

Communication and Conflict Resolution in the Workplace: Overcoming Barriers in Matrix Coating

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Abstract

Good communication is required to build and maintain mutual relationship in project teams. This is because effective communication can enable a work team to achieve their goals. This stems from the fact that when the employees understand the management expectations and target goals, they will be able to do their work task based on the required standard. Also, effective communication is critical to the success of team work because the ability to work together without issues is determined by conveying the right information at the right. However, despite the crucial role played by effective communication in a productive work environment, it was found that Matrix Coating Resource Sdn Bhd (MCR) often experience communication issues among the workforce and this result to workplace conflict and employee relationship issues. It was on this note that this consultancy project critically examined the communications and employee relationships practices of MCR in order to determine key areas required to improve project tasks completion. A sample of 50 respondents were chosen from the workforce using both interview and questionnaire instruments. The study found that the staff of Matrix often experience communication issues and this leads to disagreements and misunderstanding among the workforce. This is because proper communication using appropriate channel can help to ease both the number and severity of workplace conflicts. Driven by this, it was proposed that the management of Matrix should do well to employ people with solid communication skills because this will allow them to work together cohesively and professionally, address the issue through training exercises and behaviour modeling. It should conduct constant training programmes especially for the new staff so as to improve their ability to communicate clearly and concisely with colleagues and work team members, include communication skills in the appraisal of employees' performance and tie the organization's objectives into performance appraisal so as to achieve the goals of the company and develop team building exercises to strengthen intra-office relationship. This is because high performance teams often become more cohesive overtime as they gain experiences working and communicating with other teams in the workplace. Therefore, exciting activities such as informal networking groups, team exercises and others so as to enable the staff to work together in a cohesive way. The team building process will allow the team members to learn the best ways to work together through team experience without issues.

Key words: Communication, Conflict resolution and Barriers Effective Communication

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Good communication is required to build and maintain mutual relationship in project teams. This is because effective communication can enable a work team to achieve their goals. This stems from the fact that when the employees understand the management expectations and target goals, they will be able to do their work task based on the

required standard. This indicates that it is critical for the managers to clearly convey the goals and performance targets of the company to the staff and the employees also need to understand the intended messages so as to avoid role conflict. Spaho (2011) asserts that good communications are critical to build and maintain effective

employee relationships in the workplace because most work activities are based on how well the workers understand what is expected of them. This indicates when wrong messages are conveyed to the employees, it will make them to do the wrong thing and this will subsequently result to misunderstanding among the workforce as well as lower effectiveness since there is a discrepancy between the intended message and the received message.

Furthermore, an interview with Ms. Thirucheluma Vasegi, the accounting and administration manager of MCR, indicated that the organization often record communication issues among the workforce and this result to workplace conflict and employee relationship issues. According to Ms. Vasegi, a frequent miscommunication and role conflict have become major concerns for the management because lack of effective management of these issues are capable of causing delay in task completion and low productivity. For example, when a task is given to team members, the members may not be sure of who is responsible for which aspects of the tasks to be done. In this case, while certain team members look to clarify their roles, others merely assume that they know what is expected of them and straightaway proceed to their jobs without adequate understanding of the job roles.

The lack of clarification here often leads to misunderstanding and disagreement over who does what and at what time, thereby causing delay in the task completion. For example, a team was assigned to complete a proposal for offshore platforms contract from PETRONAS. However, lack of clarification among the team members led to misunderstanding and this made them to submit the proposal late. Consequently, MCR lost the contract worth RM500 million because of miscommunication and conflict among the team members. The issue of miscommunication here was mainly caused by lack of clarification of the job duties before proceeding down the wrong path.

Consequently, the issue of miscommunications often leads to high workplace conflict, a decline in employees' morale and turnover. For example, Ms. Vasegi indicated that 10% of the employees that voluntarily resigned or get fired do so because of frequent workplace conflicts which were mainly caused by communication issues. Driven by these challenges, this consultancy project intends to explore the issue of communication and its role in workplace conflict and employee relationships so as to enable the company minimize the identified issues and maintain an efficient workplace.

This study critically analyze the communications and employee relationships practices of MCR in order to determine key areas required to improve project tasks completion. By the end of this consultancy project, MCR will benefit significantly from the outcomes. First, the outcome of this consultancy project can offer some insights on the issues of business communication and employee relationships. Secondly, the insights provided from the project will enable MCR's management to detect and remedy the issues relating to communication and relationship so as to enhance the successful completion of project tasks. Thirdly, the project's outcomes can help the organization to improve the employees' interpersonal skills in order to promote mutual relationships among the workforce. Fourthly, the project outcome can help to improve conflict management efforts and this will create a mutual and peaceful workplace environment for improved performance. Finally, the project aims to resolve the communication issues identified in the organization as it proposes proper communication approach to improve relationships among the staff.

Literature review

One view considers communication as the act of sending and receiving messages through symbols. However, another perspective considers communication as the transfer of information from a sender to a receiver under the condition that the

receiver understands the intended message (Spaho 2011). From this context, a workplace communication can be construed as the process whereby employees stimulate meaning in the minds of others either through verbal or non-verbal messages in a formal organizational setting (Richmond et al., 2005). According to this view, it is through communication with other people in the workplace that ideas are developed because most of new ideas are formed through meanings that others stimulate. Also, the definition indicates that workplace communication can occur through spoken form (e.g. face-to-face meetings, group discussions and workshops) or written form (e.g. memos, company letters, emails and others) as well as nonverbal forms such as hand gestures, body movements and facial expressions.

Types of communication in the workplace

Organizational communication occurs in three basic directions such as downward communication, upward communication and horizontal communication.

