# Inclusivity in the Workplace for Persons with Disabilities: Analyzing Communication Effectiveness within Malaysian Companies

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**Abstract**

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit globally and changed the way how organizations work, communication is one of the key factor that plays a major role in organization sustainability. As of 2018, 488,948 people were registered as Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) with the Department of Social Welfare which reflects to 1.53% of Malaysia's population. Malaysian government has allocated a 1% policy for hiring PWDs in the public sector giving employment opportunities to 3,782 PWDs in 2015- 2017. The percentage is of PWDs employed is lower at 0.7% compare to others country like India that managed to obtain 1.43% employment rate of government jobs. The main objective of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of communication in the companies and to evaluate factors that can improve better disability employment communication support. This ethnographic qualitative research approach uses inductive data reasoning with quota sampling from 535 respondents from both public and private sector in Pahang, Malaysia. In descending order, the themes found from this study were appropriate communication device, communication flow, communication barriers and communication behaviour. The findings from this research is then implicated to managers of companies to be used when it comes to planning and practicing inclusivity in the workplace.

**Keywords**: Communication, workplace, communication barrier, covid-19, person with disabilities, PWD

## 1. Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit globally and changed the way organizations work, business organization cannot stay on conventional ways for development and ideas anymore. It is heading towards a knowledge-based society, where communication is a key instrument in playing an important role in organization's sustainability [1]. As COVID-19 become a push factor for organizations to utilize the full potential of information technology, the idea of the long-establish traditional communication style where being using one way communication loses its relevancy [2]. Effective communication is seen to be one of the significant contributing factors to organization idea development and performance [3]–[5]. Effective communication also helps improve individual's work quality [6]. Akinnubi et al. (2012) research found that there is a significant effect on effective communication with organization data transfer, new policies acceptance and resources management [7].

As effective communication is crucial for organizational sustainability, one of the main reason person with disabilities(PWD) fail to get place for jobs is due to the lack of communication skill [8]. As most of PWS employment in Malaysia are driven by government policy, 3,782 PWS being employed in public sector which reflect 0.34% from 1.2 million public sector employees in 2018 [9]. This number is significantly low as government aim to achieve 1% of public sector employment are PWS under 2010's Dasar satu peratus peluang pekerjaan dalam perkhidmatan awam kepada orang kelaian upaya (OKU) [10]. Similarly, 14,252 PWS have been employed from year 1990 to 2018 out of 13.74 million of workforce in private sector that reflect 0.1% employment rate. This number is significantly lower compared to the government incentive to promote hiring PWS to organizations such as double tax deduction, tax rebate on the cost of modifying facilities for PWS and training grand incentives under OKU talent enhancement programme (OTEP) [11].

In the Malaysian context, the communication factor is often ignored or overlooked when organizations undergo business performance evaluation [12]. Although previous research have found significant effect of effective communication toward organization performance [4], [12], [13]. Supervisor-worker relationship plays a significant impact toward communication in Malaysia. Lack of communication could affect employees, demotivating them as they could be worried about their work, idea and effort cannot be seen by others [14]. Research findings by Deep et al. (2016) found that unclear job scope, objective and goal could lead to ineffective communication in organization [15].

As Malaysia undergo two major nation Movement Restriction Order (MCO) due to COVID-19 spike cases, a majority of the industries needed to conduct a work from home (WFH) format. WFH elevated the process of organization's communication experience and performance to a new level where all communication depended on digital accessibility and facility [16]. Malaysia showed an increase in internet traffic during covid-19 where it increased from 30 percent to 70 percent and the internet speed was reduce from 30 percent to 40 percent [17]. This gives significant impact toward organization communication performance. The most significant impact of ineffective communication is employee morale drop [18]. This is because bad communication will lead to misunderstanding, lack in responsibility and decline in empowerment that will course delay in production or service [18], [19].

