



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**COMMUNICATION RESPONSE OF MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE
SERVANTS TOWARD VISION**

AMERJIT SINGH A/L S. BHAG SINGH.

FBMK 2005 3



**COMMUNICATION RESPONSE OF MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVANTS
TOWARDS VISION**

By

AMERJIT SINGH A/L S. BHAG SINGH

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

October 2005



DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

My beloved late father: Sardar Bhag Singh Ji
(05.03.1910 – 11.03.1999)
For bestowing me with his noble priceless virtues

My beloved late mother: Sardani Gurnam Kaur Ji
(07.12.1926 – 12.09.2002)
For giving me her blessings when I first embarked
on this program

My respected late father-in-law: Sardar Ranjit Singh Ji
(18.02.1918 – 21.07.1997)
For always believing in singing the praises of the
Almighty God

My darling wife: Harvinder Kaur
Who demonstrated genuine encouragement and
made countless sacrifices in making this possible

My sweetheart princess: Pevanjit Kaur
For being so understanding at such a tender age

A host of brothers, sisters, brother-in-laws, sisters-in-laws, nephews and nieces for their
constant moral support and kind words, always.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**COMMUNICATION RESPONSE OF MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVANTS
TOWARDS VISION**

By

AMERJIT SINGH A/L S. BHAG SINGH

October 2005

Chairman: Professor Md. Salleh Hj. Hassan, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

Communication response (information seeking and processing) is a pertinent concern in the study of public affairs. Guided by Grunig's situational theory of publics, this study was primarily undertaken to determine the levels of communication response of Malaysian civil servants towards Vision 2020. The Malaysian civil servants comprised of both management and professional, and support service group.

Systematic random sampling technique was employed in the sample selection of the respondents in this study. A self-administered questionnaire was designed as a research instrument. A total of 410 respondents participated in the survey conducted in the Federal Territory of Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur. The return response rate was 93.8 percent. Statistical techniques engaged included univariate, bivariate and factor analysis, t-test, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and Multiple Regression using the enter method.

The study revealed that Malaysian civil servants exhibited an active information seeking behavior and a passive information processing behavior towards Vision 2020 issues. In information seeking behavior, actively communicating civil servants showed a likelihood for participating in situations related to Vision 2020. In information processing behavior, civil servants processed the information about Vision 2020 randomly. Additionally, the results displayed that civil servants had a poor to average level of understanding and knowledge about Vision 2020.

The situational theory of publics states and this study has confirmed that high problem recognition, and moderate constraint recognition increase both active information seeking and passive information processing behavior among civil servants. This study suggests that besides continuous publicity, it is important to regularly conduct seminars and briefings to enhance civil servants understanding and knowledge about Vision 2020. Finally, this study should be replicated to cover wider geographical areas and be supplemented with other related research methodologies in explaining the activeness or passiveness of communication response among the Malaysian civil servants.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**RESPON KOMUNIKASI DALAM KALANGAN PEKHIDMAT AWAM
MALAYSIA TERHADAP WAWASAN**

Oleh

AMERJIT SINGH A/L S. BHAG SINGH

Oktober 2005

Pengerusi: Profesor Md. Salleh Hj. Hassan, PhD

Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Respon komunikasi (tingkah laku pencarian dan pemprosesan maklumat) merupakan satu aspek penting dalam kajian perhubungan awam. Kajian ini berlandaskan teori situasi publik Grunig dan bertujuan menentukan tahap respon komunikasi di kalangan pekhidmat awam Malaysia terhadap Wawasan 2020. Responden kajian ini terdiri daripada kakitangan kumpulan profesional dan pengurusan serta kumpulan sokongan dalam perkhidmatan awam.

Teknik persampelan rambang secara sistematik digunakan dalam pemilihan sampel responden kajian ini. Instrumen kajian terdiri daripada borang soalselidik yang perlu dilengkapkan sendiri oleh responden. Sejumlah 410 responden di Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya dan Kuala Lumpur telah menyertai kajian ini. Kadar pemulangan borang soalselidik dilaporkan sebanyak 93.8 peratus. Analisis statistik yang digunakan termasuklah analisis “univariate”, “bivariate” dan analisis faktor, ujian-t, korelasi Pearson serta regresi pelbagai.