Downward communication

In this communication system, the information or message flows from the senior management to the lower level employees. The downward communication is more prevalent in an organization with authoritative management style. In the downward communication style, the managers give directions to the employees on what to do and how to do it, inform the workforce about their tasks, the rules and regulations and command compliance from them. However, while the downward communication can enable the management to organize and lead the employees, the effectiveness in motivating the lower level staff may be minimal because they are merely told what to do instead of being included in the decision-making process. Besides, a part of the information sent from the top management may get lost along the way especially when the span of

control (i.e. the number of persons who report to one superior) is wide. A wide span of control occurs when a person oversees several subordinates. This has propelled some organizations to include the upward communication in their management process so as to enhance communication effectiveness (Richmond et al., 2005).

Upward communication

Unlike the downward communication, the upward communication flows from the employees to the senior management team. This occurs in the form of informing the top management about the situation at the lower level. It enables the senior managers to know how well the lower level employees are implementing the management decisions and policies. Also, upward communication occurs in the form of feedback, opinions on proposed policies and decisions and the impressions of the workforce about the organization. It makes sure that the tasks are improved on time and keeps every member on the same track with the common goal of the organization. However, while upward communication enables every member of the organization to participate in the decision-making process, it causes delay on the process of decision-making and this reduces the company's ability to benefit from first-mover advantage (Richmond et al. 2005).

Horizontal communication

In horizontal communication, information flows between employees in the work units and from employees to departments at the same organizational level. The horizontal communication enhances the coordination and integration of work activities among departments. Horizontal communications involve sharing ideas, performing work duties together and solving problems collectively. This is because it attempts to maintain a level of common purpose and

provides a sense of direction. However, horizontal communication can increase potential workplace conflict because interference among departments can generate disagreement among members (Richmond et al., 2005).

The impact of communication issues on the organization

There is no organization without communication because effective communication is required to build good human relations in the workplace and enhance business success. As a result, managers spend most of their time communicating with their employees because how well the staff meets the management standards in terms of task completion and performance depends on their understanding of the expectations and target goals. Argenti (2013) stated that managers use more than 70% of their time to communicate the goals and the expected behaviour with their workers because it helps to build trust among the employees and enhance the goal attainment. Also, more employees are becoming aware of the importance of good communication in the workplace because it forms part of their work process and several work activities cannot be done among team members without effective communication of the various assigned tasks and individual roles (Sabau & Bibu, 2012). For example, when a task is given to a group, the members may not be sure of who is responsible for which aspects of the tasks to be done. In this case, the team leader is expected to clarify the individual roles so as to enable every member to know what is expected of him or her and ensure everybody does his or her work according to plan. However, Spaho (2011) found that while every organization has some forms of communication system, some organizations have bad communication and this often affects the success of the business. This is because good communication is a prerequisite for building and maintaining good employee relations that will guarantee business success. As a result, it was

proposed that business leaders need to be good communicators so as to build trust among their staff and this will subsequently lead to confidence on the organization. Also, Wicks (2016) stated that poor communication in the workplace leads to poor employees' relations because it creates an unfriendly work atmosphere that makes people inefficient and ineffective. However, instead of dealing with the effects of poor communication in the workplace, it is better to identify the root causes and handle them properly.

The drivers of communication issues in the workplace

While effective communication is critical to maintain an efficient workplace, some organizations often experience communication problems that result to employee conflict, a drop in employees' morale and turnover. These issues are caused by several factors including cultural diversity, poor leadership and personal issues.

Cultural diversity

The changes in the demographic structure have made it possible for people from different socio-cultural backgrounds to converge in the same workplace. While the workplace diversity enhances innovation because of the fresh ideas brought into the organization, it increases communication problems among people because of the cross-cultural differences in communication styles. Wicks (2016) stated that workplace diversity proves to be a major cause of poor communication in organizations. This is because different cultures have their own ways of interpreting things. For example, pointing with the index finger may seem normal to Americans while the Asians view it to be rude. The differences in cultural norms cause misunderstandings in the workplace if the organization does not bridge the differences.

Poor Leadership

The five key functions of managers such as planning, organizing, staffing, leading and controlling depend on effective communication. This is because managers cannot give instructions without communication, equipment and supplies cannot be ordered without communication, work progress cannot be measured without communication and products and services cannot be delivered to customers without communication. It is indicated that highly successful business leaders all over the world show the ability to communicate effectively. However, research shows that several employees consider their leaders are lousy communicators and this affects their relationship. For example, some managers' verbal instructions are very dictatorial while their memos sound like the ironclad laws of a tyrant. While the messages may be understood by the employees, they are not well embraced and received by the employees. This is because employees generally like to be treated with respect and dignity. As a result, when managers set authoritative tone and content of communication, it will lead to poor relationship and unsupportive workforce (Conrad, 2014).

Personal issue

While employees are encouraged not to allow their personal life interferes with their work, sometimes it is difficult to separate a person from situations the individual may be facing outside of work and this can cause the employee in question to become distracted. Since a distracted staff is irritable, he or she will wrongfully communicate disrespect and show lack of interests on the job (Wicks, 2016). This indicates that inability to balance between work life and personal life can lead to miscommunication in the workplace.

In conclusion, while effective communication is critical to maintain an efficient workplace, some organizations often experience communication problems that result to poor

employee relation and frequent conflict because of several factors including cultural diversity, poor leadership and personal issues. The next section will discuss the term workplace conflict.

Workplace conflict

Lipsky & Avgar (2010) indicated that workplace conflict is dispute that occurs in the organization. According to this view, workplace conflict is a discord between people in the organization due to perhaps actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests among the workforce. However, Huan and Yazdanifard (2012); Huma (2013) stated that conflict is a situation whereby two or more parties in the organization are in disagreement over the task and the way to complete them. This indicates that workplace conflict can be classified into two broad kinds: when individuals' ideas, decisions or actions concerning directly with the job are in opposition or when two individuals cannot get along very well. There appears to be two types of conflict. While one is the known as task conflict, the other is known as relationship conflict. While task conflict involves disagreements over how to perform a task, the relationship conflict involves disputes among group members and colleagues because of differences in personality and lifestyles. There are two schools of thoughts about workplace conflict: the traditional and the progressive views.

