COMMUNICATION IN MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN SURABAYA, INDONESIA

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Abstract

The study aims to explain the communication in manufacturing companies in Surabaya, Indonesia. Using the qualitative research methodology, the study does not have intention to generalize the results but the conclusions are expected to be expanded by the further research. Four manufacturing companies in Surabaya were observed because they are very dynamic and concern in TQM and change management. All data used were the results of observation done in each company. The results of the study show internal communication initiated by superiors in manufacturing company can support the success of TQM implementation, employees' satisfaction, performance and readiness for change which then boost the success of change management and company's performance. The main suggestion raised from this study is that superiors have to trust their employees and improve their listening skill so that employees' ideas can be accommodated. Although, the employees' ideas are not always implemented but listening to them is important for better employees' satisfaction and performance. The further research is suggested to investigate the model of the research and add other variables such as length of tenure, gender, marriage status and others influence the communication process in manufacturing companies.

Keywords: Manufacturing companies, communication process, communication channel, listening skill

INTRODUCTION

Communication is very crucial in human being life and especially in this era when the business situation changes rapidly. The communication and changes within organization are interesting subjects to study (Johansson & Heide, 2008). Communication is not one-way activities but should be two-ways process that both superior and employees have the responsibility to make the information and messages are clear to each other so that misunderstanding, unproductive personal conflicts can be reduced. The communication among employees is easily seen because they are in the same level that may reduce the hesitation but on the hand the good communication between employees and superior, vice versa, is more difficult because each of them has the perception when starting communication. The superior sometimes keeps their image by "not talking too much" to the employees and the employees are reluctant to talk with the superior just to avoid the ignorance or refusal. In other condition the employees avoid talking with the superior because they worry of additional duties.

All the worries should be reduced because the good communication between superior and employees makes the superior knows the problems exist in company and takes fast response for anticipating the bigger problems. So, superiors must start or open the way or opportunity to communicate to make the employees comfortable in sharing information and ideas. Employees with greater opportunity to share ideas mostly have higher motivation at work.

Nowadays, the communication which initiated by superiors are done in many ways, not only face-to-face communication, but also using the email, chat messenger, and other messaging application. These communication channels make the superiors easier to start communication to attract more intense communication. Good communication between leader and employees can bring better motivation and productivity (Rukmana, et al., 2018).

Manufacturing companies with great dynamics in daily business activities need the efficient and effective communication ways. The concern of manufacturing companies is total quality so it is quite impossible to gain if the internal communication is not flowing well, not only to handle the daily activities but furthermore the good communication will boost the employees' confidence and motivation in working. It is also important for manufacturing companies in any scales in the tight competition era which requires quick and correct response (Pawitan, 2012).

The objectives of the study are to know how the communication in manufacturing companies in Surabaya, Indonesia to coordinate the daily basis operations and how it is important to get better employees' performance and the success of change management to sustain the company performance in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Manufacturing Company Characteristics

Plant employees working in manufacturing companies usually have the assumption about their existence to "pay for work" based on previous performance levels (Klein, 1996). Most of manufacturing companies concern in how to implement total quality management as one of communication strategies in daily practices, and the importance of taking into account the elements of communication is very crucial in the success of TQM implementation in company (Samsudin, et al. 2017). Total Quality Management (TQM) involves the mutual cooperation of people to do the business process of a company (Choudhary & Rathore, 2013). Manufacturing companies experience and concern in competition and continuous improvement thus they need to clarify the standards, improvement targets. The targets should be communicated well to support the implementation and the results (Larsson, et al., 2017).

