RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERVISOR-SUBORDINATE COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN KUCHING, SARAWAK.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science (Human Resource Development)

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
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DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree at another university or institute of higher learning.

Ling Siew Yeong
DEDICATION

To my dedicated and supportive parents,
  Ling Kok Luan & Ngo Chiew Yeong,

To my loving god daughter,
  Aliza Binti Tajudin,

To my beloved, caring and supportive brothers and sisters,
  Seng Wah, Siew Lin, Siew Fern, Seng Yeow,

And all those that have sacrificed for this success.

Thank You

&

God Bless You All
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE PAGE</th>
<th>DECLARATION</th>
<th>DEDICATION</th>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>ABSTRAK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction  
1.1 Background of the Study  
1.2 Statement of the Problem  
1.3 Research Objectives  
1.4 Conceptual Framework  
1.5 Research Hypothesis  
1.6 Significance of the Study  
1.7 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Terms  
1.7.1 Communication  
1.7.2 Supervisor  
1.7.3 Subordinate  
1.7.4 Supervisor-Subordinate Communication  
1.7.5 Organizational Commitment  
1.8 Scope and Delimitation of the Study  

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction  
2.1 Theories Related to Organizational Communication  
2.1.1 Classical Theory  
2.1.2 Humanistic Theory  
2.1.3 Systems Theory  
2.2 Organizational Communication  
2.2.1 Components of Communication Process  
2.2.2 Communication Pattern  
2.2.3 Communication Climate  
2.3 Interpersonal Communication
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Research Design
3.2 Location of Study
3.3 Population and Sample
3.4 Instrument
3.4.1 Part A: Respondents' Demography
3.4.2 Part B: Supervisor-Subordinate Communication
3.4.3 Part C: Sources and Channels of Information
3.4.4 Part D: Organizational Commitment
3.5 Respondents
3.6 Procedure
3.7 Data Collection
3.8 Pilot Study
3.9 Data Analysis
3.9.1 Descriptive Statistics
3.9.2 Inferential Statistics
3.10 Summary

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Supervisor-Subordinate Communication
4.2 The Differences in Employees' Level of Perception Toward Supervisor-Subordinate Communication by Demography Variables
4.2.1 Level of Perception Toward Supervisor-Subordinate Communication by Gender
4.2.2 Level of Perception Toward Supervisor-Subordinate Communication by Length of Service
4.2.3 Level of Perception Toward Supervisor-Subordinate Communication by Monthly Income
4.2.4 Level of Perception Toward Supervisor-Subordinate Communication by
4.3 Communication Pattern

