

UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND TASK DESIGN ON JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG EMPLOYEES IN THE MANUFACTURING COMPANY

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Abstract

Purpose of study: The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of interpersonal communication and task design on job performance among employees from the manufacturing industry.

Methodology: The data is analyzed through a survey (questionnaire) from 152 employees in one of the manufacturing companies in Penang, Malaysia. Hypotheses for all direct effects between the predictors (eg. interpersonal communication and task design) and criterion (job performance) are tested using regression analysis.

Result: Results presented that employees in this company have a high level of job performance ($\mu = 3.70$); interpersonal communication ($\mu = 3.64$) and task design ($\mu = 3.66$). Also, positive correlations are found between employees' performance and interpersonal communication (r=.53, p=.00) and task design (r=.54, p=.00).

Implications: Thus, this research provided a fruitful knowledge regarding the level of employees' performance as well as their internal communication and task design; among employees in one of the manufacturing company in Malaysia.

Keywords: Job Performance, Interpersonal Communication, Task Design, Employees' Performance, Manufacturing Company.

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is very crucial in any organization since a satisfied employee would have higher performance and in the long run, it will increase the organization's productivity. Nowadays, all people are appointed to play their roles and responsibilities towards their job to achieve good performance to ensure the goal of the organization can be achieved. To increase organizational productivity, employees' efforts are directed towards the whole focus of the organization or within their aspect. It brings the meaning that although employees need to set goals based on their managers' expectations; sometimes they need to set their own goals which refer to them internally. Employees' behaviors are directed on their observable and mental action which impacted on the way they make a decision. Therefore, a high performing employee will be targeted to remain within the organization as long as possible for the benefits he brings and for the positive image he creates. The performance represents one of the most important aspects that must be taken into account when talking about the internal marketing of a company, but not only. Reaching performance to the highest level becomes more and more a challenge, given the continuous development of the companies and the continuous increase of the market standards (Vosloban, 2012).

In the Malaysian context, employees' performance in the manufacturing sector should be retained because this industry has provided such a high contribution to the national GDP. Malaysia's manufacturing sales recorded a growth of 5.5 percent in May 2018, rising to RM65.3 billion as compared to RM61.9 billion reported a year ago (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018). As reported, the significant increase in sales value in May 2018 was due to the increase in Electrical and Electronics Products (7.5%), Petroleum, Chemical, Rubber and Plastic Products (6.8%) and Non-Metallic Mineral Products, Basic Metal & Fabricated Metal Products (4.3%). Thus, it is crucial to conduct a study on employees' performance to ensure the growth of GDP to the country can be increased. This is because as stated by <u>Birhane (2016)</u>, by engaging employees in improving their performance, it will lead to achieving a successful and highly productive business. Therefore, a manufacturing company that produces some electrical and electronic items in the Northern Region of Malaysia has been selected as a sample of the research.

Empirical evidence revealed several factors such as interpersonal communication and task design as the predictors of employees' performance in foreign countries. For example, interpersonal communication has been proven as the determinant of foreign managers' performance who works with their colleagues and employees in Indonesia (Wulandari, 2014). Meanwhile, in Pakistan, (Ali and Zia-ur-Rehman, 2014) presented that task (job) design has become the factor that positively related to employees' performance in the FMCG sector. Therefore, it implies the assumption that these two factors (eg. interpersonal communication, task design) may also become important in determining the level of employees' performance in the Malaysian manufacturing sector. This is because those behavioral factors are deemed crucial to be practiced by all employees especially who work in the sector which is team-centered and high in the aspect of employees' inter-related such as those who work in the manufacturing company. Moreover, different cultural may present different types of behaviors. According to Treven, Mulej and Lynn(2008), cultural variation exists in regions, organizations and



even individuals; still, a large body of research suggests that meaningful, relatively long-lasting distinctions among various international cultures exist. Thus, evidence in the local manufacturing context towards the determinants of employees' performance can be revealed based on the findings of this study.

Given that, it is the interest of this study to shed some light regarding the relationships between interpersonal communication, task design and job performance among employees from one of the Malaysian manufacturing companies. When employees practice good interpersonal communication which they can work together in a dynamics team thus their task design will be more efficient to be fulfilled, in the long run it will increase the performance level. Therefore, combining these three factors and interrogatively tested them in one research will enhance our understanding of how to provide a way for a higher level of performance among all employees; particularly in the manufacturing company.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Performance

The concept and definition of individual (employee) performance have received considerable scholarly research attention over the past 15 to 20 years (<u>Sonnentag, Volmer, & Spychala, 2008</u>). As stated by <u>Sarasvathy(2013</u>)employees' performance is essentially the result of a series of behaviors. It can be contributed to a variety of tasks that can be performed daily. Besides, the results of job performance such as productivity are important to the organization to remain its competitiveness in the market.