Communication Process

As the communication within organization flows upward, downward and laterally as well, the issue to make the effective communication and understandable either through words, symbols and actions by the sender (Johansson & Heide, 2008). The transmission of the messages in various forms is shown as Figure 1.
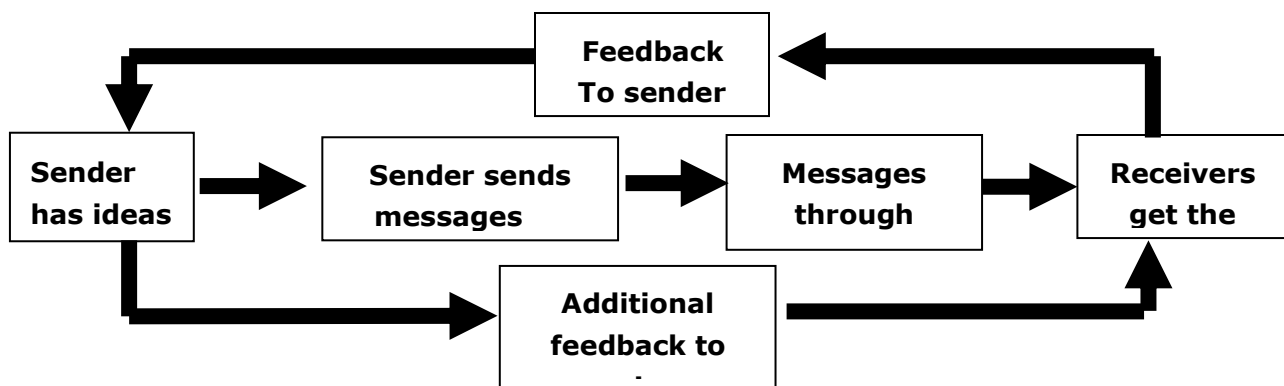

Figure 1. Communication Process

Source: Guffey, et al. (2005), adapted

Adopted from Guffey, et al. (2005) the communication process starts when there is an idea from sender who has to know the impact of the message for the receiver. Thus, sending the message requires the ability to change ideas to be the understandable sentences or forms whatever the channel used to transmit the messages. When the receiver get the messages, miscommunication may happen due to the different perception, experience or background so

the feedback is an important thing in communication to reduce the miscommunication and confirm that all messages are clear for both sender and receiver because both sides have important roles and responsibility for making good communication process.

Communication Channel

The selection of medium to transmit message is very important because of the various choices to use (Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang, 2014). From written to spoken, manual or electronic with computer-devices helps, all the communication channel is used to make the communication flows well and be understood by the receiver. Not only with the customers, but internally the company in this era uses the Internet to disseminate messages to increase the interactivity (Prajova, et al., 2016).

The communication channels must be carefully used because employees with different age ranges may have different ability to access the channels, although chatting and internet-based are still effective (Rehman & Marouf, 2008). So the usage of channels should be controlled to guarantee validity of the messages because without good controls the channels will contra productive as abuse on the shared information may occur (Zondi, et al., 2015).

Listening skill

The effective communication should involve active listening and acquire feedback whereas active listening needs close attention to the message and way the messages conveyed (Longweni & Kroon, 2018). Listening skill, as combination of hearing and psychological involvement to talking person and requires respects and acceptance, is the key to receive messages effectively (Tyagi, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research to understand the communication between superiors and their subordinates in various business settings in Surabaya, Indonesia. The sampling method used is purposive sampling method. Based on the relevancies to the topic, ease to access and readiness to be interviewed, there are 4 medium scale manufacturing companies used in this study. The data used to discuss are media to use in communication, topics of communications, communication ways about change, how the superior builds communication with his/her subordinates and the responses from employees and the observation must get the data to prove if employees' ideas are listened by superiors. The validity and reliability test of the data used triangulation methods by comparing the theories, sources cited and direct observations in the companies. Framework of the study is shown in Figure 2.

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┌─────────────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────────┐
│  Manufacturing company's│──────────────│  Internal Communication │
│      characteristics    │              │                         │
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1. Communication concern in manufacturing companies
2. Communication Process
3. Communication Channel
4. Problems in Communication
5. Listening Skills