4.3.1 Downward Communication

4.3.2 Sources of Information Received

4.3.3 Upward Communication

4.3.4 Channels of Information Sent

4.4 Organizational Commitment

4.5 The Differences of Employees' Organizational Commitment by Demographic Variables

4.5.1 Commitment Level by Gender

4.5.2 Commitment Level by Length of Service

4.5.3 Commitment Level by Monthly Income

4.5.4 Commitment Level by Education Level

4.6 Relationship Between Organizational Commitment Level and the Six Factors of Supervisor-Subordinate Communication

4.7 Discriminant Analysis - Predictor(s) of Employees' Organizational Commitment

4.8 Summary

4.9 Discussion

4.9.1 Objective One: Level of Perception Toward Supervisor-Subordinate Communication by Demography Variables

4.9.2 Objective Two: Communication Patterns

4.9.3 Objective Three: Commitment Level by Demography Variables

4.9.4 Objective Four: Relationship Between Commitment and Supervisor-Subordinate Communication

4.9.5 Objective Five: Predictor(s) of Organizational Commitment

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Summary of the Study

5.2 Conclusions

5.3 Implication

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Organizations Concerned

5.4.2 Future Research
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Distribution of Items for Supervisor-Subordinate Communication</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Degree of Response</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Interpretation of Score for Level of Perception Toward Supervisor-</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subordinate Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Distribution of Items Based on Dimensions of Commitment</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Distribution of Items Based on Types of Statements</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Interpretation of Scores for Level of Commitment</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Schedule of Distribution and Collection of Questionnaire and</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample Distribution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Alpha Value and Its Adjusted Value – Communication Audit</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Alpha Value and Its Adjusted Value – Mendes’ Measurement</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>Alpha Value and Its Adjusted Value – Porter’s Measurement</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>Statistical Test for Each Objective</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>Conventions for Describing ‘r’ Values</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Distribution of Respondents by Level of Their Perception</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toward Supervisor-Subordinate Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Independent t-test for Level of Perception Toward</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor-Subordinate Communication by Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>One-way ANOVA Between Level of Perception Toward</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor-Subordinate Communication and Length of Service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>One-way ANOVA Between Level of Perception Toward</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor-Subordinate Communication and Monthly Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>One-way ANOVA Between Level of Perception Toward</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisor-Subordinate Communication and Education Level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>The Communication Patterns of Downward Communication</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Sources of Information Received</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>The Communication Patterns of Upward Communication</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Channels of Information Sent</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Distribution of Respondents by Level of Their Organizational</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Frequency of Commitment Level by Gender</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Organizational Commitment

4.11 Frequency of Commitment Level by Gender

4.12 Independent t-test for Commitment Level by Gender

4.13 Frequency of Commitment Level by Length of Service

4.14 One-way ANOVA Between Commitment Level and Length of Service

4.15 Frequency of Commitment Level by Monthly Income

4.16 One-way ANOVA Between Commitment Level and Monthly Income

4.17 Frequency of Commitment Level by Education Level

4.18 One-way ANOVA Between Commitment Level and Education Level

4.19 Pearson Correlation Between Organizational Commitment (DV) and the Six Factors of Supervisor-Subordinate Communication (IVs)

4.20 Stepwise Multiple Regression – Model Summary

4.21 Summary of Test of Hypotheses
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Research framework modified from Model of Personally, Environmental Situation and Behavioral Outcomes (Johnston, 1974)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Systems theory uses concepts of interdependency, synergy and environment to organizational behavior (O'Hair, Friedrich &amp; Shaver, 1998)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Model of the communication process (Hanna &amp; Wilson, 1991)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>The formation of communication climate (O'Hair, Friedrich &amp; Shaver, 1998)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Sliding scale (Stewart &amp; Logan, 1998)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Management commitment process (DeCotiis &amp; Jenkins, 1995)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

This study investigated the significant relationship between supervisor-subordinate factors and commitment among the employees in hotel industry in Kuching, Sarawak. In addition, the study also attempts to determine if there are differences in the level of perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication and level of commitment based on the demographic characteristics of the employees. The demographic characteristics investigated are gender, length of service, monthly income and education level. The sample consists of 212 employees from fourteen hotels in Kuching. The employees perceive that they have a moderate level of both, perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication and organizational commitment. There are significant differences in perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication by length of service and monthly income, and also organizational commitment level by monthly income. The study also describes the quantity of communication pattern in organization, included types of information, sources for receiving and channels for sending information. The findings show that there is a significant relationship between various factors of supervisor-subordinate communication and organizational commitment at the significant level of .01, such as trust (r = .43), openness (r = .42), participation (r = .40), downward communication (r = .39), support (r = .29), upward communication (r = .28). None of the supervisor-subordinate communication factors is the dominant predictor of organizational commitment, however trust (19 %), downward communication (4 %) and openness (2 %) contribute 25 % of the variance of organizational commitment.
ABSTRAK

Kajian yang bertajuk 'Hubungan antara komunikasi penyelia-pekerja dengan komitmen organisasi di industri hotel di Kuching, Sarawak' ini meninjau hubungan yang signifikan antara faktor komunikasi penyelia-pekerja dengan komitmen di kalangan pekerja hotel. Kajian ini juga meneroka samada terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara ciri-ciri demografik dengan tahap persepsi terhadap komunikasi penyelia-pekerja, dan tahap komitmen organisasi. Pekerja mempunyai tahap persepsi yang sederhana terhadap kedua-dua komunikasi penyelia-pekerja dan komitmen organisasi. Terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara persepsi terhadap komunikasi penyelia-pekerja dengan tempoh perkhidmatan dan pendapatan bulanan, begitu juga bagi komitmen organisasi dan pendapatan bulanan. Kajian juga menguraikan kuantiti bagi corak komunikasi di organisasi, termasuk jenis maklumat, sumber menerima dan saluran mengirim maklumat. Hubungan yang signifikan juga wujud di antara semua faktor komunikasi penyelia-pekerja dengan komitmen organisasi pada tahap signifikan .01, iaitu kepercayaan (r = .43), keterbukaan (r = .42), penglibatan (r = .40), komunikasi ke bawah (r = .39), sokongan (r = .29), komunikasi ke atas (r = .28). Tidak sebarang faktor bagi komunikasi penyelia-pekerja merupakan prediktor yang dominan bagi komitmen organisasi, walau bagaimanapun kepercayaan, komunikasi ke bawah dan keterbukaan menyumbang sejumlah 25% terhadap perbezaan bagi komitmen organisasi.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Tourism development is one of the major strategies chosen by the government to diversify the nation's economy. Undoubtedly tourism activities are facilitated by it's complementary and supportive subsector, that is, the hotel industry (Norulazidah, 1998). Being a labor-intensive and people-oriented sector, the hotel industry also contributes toward the nation’s economy as one of the biggest employers in Malaysia.