The effect of workplace conflict on the organization

While the traditional perspective of workplace conflict argues that conflict is bad for business and it should be avoid because it is capable of disrupting the efficiency of the workplace, the progressive perspective argues that conflict is inevitable and it has some benefits. From the traditional perspective, the study of Huan and Yazdanifard (2012) indicated that workplace conflict can have a negative effect on the success

of an organization because it can lead to absenteeism and affect employee loyalty. This indicates that unresolved conflicts are capable of negatively impacting the success of a firm. As a result, managements need to learn the best ways to address and manage conflicts in the organization based on the cause and situation and the people involved in the dispute. Driven by the negative perception of workplace conflict among the traditional view, managers often adopt an authoritarian approach in handling conflict. However, the progressive view argues that conflict is unavoidable and if handled properly, it can generate some potential benefits for the organization. According to the progressive view, task conflict can lead to innovation because the differences in views and opinions among a work group can lead to the emergence of new ideas required to enhance performance as indicated by Huan and Yazdanifard (2012); Longe (2015).

The drivers of workplace conflict

Several factors can increase the chances of conflict occurrence in an organization. A review of the literature indicates that workplace conflict can be caused by poor communication, cross-cultural differences and personality differences.

Poor communication

A poor communication among work teams can result to disagreement because when a wrong message is sent, it may lead to conflict among the members. Huan and Yazdanifard (2012) stated that conflict often occurs when two or more people communicate. For example, when a person sends a message and the receiver does not receive the intended message, it can lead to misunderstanding and possibly discord. As a result, conflict can occur when serious issues and anger is invoked in the communication process in an organization. This can occur when one's words or values are misinterpreted or when there is inappropriate,

poorly communicated information sent through the wrong channels to transmit the information.

Cross-cultural differences

The changes in the demographic structure have made it possible for people from different socio-cultural backgrounds to converge in the same workplace. While the workplace diversity enhances performance because of the fresh ideas brought into the organization, it increases workplace conflict among employees because of the cross-cultural differences in cultural norms and communication styles. Wicks (2016) stated that cultural differences in the workplace prove to be a major cause of communication issues in organizations and this subsequently leads to conflicts among people. This is because different cultures have their own ways of interpreting things. As a result, when the values of people are misinterpreted, it can cause discord among workers. This indicates that the differences in cultural norms can cause misunderstandings in the workplace if the organization does not bridge the differences.

Personality differences

While employees are encouraged not to allow their personal life interferes with their work, sometimes it is difficult to separate a person from situations the individual may be facing outside of work and this can cause the employee in question to become distracted. Since a distracted staff is irritable, he or she may engage in behaviour that appear disrespectful to others, thereby causing misunderstanding (Wicks 2016). This indicates that inability to settle personality differences can lead to relationship conflict among team members in the workplace.

In conclusion, while the traditional perspective of workplace conflict argues that conflict is bad for business and it should be avoided because it is capable of disrupting the efficiency of the workplace, the progressive

perspective argues that conflict is inevitable and it has some benefits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample size analysis

The study used 50 staff as the sample size of the sample. This was driven by the fact that the Kuala Lumpur branch of Matrix Coating has the said number of people as the workforce. As a result, the team chose to include the 50 staff from every department in the Kuala Lumpur office because it is relatively small. Besides, the sample size was chosen because it is relatively convenient and it reduces the time and budget required to complete the project. Bryman and Bell (2011) proposed a manageable sample size from the larger population in order to minimize the time and cost involved in completing the study.

Sampling method

The sample was chosen using random sampling method. This involves selecting every employee from all departments in order to obtain in-depth insights on the issues affecting the organization. The random sampling method was chosen due to a number of reasons. First, it enhances chances of generalizing the study's findings to the larger population. This is because every unit of the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected and included in the study. Secondly, random sampling method was chosen because it enhances the representativeness of the population. Sekaran and Bougie (2010) stated that simple random sampling design is the most viable option when the goal of the study is to generalize the outcomes of the study to the whole population.

Data collection instrument

The study utilized both interview and questionnaire instruments in the data collection. Interview was conducted with the staff and the outcome of the interview session was used to design the questionnaire. The mixed data

collection method was driven by the complementary role they play. For example, interview provided in-depth insights on the current issues faced by Matrix while questionnaire provided the opportunity to collect large amount of quantifiable data. Therefore, the use of the two methods is more likely to produce detail reliable outcome from the study. The complimentary relationships between the interview instrument and the questionnaire method motivated the researchers to select the mixed technique of using both questionnaire and interview during the data collection period. Bazeley (2002) confirmed that more studies choose the mixed method because it they complement one another and it generates more validity of the results.

Data analysis technique

Since the study will use questionnaire is one of the data collection instruments, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to compute and analyze the data. The results of the study will be presented using diagrams, charts and tables.

DATA ANALYSIS

Respondents' demographic profile

Table 1 below provides the results of the respondents' demographic data. The results from the nationality profile show that a little above half of the respondents (e.g. 51.2%) are Malays followed by the Indians (e.g. 19.5%). This indicates that about half of the staff working in Matrix Coating Resource Sdn Bhd are people from the Malay ethnic group. The main reason why Malay staff outnumber the other ethnic groups is because the Malays serve as the largest ethnic group in Malaysia as reported by Foon (2016). As a result, the higher employment rate of the Malays in Matrix Company was to meet the labour of the largest population group. Furthermore, the results show that majority of the respondents (e.g. 70.7%) are female staff. The female staff outnumber the

male staff in Matrix Company because there are more qualified females than males in the county.

This stems from the fact that Malaysian universities produce more female graduates than their male counterpart. Kapoor and Au (2011) reported that there is gender imbalance in Malaysia universities with a national average of 65:35 in favour of female undergraduates. Also, Ismail (2015) reported that the ratio of female students enrolled in public universities was 64.8% compared to male students with only 35.2 % and more females had better academic results and performance from their studies. This indicates that the management of Matrix company employed more female staff because the basis of employment is merit in terms of good grades and experience.

