



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE AND
COMMUNICATION STYLES OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN THREE
MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES**

TENGGU MARINI

FBMK 2007 4



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MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES**

**By
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**MASTER OF SCIENCE
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

2007



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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July 2007

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Communication plays a very important role within an organization since ambiguous communication may contribute to various organizational conflicts. Therefore, it is important to understand the communication style used by staff. As such the main purpose of the research is to study the relationship between organizational climate and communication styles among administrative staff of three selected universities.

The specific objectives of the research is to determine the different perceptions of the organizational climate and communication styles among the staff based on their gender and types of departments; and to determine the contribution of communication styles, selected demographic factors and job related factors toward organizational climate individually and collectively. This study used quantitative research design and respondents were selected using the cluster sampling method. Based on Sullivan's (2001) sampling table, a total of 235 administrative staff was selected from a total population of 909 administrative staff from three public universities in Klang Valley. An organizational climate questionnaire from Litwin and Stringer (1968) was adapted to measure the organizational climate, while

communication style was measured using Norton's (1983) communicator style measurement.

Descriptive statistic, t-test, ANOVA, Pearson's correlation and multiple regressions were used to analyze the data. The results revealed that male staff perceived organizational climate more favorable as compared to the females. Meanwhile, the friendly, precise and attentive style was found to be the predominant communication styles among the staff. The predominant organizational climate was achievement-oriented climate whereas friendly communication style was highly applied in all group types of departments. The friendly style, dominant style, impression leaving style and attentive style were correlated significantly to organizational climate. All communication styles, selected demographic and job related factors contributed significantly and collectively to the organizational climate.

The finding indicates that achievement-oriented climate is prevalent in all the three universities and implies that action must be taken in order to create more favorable climate – the affiliation-oriented climate. The affiliation-oriented climate can be shaped through more frequent application of friendly communication style that will help to decrease conflict, and this climate is essential for human relations department since warmth and friendliness with minimum conflict is inherent in such climate. Furthermore, since the male staff has more contentious and open communication styles, it is suggested that the management should take into account the different style of communication between genders and focus their effort to narrow the gap.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA IKLIM ORGANISASI DAN GAYA
BERKOMUNIKASI DI KALANGAN STAFF PENTADBIRAN DI TIGA
UNIVERSITI DI MALAYSIA**

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Komunikasi memainkan peranan yang sangat penting dalam sesebuah organisasi memandangkan komunikasi yang tidak jelas boleh menyumbang kepada pelbagai konflik dalam organisasi. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk memahami gaya berkomunikasi yang dipraktikkan oleh ahli dalam organisasi. Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara iklim organisasi dan gaya berkomunikasi di kalangan staf pentadbiran di tiga universiti terpilih.

Objektif khusus kajian ini ialah untuk menentukan perbezaan persepsi antara iklim organisasi dan gaya berkomunikasi di kalangan staf pentadbiran berdasarkan jantina dan jabatan; dan untuk menentukan sumbangan gaya berkomunikasi, ciri demografi terpilih dan faktor berkaitan pekerjaan secara individu dan secara berkumpulan terhadap iklim organisasi. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dan responden dipilih menggunakan kaedah persampelan kelompok. Berdasarkan jadual persampelan Sullivan (2001), sejumlah 235 staf pentadbiran telah dipilih dari sejumlah populasi sebanyak 909 dari tiga universiti awam di Lembah Klang. Soal selidik berkenaan iklim organisasi daripada Litwin dan Stringer (1968) telah

diadaptasikan untuk mengukur iklim organisasi, manakala gaya berkomunikasi telah diukur menggunakan pengukuran gaya berkomunikasi Norton (1983).

Statistik deskriptif, ujian t, ANOVA, korelasi Pearson dan regresi berganda telah digunakan untuk menganalisa data. Hasil kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa staf lelaki mempunyai persepsi yang lebih positif terhadap iklim organisasi berbanding wanita, manakala gaya berkomunikasi peramah, tepat dan prihatin merupakan gaya berkomunikasi yang paling dominan di kalangan staf. Iklim organisasi berorientasikan pencapaian merupakan iklim organisasi yang paling dominan, manakala gaya berkomunikasi peramah merupakan gaya berkomunikasi yang paling kerap diamalkan di kalangan semua jabatan. Gaya berkomunikasi peramah, dominan dan meninggalkan kesan serta prihatin mempunyai korelasi signifikan dengan iklim organisasi. Semua gaya berkomunikasi, ciri demografi terpilih serta faktor berkaitan pekerjaan menyumbang secara signifikan dan berkumpulan terhadap iklim organisasi. Walaubagaimanapun, gaya berkomunikasi secara peramah merupakan penyumbang tertinggi terhadap iklim organisasi.

