

# COMMUNICATION BARRIER IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When a new employee joins a company, it is the start of a new relationship between employer and employee. Since employer and employee work closely, a development of psychological contract is something inevitable. Managing this relationship is vital to business success, hence the dynamic employer-employee relation should remain strong and mutually reliance (Schreiner, 2019). Simple calculation shows that the bigger the organisation, the harder communication will be between each level of hierarchy. Not only the owner of the business needs to plot and draft proper structure of communication flow, it will not be a smooth sailing journey if the staff or the employee refuse to follow one. The importance of communication is unquestionable in order to sustain good relationships between all parties involved, in this case, employer-employee. Therefore, this article first defines communication and industrial relations in general. Next the article describes communication barriers within the organisation. As a whole, this writing attempts to look into how communication barriers may then lead to a termination of employment.

## 2. COMMUNICATION AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Basic structure of the organisation consists of employer and employee. In some cases, an organisation can also have a union to represent part of the staff by following Industrial Relation Act 1967 and Trade Union Act 1959. Therefore, it is very important to establish a great communication flow to ensure every message can be fully delivered. Universal definition of communication can be explained as a vehicle through which people clarify their expectations and coordinate work, in this industrial context, which allows them to achieve organisational objectives more effectively and efficiently (McSHANE & GLINOW, 2010). One should understand the importance of communication within an organisation. The idea of smooth and clear communication is essential in making sure no misunderstanding happens which later causes bedlam. Employers should know how and what is the best way to deliver news or information to employees or unions per say. Same goes for employees or unions who should be able to express their needs and thoughts politely without neglecting to always be respectful. Most of the time, problems arise when employers fail to let employees know about the situation perfectly before any decision has been made which may jeopardise employee position. For example, when an employer decides they need to downsize, a clear memo and town hall should be given accordingly due time in making sure the message clearly be transmitted to the employee. The idea is to minimize or possibly eliminate any

unresolved issue or misunderstanding. No doubt that the company belongs to the owner, some of them may be in the top management position, however, that does not mean that the employer can simply make one rush decision without proper communication being channelled. In order to promote good industrial harmony practice, being transparent to the employee is really important.

Same goes to a situation between employer and union representing an employee. Most cases being raised are due to failing to properly communicate. As communication involves two parties, one to give out information and the other to receive, problems occur when neither party is willing to listen and act. Most of the time, both parties decide to defend their own point without giving a try to first listen and place themselves to understand the situation. This kind of stern environment will only make things worse with no solutions can be reached.

In the case of MOHD ZULKIFLI MOHD JUSOH V. HYUNDAI ENGINEERING MALAYSIA SDN BHD, the claimant mentioned that the company had severed ties and refused to engage in any communication with claimant. Also expressed by the claimant that he made various attempts to contact the company and or its officers to enquire regarding his employment status but there were no responses from the company. As a result, the judge ruled that company's action of terminating the claimant was without just cause or excuses which resulted to claimant been awarded to backwages in the sum of RM37,500 (MOHD ZULKIFLI MOHD JUSOH v. HYUNDAI ENGINEERING MALAYSIA SDN BHD, 2021).

Refusing to communicate may lead to misunderstanding that might jeopardise one's employment. As per in the case of WAN MOHAMAD AFFANDI WAN MOHD OSMAN v. MALAYSIA SHIPYARD AND ENGINEERING SDN BHD, the claimant refused to discuss with the employer when there were changes to make the situation better. Regardless of effort given by the employer to have decent talk with regards to the case with claimant, no response received as later claimant claimed for Constructive Dismissal. This case been dismissed by the court as the claimant to prove on a balance of probability that he was constructively dismissed by the company (WAN MOHAMAD AFFANDI WAN MOHD OSMAN v. MALAYSIA SHIPYARD AND ENGINEERING SDN BHD, 2009). Only if proper communication takes place, termination or the idea of constructive dismissal may not be in a picture.