Furthermore, the data from the age distribution show that majority of the respondents (e.g. 39%) are within the age bracket of 27 to 32 years old. This indicates that Matrix company seems to have

younger workforce than the older staff. This stems from the fact that most of the staff left school early and got the employment immediate after completing their studies. However, the income distribution show that more than half of the respondents (e.g. 58.5%) earn an average monthly income of RM2, 001 to RM3,000. The income rate is determined by the level of education and the years of working experience. For example, nearly half of the respondents (e.g. 46.3%) are degree holders and above half of the respondents (e.g. 53.7%) have worked in the company for about one to three years. This indicates that the income level of the staff is determined by their education and work experience level. The study of Sadeghi et al. (2012) revealed that people with lower level of degree receive lesser salary in comparison with people with higher level of degree and experience of their employment. Similarly, the study of Wannakrairoj (2013) found that education and experience positively correlated with the wage rate of a person in both urban and rural labor markets.

Table 4.1: Results of the respondents' demographic profile

Demographic variables		Number	Percentage (%)
Nationality	Malay	21	51.2
	Chinese	5	12.2
	Indian	8	19.5
	Others	7	17.1
	Total	41	100
Gender	Female	29	70.7
	Male	12	29.3
	Total	41	100
Age range	21-26 years old	10	24.4
	27-32 years old	16	39
	33-39 years old	8	19.5
	40 and above years	7	17.1
	Total	41	100

Salary	RM1,000 - RM2,000	7	17.1
	RM2,001 – RM3,000	24	58.5
	RM3,001—RM4,000	8	19.5
	Above RM8,000	2	4.9
	Total	41	100
Education	SPM	1	2.4
	Diploma	13	31.7
	Degree	19	46.3
	Master	4	9.8
	Others	4	9.8
	Total	41	100
Marital status	Single	14	34.1
	Married	26	63.4
	Others	1	2.4
	Total	41	100
Experience	Less than a year	7	17.1
	One to three years	22	53.7
	Four to six years	11	26.8
	Others	1	2.4
	Total	41	100

4.2 Workplace communication

Figure 4.1 below shows the results of the respondents' views about their supervisors' listening skills. The results show that nearly half of the respondents (i.e. 43.90%) agreed that their supervisors are very receptive listeners. This is because their supervisors are always ready and willing to listen to their concerns in the workplace. This indicates that majority of the staff in Matrix Coating Resource seem to be contended with their

leaders' listening abilities and this impact on their relation with the management. Richmond et al. (2005) asserted that companies with the upward communication flows system make out time to listen to the lower level when they inform the top management about the situation in the organization. The leaders' ability to listen to the lower level employees enable the senior managers to know how well the policies and decisions of the management are being implemented.

Figure 4.1: Results of the respondents' views on their supervisors' listening skills

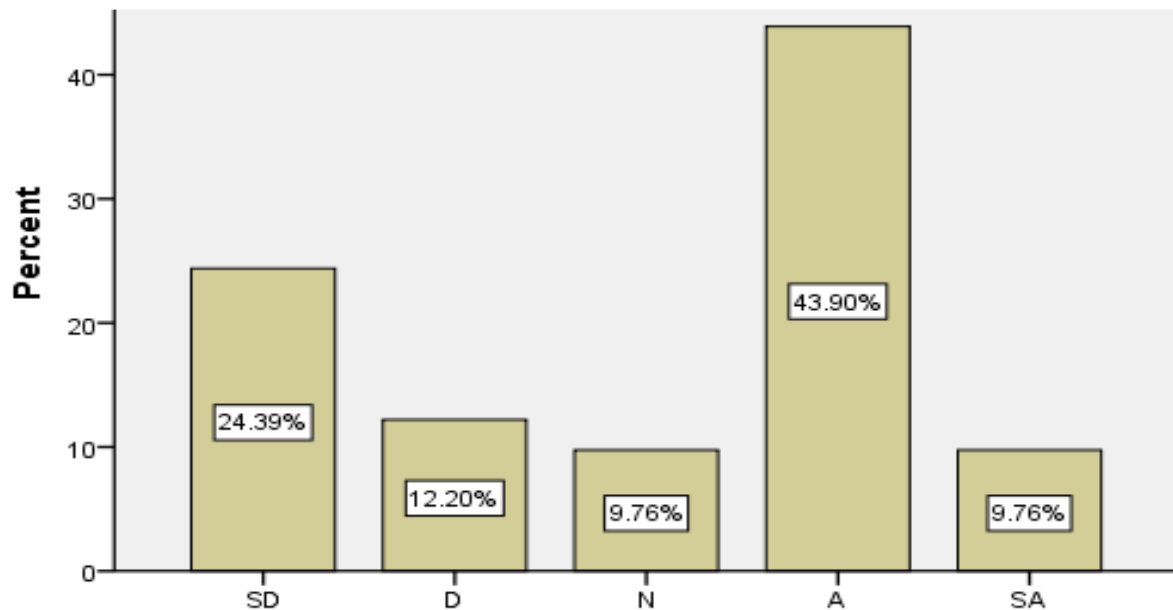


Table 4.2 below shows the results of how effective the work expectations are communicated to the employees in the workplace. According to the results, nearly half of the respondents (i.e. 41.5%) agreed that their work expectations are communicated to them effectively. This means that majority of the staff that work in Matrix Coating understand the goals and targets to be achieved in the workplace because they were told what to do although 24.4% of the respondents disagreed with this claim. This means that some

employees working in the company do not precisely know what is expected from them in the workplace and this would be caused by lack of adequate briefing or communication about the job roles when they were employed. This suggests that there is a breakdown of communication among the staff since some are not very clear with the job expectations and this can lead to conflict of interest because of possible intrusion into other staff's job roles.