Employees' (workers') performance is regarded as how well an employee can dispatch their duties to the specified organization (Femi, 2014). The author added that setting and communicating performance standards and expectations, observing and providing feedback, and conducting appraisals enable employees to achieve the best results through managing employee performance.

As defined by <u>Chin-Wen Liao</u>, <u>Lu</u>, <u>Huang and Chiang (2012)</u>, job performance is the standard for advancements, redundancy, rewards, punishments, reviews and salary changes. It also satisfies the needs of employees to realize themselves. Further, <u>Ahmad & Shahzad (2011)</u>stated that employee performance symbolizes the broad belief of the personnel about their behavior and contributions towards the achievement of the organization. Therefore, job performance appears as the most essential component of being examined among employees in this company based on <u>Chin-Wen Liao et al. (2012)</u>performance definition. Referred to this performance definition, it seems that high level of performance should be maintained to strive the standards for employees' advancement for instance. For this purpose, this study attempts to reveal several factors that may create a good impact on employees' performance in the manufacturing company. Apart from that, since self-assessment are largely consistent with the literature on management by objectives or MBO (<u>Idowu</u>, 2017); thus the perspective of job performance will be obtained in the part of the employees by using the self-kind of rating in this study.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication in recent years has been consistently placed high as an important requirement for conducting successful job performance in the organizations (Singh & Lalropuii, 2014). It refers to the interpersonal communication of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another, which is very essential for the success of any organization. Therefore, it must be effectively handled to ensure the attainment of the organization's success. As defined by Vardaman and Halterman (1968) communication inside the organization as the flow of information, materials, perceptions and understandings among the various stakeholders of the organization, all the methods, media and means of the communication, all the networks, channels, systems of communication or organizational structure, all the person to person interchange or interpersonal communication. They include all aspects of communication and make it comprehensive; because it advises that there are so plentiful things are going on in the organization.

Interpersonal communication is defined as involving real-time face to face or voice to voice conversation that allows instant feedback (<u>Plunkett, Attner, & Allen, 2007</u>). They also added that interpersonal communication is appropriate for discussing matters that require give and take between participants. Such matters include discussion about performance appraisal; an MBO conversation in which praise or criticism is given coaching, counseling or training sessions. Meetings and conferences are useful forms of interpersonal communication as well as brainstorming sessions, quality circles, committee meetings, and contract negotiations.

According to <u>Wilson (2008)</u>, communication in a different organization refers to various ways, strategies, and tools which employees use in their official, interpersonal, and small group communication activities. The easiness or complexity of the interpersonal communication process depends on the easiness or complexity of the organization. Dozens of different definitions have explained the communication structure. Yet, there is almost consensus that communication occurs at four levels, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational and macro-social (<u>Hargie, Dickson, & Tourish, 1999</u>). Each of these levels has a special place and a different position in the daily people interactions, starting from different situations and differences in the context in which they take place (<u>Vladimir, Dana, Gordana, & Filip, 2017</u>). As pointed out by <u>Anderson and Martin (1995</u>), several motives of interpersonal communication are included of pleasure (which was for fun); affection (which meant caring); escape (the filling of time to avoid others' behaviors); relaxation (an unwinding concept); control (which concerned on power) and; inclusion (shared of feelings to avoid loneliness).



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At the level of interpersonal communication, the focus of the study of communicative relationships is narrowed and fixed between two persons or in the frame of a very small group. Given that, communication can improve employees' job performance (Goris, 2007), and interpersonal communication in the management can increase of happiness that makes employees feel obligated to reciprocate with increases their performance (Wulandari, 2014), thus; investigating the effect of interpersonal communication on job performance among employees in manufacturing sector may provide additional evidences to the body of knowledge. It implies the assumption that the better the interpersonal communication, the better the level of employees' job performance. Therefore, the first hypothesis is developed. H_1 : There is a positive effect of interpersonal communication on job performance among employees in the Malaysian manufacturing company.