Communication is defined as a process of information transfer between two or more person to achieve mutual understanding or action. One study said that communication is an establishment and transaction of meaning verbally or nonverbally [20]. Today in this technological era, communication no longer consider as information transfer from one party to another, but it involves with more wide interpretation of process in exchange idea, readiness, information and feeling. Beside communication also not only flow throughout speech but the process can be in the way of text message, body language, sign language and gesture, speech tone, writing style, attitude and behaviour. Good communication will lead toward good relationship, collaboration and cooperation within the organization which are crucial aspect in professional practice [21]. Effective communication in the workplace is not always easy because there are obstacles that can easily prevent it until the information is distorted, misunderstandings occur and confusion arises [22].

Groupware is a support system in the way of technology that ease group work within the organization commonly known as collaborative technology [23]. It helps organization be able to have better communication, coordination, negotiation, cooperation and problem solving internally and externally [24]. Groupware tool such as digital document, infographic, internet, email, instant messaging and video conferring where been divided into two categories which are synchronous and asynchronous.

Communication flow in the organization is divided into four model which are upward communication, downward communication, horizontal communication and diagonal communication [25]. Downward communication transfer information from top of the organization flow toward bottom of the organization which suitable to give organization related information and command to lower level. Upward communication is define as draw in information transfer from low level management to the upper-level management usually contain feedback and enquiry [26]. Horizontal communication or also known as lateral communication indicate information transfer moving horizontally where all person is at the one level without hierarchy [25]. Diagonal communication or also known as cross-functional communication where information transfer happens between high level management and low-level management in diverse level of hierarchy depend on different issue to be tackle within the organization [27].

Coordination can be defined as a management function, which is a union of actions among employees, departments and groups to ensure that various departments and groups function in harmony [28]. In the coordination of efforts and activities in a single work unit, the communication system plays an important role in it because coordination between many individuals and activities can be done only through communication. There are two types of coordination, namely internal coordination and external coordination. Internal

coordination, which refers to the coordination of activities from different segments of the organization [29]. Meanwhile, external coordination is the formation of relationships between managers, executives, divisions and employees, referring to the chief coordinator in line with market agencies, competitors, the general public, technology, different institutions, agencies and financial institutions [29].

Communication barriers include a variety of things that hinder clear and effective communication, the existence of various forms and measures from linguistic problems to individual problems of colleagues [30]. Organizational barriers is structural barriers, where the organization is designed based on a formal hierarchical structure [31]. Hierarchy is the factor which occurs from communication from subordinate to superior officers resulting in some stages of the hierarchy losing transmission or communication delayed or distorted [30]. Every organization has rules with media, messages and means of communication that need to be used. Due to the strict rules, employees refrain from sending any orders and also, by maintaining a position in the organization, organizational policy determines the relationship between employees and the way they communicate with each other [32]. Personal barriers refer to internal factors for sender and receiver, which influence in the communication process [28]. These factors include emotions, life experiences, attitudes, behaviours that hinder a person's ability to communicate [33].

It is the influence of above observation that driven to conduct this research. This research in general is going to identify the factor toward effectiveness of communication of organization in the scope of Pahang, Malaysia public and private sector. The main objective of this research is to determine the effectiveness of communication by examine employee intuition on their organization communication, communication flow and coordinate or knowledge sharing and communication barriers. This then help to provide guideline for policy maker in preparing needs and training to improving communication between employee and employee with disabilities. Thus, promote inclusivity in the workplace for Persons with Disabilities in Malaysia companies.

## 2. Methodology

### A. Research Design

This qualitative research methodology utilized an ethnographic approach, looking at it from a Malaysian perspective. There are steps taken in conducting qualitative research to analyze communication effectiveness among workers inside the organization to ensure the result is rigorous and trustworthy [34]. First a set of philosophical assumption is developed before conducting the research [35]. The ontology aspect focusses on the current communication practice, employee perception on the current communication and tool and improvement needed for future communication. These three aspects are sufficient to analyses the communication effectiveness in organization. For epistemology aspect, there is no need for in-depth relationship between participant and researcher, so conducting survey is sufficient for the study. The axiology aspect focuses on the participant from the different sector and business activity. Rhetorical aspect focus on the survey will form writing format with first-person pronouns for easy understanding. Methodological aspect in this study will used inductive logic to study the factor that effect effective communication of participant.