Table 4.2: Results of how effective the work expectations are communicated to the employees in the workplace

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	9.8
Disagree	10	24.4
Neutral	8	19.5
Agree	17	41.5
Strongly Agree	2	4.9
Total	41	100.0

Table 4.3 below shows the results of how effective the lower level staff communicate with the upper level management. The results show that majority of the respondents (i.e. 36.6%) disagreed with the claim that there is effective communication between the lower level staff and the upper level management. Thus, there is limited free flow of information especially from the lower level staff to the management and this makes it difficult for the lower level staff to share their ideas or opinions on proposed management policies and decisions. The limited upward communication can be attributed to the fact that the organization adopts and

implements downward communication system whereby the managers give directions to the employees on what to do and how to do without seeking their opinions on issues. Richmond et al. (2005) indicated that while downward communication can enable the management to organize and lead the employees, the effectiveness in motivating the lower level staff may be minimal and part of the information sent from the top management may get lost along the way especially when the span of control (i.e. the number of persons who report to one superior) is wide, thereby creating communication breakdown.

Table 4.3: How effective the lower level staff communicate with the upper level management

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	9	22.0
Disagree	15	36.6
Neutral	4	9.8
Agree	7	17.1
Strongly Agree	6	14.6
Total	41	100.0

Table 4.4 below shows the results on the supervisors' ability to build effective workplace relationship. The results show that nearly half of the respondents (e.g. 41.5%) agreed that their supervisors possess the required skills to build effective relations among the staff although 24%

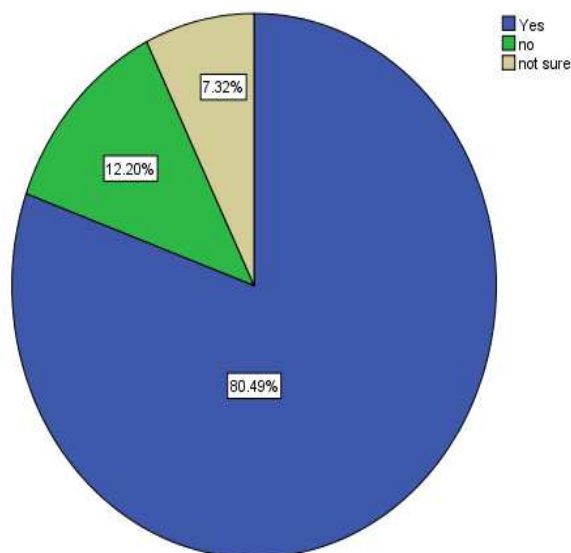
of the respondents seem to disagree with this claim. Since majority of the respondents support the claim, it can be concluded that the management have good ability to build mutual working relationship workforce and this is likely to enhance the success of the firm.

Table 4.4: Results on the supervisors' ability to build effective workplace relationship

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	12.2
Disagree	10	24.4
Neutral	8	19.5
Agree	17	41.5
Strong Agree	1	2.4
Total	41	100.0

Figure 4.2 below shows the results of the effect of communication issues on potential workplace conflict. The results show that majority of the respondents (e.g. 80.49%) indicated that inability to communicate effectively can lead to conflicts among the employees in Matrix Coating Resources. According to this finding, disagreements and misunderstandings can occur among the workers of Matrix when there are communication problems. This is because when a

Figure 4.2: Results of the effect of communication issues on potential workplace conflict



person sends a message, the receiver may receive a different thing and this will affect the chances of mutual working relations. Spaho (2011) found that while every organization has some forms of communication system, some organizations have bad communication and this often affects the success of the business because good communication is a prerequisite for building and maintaining good employee relations that will guarantee business success.

In conclusion, the study found that the supervisors in Matrix company are very receptive and good listeners because they are always ready and willing to listen to the concerns of the employees in the workplace. However, the study further found that there are limited chances of the of the lower level staff to communicate directly with the upper management team because the organization adopts and implements downward communication system whereby the managers give directions to the employees on what to do and how to do them without seeking their opinions on issues.

As a result, this makes it difficult for the lower level staff to share their opinions on proposed management policies and decisions. Furthermore, it was found that some employees working in the company do not precisely know what is expected from them in the workplace because of lack of adequate proper information or

misinformation about the job roles when they were employed. Therefore, there is a breakdown of communication among the staff since some are not very clear with the job expectations and this can lead to conflict of interest because of possible intrusion into other staff's job roles.

Workplace conflict

Figure 4.3 below shows the results on how often conflict occurs in the workplace. As shown in Figure 4.3 below, over half of the respondents indicated that conflict often occurs in Matrix and this is caused by poor communication among work teams which causes disagreement over how things should be done because when a wrong message is sent, it may lead to conflict among the members. The frequent workplace conflict in the organization has high potential of affecting employee relations and subsequently the successful completion of tasks in the workplace because it is capable of disrupting the efficient and smooth working relation of the work teams. Huan and Yazdanifard (2012) indicated that workplace conflict can have a negative effect on the success of an organization because it can lead to absenteeism and affect employee relation and loyalty. This indicates that unresolved conflicts are capable of negatively impacting the success of a firm.

Figure 4.3: Results on how often conflict occurs in the workplace

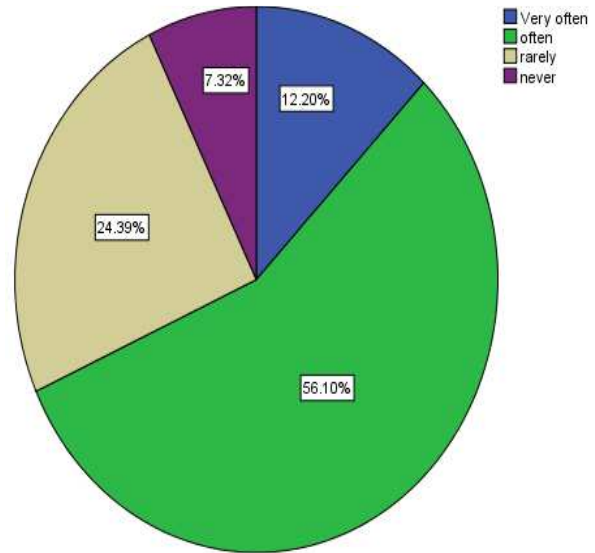


Figure 4.4 below shows the results of the effect of unresolved conflicts on task completion among the employees. The results show that majority of the respondents (e.g. 75.61%) indicated that minor conflicts in terms of disagreements and misunderstandings often occur in the organization because of personality differences, cross-cultural communication issues since the workforce consist of people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds with different cultural norms and values among other reasons. For example, when a person sends a

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message and the receiver does not receive the intended message, it can lead to misunderstanding and possibly discord among the staff. Yazdanifard (2012) claimed that conflict can occur among employees when one's words or values are misinterpreted or when there is inappropriate, poorly communicated information sent through the wrong channels to transmit the information.