Kajian ini mendapati pekhidmat awam Malaysia memaparkan tingkah laku pencarian maklumat yang aktif dan tingkah laku pemrosesan maklumat yang pasif terhadap Wawasan 2020. Dalam tingkah laku pencarian maklumat, pekhidmat awam memperlihatkan kecenderungan untuk melibatkan diri secara aktif dalam situasi-situasi yang berkaitan dengan Wawasan 2020. Sementara itu, bagi tingkah laku pemrosesan maklumat, didapati pekhidmat awam cenderung memproses maklumat yang diperolehi secara rambang. Hasil analisis kajian menunjukkan pekhidmat awam mempunyai tahap pemahaman serta pengetahuan yang lemah hingga sederhana mengenai Wawasan 2020.

Teori situasi publik menyatakan dan kajian ini telah mengesahkan bahawa tahap pengiktirafan masalah yang tinggi serta tahap pengiktirafan konstrain yang sederhana telah mempertingkatkan tingkah laku pencarian maklumat secara aktif dan pemrosesan maklumat secara pasif di kalangan pekhidmat awam. Kajian ini menyarankan di samping publisiti berterusan, adalah penting seminar dan taklimat diadakan secara kerap bagi tujuan mempertingkatkan pemahaman dan pengetahuan pekhidmat awam mengenai Wawasan 2020. Akhirnya, kajian ini perlu diulang bagi merangkumi lokasi yang lebih luas serta digabungkan dengan beberapa kaedah penyelidikan lain bagi menjelaskan lagi keaktifan ataupun kepasifan tingkah laku komunikasi di kalangan pekhidmat awam Malaysia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am indeed thankful to *Sat Guru Satchey Patsha* (Almighty God) for giving me the inner strength, courage and blessings to initiate, proceed and finally complete this thesis. Next, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to a great number of people who provided me valuable assistance in finalizing this academic exercise.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Chairman of the Supervisory Committee, Professor Dr. Md. Salleh Hj. Hassan for offering constructive ideas and constant guidance throughout the preparation of this thesis. I would also wish to extend my gratitude to the members of the Supervisory Committee, namely Professor Dr. Musa Abu Hassan and Dr. Siti Zobidah Omar for sharing their expertise and providing kind assistance in accomplishing this challenging task.

I also would like to acknowledge the friendship and intellectual sustenance given to me by Professor James E. Grunig, who developed the situational theory of publics, by putting me on track, and consequently making this thesis possible. I must also not forget to thank Professor Dr. Syed Arabi Idid from International Islamic University Malaysia and Associate Professor Dr. Kiranjit Kaur from Universiti Teknologi MARA for their meaningful comments and suggestions to improve the proposal and write-up for this thesis.

Also, allow me to record my sincere gratitude to the Public Services Department Malaysia (PSD) and the office of the Chief Secretary General to the Government of Malaysia for the kind assistance in facilitating the participation and cooperation of respondents in conducting this study.

Finally, from the bottom of my heart, my *syukeria* (great thanks) to my darling wife, Harvinder Kaur, and my sweetheart princess, Pevanjit Kaur, for their unlimited sacrifices, firm and continuous support, earnest understanding, great intensity of patience, and for being my genuine source of inspiration throughout this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ABSTRAK	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
APPROVAL	ix
DECLARATION	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF FIGURES	xviii
LIST OF GRAPHS	xix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xx
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Research Problem	4
Research Objectives	6
Scope of the Study	7
Significance of the Study	8
Limitation of the Study	10
Keyword Definition	11
Summary	12
II LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Communication Response	14
Public Policy	18
Public Policy and Government Machinery	18
Malaysian Government System and Policy: A Brief Overview	22
Communication and Better Public Policies	25
Vision 2020	27
Salient Observations of Vision 2020	27
Economic Growth and Vision 2020	32
Issues Emerging from Vision 2020	33
Civil Service	39
Role of the Civil Service	39
Identified Strategies in Communicating Vision 2020	45
Utilization of Information Sources	52