Hotel industry is sensitive to changes in the economy and business cycles like recessions, booms, downsizing or reengineering (Rutherford, 1995). The cyclical nature of the international economies has recently had a significant impact on the hotel industry, the ability to respond to changing circumstances. Research has revealed that the social process, which is concerned with human beings in their relations to each other, enhances employee adaptability towards the change process. During this substantive context of turbulent change, effective communication of desired message is crucial in reducing employee uncertainty and improve their attitudes toward the change process (Parry, 1999).

In the labor-intensive sector, communication has a very high priority. General manager delegates duties to a large and diverse number of subordinates by sending the message or instruction to ensure that each unit is well functioned. At the same time, the general manager must continually be kept informed of their subordinates in order to keep his 'finger on the pulse' of the hotel. This shows the importance of a two-way communication in the service organization. Today organizations are information rich and increasingly 'high-tech' and the employee still drive the organizational system. If people are well-blend with the organizational objectives and fellow employee commit their talents and energies to create high performance organizations, they must excel at interpersonal communication (Schermerhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2000).

Interaction between supervisors and subordinates is one of the categories of interpersonal communication. Supervisor-subordinate communication is a two-way street and a supervisor cannot be successful alone, both supervisor and subordinate must work hard to create supportive association and maintain the good relationship. Obviously, the supervisors are in the best position to set the tone for the relationship since they have higher status by virtue of their position (Trenholm & Jensen, 1992).

The most prevalent form of all work relationships is the one between supervisors and subordinates, especially in a labor-intensive sector. This relationship develops within a communication climate, which is produced from the behaviors and attitudes of all supervisors and subordinates. The patterns of communication and personal characteristics are the main factors contributing to this climate. These factors will then influence the employees' job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Since the real value of organizational commitment is in its capacity to facilitate change (Riley, 1996), therefore the strongly committed employees are the core of excellent operations in the hotel industry (DeCotiis & Jenkins, 1995).
1.1 Background of the Study

During the transition period such as mergers and acquisitions (Isabella, 1990 cited by Kramer, 1996), the hotel industry, which is sensitive to economic cycles, has to undergo restructuring and reorganizing processes in order to balance the need for stability and change. Organizing is a multi-step process (Dale, 1967 cited by Rutherford, 1995), it combines the sub-work into a unified and harmonious whole through the mechanism of coordinating and monitoring. This is obvious in the hotel organization that encompasses various departments like Front Office Department, Housekeeping/Engineering/Security Department, Food and Beverage Department and so on. Moreover, hotel industry is a people-oriented industry or labor-intensive sector and poor communication is a barrier in implementing change (Muhamad Bustaman, 1998). Therefore, it is crucial and critical to communicate effectively with employees to motivate them, to supervise them and to work with them in order to achieve greater overall performance results. Supervision is a people-oriented profession (Humphrey & Stokes, 2000), and communication is the most important professional tool that the 21st century supervisor will possess.

Fast-paced and competitive, the hotel industry is sensitive to changes. Committed employees play an important role in helping to compete more effectively in good times and react to adverse conditions when things turn bad. This study examines the supervisor-subordinate communication practices, as a fundamental management task in the hotel industry, as an influence over the employees’ commitment over their job performance or social relationship.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Communication among members provides vital information for the organization, and it is the process through which information flows throughout an organization. Unfortunately, study has revealed that communication is not done very well in most organization. It seemed to be the most common problem confronting the managers and is identified as a major organizational weakness. In addition, Andrew and Braid identified causes of communication failure, such as one-way direction; not responsive to employee needs; and poor communication skills. These problems are due to the low profile of communication competency training and the ability to communicate effectively with colleagues is typically taken for granted.