Figure 4.4: Results on how often conflict occurs in the workplace

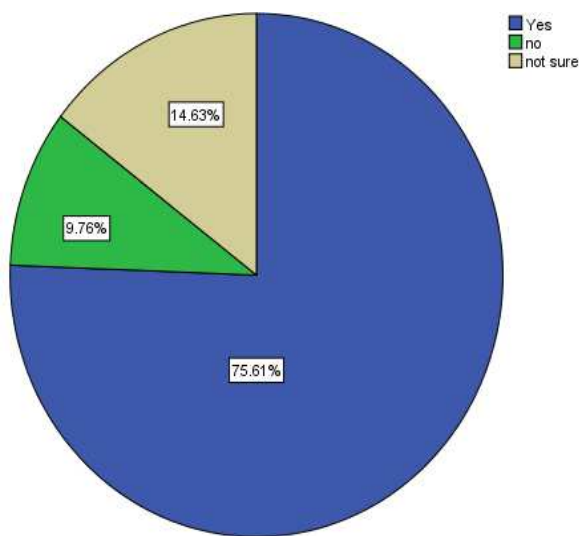


Table 4.5 below shows the results on the possible ways the management employ to handle conflict in Matrix. According to the results, over half of the respondents agreed that the management of Matrix company resolve conflict through structural adjustment. This means reallocating the conflicting parties to different other departments, change the seating arrangement and office space. This indicates that the management of Matrix company perceive conflict as a negative issue that needs to be avoided by any means necessary. Robbins (2000) indicated that conflict among employees can be resolved through structural adjustment by changing the seating patterns and relocation of the parties involved.

Table 4.5: Results of how the management handle conflicts among the staff in Matrix

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	2.4
Disagree	6	14.6
Neutral	6	14.6
Agree	24	58.5
Strongly Agree	4	9.8
Total	41	100.0

Table 4.6 below shows the results on how conflicts among employees can be handled. As shown below, more than half of the respondents

(e.g. 63.4%) agreed that the management of the organization attempts to resolve conflicts in the workplace through effective communication

between the employees and the management. This involves clearly explaining each employee's job roles and tasks especially when the disagreement or misunderstanding is due to conflict of interest among the staff. Myatt (2012) stated that since most conflicts in the workplace are caused by poor communication or the inability to control one's

emotions, conflict can be resolved when the management uses clear, accurate, concise and timely communication of information. This is because proper communication using appropriate channel can help to ease both the number and severity of workplace conflicts.

Table 4.5: Results of how the management handle conflicts among the staff in Matrix

Scales	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	2.4
Disagree	4	9.8
Neutral	6	14.6
Agree	26	63.4
Strongly Agree	4	9.8
Total	41	100.0

In summary, the study found that poor communication among work teams causes disagreements and misunderstanding over how things should be done because when a wrong message is sent, it may lead to conflict among the members. However, it was found that the management of Matrix company attempts to resolve conflict through structural adjustment and explanation of job roles to avoid conflict of interest among staff.

Analysis of the data collected from the interview session

The sample size for the interview was 10 subjects and it comprised of five female and five male employees representing different departments and positions. The interview participants were selected based on their long years of working experience in Matrix as well as their wealth of knowledge about the operations and management of the organization. As a result, the decision to choose the interviewees was based on their ability

to provide useful insights on the communication issues as well as workplace conflict from diverse viewpoints and perspectives and the most appropriate ways to address them. On the communication issues faced by Matrix, it was gathered that the likely communications problems experienced in the workplace are miscommunication, misinformation and misinterpretation of messages as well as typographic errors in some written documents. It was found that some employees exhibit limited ability to engage in a clear and concise communication among team members or between employees and management while other employees show inability to listen to other team members or colleagues. One interviewee said, "There have been few cases of communication problems among some employees especially the new workers who seem to have difficulty in fully expressing themselves although the issue seems to be improving lately". However, another interviewee said, "when a task is given to team

members, the members may not be sure of who is responsible for which aspects of the tasks to be done. In this case, while certain team members look to clarify their roles, others merely assume that they know what is expected of them and straightaway proceed to their jobs without adequate understanding of the job roles". Furthermore, another interviewee said, "inability to listen is a major issue experienced here and it causes communication problems especially among team members". However, another interviewee said, "some people fail to reply messages either on time or completely ignore them and this is a huge problem faced in the workplace". This indicates that there are evidences of communication issues in Matrix company among the employees and this occurs in the form of lack of proper information, poor information or misinformation through either mechanical errors or grammatical errors in written documents due to poor communication skills.

On the causes of communication problems in the work, it was gathered that several factors determine the communication issue in the workplace. These factors range from allowing personal issues to interfere with work, language barriers caused by cross-cultural differences in terms of gestures, facial expressions and others as well as lack of appropriate communication and interpersonal skills especially among the newly recruited staff and lack of feedback. According to one interviewee, "allowing personal life to interfere in one's work can cause communication problems in the workplace". Similarly, another interviewee said, "when an employee becomes distracted, he or she may wrongfully communicate disrespect and show lack of interests on the job". However, another interviewee said, "Some people fail to reply messages either on time or completely ignore them and this causes communication breakdown among team members or colleagues". Furthermore, another interviewee said, "Being an international organization, Matrix employees people from several countries including

Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia and language barriers often become a major cause of poor communication in organization. This is because different cultures have their own ways of interpreting things". This supports the work of Wicks (2016) stated that workplace diversity proves to be a major cause of poor communication in organizations.

