Enhancing organizational and interpersonal communication in multinational companies: The effectiveness of the onion model

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A B S T R A C T

As we moved into the 21st century, it became clear that the success of any organization depends on more than just the technical skills of its managers, who lead the business. It also relies on the active participation of every employee and the quality of communication and interactions within the company. This study focuses on the development of onion models and how effective they are in improving interpersonal communication. The research employed a mixed-method approach, gathering data through reviews of existing literature (secondary data) and direct fieldwork, including interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for primary data. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze the data. The participants in this study included 50 individuals ranging from owners and directors to managers, regular employees, and office assistants. The findings indicate that the onion model demonstrates a pattern of organizational communication that a) happens between individual members or across the whole organization, b) is formal and hierarchical, c) includes both verbal and non-verbal forms, d) can be direct or indirect, and e) serves the purpose of interaction and detailed discussion related to the company's internal operations. The study concludes that the onion model is effective for use in large and multinational companies.

1. Introduction

Today's economic globalization brings new challenges for a business organization to survive in competitive competition (Masroor and Asim, 2019; Naradda Gamage et al., 2020). Therefore, business organizations must have competent human resources who can carry out and complete their duties and obligations in carrying out company management or operations to achieve organizational goals. Entrepreneurship in business organizations is recognized not in isolation (Venkataraman, 2019) but in its ability to communicate and interact well within the internal scope of the company and with other parties (Enke and Borchers, 2021). Through such communication or interaction, employees and stakeholders will form a specific personality in the form of organizational culture or at least the prevailing value system.

Entering the 21st century, the success of every organization requires not only technical expertise from managers as leaders in business entities but also the involvement and active role of all employees in the company (Guinan et al., 2019). So, in the organization, there is a need for good communication and interaction. This is because the more competitive the business environment that has been opened globally, the more the problems the company faces are also increasingly complex (Hopkinson et al., 2018). For this reason, the role of every individual in the company (both at the top management level and employees with the lowest position) is needed to prevent and remove obstacles that might prevent individuals from communicating and obtaining valuable information.

In terms of leadership in the organization, several leaders (managers) are needed who have flexible, specific, and firm ways of communication to influence others to be able to work together as a team to achieve the goals to be performed concurrently through an appropriate communication model in the company's activities. To be able to complete the expected goals, everyone in an

entrepreneurial entity must also have effectiveness in communicating, such as speaking honestly, being able to get along with others, liking suggestions and constructive criticism, and being tolerant. Everyone in the company needs to have high innovation and creativity in communicating, be flexible, have the ability to understand various dialects, have positive perceptions and perspectives, and have confidence that sharing well is the guidance of each individual in the frame of duties, roles, and norms of the company.

This article discusses the communication in the company's internal activities, namely the form of communication in the form of an onion model. This model was developed by looking at the reality of communication within the company and is usually formed as such. In contrast, communication in ordinary companies is formal and tiered, like layer by layer of onion skin (red). A company owner will communicate reciprocally with the company's directors, not the office boy. The directors of the construction services company will speak reciprocally with the company manager or site manager and not with the project foreman. This mutual communication looks tiered because of the span of control inherent in the organizational structure. Tiered and formal communication is called the onion model and will be discussed in the following article. This discussion is intended to see whether the onion model is a reality of communication in the company's internal environment. The communication onion model is only a novelty regarding mentions among existing and commonly known communication models. Of the various communication models in multiple literatures, there is never mention of a formal, tiered, and normative communication model (Gaspar et al., 2021; Namhata and Patnaik, 2019; VanDyke and Lee, 2020). Communication within an organization or company (especially for companies with extensive qualifications) is formal or normative. It tends to be tied from one position to another (has a hierarchy), as in the image of the skin (layered) on the onion (red).

