Cross-Cultural Communication Barriers in Organizations

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Abstract. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) was enacted at the end of 2015, this is an opportunity for a country's skilled workforce to become professional workers in ASEAN member countries. Because the inherent nature of the enactment of the AEC is the repeal of regulations that allow the flow of goods, services, people (skilled workers), and money to be unhindered. In this condition, the role of cross-cultural communication in organizations is very strategic in creating reinforcement for the sustainability of skilled workers in pursuing their professional careers. It has become a trend that in the era of the global economy there are company activities that involve individuals/employees/managers from more than one country, both those assigned to other countries and those assigned to their own country. This condition causes cross-cultural communication to become unavoidable. In cross-cultural communication, one of the obstacles is language. Language is an extension of a culture. Differences in understanding or interpreting a word or symbol become a potential barrier to communication and this can hinder the process of business or organizational activities. For individuals who are involved in cross-cultural communication within an organization, it is recommended: 1) Increase knowledge and understanding of the culture of business partners or colleagues, 2) It is better to assume that other people who come from other cultures are different from us so as not to cause misperceptions and miscommunication with that person, 3) Apart from mastering the universal language, it is highly recommended to learn the local/regional language where we are assigned/work.

Keywords: Communication, Cross Culture, Organization

Abstrak. Masyarakat Ekonomi ASEAN (MEA) diberlakukan pada akhir tahun 2015, hal ini merupakan peluang bagi tenaga kerja terampil yang dimiliki suatu negara untuk menjadi pekerja profesional di negara- negara anggota ASEAN. Karena sifat yang melekat dari diberlakukannya MEA adalah terjadinya pencabutan regulasi yang memungkinkan arus barang, jasa, orang (tenaga terampil), dan uang menjadi tidak ada hambatan. Kondisi ini peran komunikasi lintas budaya dalam organisasi adalah sangat strategis untuk menciptakan penguatan terhadap keberlangsungan tenaga terampil dalam meniti karir profesionalnya. Hal ini sudah menjadi *trend* bahwa pada era perekonomian global terjadi aktivitas perusahaan yang melibatkan individu/karyawan/manajer yang berasal lebih dari satu negara baik mereka yang ditugaskan di negara lain maupun yang ditugaskan di negaranya sendiri. Kondisi tersebut menyebabkan terjadinya komunikasi lintas budaya yang menjadi tidak dapat dihindari. Dalam komunikasi lintas budaya salah satu hambatannya yaitu adanya bahasa. Bahasa merupakan perluasan dari suatu budaya.

Perbedaan pengertian atau memaknai suatu kata atau simbol menjadi suatu potensial hambatan komunikasi dan hal tersebut dapat menghambat proses aktifitas bisnis atau organisasi. Bagi individu-individuyang terlibat dalam komunikasi lintas budaya dalam suatu oragnisasi maka disarankan: 1) Meningkatkan pengetahuan dan pemahanan tentang budaya dari rekan bisnis atau kolega, 2) Sebaiknya menganggap orang lain yang berasal dari budaya lain berbeda dengan kita agar tidak menimbulkan salah persepsi dan miskomunikasi dengan orang tersebut, 3) Selain mengusai bahasa universal maka sangat dianjurkan untuk mempelajari bahasa lokal/daerah tempat kita ditugaskan/bekerja.

Kata kunci: Komunikasi, Lintas Budaya, Organisasi

INTRODUCTION

ASEAN is the third largest economic power after Japan and China and consists of 10 countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) originated from the agreement of ASEAN leaders at the December 1997 summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This agreement aims to increase ASEAN's competitiveness and be able to compete with China and India to attract

Foreign investment. Foreign capital is needed to increase employment and the welfare of ASEAN citizens. At the next high-level conference, which took place in Bali in October 2003, ASEAN officials declared that the MEA would be formed in 2015. There are several impacts from the consequences of the MEA, namely the impact of the free flow of goods for ASEAN countries, the impact of the free flow of services, the impact of the free flow of investment, the impact of the flow of skilled labor, and the impact of the free flow of capital.