Furthermore, it was gathered that workplace conflict is a likely issue that occurs in the organization. This stems from disagreements over what to do and how to do it, discords based on personality differences and other issues. From the interview, it was gathered that conflicts occur among team members especially when there is lack of clarity on the task roles. Two interviewees said, "When a work is assigned to a team and disagreements occur when there is clarity on issues relating to who does what at what time". However, another interviewee said, "Potential sources of conflict include poor communication among people and differences in how people do things in the office". Besides, another interview said, "Disagreements and misunderstands occur due to cultural differences. For example, when one's words or values are misinterpreted or when there is inappropriate, poorly communicated information sent through the wrong channels to transmit the information". This indicates that conflicts that occur in Matrix company are caused by poor communication abilities and differences in personality and cultural values. This supports the study of Huan and Yazdanifard (2012) stated that conflict often occurs when two or more people with different views and backgrounds communicate. For example, when a person sends a message and the receiver does not receive the intended message, it can lead to misunderstanding and possibly discord.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study found that the supervisors in Matrix company are very receptive and good listeners.

This is because the supervisors are always ready and willing to listen to the concerns of the employees in the workplace. Furthermore, it was found that the management have good competence in building mutual working relationship among the workforce and this is likely to enhance the success of the firm. However, the study further found that there are limited chances of the of the lower level staff to communicate directly with the upper management team because the organization adopts and implements downward communication system whereby the managers give directions to the employees on what to do and how to do them without seeking their opinions on issues. As a result, this makes it difficult for the lower level staff to share their opinions on proposed management policies and decisions. As a result, the management does not really know the concerns of the lower level employees and this can affect the morale of the employees. Besides, it was found that inability to communication effectively in the workplace can lead to conflicts among the employees in Matrix. According to this finding, disagreements and misunderstandings often occur among the workers of Matrix due to communication problems. This is because when a person sends a message, the receiver may receive a different thing and this will affect the chances of mutual working relations. Furthermore, it was found that some employees working in the company do not precisely know what is expected from them in the workplace and this would be caused by lack of adequate briefing or communication about the job roles when they were employed. This suggests that there is a breakdown of communication among the staff since some are not very clear with the job expectations and this can lead to conflict of interest, misunderstandings, delay in task completion and other issues. Spaho (2011) found that while every organization has some forms of communication system, some organizations have bad communication and this often affects the

success of the business because good communication is a prerequisite for building and maintaining good employee relations that will guarantee business success.

Furthermore, the study found that poor communication among work teams causes disagreements and misunderstanding over how things should be done because when a wrong message is sent, it may lead to conflict among the members. The frequent workplace conflict in the organization has high potential of affecting employee relations and subsequently the successful completion of tasks in the workplace because it is capable of disrupting the efficient and smooth working relation of the work teams. Huan and Yazdanifard (2012) indicated that workplace conflict can have a negative effect on the success of an organization because it can lead to absenteeism and affect employee relation and loyalty. This indicates that unresolved conflicts are capable of negatively impacting the success of a firm. Also, the study found that disagreements and misunderstandings often occur in the organization because of personality differences, cross-cultural communication issues since the workforce consist of people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds with different cultural norms and values among other reasons. For example, when a person sends a message and the receiver does not receive the intended message, it can lead to misunderstanding and possibly discord among the staff. Huan and Yazdanifard (2012) claimed that conflict can occur among employees when one's words or values are misinterpreted or when there is inappropriate, poorly communicated information sent through the wrong channels to transmit the information.

However, it was found that the management of Matrix company attempts to resolve conflict through structural adjustment. This means reallocating the conflicting parties to different other departments, change the seating arrangement and office space. This indicates that the management of Matrix company perceive

conflict as a negative issue that needs to be avoided by any means necessary. Robbins (2000) indicated that conflict among employees can be resolved through structural adjustment by changing the seating patterns and relocation of the parties involved. Also, it was gathered that the management of the organization attempts to resolve conflicts in the workplace through effective communication between the employees and the management. This involves clearly explaining each employee's job roles and tasks especially when the disagreement or misunderstanding is due to conflict of interest among the staff. Myatt (2012) stated that since most conflicts in the workplace are caused by poor communication or the inability to control one's emotions, conflict can be resolved when the management uses clear, accurate, concise and timely communication of information. This is because proper communication using appropriate channel can help to ease both the number and severity of workplace conflicts.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Recommendation

Having identified the possible communication issues and conflicts in the organization, it is recommended that the management of Matrix should resolve the issues through team building, training and behaviour modeling and open frequent communication skill.

Team building

Team building involves various activities utilized to improve social relations in the workplace through collaborative tasks. Several models and theories have been developed over the years by scholars to improve social relations in the workplace among them include the Team Building Theory developed by Tuckman, and Jensen, (1977). According to the model, the life cycle of every team involves five stages such as forming,

storming, norming, performing and adjourning (refer to Figure 6.1 below for the team building model). The stages progress from a period of inefficiency to uneasiness through to a period of high performance due to cohesiveness of the team members. According to the theory, people are more likely to achieve better results when they work in teams. As a result, it is proposed that the management of Matrix Coating should develop team building exercises to strengthen intra-office relationship. This is because high performance teams often become more cohesive overtime as they gain experiences working and communicating with other teams in the workplace. Therefore, exciting activities such as informal networking groups, team exercises and others should be utilized by the management of Matrix Coating to enable the staff to work together in a cohesive way. The team building process will allow the team members to learn the best ways to work together through team experience without issues.

Forming stage

This stage is characterized with uncertainty and confusion being the starting point of team building. Therefore, the management of Matrix should fully explain and define the goals and responsibilities of the teams so as to enable the team members to get along and work together in harmony. The team leader needs to assign and clearly explain the various roles of the members and ensure that everyone complies with them so as to achieve the desired goal.