The psychic state of subordinates can be more easily understood by the 'immediate superior,' which can only happen in the Onion Model. Typical and consistent behavior is usually aroused by internal factors, such as an upbeat, true personality (diligent, curious, forgiving, polite, open, honest, there is a sense of belonging to the company, and so on) (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2020). But if a person's behavior is less consistent, most likely the behavior is driven by external factors such as high salary, because of being supervised by superiors, career, expecting tips/bonuses, desire to be noticed or praised, and so on. At least, people's behavior is driven by internal and external factors. From our perspective, we tend to perceive the behavior of others based on situational (external) factors. One attribution error source is messages perceived as incomplete or incomplete, so we try to interpret the message by analyzing our shortcomings or filling gaps in

perception. This bias error can be overcome by observing direct superiors to direct subordinates.

There are four types of communication barriers: personal, physical, cultural, and environmental barriers (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2018; Morrison-Smith and Ruiz, 2020). Emotional barriers are obstacles that occur in the participants of communication themselves, both 'communicators and communicants.' Personal barriers to communication include attitudes, emotions, stereotyping, prejudice, bias, and so on (Byrd et al., 2019). These various obstacles are interesting to discuss so that conclusions can be drawn about an ideal communication model within the company, namely the Onion Model, where personal, cultural, and environmental barriers can be further eliminated. Therefore, this study focuses on developing onion models and their effectiveness in interpersonal communication.

2. Method

The research method used by the author is a mixed methods research method. As a research method, mixed methods focus on collecting, analyzing, and mixing quantitative and qualitative data in a single or advanced study. The author chose to use an exploratory type design included in the sequential model. This type of design is a mixed methods research design carried out by conducting qualitative research first and then continuing with quantitative research (Leavy, 2022).

The first qualitative method is that researchers conduct an inventory of various laws and regulations relevant to regional public peace and order regulations. Second, the laws and regulations that have been inventoried will then be analyzed by relying on two aspects: philosophical and juridical. Intellectual elements are analyzed based on the content of laws and regulations. The juridical aspect is studied regarding the norms of rules and regulations that form the basis of regional authority and determine the substance of regulations that must be implemented in modern management systems, especially in communication. Then, we proceed with quantitative methods, namely, conducting empirical studies used to describe aspects of sociological legitimacy. Empirical studies are conducted through practical experience and objective analysis in company management and finding trade union communication management.

The data collection technique used is literature studies on secondary data. Literature studies are carried out to obtain secondary legal materials by reviewing books related to the object of preparation (Chigbu et al., 2023). Primary data were obtained through field studies by conducting interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The data analysis used is qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative analysis analyzes data sourced from the law based on concepts, theories, laws and regulations, doctrines, legal principles, expert opinions, or views of researchers. At the same time, quantitative

analysis is carried out to analyze the results at FGD. At the time of the FGD, respondents were given questionnaires related to the quality of interpersonal communication, which were used to strengthen the researchers' guesses regarding this onion model. Respondents comprised 50 people: owners, directors, managers, employees, and office assistants.

3. Result and discussion

The onion model is a linear and secular model of interaction between members of an enterprise in the context of working to achieve the goals of the business organization, that is, productivity and economic results. The onion model shows the author's assessment of the daily communication, roles, and functions of tasks, procedures, and operational standards of organizational members in the company. The reason is that the onion model is formed mechanically and becomes an artifact in the company's management. The author can describe the model through Fig. 1.
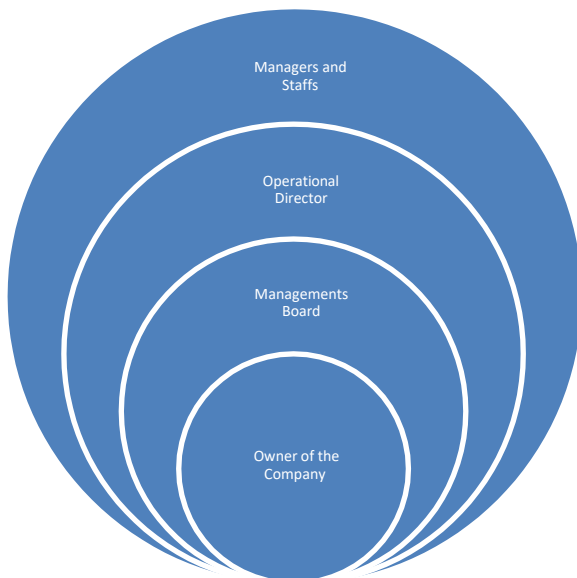