The impact of the free flow of skilled labor that enters from one country to another in the ASEAN region requires sufficient understanding of culture and mastery of the language used by a country because these two things are an effective door for skilled workers to understand civilizational behavior. a nation so that its existence as a profession can still exist. Therefore, cross-cultural communication within a company is an important topic to study.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Organizational Communication

Organizational CommunicationGoldhaber in Muhammad (2005: 67–74) explains that the definition of organizational communication is a process that creates and exchanges information in a network of relationships that are mutually dependent on each other to overcome uncertain or ever-changing environments. This definition contains seven key concepts: process, message, network, interdependence, relationship, environment, and uncertainty. The seven key concepts are explained as follows:1) Process: an organization is an open, dynamic system that creates and exchanges messages among its members on a continuous and unending basis.2) Message: a meaningful arrangement of symbols about objects and events produced by interactions with people. Someone in communication must be able to compose a mental picture, give that picture a name, and develop feelings towards it. Communication is said to be effective if the message sent is interpreted the same way as that intended by the sender.3) Network: The organization consists of a series of people, each of whom occupies a certain position or role in the organization. Message creation and exchange From these people, the message travels through a set of pathways called a communications network. This communication network may include only two people, several people, or the entire organization.4) Interdependence: an organization is an open system, so if one part of the organization is disrupted, it will affect other parts and possibly the entire organizational system.5) Relationship: The passage of messages in the organization is linked by humans. Human relations in organizations that focus on the communication behaviors of the people involved in the relationship need to be studied. The attitude, skills, and morale of a supervisor, for example, influence and are influenced by organizational relationships. Thayer in Muhammad (2005: 67–74) distinguishes between existing relationships that are individual, group, and organizational.6) Environment: all the totality of physical and social factors that are taken into account in making decisions about individuals in a system. The environment can be divided into an internal and external environment. The internal environment includes employees, organizational functional groups, goals, and types of products and services, while the external environment includes customers, competitors, suppliers, regulations, and technology.7) Uncertainty: the difference between the available information and the expected information. The available

information may be lacking or excessive, so to reduce this uncertainty, communication must be carried out between members of the organization.

Purpose and Flow of Communication in the Organization

The purpose of communication within the organization is mutual understanding, in the sense of trying to understand each other among members of the organization. Communication within the organization involves four functions, namely: 1) controlling the behavior of its members; 2) maintaining motivation; 3) serving as an emotional statement; and 4) serving as an informative statement (Robbin, 1996: 5). The flow of communication within the organization includes both vertical and horizontal communication. Each of these communication streams has very clear functional differences (Pace & Faules, 2006: 185–196).Vertically, the communication flow function can be divided into two parts. First, downward flow, including: a) conveying information about how to do work; b) conveying information regarding the rationale for doing the work; c) providing information on organizational policies and practices; d) conveying information regarding the performance of subordinates; and e) conveying information to develop a sense of belonging to the task. Second, upward flow includes: a) receiving reports on work results from subordinates; b) receiving suggestions for improvement from subordinates; c) listening to the constraints faced by subordinates.Horizontal communication, namely the act of this communication, takes place between employees or divisions that have an equal position. The functions of horizontal communication flow are: a) improving task coordination; b) problem-solving efforts; c) mutual sharing of information; d) efforts to resolve conflicts; e) ensuring the same understanding; and f) developing interpersonal support (Muhammad, 2005: 121–122).

Organizational Communication Climate

Muhammad (2005: 85-86) explained that the climate of communication and organization is necessary. the attention of an organizational leader because these factors affect employee behavior. Research conducted by Redding (Goldhaber, 1986) shows that the communication climate is broader than just employees' perceptions of the quality of relationships and communication within the organization and the level of influence and

involvement. Redding (Goldhaber, 1986) suggests five important dimensions of the communication climate, namely:1) Supportiveness, or subordinates observe that their communication relationship with superiors helps them build and maintain feelings of worth and importance.2) Participation in making decisions3) Trust, can be trusted, and keep secrets.4) Openness and candor5) High-performance goals and performance goals are communicated clearly to members of the organization.Meanwhile, Gibb (1997) emphasized that certain communication behaviors of organizational members lead to a supportive climate, which appears in the following behaviors:1) Organizational members focus messages on observable events rather than subjective or emotional evaluations;2) The problem orientation of members of the organization focuses their communication on solving problems together;3) Spontaneity: members of the organization communicate politely in responding to situations that occur;4) Empathy: members of the organization show concern and understanding towards other members;5) Equality: members of the organization treat other members as friends and do not emphasize position and power; 6) Members of the organization are flexible and adapt to different communication situations.