Storming stage

The storming stage is characterized with conflicts over how to perform the assigned tasks. The different working styles among the team members often cause unforeseen issues that may lead to frustration. As a result, the management of Matrix Coating can help the various teams working in the company to better work together in harmony so as to achieve the desired goal. First, the management

should clearly explain the desired goals to be achieved by every team and enable every team member to understand exactly the roles and responsibilities. Secondly, the management should provide support of established processes to enable every team to build strong relationship with colleagues.

Norming stage

At this stage, team members start to resolve their differences, appreciate the strengths of other members and respect the authority of the team leader. Having understood each other better, the team members can socialize together and offer help to one another through constructive feedbacks so as to enable each other perform his or her tasks on time. Furthermore, the team members can develop stronger commitment to the actualization of the team goals.

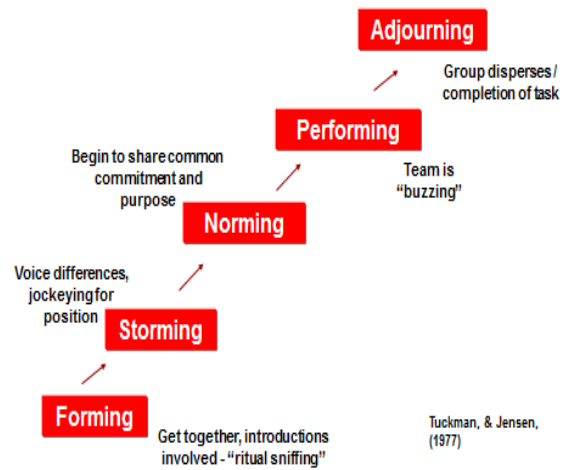
Performing stage

At this stage, the team's commitment and hard work lead to the attainment of the team's goals. This is driven by the structures and processes set by the management and team leadership that support the members. Some works can be delegated to other team members while the leader concentrates on team development.

Adjourning stage

Having achieved the desired goals or completed the project works, the team is disbanded through organizational restructuring.

Figure 6.1: The stages of team building development



Source: Tuckman, and Jensen, (1977)

Training and behaviour modeling

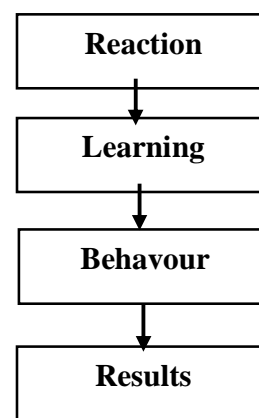
Besides the team building activities, it is proposed that the management of Matrix can address the communication problem through training exercises and behaviour modeling. The management can conduct constant training programmes especially for the new staff so as to improve their ability to communicate clearly and concisely with colleagues and work team members. Furthermore, the training programme can focus on how the employees can work together with others in harmony without much disagreements. To achieve this goal, it is proposed that the management of Matrix Coating should employ the services of leading training specialist organizations in Asia or

around the world to come and train the workforce of Matrix. This will enable the staff to achieve the desired results such as high communication skills, employee relationship skills and other social or people skills required to thrive in the workplace. Furthermore, the management of the organization can often conduct seminars, workshops and others to improve the skills of the workers.

After conducting the various training programmes designed and implemented by the external training specialists, it is suggested that the management of Matrix should use Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model to analyze the effectiveness of the training programme. The Kirkpatrick's model can help the management to objectively analyze the effectiveness of the training programme and determine how well the objectives were achieved or how well the employees of the organization improved on their communication skills, their social skills and other critical skills required to succeed in the company. Figure 2 below shows the Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model. First, the management of Matrix should measure how the employees reacted to the programme after the training. This means determining how well the employees feel about the trainers, the training materials, its presentation and the venue. After conducting the training programme, it is recommended that the management of Matrix measures the employees' reactions to the training so as to enable them understand how well the training was received and identify areas that were not covered. Secondly, the management should measure what the employees have learnt and how much knowledge increased after the training programme. This can be determined by measuring the level of knowledge gained and the objectives set out at the beginning of the training session. Thirdly, the management should determine how well the behaviour of the employees changed after the training programme. This can be measured by determining how better

the employees communicate after the training programme and how well the staff work together without disagreements or misunderstanding. Lastly, the effect of the training programme on the performance of the employees, Matrix Coating and good bottom line will have to be measured.

Figure 6.2: The Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model



Adapted from Kirkpatrick, and Kirkpatrick, (2007)

Open frequent communication system

The management of Matrix should adopt an open and frequent communication system where the lower level staff can communicate and relate with their supervisors and upper level management team. This will enable the senior managers to know how well the lower level employees are implementing the management decisions and policies. At the same time, the open communication systems will enhance free flow of communication between the staff and management because the employees can participate and contribute in the decision-making process. To achieve this, it is proposed that the organization can use emails, create WhatsApp groups where work related information can be shared among the staff or team members, create a Facebook or

Twitter page where the workers of Matrix Coating can communicate freely with the upper level staff so as to build effective employee relationship and enhance performance. Besides the digital communication systems, it is proposed that the management of Matrix Coating can form informal networks in the workplace where the employees can share ideas and provide supports for each other.

Conclusion

While good communication is a prerequisite for building and maintaining mutual relationship in project teams in the company, it was found that the staff of Matrix often experience communication issues and this leads to disagreements and misunderstanding among the workforce. This is because proper communication using appropriate channel can help to ease both the number and severity of workplace conflicts. Driven by this, it was proposed that the management of Matrix should do well to employ people with solid communication skills because this will allow them to work together cohesively and professionally, address the issue through training exercises and behaviour modeling. It should conduct constant training programmes especially for the new staff so as to improve their ability to communicate clearly and concisely with colleagues and work team members, include communication skills in the appraisal of employees' performance and tie the organization's objectives into performance appraisal so as to achieve the goals of the company and develop team building exercises to strengthen intra-office relationship. This is because high performance teams often become more cohesive overtime as they gain experiences working and communicating with other teams in the workplace. Therefore, exciting activities such as informal networking groups, team exercises and others so as to enable the staff to work together in a cohesive way. The team building process will allow the team members to learn the best ways to

work together through team experience without issues.

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