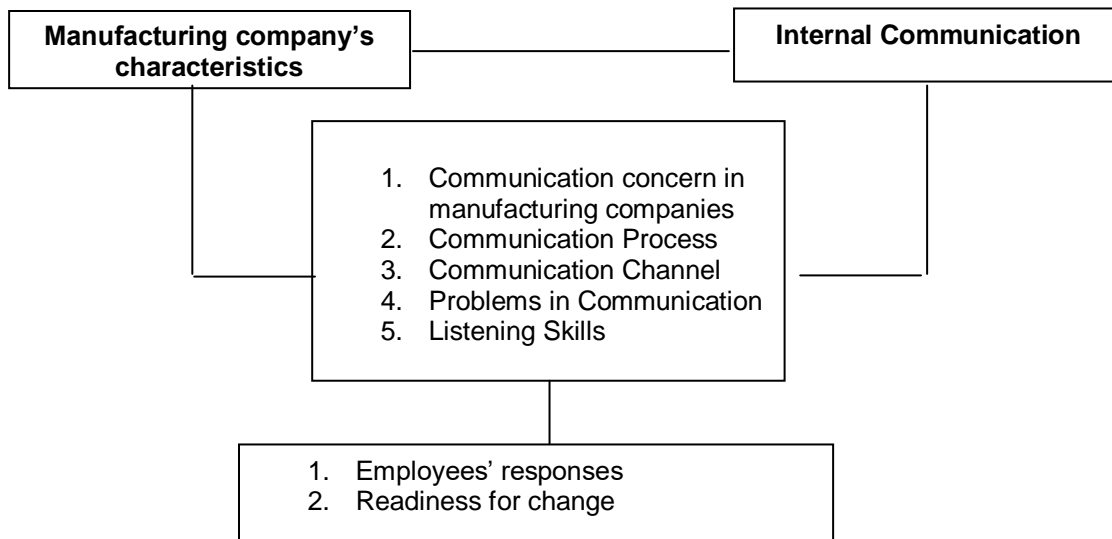1. Employees' responses
2. Readiness for change

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

The framework describes how this study is conducted. Firstly, manufacturing company's characteristics will be explained and related to the issues of internal communication to bear the details such as: communication concern, process, channel, problems and listening skills. The details then are used to explain the employees' responses and readiness for change.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on observation in four manufacturing companies as shown in Table 1, the changes happened in those companies are about the procedures, job description and other management issues. Those changes are proposed to make the works and activities done well and bring better quality of the products they serve to satisfy customers. The issues are linked to the characteristics of manufacturing companies which concern in the quality either process or products.

As the internal communication may arise from top to down level of management, it is also possible to flow from bottom to upper level. While the top-down communication is about job, order or command from superiors to employees, the bottom up one is about the input or ideas from the employees who take in charge in daily activities. Because the manufacturing companies concern in the implementation of total quality management, so without good communication, the expected total quality management is impossible to reach.

Figure 1 shows the communication process which is not only one way pattern but two ways either from sender to receiver or receiver to sender. It is obvious that superior will give order to employees as subordinate by sending message in various applicable channel, but internal communication should involve the employees (lower level of management) to be active

by giving feedback, such as questions, reports, confirmation or explanation, to their superiors to ensure the message sent are clearly understood. The superiors of four companies studied show either direct or indirect way to communicate.

Communication channels used by the superiors in observed companies are all the media by which the employees know and accessible. Emails, memos, letters and the messenger/chat application in mobile phone platform (especially Whatsapps/WA) are used instead of phone calls or SMS. The usage of those channels depends on the importance, urgency and length of the message sent. The fastest way to contact the employees is not only by phone calls but Whatsapps application as well. Most employees in Indonesia use Whatsapps application to communicate. If the message sent is long one, letters or emails are still effective to use. However, the selection of the channels is important because the goal of communication is understanding. It is not about which channel is cheap, but the performance of the channel to deliver the message. The right choice of the channel used will influence the perception of the employees (Rehman & Marouf, 2008).

Table 1 shows the bottom-up communication flow does not appear. The process of good communication needs the two ways communication which both parties are active. Two of the companies have the problems to attract the employees to communicate with the superior because of the perception. The superiors in company 3 and 4 (see Table 1) do not give the employees space to share their ideas or inputs, so the employees in these two companies are not open enough to their superiors. Company 1 and 2 show the willingness of the superiors to gather the information from the employees and even consider the ideas to be implemented.

The problems in communication within the observed companies may arise from the usage of the channels, time, topics, the communication style, and the perceptions of the superiors. The wrong usage of the proper communication channels may create other problems among the employees, especially when the employees are not familiar with the devices or channels used. Even though the channels are ready 24 hours, but the superiors need to understand the time in which their employees are ready to get their messages. Most employees are reluctant to communicate in rest time or when they are at home. The superiors should know that employees are open for job-related topics while they are contacted by superiors in the right time. Non job-related topics are good to share when superiors and employees have time out together in lunch time or other non-formal occasions. The informal topics such as personal ones and the place to talk or communicate, such as within lunch time can help to attract the employees to share the hidden problems at work so the superiors can solve earlier. Two of the observed companies show the lack of trust from the superiors to employees. However trust can

influence the job satisfaction by providing interaction and communication in integrity and honesty (Hassan, et al. 2016).