In fact, human beings often cannot understand each other, probably it is due to the individual differences in mental constructions about the world surrounding us. So, efforts must be taken to have a shared information among the members in an organization, in order to achieve the same goals. This effort is essential because supervisors or managers cannot do the job of their unit without the cooperation of subordinates or employees. Unfortunately, developing positive supervisor-subordinate communication is frequently neglected in the quest for increased productivity.

Hotels experienced fairly substantial in labor turnover rates due to the cyclical nature of the business, low wage rate (low-skilled jobs and relatively labor-intensive), part-time work, new entrants into the labor force and high stress level. High employee turnover has a negative impact on organization related to productivity, the standard of quality and service. A major cause of high employee turnover is low job commitment. Besides,
Introduction

Miscommunication or poor communication has caused the growing dissatisfaction and the feeling of being less committed toward their organization.

Literature research show that both communication and commitment are two of the key factors in improving service delivery, increasing productivity and gaining the competitive edge, especially in the hotel industry. Thus, to understand how supervisor-subordinate communication creates positive and conducive climate and to what extent the effort will enhance organizational commitment among the employees in the hotel industry, is the purpose for this study.

This study will try to find answers to the following general research questions:

1. What is the perception of the employees towards their supervisor-subordinate communication in their organization?
2. Are the employees committed towards their organization?
3. Do employees’ demographic characteristics influence their perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication and commitment toward their organization?
4. Does the employees’ perception of their supervisor-subordinate communication influence their commitment towards their organization?

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to determine whether employees’ perception towards their supervisor-subordinate communication has any relationship with their organizational commitment and the factors that influence the organizational commitment. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To determine if there are any significant differences in employees’ perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication of different backgrounds (gender, length of service, monthly service, education level).
2. To describe the communication patterns in the organization.
3. To determine if there are any significant differences in employees’ organizational commitment of different backgrounds (gender, length of service, monthly service, education level).
4. To determine the significant relationship that exists between employees’ commitment and supervisor-subordinate communication.
5. To determine the factor related to supervisor-subordinate communication that is the most dominant in influencing employees’ commitment.
1.4 Conceptual Framework

The framework shown in Figure 1.1 is used to determine the relationship between supervisor-subordinate communication and employees' organizational commitment in the hotel industry. It also determines how the demographic characteristics of hotel employees influence their commitment towards the hotel organization.

Supervisor-subordinate communication is the independent variable in this study. It consists of two categories of variables: (a) Communication patterns, composed of downward communication and upward communication; (b) Communication climate, composed of supervisor-subordinate's trust, supervisor-subordinate's openness, supervisor's support and subordinate's participation. Each factor was tested against the organizational commitment, that is the dependent variable.
The selected demographic characteristics, which include gender, length of service, monthly income and education level, was tested to see their influences on the perception toward the supervisor-subordinate communication and organizational commitment. Finally, the most dominant factor that influences the employees' organizational commitment was determined.

1.5 Research Hypothesis

From the conceptual framework discussed above, fifteen null hypotheses are developed for this research. They are as follows:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between male and female employees in terms of their perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between employees of various lengths of service in terms of their perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between employees of various monthly incomes in terms of their perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference between employees of various education levels in terms of their perception toward supervisor-subordinate communication.

H₀₅: There is no significant difference between male and female employees in terms of their organizational commitment.

H₀₆: There is no significant difference between employees of various lengths of service in terms of their organizational commitment.

H₀₇: There is no significant difference between employees of various monthly incomes in terms of their organizational commitment.

H₀₈: There is no significant difference between employees of various education levels in terms of their organizational commitment.

H₀₉: There is no significant relationship between employees' organizational commitment and downward communication.

H₁₀: There is no significant relationship between employees' organizational commitment and upward communication.

H₁₁: There is no significant relationship between employees' organizational commitment and supervisor-subordinate trust.

H₁₂: There is no significant relationship between employees' organizational commitment and supervisor-subordinate openness.

H₁₃: There is no significant relationship between employees' organizational commitment and supervisor's support.

H₁₄: There is no significant relationship between employees' organizational commitment and subordinate's participation.