Second, research paradigm will be based on social constructivism where open-ended question will be used in survey to allow participant to construct their own view thus help the researcher examine the effectiveness of communication among organization.

Third, ethnography approach is selected as the research study the effective communication in different type of organization and employee status within Malaysia organization environment.

Lastly, trustworthiness factor is been consider providing rigor to a qualitative research, which adds credibility to this study. The survey will start with the sufficient amount of description such as the purpose of study, why the data is collected and some examples of effective communication to ensure transferability of the study. The used of software in the data analysis will ensure conformability of the study and discussion from two point of view which are emit and etic will ensure authenticity of the study.

### B. Population and sampling

The theoretical population for the study was employee of business organization in Pahang, Malaysia. The study used non-probability convenience sampling to sample 535 employees.

### C. Data collection

A questionnaire with open-ended question about the current communication practice in the organization, employee perception on the current communication and tool and improvement needed for future communication is been distributed using email. Besides that, a printed form also been distributed because it hard to collect contact information to distribute the survey online as target population is in various industry and level. Apart

from there are also respondent that tend to ignore the online survey. Although interview method can give deeper view on the topic area but it hard to be conducted during covid-19 pandemic due to several restriction.

### D. Data analysis

A general percentage would be extracted from the data to get the demographic information of the participants. Then, NVIVO 11 Plus software was utilized to get themes for the research.

## 3. Result

### A. Respondents' demographic characteristic

From the demographics information, 89 percent of our respondents are work at profit-oriented organization. Approximately 34 percent of the respondents are currently work at low management, 32 percent at middle management and 19 percent are at top management while 20 percent was work at non-management department. Twenty-three percent of the respondents are doing marketing or sales as their business activities, 16 percent are in hospitality, 12 percent are in human resources, 11 percent are in finance and others business activities are below 10 percent. Approximately 21 percent of the respondent work in service sector while 16 percent in transportation sector, 12 percent in retail industry and others industry are below 10 percent. Sixty percent of the respondent was working in organization below 100 employees while 30 percent work in organization size between 100 to 1000 employee. Next, 53 percent of the respondent was working in organization that gain 50 percent below in revenue turnover and 19 percent of the respondent was working in organization that gain more than 50 percent in revenue turnover. Lastly, 15 percent of the respondent was working in organization that establish less than one year and 73 percent of the respondent was working in organization that establish not more than 10 years.

Apart from that, there is another question to identify information items that are very important to receive communication which are the respondents are given the option to answer multiple choice answers. Here are the available answer choices such as the potential plans of the firm, the firm's goods and services, the overall financial picture of the firm, the skills of the firm, the process of human resources, benefits, rewards and incentive systems, technological advances, challenges and trends affecting our firm, main consumer business problems, success stories of the company, competitive policies, marketing programmes, government affairs affecting the company and community involvement. The highest answer choice was the company's strategies for the future with 86 respondents (16.07%). The second highest is the products and services of the company with 72 respondents (13.46%). The third highest is the overall financial picture of the company with 32 respondents (5.98%). The fourth highest is benefits with 31 respondents (5.76%). The rest, the number of respondents is less than 31 for each item.

### B. Qualitative Themes

Inductive data reasoning was used to identify the research theme. There were three stages of analysis conducted. First, the researcher performed open encoding where part of the data was extracted from the original file. The section is then analyzed to find important points, extracting them from the data. Next, the important points are coded into by category. Meanwhile, to find themes and sub-themes, groups representing the entire list of important points are grouped into smaller groups. This process is used because researchers want to conduct accurate qualitative research by using inductive data reasoning where the discovery process is through the data itself and has not been through labelling as a factor. After the theme have been identified, it then been run through word count frequency using NVivo 11 plus software. The top words found in the software after entering the category of word frequency generalization where different words mean the same will be categorized into one category [36]. The identified themes were then cross compared with a second coder to facilitate interpretation of which category can improve effective communication for PWS in workplace.

