UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

COMMUNICATION RESPONSE OF MALAYSIAN CIVIL SERVICE SERVANTS TOWARD VISION

AMERJIT SINGH A/L S. BHAG SINGH.

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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  
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

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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

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Oktober 2005

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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 professional dan pengurusan serta kumpulan sokongan dalam perkhidmatan awam.


Teori situasi publik menyatakan dan kajian ini telah mengesahkan bahawa tahap pengikhtirafan masalah yang tinggi serta tahap pengikhtirafan konstrain yang sederhana telah mempertingkatkan tingkah laku pencarian maklumat secara aktif dan pemprosesan 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.
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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.
I certify that an Examination Committee met on 12th October 2005 to conduct the final examination of Amerjit Singh A/L S. Bhag Singh on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Communication Response of Malaysian Civil Servants Towards Vision” 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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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

[Signature]

AMERJIT SINGH A/L S. BHAG SINGH

Date: 19/12/2005
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<tr>
<td>EPU</td>
<td>Economic Planning Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRD</td>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Institute of Strategic and International Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAMPU</td>
<td>Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit</td>
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<td>NIC</td>
<td>Newly Industrialized Countries</td>
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<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Development Policy</td>
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<td>NEP</td>
<td>New Economic Policy</td>
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<td>OLS</td>
<td>Ordinary Least Squares</td>
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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 Halimaton, 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