Hasil kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa iklim berorientasikan pencapaian terdapat di ketiga universiti, dan memberi implikasi bahawa tindakan mesti diambil untuk mewujudkan suasana iklim yang lebih harmoni, serta iklim organisasi yang berorientasikan pencapaian. Iklim berorientasikan penggabungan boleh dibentuk melalui aplikasi gaya berkomunikasi peramah, yang boleh membantu mengurangkan konflik; dan iklim ini amat penting untuk jabatan hubungan manusia kerana iklim organisasi tersebut menekankan gaya kemesraan. Akhir sekali, kerana staf lelaki lebih menekankan gaya berkomunikasi yang agresif dan terbuka, pihak pengurusan

harus lebih prihatin dalam mengkaji perbezaan jantina dalam berkomunikasi, dan lebih fokus dalam usaha mengurangkan jurang tersebut.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alhamdulillah, praise be to Allah SWT for His blessings. I would also like to express my appreciation to all the people who have helped me during the process of completing this thesis.

I would also like to convey my big appreciation and gratitude to all the lecturers of Modern Languages and Communication Faculty in UPM who have helped me throughout my study and upon my thesis completion, especially to Dr. Narimah Ismail, the chairperson of my supervisory committee for her kind assistance and patience while guiding me in accomplishing the thesis, and also to Dr. Siti Zobidah Omar as the member of my supervisory committee for her great support and guidance. My enormous gratitude also goes to my mother for her undying love, my late father for his love and for believing in me although I did not have the chance to show him my completed thesis, also for my brother and sisters for their tender love and care.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Jusang Bolong for helping me patiently regarding statistics and all the helpful staff of the Communication Department of UPM, my classmates: Suhaila, Aisha, Serina, Faisal, Amin, Zaki, Ayahmi, Nina and many more, including my Indonesian friends in here: Vivi, Galliv, Aga, my housemate Nassim and also to all of my Indonesian friends in Indonesia whom I can not mention one by one, for their precious supports, attentions, suggestions and friendships.

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on July 13, 2007 to conduct the final examination of Tengku Marini on her Master of Science thesis entitled “Relationship between Organizational Climate and Communication Styles of Administrative Staff in Three Malaysian Universities” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CEAS	College of Engineering and Applied Science
CEDA	Center for Educational Development and Assessment
CSM	Communicator Style Measurement
CSPT	Communication Style Profile Test
INTAN	Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara / National Institute of Public Administration
LSOCQ	Litwin and Stringer Organizational Climate Questionnaire
LCCI	London Chamber of Commerce and Industry
MCE	Malaysian Certificate of Education
OCDI	Organisational Culture Diagnostic Instrument
OCQ	Organizational Climate Questionnaire
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SD	Standard Deviation
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UM	University of Malaya
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
USA	United States of America
VC	Vice Chancellor

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the introduction of the study. It contains several headings: (1) Background of study, (2) Statement of research problem, (3) Objectives of study, (4) Significance of study, and (5) Limitation of study.

Background of Study

Organizational climate has been asserted as having an important and influential effect on staff's job satisfaction, institutional effectiveness along with success in organizations, including higher education institutions. Positive organizational climate has a significant positive impact for staff because it enhances perceived levels of staff's satisfaction, loyalty and commitment. The increased level of staff's satisfaction, loyalty and commitment will eventually increase institutional effectiveness and support the success of organizations, as well as higher education institutions (Thompson, 2005).

In Malaysia, the government has often expressed its concern at the high turnover of academic staff in higher education institutions. This raises questions as to the quality of staffing and the status of staff in Malaysian universities. One of the principal causes of high staff turnover is low staff commitment (Morris, Yacoob and Wood, 2004). Since positive organizational climate may enhance not only staff's commitment but also staff's satisfaction and loyalty (Thompson, 2005; Aarons and Sawitzky, 2006), therefore, recognition of the kind of the organizational climate

