

# COMMUNICATION AND PERCEIVED LEADERSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

Organizational change, as in merger, is a situation where uncertainty is high. Employees worried about many things changes will affect them, especially regarding job security. In an educational institution that went through merger recently, 95 employees mention that communication (29,55%) is one of the problems that hinders the organization from effective functioning. This includes lack of: trust, coordination, open communication, role and job descriptions as well as policies clarity.

Communication is an important factor in effective leadership especially during organizational change. One of the qualities of an effective leader is the ability of establishing good communication with the environment, including the employees or people within the organization. Leader's success depends on the success of their subordinates in executing the job, thus the leaders need to establish effective communication with their subordinates. Transformational leadership is identified as the effective type of leadership in context of change. Survey showed that 78 structural position employees, perceived their immediate supervisor in the transformational leadership dimensions as follows: challenging the process (mean 19.69), inspiring shared vision (mean 20.96), enabling others to acts (mean 21.73), modeling the way (mean 20.3), encouraging the heart (mean 20.30). The survey told us that leaders, represented by immediate supervisor, need to communicate their leadership behavior more effectively to their subordinates.

Factors perceived as hindrance and less effective perceived leadership behavior might be related to how daily communication is conducted in this organization: necessary information regarding any changes only disseminate after the emergence of triggering event (s), using policies or principles that need to be adhere by all the members of organizations when confronted with rumors/conflicts, only certain parties have the information which are important to all employees. Thus more appropriate communication strategy should be considered to improve more effective communication among leader (s) and employees.

**Keywords:** merger, communication, perceived leadership, lecturers

## 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Change is the new trend in every organization. It is one of the adaptive actions taken by the organization to survive (Jones, 2007). Four private educational institutions recently merged into a university due to the internal and external forces of changes. As normal as it is, changes always bring unease feelings to the people affected. Those feelings could arise because people did not well-informed or not knowing what is going on, that easily leads to rumors and resistance.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of merger, the process is still hard to chew. Among other factors, communication and leadership play significant role to ease the transitions and help the organization to focus faster on achieving its goals. For that matter, the two will be the focus of our discussion.

## 2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

### 2.1 Communication and organizational change

Communication is seen as a key factor that leads to successful change process in organization, where the implementation of communication itself can be very problematic. The important characteristics of

communication process in implementation of change are information dissemination, soliciting input, and socialization (Lewis, 2011).

*Information dissemination* is a communication process frequently used during organizational change in order to reduce uncertainty (lack of information or as confusion related to many available possible interpretations of events or objects). The problem arise if the non-implementers individuals within the organization lack of necessary information (strategic) to be able to participate in change initiatives productively (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004). The organization can provide knowledge and information possessed by top management to reduce uncertainty feelings. Uncertainty and ambiguous situations encourage people to sense making process in organizations. In this situation, people need more information as well as values, priorities and preferences to help them clarify what matters (McPhee & Zaugg, 2001) and to reframe problematic situations (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008).

*Soliciting input* basically is an encouraging active involvement from stakeholders that can lead to lower resistance, increasing satisfaction and feeling in control (Bordia, et al., 2004; Sagie, Elizur, & Koslowsky, 1990). This activity also means that organization did not left out its people. All people considered equally important to the process.

*Socialization* is the activity organization takes to shape the understandings its members have regarding the values, priorities, procedures, job tasks, culture, and formal and informal expectations. When organization change, it usually altering people's role within the organization followed by reevaluation of the person-environment fit concept (Rousseau, 1996).

## **2.2 Organizational change and leadership**

Merger equals change. At this point, people need no more of uncertainty that comes from organizational sources. Leaders must act as agents of change (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003) prompting others to follow. In order to do so, leaders must be effective. Effective leadership is critical in the organizational change process (Miller, 2012). Previous researchers suggest that transformational leadership has been one factor that explains leaders success in achieving large-scale change in organization (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Banerji & Krishnan, 2000; Barbuto Jr., 2005).