	Page
The Situational Theory of Publics	58
Assumptions and Development	58
Information Seeking and Information Processing Behaviors	61
Cognitions, Attitudes and Behaviors	63
Problem Recognition, Constraint Recognition and Level of Involvement	65
Demographic Variables	68
Previous Studies and Major Findings	70
Recent Studies	75
Studies in Malaysia and Neighboring Countries	77
Why the Situational Theory of Publics?	84
Conceptual Framework of the Study	87
Summary	90
III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	92
Location, Population and Sampling	92
Procedure for Sample Selection	93
Research Design	97
Development and Administration of Research Instrument	98
Operationalization of Research Variables	101
Reliability and Validity of Research Instrument	109
Procedure for Data Collection	116
Data Analysis	118
Summary	125
IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS	126
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	126
Levels of Communication Response	129
Levels of Problem Recognition, Constraint Recognition and Involvement	134
Relationship between Communication Response (Information Seeking and Processing Behavior) and Problem Recognition, Constraint Recognition and Level of Involvement	144
Information Seeking Behavior	149
Information Processing Behavior	154
Relationship between Selected Demographic Variables with Communication Response	162
Differences by Gender and Position	164
Differences by Gender, Position and Academic Qualifications	168
Level of Understanding and Knowledge about Vision 2020	169

	Page
Utilizing Information Sources for Communication Response	175
Suggestions in Communicating Vision 2020	180
Summary	182
V SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	184
Summary of the Study	184
Problem Statement	184
Objectives	185
Methodology	186
Findings	187
Conclusions of the Study	194
Implications of the Study	195
Recommendations for Future Studies	198
BIBLIOGRAPHY	200
APPENDICES	211
BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR	238

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Categories of Mean and Interpretation	103
2	Reliability Scores of Pre-Test and Actual Data	113
3	Population and Sample of the Study	118
4	Univariate Analysis for Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	128
5	Univariate Analysis for Information Seeking Behavior Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	130
6	Univariate Analysis for Information Processing Behavior Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	132
7	Overall Mean and Standard Deviation for Communication Response Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	133
8	Univariate Analysis for Problem Recognition (Awareness) Variable Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	135
9	Univariate Analysis for Problem Recognition (Understanding and Believability) Variable Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	137
10	Univariate Analysis for Constraint Recognition (Communication Barriers) Variable Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	138
11	Univariate Analysis for Constraint Recognition (Curiosity and Complicated Issues) Variable Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	140
12	Univariate Analysis for Level of Involvement (Importance of Challenges) Variable Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	142
13	Univariate Analysis for Level of Involvement (Connection) Variable Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	143
14	Factor Loadings of Information Seeking and Processing Behavior	232

Table	Page	
15	Factor Loadings of Problem Recognition, Constraint Recognition and Level of Involvement	233
16	Correlation between Selected Independent Variables and Communication Response Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	148
17	OLS Estimates of the Regression of Information Seeking Behavior of Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	150
18	OLS Estimates of the Regression of Information Processing Behavior of Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	155
19	Independent Samples t-test for the Differences of Means of Selected Variables of Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	165
20	Correlation between Selected Independent Variables and Communication Response Among Civil Servants Towards Vision 2020	166
21	Estimated Values of Information Seeking and Information Processing Behaviors Towards Vision 2020 by Gender and Position of Respondents	167
22	Estimated Values of Information Seeking and Information Processing Behaviors Towards Vision 2020 by Gender, Position, and Academic Qualifications of Respondents	169
23	Univariate Analysis for the Level of Understanding and Knowledge of Civil Servants about Vision 2020	170
24	OLS Estimates of the Regression for Level of Understanding and Knowledge on Vision 2020 and Work Experience	173
25	Estimated Values of Information Seeking and Information Processing Behaviors Towards Vision 2020 by Gender, Position, and Level of Understanding and Knowledge of Vision 2020	174
26	Univariate Analysis for Information Sources on Vision 2020 Among Civil Servants	175

Table		Page
27	Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Information Seeking and Information Processing Behaviors, and Information Sources	176
28	OLS Estimates of the Regression of Information Seeking and Information Processing Behaviors, and Information Sources	178
29	Rank Order of Respondents' Suggestions in Communicating Vision 2020	180



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Independent and Dependent Variables in Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics	61
2	Conceptual Framework of the Study	89
3	Factor Plot for Information Seeking and Information Processing Behavior towards Vision 2020 Issues	145
4	A Schematic Presentation Showing the Contribution of Independent Variables to Communication Response in the Malaysian Civil Service	161

LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph		Page
1	Scatter Plot of Work Experience against Level of Understanding and Knowledge on Vision 2020 Issues	172



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EPU	-	Economic Planning Unit
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
HRD	-	Human Resource Development
ISIS	-	Institute of Strategic and International Studies
MAMPU	-	Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit
NIC	-	Newly Industrialized Countries
NDP	-	National Development Policy
NEP	-	New Economic Policy
OLS	-	Ordinary Least Squares
OPP	-	Outline Perspective Plan
R&D	-	Research and Development

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The process of communicating to the publics about government policies is a vital aspect of public affairs. The role of communication in general, and public relations specifically, is undoubtedly essential in achieving the desired results of government policies. Government policies, or often referred to as public policies, encompass the theoretical framework designed for the administrative process of a nation. Notably, good public policies are essential for the success of any program. Such policies must reflect sound reasoning and be predicated on the well-being of the clientele being served and the general public. Consequently, it is important for policy makers to know that they should be responsive to needs of the public.