Fig. 1: Union model of communication

From Fig. 1, it can be seen that the owner or director of the company cannot talk directly with the lowest level of company staff to drive the company's activities but through hierarchical media because of several things, such as the company's standard operating procedures, time spans, and so on. In the job structure, the prevailing norms in the company, differences in perception, egalitarian attitudes, empowerment functions, and several other causes (Lomazzi et al., 2018). This onion model applies to relatively large companies or multinationals and is a limitation of the thinking in this article. Researchers often review and observe the Onion Model directly in structured and strengthened company activities based on the results of filling out questionnaires at the time of FGD.

Based on the analysis results, the onion model is a general description of communication in company

activities to create a good communication climate, such as language and gestures that the recipient of the message can understand, and a sense of empathy is needed for the communication. Although tiered and formal, the onion model will still bring social integration between employees within the company and make it easier for organizational members to integrate. The onion model will maintain the relationship between management functionals so that it can work and be well maintained because it creates order in communication, interaction, and exchange of information. Organizational communication thinking like this also illustrates that the Onion Model can be seen in technology-based messaging activities such as telephone, intercom, social media, email, and cell phones, including the speaking ethics used in such communication.

The onion model is similar to Social Penetration Theory (Mangus et al., 2020). However, the onion model put forward by the researcher differs significantly from the theory of social penetration in terms of intent and meaning. Social penetration relates to applying online technologies to intimacy in computer- or digital-mediated communication, such as online dating (Perloff, 2018). Social Penetration is very important when getting to know others online because it will determine the decision to meet in person, establish intimacy, and establish relationships (Miguel, 2018). More online dating users will often ask more questions and disclose more information as a form of self-disclosure. The pattern of self-openness is part of Social Penetration, which is to develop deeper intimacy with others through openness or mutual openness. Social Penetration Theory argues that societies have highly organized information systems about themselves and others. Self-openness in a new relationship will be determined through two processes: the depth of penetration and the breadth of penetration (Jung et al., 2020). Depth of penetration is the depth of disclosure in an area or aspect of a person's life.

Conversely, breadth of disclosure is the range of fields or diversity in a person's life during the disclosure process. Social Penetration Theory explains the role of self-openness, intimacy, and communication in developing interpersonal relationships. The different levels of Social Penetration are conceptualized in two dimensions: breadth and depth. In this case, depth relates to the degree of intimacy in the process of social penetration, which will determine a person's comfort in opening up to certain aspects of his personality because his personal life is not openly disclosed. Social Penetration Theory is intended to penetrate to gain intimacy with the communicant. The onion model that the author conveys is a tiered and formal interaction between superiors and subordinates in the company's operational activities.

The onion model is organizational communication between individuals or all organization members. Formal and tiered, both in verbal and nonverbal forms, directly or indirectly, for interaction and explanation of the

implementation of internal company work. The onion model can produce a practical communication foundation through the following elements: trust between members of the organization, understanding the content of communication, sharing information, being formal, giving mutual support, happiness and satisfaction between communicators and communicants, being able to listen to each other, reducing psychological pressure, causing reflection, accepting the conditions of the messenger, tiered communication in broad company activities, communication in carrying out work. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of interpersonal communication starts from five general qualities: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positive attitude, and equality. These five qualities become the basis or dependent variable of the effectiveness of the onion model. These five aspects are then realized in the form of a questionnaire to see the effectiveness of this onion model. This questionnaire was distributed during the FGD. The total number of people who filled out the questionnaire was 50 from one of the companies in Banten province. Respondents included owners, directors, managers, employees, and office assistants. The results of filling in respondents can be seen in Fig. 2.
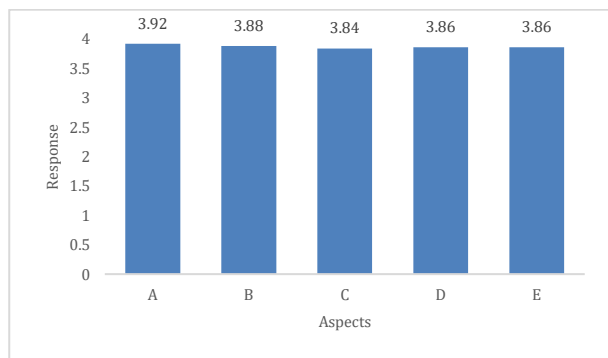