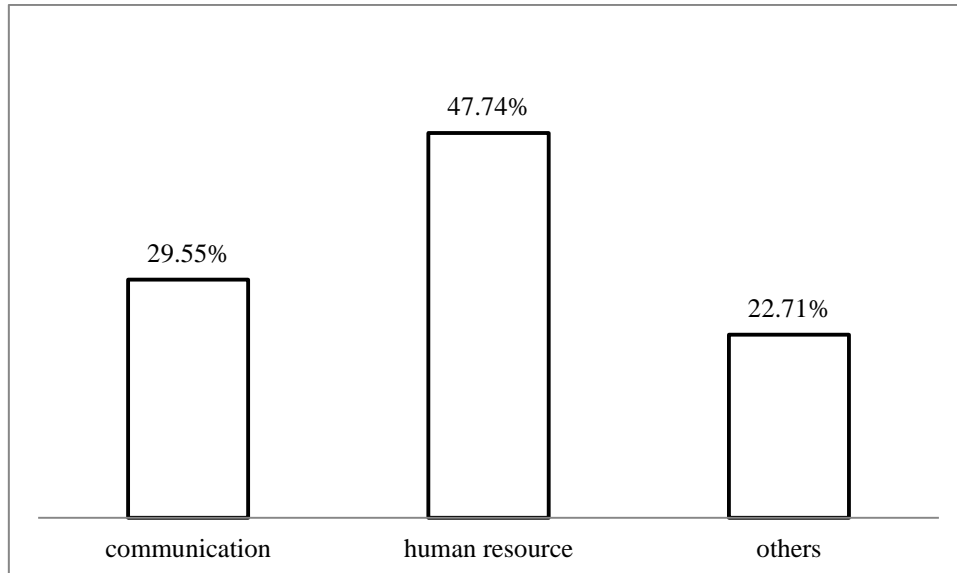
A model of transformational leadership from Kouzes & Posner (2007) is one of the transformational leadership models that describes specific and observable behaviors performed by outstanding leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). This model incorporates leaders' behaviors among 5 dimensions. First dimension stresses on initiating changes through questioning existing norm and innovation within the organization where leaders show their willingness to take risks and learn from the failures/mistakes (challenging the process). Second dimension dealing with leaders behavior to make effort to connect with the follower's dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions and values or incorporates the aspirations of the constituents (inspiring shared vision). Leaders have to have the ability to foster collaboration and build trust. Thus they know the important of teamwork, trust and empowerment (enabling others to acts) as the third dimension. The fourth dimension of effective leaders describes that leaders need to be a role model in earning the right and the respect to others. People first follow the person, then the plan (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). It entails to role model the behaviour and values of the organisation, through leading by example (modeling the way). Last but not least, leaders need to make recognition of followers' efforts and accomplishments where leader's actions demonstrate and builds the morale of the followers, link rewards to performance (encouraging the heart).

## **2.3 Communication and leadership**

Most common definition of leadership is the individual ability to influence others to do what he/she wants. In organizational context, the aim is to achieve organization's goal. From many definitions of leadership, it leads to leadership as a form of effective communication, for people willing to do what the leader asks. Leadership is human (symbolic) communication that modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and need (Hackman & Johnson, 2013) p. 11. Thus leaders expected to be able to communicate effectively (Barrett, 2006; Cawiezel et al., 2004; Miller, 2012). Furthermore, effective communicator is the quality that differentiate effective leader (Miller, 2012).

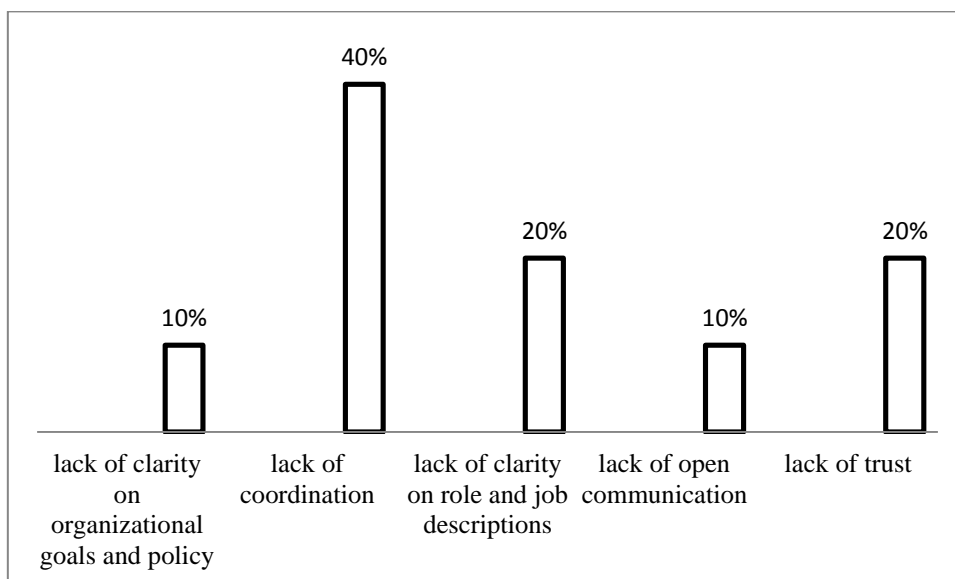
### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Survey to the 95 employees regarding their perceptions of what kind of factors that hinders the organization from effective functioning, reveals that communication is identified as the top two hindrances along with human resource factors on the top of the chart.