## 2.1 COMMUNICATION BARRIERS WITHIN ORGANISATION

It is believed that a company works under the idea of Goal Improvement whereby companies always look forward to making positive change within the organisation. As part of developing a company, two hub threads need to be focused; 1) the learning of individuals and organisation, and 2) the performance of individuals and organisation (Mohammad Shahhosseini, 2012). This includes attaining expertise and developing excellent quality both in product or business given as well as relationship between all stakeholders. Industrial Relations focus mainly to promote a harmonious environment in the company. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge any noise which will block communication. Failing to decode feedback from the sender will be one of the first problems in communication. In the field of Industrial Relations, failure to communicate will lead to numerous problems and the worst can be termination of employment. As communication should aid employee well-being, it can also help the employer to understand the needs and situations better. Not only that, through communication, one can express and validate their self-worth within the organisation.

Communication barrier may come from both ends, employer or employee. As most can easily see employees flawed whenever arguments or problems arise, having an eagle view will lead you to understand that it is also possible for an employer to first build this barrier. An article from Inc. suggests that of employee who strongly agree that their manager focuses on their strengths, 67% are engaged at work. Among those that strongly disagree, 71% report that they are actively disengaged (PATEL, 2017). From here it shows that poor communication leads to a low level of engagement between employer-employee. If communication is not effectively delivered to the employee, it will definitely affect the element of loyalty, productivity and retention. In communication, clarity is key and trust is crucial.

Most of the time, employees are unable to express and seek the help they need in order to succeed. For some reason, employees believe it is something the employer should be able to see and provide the help without been expressed verbally by the employee. This stigma needs to be changed. Employees need to be able to seek help on how to do the work. It is not fair to blame the employer entirely if they fail to recognise an employee's need as the employer has a bigger plate to serve. Therefore, being the first to go and ask help will allow the employer to prepare all the training or any other suitable solution to help resolve the problem.

The company should be able to provide a sound and fair platform for the workers to discuss whenever they need. Infuse the sense of belonging within the employee towards the organisation. By doing so, employers can have better comprehension of how the employee views the company. Return of Investment in this will be a success of the organisation as a

whole. When it comes to communication barriers, the noise comes in many forms. As from the employer, one may feel no need to share the updates with employees under many circumstances. Information too personal to be exposed, limited time for discussion, rushed decisions made to save the organisation, or too hard for employees to digest are among the reasons why communication from top management has hardly been transmitted to lower management. As per employee, one hardly listens to the explanation given by the employer which puts the employee out of the chain of communication. Employees would think that they have rights to ask for whatever they wish without giving in depth thoughts of the situation. The habit of easily jumping into conclusions may also be one of the main barriers in communication within industrial relations.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

There is no manual in knowing which is right and which is wrong in an employer-employee relationship. Hence, how can one help to curb as solving communication barriers entirely may not be an objective aim to this. Termination is inevitable but the impact can be greatly reduced if it has been handled properly, especially when the communication element has been highly focused. A survey from Airtasker shows that employers have terminated an employee from a job mainly due to attitude issues (57%) and personality issues (41%) before other reasons (Airtasker, 2019). Therefore, looking back to the basic idea of recognising each and every one's roles may help improve this problem. By knowing the role of the employer, one can help to make use of the power they have to build a better environment. As for employees, recognise and respect the employer by actively listening to them. Listen here in the sense of trying to understand a company's situation or performance before coming up with demands. Either side can be hard to work with if both decide to stick and only think that they have the best solution for the situation. It is important to stand and understand that companies need employees to work on achieving goals and employees need companies to provide better pay for better life. Without eliminating noise that might disturb the communication, industrial harmony may not be in the picture. All stakeholders should apprehend the power of communication to lead the better direction of a company. Either to be at the top performing and achieving the best which can provide better return to everyone, or, be at the place where job security is at risk and no proper direction has been given and followed. Nevertheless, this is still an issue which needs a lot more study as different scenarios may bring different conclusions to draw with. As a conclusion, recognising a communication barrier and trying to minimise the impact is a job for all

stakeholders in making sure exact information has been transferred appropriately in order to expect good reception from another end.

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