Public affairs focuses on relationships which will have a bearing on the development on public policy. Public affairs incorporate the public relations practice that addresses public policies and the publics who influence such policy (Cutlip, Centre and Broom, 2000).

Public policies, on the other hand, often demonstrate a dynamic relationship between policy makers' ideas and the organizations that adopt the policy. In a government organization, for example, such relationship could be attributed to the creation, synthesis, and dissemination of knowledge in communicating a particular public policy. Public

policy sets the goal environment of individuals and communities. Subsequently, what constitutes a good or poor public policy depends on the action programs and the implications of such action programs on the publics.

Good public policies must be practical and research-based, addressing the needs of the local population (Murray, 2001). In the context of public affairs, besides short and medium-term policies, administrators must be willing to advocate for and adhere to policies that will produce long-term results, even if their benefits will not be evident in the immediate future. Thus, in building and maintaining government relations in order to influence public policy, public affairs should highlight the communication response, that is, the information seeking and processing behavior of the publics.

In displaying government-to-publics and publics-to-government communication, public affairs entail the process of managing communication response towards issues emerging from a public policy. A rapid growth in public affairs showed that public affairs functions, include among others, the ability to manage an organization's response to political issues and its relationships with government (Gruber and Hoewing, 1980). However, such response is not confined only to political issues.

White and Mazur (1995) pointed out that skilled public affairs practitioners need to know how politicians and civil servants work together to respond to public issues, interests and social needs. In further discussing the practices of public affairs in relation to the current notion of globalization, Syed Arabi (2001) enquired the response of public affairs when

faced by economic globalization in the developing societies. Thus, one major aspect of public affairs, then, is identifying and describing the publics involved, and most importantly, predicting the communication response of publics towards related public policies and programs.

In supporting the above notion, Schachtel (2001) elaborated that communication response not only aims at improving communication, but also enables governments to determine the activeness and passiveness of communication behavior. Consequently, useful insights from the levels of communication response enable relevant amendments be made both in policy and program planning and implementation.

As noted, public affairs is concerned with attempt to identify issues and matters of public concerns which, if acted upon (as reflected in the information seeking and processing behavior) by significant groups, are likely to have an impact on government events. Ultimately, such communication response offers valuable input in determining the success or failure of a public policy or program. In Malaysia, one of the major public affairs events was the launching of Vision 2020.

Vision 2020 was introduced to transform Malaysia into a fully developed nation. The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, at the inaugural meeting of the Malaysian Business Council on February 28, 1991 in Kuala Lumpur presented a working paper entitled "*Malaysia: The Way Forward*" (1991). The purpose

of this paper was to present a direction on the future course of the nation in attaining the objective of developing Malaysia into an industrialized country.

Statement of the Research Problem

In discussing the concept, implications and challenges of Vision 2020, report by the Prime Minister's Department (1991) highlighted a discernible gap between the aspiration of Vision 2020 and the reality that existed in the public sector. As the implementing agents of public policies, civil servants form a vital link between government and the people. Being the front-liners in implementing and achieving the targets of Vision 2020 (Ministry of Information, 1995), this gap poses a serious problem to be addressed. Furthermore, no policy or program, no matter how well formulated, will accomplish anything, if the prevalent behavior among publics involved demonstrates the existence of such a gap. Hence, the research problem in this study particularly concerns the extent to which civil servants recognize, understand and communicate about the issues in Vision 2020.

Previous studies (Mohd Fo'ad, 2000; and Halimatun, 2000), seminar papers (Mohd Sheriff Kassim, 1992; Abdullah Abdul Rahman, 1991; Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid, 1991, 1992 and 1993; Ali Abul Hassan, 1991), and views expressed by scholars (Khoo Kay Kim, 1997; and Jomo, 1994) observed the realization of Vision 2020 which has often been described as the core thrust of all public policies, required clear understanding, knowledge and active involvement in discussing Vision 2020 issues. Thus, it is pertinent