**Picture 1. Categorization of Perceived Hindrance of Organizational Effective Functioning**

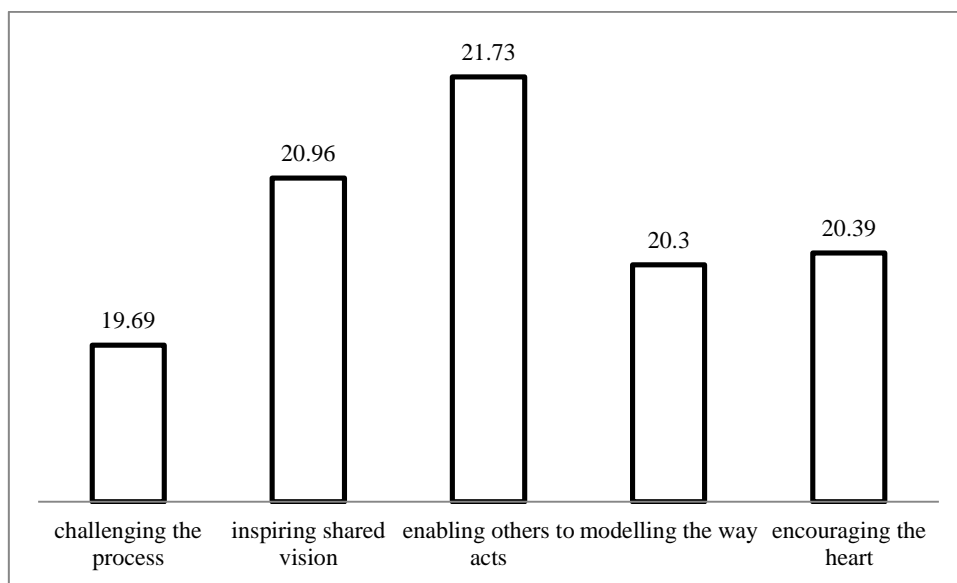
Even though this did not necessarily represent all the employees of this organization, but it raises an alert that this is too serious to be overlooked. This result shows that on communication aspect, this organization is not yet effective. Jammed communication easily leads to negative aspects, in this case include lack of: trust, coordination, open communication, role and job descriptions as well as policies clarity. In a long run, this will hinder the organization to achieve its intended goals.



**Picture 2. Categorization of Perceived Hindrance on Communication Area**

Looking further, it is lack of coordination that perceived to be the most frequent problem in this organization. This arises from employees' observation of daily practices where there are similar activities assign to two different unit or job. If this problem persist all the organizational functioning will takes more efforts and inefficient to deploy.

One of the communication elements is the human factor. How human factor (sender or receiver) deploy or receive information will determine the effectiveness of communication. Managerial strategies in this organization in communicating about change, fall within withhold and uphold style (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). Only certain parties have the necessary information, management withholds information as much as possible. When management is confronted with questions or rumors, they mostly referring to the rules and policies that some not even consistently implemented or seeing the action as an insubordination. When an organization went through merger, sufficient and accurate information plays important role to smoothen the process. The ineffective communication is also tells us that leadership in the organization is need to be improved. As reveals by the survey using Kouzes & Posner (2007) transformational leadership, it is clear that leaders perceived still maintaining status quo, which contradicts the change that is happening.



**Picture 3. Lecturers' Perceived Leadership**

Organizational change or any change at all is about challenging status quo. Result on picture 3 shows that this organization is still not resolved the unfreezing stage (Lewin, 1951 in (Weick & Quinn, 1999)). Thus if during the unfreezing stage the status quo and any forces that tried to sustain the status quo need to be called to question (French & Bell, 1984). If the leaders does not yet move on to the intended change the said, how can the sub-ordinates belief the idea in the first place. This is just the tip of the ice berg phenomenon that points out the important to be dealt with in order to accelerate the change process effectively.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Practices of daily communication within the organization influence how people perceived their leaders' behavior. Inappropriate strategy or ineffective communication leads to unwanted perceptions that, eventually slows down organizational progress. Open minded, practicing appropriate communication strategy and leadership behavior will yield intended results. In this case open communication is on the first agenda for this organization. Further research is needed to be able to identify which aspect of the organizational communication that contributes more on the perceived transformational leadership.

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## BRIEF CV OF AUTHORS

Fida Nirmala Nugraha, is one of the Industrial Engineering's lecturers at Telkom University since 2003. She completed bachelor, profession and master degree on Psychology at Padjadjaran University. Her research interests are focused around optimization of students' academic potential and organizational dynamics. She also involved in some related project and training development in the previous years on the areas. During her personal times, as a freelance associate in Psychological bureau, she's occasionally join in organizational recruitment and selection process. Since 2014 she is back to her almamater to pursue advance education, focusing on organizational change effects on its people.