Four themes were derived from this research, which are appropriate communication device, communication flow, communication barriers and communication behaviour (please refer to Table 1).

**Table 1:** list of study theme

| Themes | Explanation of themes |
|---|---|
| Appropriate communication device | Participants mentioned about the appropriate communication tools in communicating in the company. |

| Communication flow | Participants mentions about the communication channel, communication medium. |
|---|---|
| Communication barriers | Participants mentioned about communication barriers that exist in the company. |
| Communication behaviour | Participants mentions about what is behaviour that them must have to communicate with other in organization. |

## C. Appropriate communication device

The first theme found in this study is the appropriate communication device. Using NVivo 11 plus software, the researchers run the theme through word count frequency. The top words found in the software after entering the category of word frequency generalization where different words mean the same will be categorized into one category. For respondents, appropriate communication tools are important for a smooth and easy to understand communication process.

Respondent 144 answered on a topic they felt was important for them to know more and wanted the company to include in future communications:

"Communication style and use appropriate communication tools".

Respondent 288 responded to suggestions for the company to help improve performance and efficiency:

"Upgrade communication tools".

## D. Communication flow

The second theme found in this study is communication flow. Using NVivo 11 plus software, which the researcher conducts the theme through the calculation of word frequency. The upper part of the discovery of two words found from the software after entering the category of word frequency generalization where different words mean the same will be categorized into one category. Among them, communication channel and communication medium.

Respondents 140 and 262 answered about the best thing about communications in the company: "Have a communication channel".

Respondent 141 answered about the best thing about communications in the company: "Communication flow is clear".

Respondent 161 answered about other topics do they feel are important to know more about and would like the company to include in future communications. "More communication channel for communicate between manager and worker".

## E. Communication barriers

The third theme found in this study is communication barriers. In this theme, there are two parts involved with communication barriers such as the other topics do they feel are important to know more about and would like the company to include in future communications and suggestions for the company to help improve performance and efficiency.

Respondent 106 answered on other topics do they feel are important to know more about and would like the company to include in future communications. "Different language can be communication barriers".

Respondent 133 answered on other topics do they feel are important to know more about and would like the company to include in future communications. "Some of worker no fluent in BM so I hope there are program to help them".

**F. Communication behaviour**

The fourth theme found in this study is communication behaviour. In this theme, there are three parts involved with communication behaviour such as the best thing about communications in the company, the other topics do they feel are important to know more about and would like the company to include in future communications and suggestions for the company to help improve performance and efficiency.

Respondent 50 answered regarding the best thing about communications in the company: "Having a good communication can create a better clients relationships".

Respondent 147 answered regarding the best thing about communications in the company: "Being a good listener is one of the best ways to be a good communicator".

**4. Discussion**

This research explores the communication effectiveness within companies in Malaysia in randomly selected companies in Pahang region of Malaysia. The result reveal appropriate communication tool for effective communication, communication flow, barrier to effective communication and communication behaviour. Among some of the effective in communication within Malaysia companies reveal by this study include demographic attributes. Key among the attributes show that the information flow is significantly low in lower management level compare to others management level across different industry and business activities. In the study, it clearly sees that most organization only focus on one way communication and normally that communication is in either downward communication when it is dealing with instruction or upward communication when dealing with feedback. In this study the flow of communication become ineffective when the information needs to deal with diverse level of hierarchy and this problem is usually observed when the organization have more that 50 employees in size. This problem also been identified in other study [37]–[39]. When dealing with the PWD the information flow need to be more dynamic such as cross-functional communication to ensure there is no discrimination on PWDs as recommended in some study [40].