within organizations, including educational organizations such as universities, is of great importance for planning, organizing and effecting changes whereas these changes are necessary for dynamism of the educational system. A study by Zaliza Mohd Nasir (2004) in Malaysia revealed that all organizational climate dimensions were related to job motivation. Therefore, the measurement of an organizational climate can describe how staff perceive the organization and reflect whether staff have high or low job motivations. The reasons of low job motivation may include dissatisfaction ranging from salary and wage, insufficient opportunity for progress, closed communication channels, the promotion of some of the personnel without possessing necessary qualifications, and undefined organizational goals (Heshmatkhan, 1996 as cited by Alavi and Jahandari, 2005). According to Gunbayi (2007), an accurate assessment of the organizational climate can also identify the unnecessary obstacles to employees contributing their best. Thus, it is of vital importance for managers to measure organizational climate factors, which affect employees positively and negatively in order to create a climate, in which job satisfaction and effectiveness is supplied in an organizational environment.

Communication style is also important in relation to organizational climate since staff interact and communicate to other organizational members using different communication styles within organizational climate. This communication style may lead to positive organizational climate that facilitates loyalty, commitment, and trust (Thompson, 2005), while on the other hand, it may also cause organizational climate of non-commitment (Leadership Advantage, 2001).

Therefore, it is important to identify which communication styles that will lead to a more positive organizational climate in order to build better relationship among staff and enhance organizational performance.

A relevant study regarding communication styles among Malaysian was carried out among graduate students by Wong (2002) for his thesis entitled “Communication Styles among Malaysian Graduate Students”. This study revealed that some communication styles were differentiated by gender and ethnic, whereas friendly style was predominant among Malay adults and the attentive style was more predominant among Chinese adults. For Indian adults, the friendly and animated styles were obvious. However, only a few research existed on the communication style among staff in organizations in Malaysia. While in Indonesia, it was said that Indonesian personnel generally often use indirect and complex methods of communication, which can be considered as having high context cultures (Whitfield, 2006). In the United States however, people usually demonstrate direct communication style and were considered as having low context cultures (Cohen, 1987; Nelson, Al Batal and El Bakary, 2002).

In general, the research examining organizational climates in higher education has focused only on faculty and student perceptions (Volkwein and Zhou, 2003; Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser, 2000; Hagedorn, 2000). Albeit minimal in comparison to research based on faculty and students, there have been a handful of studies specifically addressing organizational climate and job satisfaction among administrative staff (Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser, 2000; Volkwein and Zhou, 2003; Allen, 2003; Thompson, 2005). As stated by Volkwein and Zhou (2003):

Higher education research has shown that several work-related variables exert positive and significant influences on administrative satisfaction: a supportive organizational culture, teamwork, relationships with colleagues and superiors, worker autonomy, and self-fulfilment.

Similar to the above evidence, a study by Volkwein and Zhou (2003) examined the administrative job satisfaction at both public and private universities. Their collective findings reported job insecurity, stress, and pressure as having a significant negative impact on overall satisfaction, while teamwork, recognition, advancement, feelings of independence, as well as social and professional relationships with colleagues and supervisors had a significant positive impact on overall satisfaction.

Another study conducted by Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser (2000) examined the morale of mid-level administrators. Defining morale as a state of mind regarding one's job, including satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, and sense of common purpose with respect to one's work, they found that organizational climate-related items such as trust, communication, guidance, feedback and recognition of competence from supervisors as significant contributors to overall morale. A different study examined the organizational climate and its relationship to job insecurity in three different universities. Utilizing approximately 60 administrative staff interviews, Allen's (2003) qualitative examination identified the following organizational climate-related items as contributing factors to high levels of insecurity: lack of respect and trust, poor interpersonal relationships, and not seeing oneself as part of the campus community.

Involving administrative and support staff as participants, Thompson (2005) conducted a study at a small, highly selective private residential liberal arts institution in America. He found that organizations perceived as having a positive organizational climate have greater levels of perceived satisfaction among employees in terms of work and overall experience.

The above patterns of similarity regarding the relationship between organizational climate-related variables and administrative staff satisfaction provide strong evidence of the importance and influence of such factors in the workplace. For example, issues regarding self-fulfillment, recognition, morale, respect, and the quality of peer relationships and interactions between organizational members (and leaders) are conducive and vital in producing a positive or balanced organizational climate that facilitates loyalty, commitment, and trust. Thus, the significance of a positive organizational climate cannot be overstated in terms of the benefits yielded as a result of the harmony between an organization and its members. In consequence, inquiries to that end remain important and essential (Thompson, 2005).