Task Design

Task (Job) design and related concepts have rooted back in 1900. As stated by <u>Bodmer (1993)</u>and <u>Price (1989)</u>, systematically exam the jobs with numerous methods and techniques but all of these consider job design is the most important in scientific management. Designing jobs and roles appropriately are very imperative in elevating the performance of employees (Ali & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2014). Employee productivity would positively impact by designing a task that influences an individual to set a goal. It is because different people have different abilities that may perform on a certain task that can affect job performance. In the view of <u>Opatha (2002)</u>, job (task) design is the functions of arranging tasks, duties, and responsibilities into an organizational unit of work. There are various approaches to job design. For instance, <u>Aswathappa (2013)</u> explained that the various approaches to job design are namely; job rotation, job engineering, job enlargement, and job enrichment.

Based on the existing literature, it can be claimed that task design has been one of the most effective tools used for optimizing an employee's performance. It plays a crucial role in the achievement of organizational as well as personal goals (Zareen, Razzaq, & Mujtaba, 2013). Task design is defined as specifying the contents or methods of any job in such a way that various requirements of the job holder can be effectively satisfied (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). These requirements may include social, technological, personal and organizational desires. It is related to the process of transformation of inputs to outputs and it also takes into consideration the human factors as well as organizational factors which are of very much importance in the achievement of desired performance. When employees get involved and are familiar with the task design they become more motivated to take an active part in the achievement of organizational goals and as a result performance of employee increases which positively impacts the organizational outcomes.

Given that there is a significant and positive relationship between task design and perceived degree of employees' performance in Kenya banks (Ngugi, 2014); and in FMCG's Pakistani Sector (Ali & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2014), this study attempts to examine the effect of task design on employees' performance in the Malaysian manufacturing company. Hence, the results revealed whether different cultural may present different types of behaviors especially on the relationship between task design and employees' performance in different countries (ie. Kenya, Pakistan, Malaysia). Therefore, the second hypothesis is developed for this research. H₂: There is a positive effect of job design on job performance among employees in the Malaysian manufacturing company.

METHODOLOGY

The population for this research included all employees from one manufacturing company located in Penang, Malaysia. 152 out of 250 employees from the various department participated in this research. This study utilized the individual unit of analysis which aimed at all employees as the respondents in obtaining the data. Data for respondents' demographics have been obtained based on four questions such as gender, age, educational level, working period, a position held in the present organization. Respondents' age has been categorized into five groups such as below 25 years old, 26 to 30 years old, 31 to 35 years old, 36 to 40 years old and above 40 years old. Educational level has been asked into 5 categories according to the employees' entry qualification into the company (eg. diploma degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, others). Meanwhile, respondents' years of working experience are categorized into 4 scales including less than a year, 1 to 5 years, 6 to 9 years, and more than 10 years. As for the respondents' position, four categories have been asked whether the participants are the general manager, manager, executive, and non-executive employees. In this research, respondents' agreement towards their involvement in interpersonal communication, team dynamic, and task design becomes the basis for the understanding of their level of job performance in the company. All data collected are analysed by using SPSS (version 22).

Job performance was the dependent variable in this study. In this research, the instrument for job performance is fully adopted (<u>Sarasvathy, 2013</u>). It is measured by 20-items. The three independent variables in this study consisted of interpersonal communication and task design. The interpersonal communication scale is adapted from the instruments of <u>Sumeya (2016</u>). There were 19-items used to measure interpersonal communication. As for the task design scale, it has been measured based on 12-items as developed by <u>Achiaa (2012</u>). All statements are based on five-point scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The total of 152 out of 250 distributed questionnaire sets are successfully collected, indicated 61% of the response rate. The majority of the respondents were female which contributed to 59%, while the remaining 41% of the respondents were

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male. The major group of respondents was in the categories of 26 to 30 years old; contributed to 42.8%. It is followed by respondents in the ages below 25 years old category; contributed to 32.2%. The next age categories were in the range between 31 to 35 years old; contributed to 19.7%. Then, respondents between the ages of 36 to 40 years old contributed to 3.9%. Respondents in the category above 40 years old became the least number of respondents; contributed to 1.4%.

As for the respondents' academic qualification, the majority of the respondents which contributed to 49.3% were the Degree holders. This figure is followed by 25% and 18.4% were the Master and Diploma holders. 6.6% of the respondents were Ph.D. holders meanwhile the remaining 0.7% of them had other educational qualifications. To the extent of working experience, 49.3% of respondents had working experience in between 1 to 5 years. Meanwhile, 44.1% of the respondents had 6 to 9 years of working experience. 5.0% of the respondents had more than 10 years of working experience. Last but not least, 1.6% of them had less than a year of working experience. In the aspect of respondents' position, the majority of them (43.4%) came from the non-executive level and 33.6% were at the executive level. 14.5% of respondents were the managers and the remaining 8.5% were the general managers.