Next finding in this research is the unproper communication channel used within organization that give effect on organization communication effectiveness. Employee in organization tend to use instant massaging application such as WhatsApp to communicate due the information transfer is faster compare to other medium. They only used proper channel when it deal with formal employment matter. This mostly will happen when the matter involve different department or level of management. In most cases, due to formality the communication using proper communication channel such email is used but the interaction is not really happening. This happen when the receiver just read the content and not acknowledge the sender that the information is received or accept. When this situation happen, the communication need to be continue using phone call or instant messaging. This finding is related to previous study that conduct in Malaysia [41]. Some other drawbacks that been identify when the organization communication been held in instant messaging are the employee having difficulty in finding the previous information in the chat history. Some event worse when the information data is lost. This can happen easily as the data is not store in company database but instead in individual phone. Other than that, in group messaging, the employee tent to mix the business particular subject with personal or non-business office matter. This make the important subject tend to be neglect or overlook. The same study also showed alike result [42]. But the used of new communication tool like instant messaging in organization is not that bad, the used of instant messaging for example also show the gap between employee and employer is reduce thus eliminate the barrier to effective communication and promote all level off communication instead downward or upward communication in traditional way of communication practice in Malaysia. The positive impact also been recorded in previous study [41], [43]. Communication using instant messaging also promote more healthier communication. Employees tend to discuss things especially things related to work problem that they will not discuss in face-to-face interaction. This also happen in others study [44]. This finding can be related when conducting PWS as they tend to get from communication tools to help them to communicate as similar by other research [45].

As Malaysia is a multicultural country, communication barrier involve language is noticeable. Event thought most of employee can understand and communicate in English and all the works communication are in English but there more prefer to use Malaysia language as medium to communicate with their colleague. They find its okay to use English as a medium in their job, but when they deeper discussion happen the use of national language is more preferable to explain what they trying to say compare then try to explain it in English. The same result are found in other research [12].

The research further revealed that when they are having a good communication skill its easier for them to having a good relationship with the client. This is because they tend to know what their client needs faster when

they have a good communication skill. They client feel more comfortable to share what their want and more relaxed when doing business. Some research also reported the same finding [46].

Lastly, the employee is show significantly better communication skill than others when he or she is give attention when communicate with others. Finding found the presenter or moderator in meeting find disturbing when they are employee that half pay attention in the meeting for example stare at their mobile phone. Other than that, the employee tends to have a longer conversation with others when that people not interrupting when he was talking. Beside that employee also more prefer to communicate with some one that give facial expression when communicate or some just give verbal sound like 'Mnmm'. All the point here can be concluded as a good listeners skill. Some study also found the same findings[47].

## 5. Conclusion

After the exploration of the effective communication within companies in Malaysia, the study confirms that, there are some factors in promote effective communication. The study identifies several factors that need to be consider ensuring effective communication that can be theme around appropriate communication device, communication flow, communication barriers and communication behaviour. This finding could take a toll on employer planning for PWD worker. Several recommendations are proposed to help overcome the challenge. The first one is communication flow should evolve; the more lenient communication model should be adapted such as diagonal communication flow model. This will give advantage to solve problem, useful information sharing and eliminate conflict. This type of communication flow is more suitable in organization with PWD to avoid them to be abuse. Second, the organization can explore the new technological tools to help facilitates communication. The tools can be in the form of synchronous and asynchronous. Consideration of using technological tools is important for PWD worker as their ability to give feedback is low. Third, the barrier of language can be a huge problem in communication within organization. This will become worse for PWD as majority of them only understand single language due to limitation of learning. Thus, this problem can be solve by providing training or class on depend on what the language PWD communicate for employee to promote better basic communication. Lastly, employee need to be train with basic communication skill like body language, facial expression and communication ethics as this will promote communication effectiveness within organization especially for some with PWD employee that depend on body language to communicate.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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