Obstacles to the Effectiveness of Communication in Organizations

Gibson, et al. (1997: 440–446) describe some of the main barriers to communication within organizations, including:1) Differences in background (frame of reference): Different people may interpret the same communication differently depending on their previous experience. This causes a difference between the encoding process and the decoding process.2) Listening selectively is a form of selective perception in that a person tends to obscure new information, especially if the information is contrary to their beliefs. For example, someone will receive direction from superiors or management, so they only pay attention to things that strengthen our trust.3) Consideration of value, concerning the thorough evaluation of the message before receiving all communications. Value judgments may be based on the recipient's evaluation of the communicator, previous experience with the communicator, or the intended meaning of the message.4) Trust in the communicator, meaning the recipient's belief in and acknowledgment of the communicator's words and actions. The recipient's level of trust in the communicator then directly influences the receiver's views and reactions to the communicator's words, ideas,

and actions.5) For language problems, communication has been defined as conveying information and understanding through the use of signs or symbols (common symbols). The same words may mean different things to different people. That understanding is found in the recipient of the information, not in words. Communication is disrupted when different groups use words in different ways.6) Filtering usually occurs in upward communication in the organization. Filtering relates to the "manipulation" of information in such a way that the information is captured positively by the recipient. Subordinates "cover" unpleasant information from superiors or leaders.7) Language In groups, often official, professional, and social groups develop their own words or expressions that only have meaning for their members. Such specialized languages serve many useful purposes. This language can give its members a feeling of belonging, oneness, and self-worth. This language can facilitate effective communication within a group, but the use of this language can result in communication barriers if used with people from other groups.8) Differences in status. Often, organizations explain hierarchical levels through various symbols, titles, offices, rugs, secretaries, and so on. Such status differences can pose a threat to someone lower in the hierarchy, who can avoid or distort communication.

Cross-Cultural Communication in an Organization

Kinicki & Kreitner (2003: 123–124) explained that globalization essentially requires employees to be more internationally aware and cross-culturally capable. Managers and employees who live in their home countries will find it difficult to escape from the global economy. Many will penetrate both international markets by working for foreign companies or dealing with foreign suppliers, customers, and assistant workers. The global economy is a blend of rich cultures that form one of the organizational cultures.According to Robbin (2002:17), effective communication is often difficult to achieve even in the best of circumstances, such as coming from the same culture and among members of the organization who share many similarities.In the context of organizations whose members are diverse or multinational, cross-cultural factors clearly create the potential to increase communication problems. The process of encoding and decoding messages into symbols is based on individual cultural backgrounds, so the results are not the same for everyone. There are major differences in background between

senders and receivers and large differences in the meanings attached to some words or behaviors. People from different cultures see, interpret, and evaluate things differently, and the consequences of their actions are different.Mulyana (2007: 327–328)explained that each person has a unique style of speaking, not only in the way they speak but also in the topics of their conversations. This particularity is generally inherited by a person from his culture. Edward T. Hall (1973) distinguishes high-context culture and low-context culture, which have important differences in how the message is encoded. Low-context culture is characterized by verbal and explicit messages, direct speech style, and being direct and frank. These adherents of low-context cultures have something to say. mean and mean something said. High context culture is characterized by high communication; most messages are implicit, indirect, and not straightforward. The real message may be hidden in the speaker's nonverbal behaviors, such as voice intonation, hand gestures, body posture, facial expressions, eye gaze, and physical appearance.Robbin (2003: 125) further explains that cultural barriers and the implications of cross-cultural communication can be anticipated by understanding the concepts of high context culture and low context culture. Countries like China, Vietnam, and Saudi Arabia are high-context cultures. They emphasize nonverbal and subtle situational cues when communicating with others. Something that is not said may be more significant than something that is said. In this culture, a person's formal title, social status, and reputation are important considerations in communication. In contrast, people from Europe and North America reflect a low-context culture. They depend on words to convey meaning. Body language or titles or designations are secondary to spoken and written words. Communication in a high-context culture implies trust in the other party. Something that appears to outsiders to be casual and insignificant in conversation is important because it reflects a desire to build relationships and create trust. Oral agreement means strong commitment in a high-context culture, and age, seniority, and position in the organization are highly valued and greatly affect credibility. But in low-context cultures, valid contracts will tend to be written, worded in detail, and legalized.There is a common, low-context culture that values candor. Managers are expected to be explicit, clear, and detailed in conveying their intentions. This is in contrast to high-context cultures, where managers tend to give suggestions rather than give orders.