As presented in Table1, employees in this company have a high level of job performance with a mean score of 3.70. Also, the findings showed that the respondents have a high level of interpersonal communication and task design as well with the mean values at 3.64 and 3.66 each.

Variables		Ν	Means	SDS	
1.	Job Performance	152	3.70	0.57	
2.	Interpersonal Communication	152	3.64	0.51	
3.	Task Design	152	3.66	0.54	

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations

Apart from that, standard deviations for all the variables are reported at the values of 0.57, 0.51 and 0.54 respectively. This presented that job performance had the highest standard deviation. Thus, this indicated that the data are widely spread which means it is less reliable. Interpersonal communication has a low standard deviation which shows that the data is more reliable.

Table 2 showed the correlation analyses between all variables for 152 participants in the research. Task design is found to have a positive correlation with employees' performance (r=.54, p=<.01). Also, interpersonal communication is presented to have a positive correlation with employees' performance (r=.53, p=<.01) in this research. In interpreting the strength of relationships between variables, all of the correlations presented a kind of moderate correlation between all variables.

Variables		Ν	1	2	3
1.	Job Performance	152	-		
2.	Interpersonal Communication	152	.53**	-	
3.	Task Design	152	.54**	.55**	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 presented the regression results of interpersonal communication and task design on employees' job performance. As indicated in Table 3, interpersonal communication is positively related to employees' job performance (β =.53*, p=.00). The same results are presented for the relationship between task design and employees' job performance. As shown, task design is positively related to employees' job performance (β =.54*, p=.00). 39% of the variance in employees' performance is explained by interpersonal communication and task design (R²=0.39). Therefore, both hypotheses are supported in this research.

 Table 3: Regression Results of Interpersonal Communication and Task Design on Job Performance

Variables	Beta	t-Ratio	Sig. T
Interpersonal Communication	0.53	7.60	0.00
Task Design	0.54	7.78	0.00
R square = 0.39			
Sig.F =0.00			

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

CONCLUSION

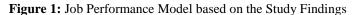
The results of this research provided a fruitful knowledge regarding the level of employees' performance as well as their internal communication and task design; among employees in one of the manufacturing company in Malaysia. Based on the findings, it is presented that the level of employees' performance among the employee in this company is high with a mean score of 3.70. This showed that most of the employees in this company are well performed with their job. In general, job performance is based on the completion of the task description as expected by the management. In this research,

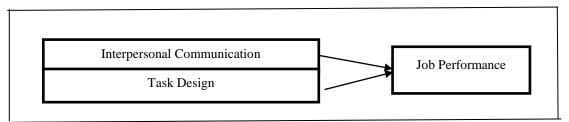


employees' performance has been measured based on their performance in overcoming stress and workload, working environment, salary acceptance.

As indicated in Table 1, results also presented a high level of interpersonal communication (μ =3.64) and task design (μ =3.66) among employees in this company. Therefore, interpersonal communication gives effectiveness to the team that involves them with the priority of the task of employees. The highest level of task design score showed that the functions of task design in this company are well-arranged by the management. Thus, employees in this company were familiar with their task design, therefore they took an active part and as a result, they can maintain the level of their performance. Apart from that, the high level of interpersonal communication showed that employees in this company involved with high real-time face-to-face or voice-to-voice conversation and at the same time they engaged with good interactions based on task understanding and the efficient use of their shared resources in a group setting. Thus, the necessary actions have been taken by the management to ensure all employees may remain in these kinds of positive behaviors. For example, management may provide a basis to ensure all team members can communicate the problems related to employees' task design. Therefore, the problems of task design can be solved by giving clear instructions through all levels of the organization.

As theorized, this study also provided several pieces of evidence regarding the influences of interpersonal communication, team dynamic and task performance on employees' performance. As indicated in Table 3, there was a positive relationship between interpersonal communication and job performance (β =.53*, p=.000) among employees in this company. It implied that the more employees involved in interpersonal communication, the more they performed with their job. Similarly, there was also a positive relationship between job performance and task design (β =.54*, p=.000). These results showed that the more employees perceived a good task design, the more they performed with their job. To date, this study is conducted to examine the impact of interpersonal communication and task design on employees' job performance. Since the results presented that all of the predictors are positively significantly to job performance; thus, the components of job performance model among employees in this Malaysian manufacturing company is given in Figure 1.





Last but not least, future researchers are advised to focus on other factors that may create influences on employees' performance in the manufacturing industry (eg. personality, political behavior, autonomy, strategic alignment, talent management, etc.). Thus, broader concepts of job performance can be added to the existing knowledge.

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