The hidden communication problem is about the willingness to listen to others. Environments, ambience, and other physical situation can be obviously indicate the readiness of communicators. Listening is not a passive activity because during listening to others talking, the mindset, perceptions and paradigms will process the messages sent by the sender. However, among the superiors, listening is not easy because they think of their position and authorities must be eligible as the senders not receivers. Superiors may ignore the ideas from their employees because they do not want to be steered by employees. Listening skill of the superiors of the companies studied should be improved by eliminating the perceptions, enhancing the frame of references and putting other as the important person.

Table 1. Observation Results

No.	Position/ Dept	Medium of Comm.	Comm. topic	Change communicated	Ways to communicate changes	Employees' perception on ways the leader communicates	Listened ideas
1	Manager/ HRD	WA, Phone calls, verbal, meeting	Job	Organization culture, change in organization structure.	Indirect in small or big meeting.	Employees feel comfortable to work.	Most ideas are listened well by the superiors.
2	Accounting manager/ Accounting	WA, Phone calls, email, verbal, meeting	Job, personal	SOP and job description	Direct	Employees are comfortable as the communication is not only formal but also informal.	Most ideas from employees are listened and executed according to company regulation.
3	Manager/ Factory	WA, line, SMS, Phone calls, email, verbal, meeting, letter, memo	Job, personal	Change in management	Indirect.	Employees are reluctant because the leader often say bad words.	Only some ideas are listened, others are ignored.
4	Manager/ General	WA, line, SMS, Phone calls, email, verbal, meeting, letter memo.	Job	Changes in procedures	Direct to all teams.	Employees are not open enough because the manager does not easily trust the employees.	Ideas and inputs are mostly ignored.

Table 1 shows that the plan of companies to change is about the procedures as responses of rapid change in business situation and tight competition. Manufacturing companies concern in these issues. Thus, management and employees need to discuss problems openly to achieve quality results (Balci, 1998). Resistance to change may happen if the change is not explained and communicated, so in the rapid change situation, manufacturing companies superiors should actively explain the required changes to the employees either in formal or informal ways.

The importance of communication in the workplace is to create the job satisfaction, avoid bigger conflict, improving productivity and relationship (Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang, 2014). Conflict may arise but with the open communication, solution and reconciliation will be faster and better. The job satisfaction is increasing if the employees are trusted and listened while sharing ideas (Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang, 2014). Management of the companies should consider their employees by involving them in the tasks, instead of dealing with the coordination (Bucata & Rizescu, 2017). As the communication may boost the teamwork spirit as well, superiors has to trust and empower their subordinates to improve related things (Balci, 1998).

Two of the observed manufacturing companies (See Table 1) apparently ignore the ideas and other inputs from employees and the employees are resistant to change or not committed to the activities. The rapid business changes requires high participation of the employees by making them feel involved and accepted in any program arranged (Johansson & Heide, 2008). To make the employees feel involved, the superiors can ask for the feedback from employees because the important thing in internal communication is gaining feedback (Zondi, et al., 2015). By gaining feedback, the superiors will get the confirmation whether the changes are understood by the employees or not.

The companies should improve the communication because the poor communication will make the attitude declines and bring negative impact to the performance. One of the principles of organizational communication is that the opinion leaders will change attitude and opinion effectively (Klein, 1996), so the leaders in the respective companies should listen and understand their subordinates well. The direct supervisor is the source of information thus the supervisor has to be communicate well until the employees understand. The good internal communication in manufacturing companies which have large numbers of employees will increase the productivity, loyalty, good collaboration among workers and in the long-term brings the success to the company (Bucata & Rizescu, 2017).