Even though a handful of researches have been done with regards to organizational climate (Thompson, 2005; Allen, 2003; Volkwein and Zhou, 2003; and Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser, 2000), there is a lack of study carried out concerning organizational climate and staff's communication styles, specifically in Malaysia.

Besides communication styles, there are several other potential factors that relate to organizational climate as suggested by Payne and Mansfield (1978). Some of those factors are factors linked to job related factors, namely: contextual, technological and

structural parameters of the overall organizational system, which include size of the organization (Cawsey, 1973 as cited by Hellriegel and Slocum 1974b; and Payne and Mansfield, 1978) and type of department (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1974b). Other factors that also related to organizational climate as Jensen (2003) stated which supported what Payne and Mansfield (1978) and Hellriegel and Slocum (1974b) suggested are job position and salary, along with demographic factors that were pointed out also as potential factors that may influence organizational climate. These demographic factors included age (Zaliza Mohd Nasir, 2004), gender (Gunbayi, 2007; Thoreson et al., 1990; Austin and Gamson, 1983 as cited in Peterson and White, 1992; Jones and James, 1979; James and Jones, 1974), years of service or working experiences, and education level (James and Jones, 1974; Jones and James, 1979).

On that ground, it is significant to identify the predominant communication styles among staff along with job related factors and demographic factors that have the most contribution toward positive organizational climate within the Malaysian context.

Statement of Research Problem

Recognition of the organizational climate that exists among the staff is important as it is essential for planning, organizing and effecting positive changes for the organization. At the same time, recognition of communication styles that are dominant among the staff is also important, as different staff may use different styles to communicate and some of the communication styles may lead to a more favourable climate while the rest may lead to organizational climate of non-

commitment or least favourable climate. Along the same vein, demographic and job related factors may also contribute to organizational climate. However, the communication style that can help the staff to form a more favourable climate as well as demographic and job related factors that may also contribute to organizational climate among staff still need to be identified.

Previous research that had been done at international levels on organizational climate and communication styles did not mention precisely which communication styles will lead to a more positive climate. Gender (Gunbayi, 2007; Thoreson et al., 1990; Austin and Gamson, 1983 as cited in Peterson and White, 1992; Jones and James, 1979; James and Jones, 1974) and type of departments (Goodman, 2005; Jensen, 2003; Acker, 1996; Moran and Volkwein, 1988; Drexler, 1977; Hellriegel and Slocum, 1974b) were mentioned in previous research also in the symbolic interactionism theory and interactional approach that guided this study as strong factors that can differentiate organizational climate. Therefore, this study was conducted in order to find out whether both of the factors -gender and type of departments- can really differentiate organizational climate in higher education institutions that involved administrative staff, and how big is the contribution of each factor, along with other demographic and job-related factors toward organizational climate. There is a need to make comparison between gender towards organizational climate, since female staff tend to get discrimination at workplace, for example in terms of pay and promotion or rewards (Morris, Yacoob and Wood, 2004), and tenure-track standards (Chliwniak, 1997). Therefore, female staff might perceive less favourable organizational climate as compared to male staff. In a study conducted in India by Kundu (2003), it was found that even the female staff themselves believed

that they had less chance of receiving working facilities, promotions, and salary increases than males as and all of these may influence how female staff perceive organizational climate. Consequently, there is possibility that there is a difference on organizational climate based on gender. Identification of the difference between male and female staff will provide insights of how male and female staff perceive organizational climate and to find the solution to narrow the gap, if there is a difference.

On the other hand, Gunbayi (2007) who conducted a study in high schools in Turkey and involved teachers as the respondents, found that there was a trend for men to report higher open climate than women in intimacy, support and member conflict. This may be because most of the principals and supervisors in Turkey are men. Thus, women teachers may have difficulty in making themselves understood by the principals and supervisors due to the difference in gender, which may affect the school climate perceived by women who have little chance of becoming principals and supervisors negatively. Therefore, there is a high possibility that organizational climate may be differentiated by gender. Addressing higher education, Hensel (1991) argued that gender differences ought to be acknowledged in the academy so that policy supporting a more equitable environment might be developed and implemented. Employee perceptions of their work culture and climate influence employee motivation (Peterson and White, 1991). Increased understanding of the factors that influence those perceptions may lead to changes in the work environment that result in increased employee satisfaction and productivity. As gender structures may be influential on employee perceptions of work culture and climate, exploration on that influence is important (Arnold and Peterson, 1998).