Fig. 2: Results of filling out questionnaires (scale 5) effectiveness of onion models

Fig. 2 explains the meaning of each aspect. Aspect A is openness, aspect B is empathy, aspect C is supportive, aspect D is positive attitude, and aspect E is equality. In simple terms, the quality aspect of openness gets an average score of 3.92, including the high category. At least, it refers to three aspects of interpersonal communication. First, an effective interpersonal communicator must be open to the people he interacts with. This does not mean that people must reveal their entire curriculum vitae immediately. This may be interesting, but it usually doesn't help communication effectiveness. Instead, there should be a willingness to be open by disclosing usually hidden information, as long as such self-disclosure is reasonable. In companies that have been extracted, the data shows that leaders to the very bottom implement information disclosure that can be accessed by all (Larrán Jorge et al., 2019).

The second aspect, with a score of 3.88, refers to the willingness of the communicator to empathize with incoming stimuli. People who are quiet, uncritical, and unresponsive are generally participants in boring conversations. An employee wants his boss to respond openly to what he says, and employees are entitled to expect this. There is nothing worse than indifference. Disagreements are much more pleasant. A superior shows openness by reacting spontaneously to the communication of his subordinates or colleagues, even in a non-verbal form. In this condition, communication is not one-way or linear but somewhat circular or bidirectional. The communicant's response to the message received is at least nonverbal, for example, in the form of a gesture or an expression, so it is two-way (Subarkah, 2018). In this way, the onion model underscores the fact that communication is bidirectional, and the boundary between the definitions of communicator and communicant is unclear. These limitations make onion model communication more likely to be communicated at the current and formal communication science level. For the practicality of diction in writing, writers sometimes use the terms communicator and communicant for communication actors. Empathy is a person's ability to 'know' what another person is experiencing at a particular moment from that person's point of view, through that person's point of view. At the same time, sympathy is feeling the condition experienced or judged by others. Empathic people can understand other people's motivations and experiences, feelings and attitudes, and other people's hopes and desires in the future (Bacq and Alt, 2018). A superior can communicate verbally and non-verbally empathy to his subordinates (Winarso, 2018).

The third aspect, with a score of 3.84, explains that interpersonal relationships in the Onion Model have a supportive attitude. A boss can show a supportive attitude by being 1) descriptive (not evaluative), 2) spontaneous (not strategic), and 3) proportional (not overconfident). The fourth aspect is a positive attitude, with a score of 3.86. A boss can communicate a positive attitude in interpersonal communication in at least two ways, namely by 1) expressing a positive attitude and 2) encouraging subordinates to interact easily. A positive attitude refers to at least two aspects of interpersonal communication. First, interpersonal communication is built when a person has a positive attitude towards himself. Second, positive feelings towards communication situations are essential for effective interaction. There is nothing more enjoyable than communicating with people who can enjoy interaction or react well to various situations or language events (Xie and Derakhshan, 2021).