Even though the communication channels vary nowadays, but the face-to-face communication is still the most effective way to create greater impact to the employees' satisfaction and performance (Klein, 1996). The usage of electronic media is helpful to save time but the engagement between superiors and subordinates are not maintained. On the other

hand, the electronic media is also easy to manipulate. The face-to-face communication is important either between individuals or among the groups, so the instruction given is clear for all (Puvanasvaran, et al., 2009). It needs the clear messages spelled from top to bottom or vice versa in the organization especially in manufacturing companies in which the issues occurred because communication as the exchange of ideas through words or symbols among people in company especially in case of the disseminating information related to work performance (Femi, 2014). On the hand, the communication will also enhance the practices of Total Quality Management to increase the quality of management practices and firms performance (Sayyad, 2017). The results of the study can be formed in the new framework as shown in Figure 3.
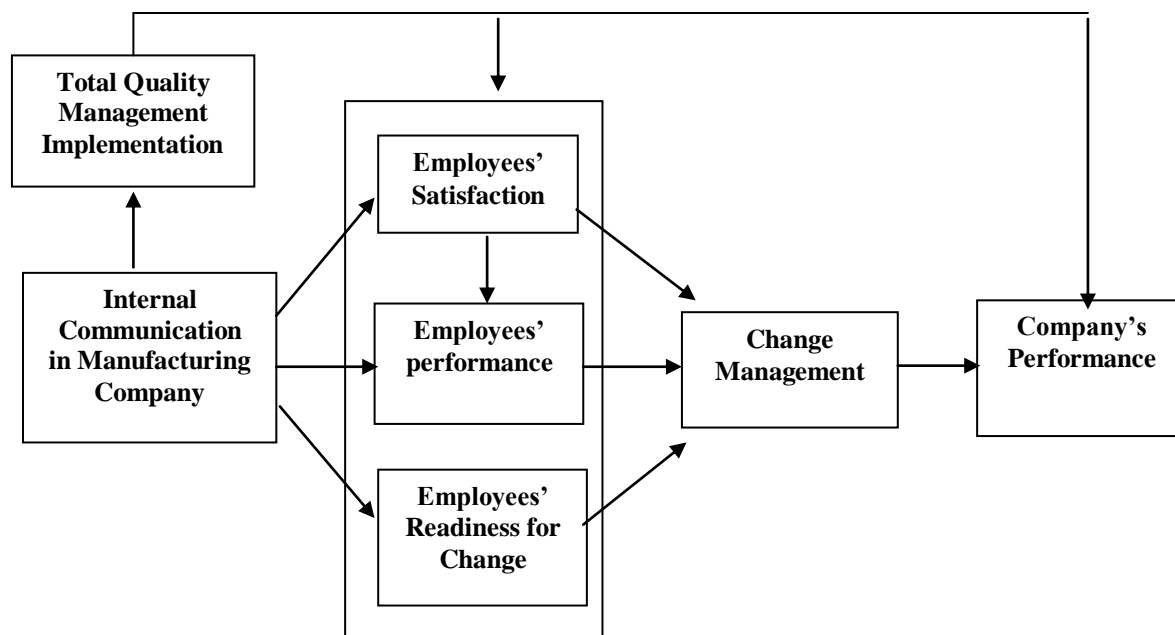

Figure 3. Model of Internal Communication in Manufacturing Companies

Figure 3 shows the importance of internal communication in manufacturing company to influence the implementation of TQM, as the concern of most manufacturing companies. The success of TQM implementation will have impacts to employees' satisfaction, employees' performance and employees' readiness for change meanwhile in the same time, internal communication also boosts those three components. Employees' satisfaction itself, theoretically, influences employees' performance. Employees' satisfaction, performance and readiness for change can support the success of change management which will increase company's performance in the future.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The dynamic type of manufacturing companies with the demand for changes over time, has caused the importance of the communication among the people in manufacturing companies which concern in daily operation total quality management. The successful changes made by top management will only be successful if the top down and bottom-up communication flow well. The ability of top management to listen to ideas from employees and, if possible, implement them will enhance the employees' satisfaction at work. The listened ideas of employees will boost positive responses from them. It makes the process of change management is easier to take place. Manufacturing companies concern in the total quality management implementation, but it requires good communication from superiors to subordinates so that all procedures, rules and standards are clear and understood well by the executors.

The recommendation for the managerial implication from the study suggests the manufacturing company superiors to improve their listening skills. The ideas of employees which are listened by manufacturing companies' superiors will increase their employees' satisfaction at work and performance.

The deeper investigation and observation with quantitative research methodology will be proposed for the further research to examine the transferability of the research finding and the further research can enhance the model by adding some more variables, either control, mediating or moderating variables to enhance the findings such as age, duration of tenure, gender, marital status, manufacturing company culture and other relevant variables.

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