organizations, which often emphasize hierarchical structures, prefer a combination of directive and participative strategies. Western organizations, while also directive, show a balance by incorporating feedback mechanisms.

These differences underscore the need for organizations to adapt their communication strategies to their cultural and organizational context. For multinational corporations operating in Malaysia, understanding these factors can lead to more effective communication strategies that enhance employee commitment and overall organizational performance.

6 Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of intra-organizational communication strategies in the context of Malaysian manufacturing organizations. By comparing the strategies used by local, Eastern, and Western organizations, the study provides insights into how different cultural and organizational contexts influence communication practices. The findings suggest that tailored communication strategies, which consider the cultural background of the organization, can significantly enhance employee commitment.

Future research could expand on this study by exploring other industries or geographical regions, providing a broader perspective on the relationship between communication strategies and employee commitment. Additionally, quantitative studies could further validate the findings and explore the impact of specific communication strategies on organizational outcomes.

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