Fifth is equality, with a score of 3.86. Every situation may involve gaps. One may be more intelligent, more prosperous, or more athletic than another. There have never been two people who are truly equal in every way. Although there are gaps, interpersonal communication will be more effective if the atmosphere is 'made' similar. This means there must be an implicit recognition that both parties are equally valuable and valuable and that each party has something important to contribute. In

interpersonal relationships characterized by equality, disagreements and conflicts are seen more as an attempt to understand inevitable differences than as an opportunity to bring down the other party (Fineman, 2019). Equality does not require superiors to accept and approve of any verbal and nonverbal behavior of subordinates or officials above them. Due to this nature of equality, effective formal communication occurs between individuals close to each other in position, as described in the onion model details.

In company activities, several factors cause communication failure in the implementation of company management, including convoluted or convoluted messages from superiors to subordinates without a clear core idea. This makes it difficult and lazy for subordinates to understand the superior's message, so communication can fail. This is often experienced by those not used to communicating with others. Negative perceptions of superiors will impact the message recipient (subordinates) (Braun et al., 2019). Therefore, one should eliminate these negative perceptions, especially by exhibiting good behavior. Thus, the image of the messenger (superior) should appear better. Egalitarian attitudes, differences in perception, and talking too technically will also make communication between the two parties ineffective, such as verbal communication about important company tasks from a president director to an office boy or office boy complaints about cleaning equipment submitted directly to the president director.

Onion model communication has a pattern as a) organizational communication that occurs between individuals or all members of the organization, b) formal and tiered, c) in verbal or non-verbal form, d) direct or indirect, and e) for interaction in the implementation of internal company work. In communication science theory, various scholars have not agreed on the definition of the word communication. Various scholars have tried to study the term and have generally found that there are several approaches to understanding the term communication. Although all definitions in multiple articles may be similar, not all can be applied to specific purposes when we study organizational communication. Therefore, the author will define "human communication" as communication or organizational communication. The first step in determining the term "human communication" was an attempt to represent many experts' initial definitions of communication. Communication is the breath of the sustainability of an organization (Lundgren and McMakin, 2018). An organization will not run without communication. This is the background of various studies on organizational communication, where organizational communication is a communication network between people who depend on each other in organizational activities. An organization consists of people who have their respective tasks, so they require good communication so that organizational performance can run well and organizational goals can be achieved. Effectiveness in an organization has characteristics such as communication.

Effective organizational communication is shaped by the cultural backgrounds of its members, the relationships within the group, members' expectations, their education, and the current situation in the organization (Cletus et al., 2018). A model systematically explains specific aspects of a process. Models are created to help us identify, describe, or categorize the important parts of a process. Communication, as a science that studies how humans interact, can also be explained through various models. These communication models are designed to help us understand communication and identify different forms of human interaction. There are two main types of models: functional models and operational models. These models are often used in scientific studies, particularly in the study of human behavior. Operational models describe processes by measuring and projecting possible outcomes and other factors that influence the process. The onion model, as described, is an example of an operational model.

4. Conclusions

Organization communication in the form of an onion model as a novelty is communication between members in the organization to discuss and exchange information consisting of a) interpersonal communication, b) group discussion, namely the exchange of ideas and opinions carried out by three to ten discussion participants to discuss specific problems such as discussions between company owners and directors and company managers, c) General discussion, namely the exchange of ideas and opinions conducted by more than ten discussion participants to discuss specific issues such as discussions between managers and their subordinates regarding the rights and obligations of company employees. The onion model is essentially a model of linear and secular interaction between organizational members in the context of carrying out work to achieve organizational goals, namely the formation of productivity and trust-shaped outcomes from parties outside the company. The onion model is an author's assessment of the daily communication, role, and function of organizational members' tasks, procedures, and operational standards in large companies. Thus, onion model communication can be defined as organizational communication between individuals or all members of the organization, formal and tiered, in verbal or non-verbal form, directly or indirectly, for interaction and elaboration of the implementation of internal company work. The onion model has a pattern as a) organizational communication that occurs between individuals or all members of the organization, b) formal and tiered, c) in verbal or non-verbal form, d) directly or indirectly, and e) for interaction and elaboration of the implementation of internal company work.

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards throughout its execution. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. They were fully informed about the study's aims, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing the data and securely storing all records. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any point without any repercussions.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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