Language in Cross-Cultural Communication

Mulyana (2007: 266) explains that according to Larry L. Barker, language has three functions: naming, interaction, and transmission of information. Robbin (2002: 12) explains that words mean something different to different people. Age, education, and cultural background are three of the variables that clearly influence the language a person uses. In an organization, workers usually come from different backgrounds. Furthermore, the group of workers is divided into departments that carry out specific tasks. In large organizations, members are often geographically separated, even carrying out assignments in different countries, so that individuals in each location will use terms and expressions that are unique to their area. The existence of hierarchy in the organizational structure can also cause language problems; for example, differences in the meaning of the words incentives and quotas have been found at different levels of management. Top managers often talk about the need for incentives and quotas, but the terms imply manipulation and create the displeasure of lower managers. This shows that even though two people may speak the same language, the use of language is not uniform. If we know how each of us modifies language, then difficult communication can be minimized. The problem is that organizational members usually don't know how the people they interact with modify the language. The sender of the message tends to assume that the words and terms used have the same meaning for the recipient of the message. This assumption is often incorrect.Kinicki & Kreitner (2003: 136–137) describe more than 3000 different languages spoken in the world. Anthropologists have two different views. There are relativist anthropologists who hold the view that language helps the development of unique perceptions. On the other hand, the universalist school states that all languages have the same elements and therefore help the development of general perceptual processes. A study was conducted to prove the truth of these two views. The research subjects were adults from 8 countries, namely the US, UK, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. Each subject was given 15 cards, each containing three pairs of words. This study aims to prove whether adults from different cultures and speaking different languages will receive the same semantic elements in the paired words. This research concludes that cultural differences affect the understanding and use of semantic relations.Mulyana (2007: 276) also explains that language is bound by

cultural context and is seen as an extension of culture. Sapir Whorf's hypothesis is called the Theory of Linguistic Relativity; in fact, every language shows a unique symbolic world, which describes the reality of thoughts, inner experiences, and the needs of its users. So different languages influence the wearer to think differently, see the environment and the universe around them in different ways, and behave differently too.

Guidelines for Conducting Cross-Cultural Communication

Robbin (2002: 18) explains that when communicating with people from different cultures, there are several things that can be done to reduce misperceptions, misinterpretations, and misevaluations, namely:1) Assumes differences until proven similarities exist. Most of us assume that other people are more like us than they actually are. But people from different countries are often very different from us. So it is far less likely to err in assuming that others are different than in assuming they are the same until differences are proven.2) Emphasizing explanation rather than judgment or interpretation In contrast to portrayal, interpreting or judging what someone says and does is based on the observer's culture and background rather than the situation being observed.3) Empathize; before sending a message, put yourself in the position of the recipient of the message. Seek out her values, experiences, frames of reference, education, upbringing, and background, which can provide additional insight. Trying to see other people as they really are4) Consider interpretation as a working hypothesis or temporary guess. When we provide interpretations of new situations or thoughts from foreign cultures, these interpretations are used as hypotheses that must be tested further. It is necessary to do a careful assessment of the feedback provided by the recipient of the information to ensure that the feedback is in accordance with the hypothesis.

Kinicki & Kreitner (2003: 137) explain that there are three choices in conducting cross-cultural communication, namely:1) Stick to your own language;2) Depends on the language translator; 3) Teach yourself the local language. It was further explained that based on the experience of successful international managers from the three choices, the third option, namely learning the local language/country of work, is considered the most effective in facilitating communication with business partners. Ignoring the local

language/reluctance to learn the local language means the possibility of losing understanding of certain meanings which can be very important for business continuity.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that in the era of the global economy, there were company activities that involved individuals, employees, and managers from more than one country, both those assigned to other countries and those assigned to their own country. These conditions lead to cross-cultural communication that cannot be avoided. One of the obstacles to cross-cultural communication is language difference. Language is an extension of a culture. Differences in understanding or interpreting a word or symbol become a potential barrier to communication, which can hinder the process of business or organizational activities.

SUGGESTION

For individuals involved in cross-cultural communication within an organization, it is recommended that they: 1) increase their knowledge and understanding of culture from business partners or colleagues; 2) It is better to assume that other people who come from other cultures are different from us so as not to cause misunderstandings and miscommunication with that person; 3) In addition to mastering the universal language, it is highly recommended that we learn the local or regional language where we are assigned or work.

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