H₁₅: None of the supervisor-subordinate communication factors (downward communication, upward communication, trust, openness, support, participation) is the dominant predictor of employees' organizational commitment.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study attempts to provide organizations with some insight into the aspect of communication between supervisors and subordinates, and its relationship with employees' organizational commitment.
Previous studies have shown that, in general, different levels of leaders, such as executive, director, manager and supervisor, spent at least 70 percent of their time in all types of communication (Humphrey & Stokes, 2000; Diwan, 1999; Andrew & Baird, 1992; both Kotter, 1982 & Mintzberg, 1975 cited by Nebel, 1991; Sigband & Bell, 1989), while supervisors spent one- to two-thirds of their time in direct communication with their subordinates, specifically (Trenholm & Jensen, 1992; Jablin, 1987). Since communication consumes most of the working time, just imagine how significant is its impact on organizations if communication is to be improved. Thus, it attracts the interest of the researcher to investigate the influence(s) of this ‘people skill’ on the employees’ organizational commitment.

From the organization perspective, this study tries to uncover the existing communication patterns and climate between the supervisor and the subordinate and to what extent they really influence the employees’ organizational commitment. In other words, this study reveals what is lacking in the hotel organizations and what they have neglected in their daily practices. Hence, human resource management will take the appropriate steps and efforts (Kim Hoque, 1999) to create the members’ awareness about the importance of interpersonal communication in general, and supervisor-subordinate communication in particular, or provide training to help them to master the communication skills or the ‘people skills’. This is vital in the hotel industry which is highly ‘people-oriented’. Hopefully, these skills will improve the flow of communication between supervisors and subordinates, and produce a positive communication climate which, in turn, will enhance and sustain employees’ commitment toward the organization.

From the supervision perspective, this study may provide some guidelines for supervisors to read the employees’ communication needs, and adjust their personal interactions with employees in order to enhance effective and enjoyable communication between them. On the whole, the study enables the management to seek ways and alternatives to fulfil the employees’ communication needs, from the micro perspective, as well as, to develop and establish a strategy to achieve the important organization goals, from the macro perspective.

1.7 Conceptual and Operational Definition of Terms

The purpose of a definition is to set boundaries and to focus attention (Trenholm & Jensen, 1992). The following terminology used in this study are defined conceptually and operationally.

1.7.1 Communication

Many definitions of communication have been formulated, providing different insight. Obviously, communication is a complex process to be described or defined. Trenholm and Jensen (1993) view communication from a more social perspective and define that communication is the process whereby humans collectively create and regulate social reality. It is a dynamic, ongoing process, having no beginning and no end. The focus here is that communication is not a thing that is static. “Collectively”, indicates that the relationship between human society and human communication is circular, that is, to act as a coordinated whole (with common sharing). And the by-product is human creativity. “Regulate social reality” means that communication is a powerful regulator of action, by means of persuading, dissuading, angering, hurting, comforting, soothing, entertaining.
In this study, the researcher views communication as based on the transactional approach (Wilbur Schramm, 1983 cited by Myers & Myers, 1992):

Communication is now seen as a transaction in which both parties (supervisor and subordinate) are active. The parties are not necessarily equally active - that is more likely in the case of interpersonal communication, but less so in the case of mass media and their audiences - but to both parties the transaction is in some way functional. It meets a need or provides a gratification. To a greater or lesser degree, information flows both ways.

In addition, the transactional approach views communication as reciprocal exchanges of feelings, meanings, ideas, responses and share the control over and responsibility for its outcome (Andrew & Baird, 1992).

1.7.2 Supervisor

Based on the dominance-submissiveness continuum, the supervisor is generally the person of higher status who has the legitimate right to request the subordinate to carry out certain job responsibilities. Besides, the supervisor can bestow rewards or punishment upon the subordinate (Richmond & McCroskey, 1991).

In this study, the supervisor is the immediate superior to whom the employees are responsible directly, and have the most contact with employees concerning the work or the job in their respective departments. For a small organization with only one manager/employer, he/she will also be referred to as top manager, middle manager, lower manager and supervisor at the same time.

1.7.3 Subordinate

The subordinate’s role is defined as the lower status person or the one who is submissive or less powerful (Richmond & McCroskey, 1991).

Subordinates here, refer to hotel employees who perform nearly all the guest service and interacting with the guests such as answering the phones, checking in the guests, cooking and serving the food, cleaning the rooms and repairing the air-conditioning. Subordinates also include those in the management level who are directly responsible to their respective supervisor or immediate superior.

1.7.4 Supervisor-Subordinate Communication

In this study, the hyphenated term supervisor-subordinate communication, emphasizes both types of communication flow: downward and upward communication, which are performed by each individual engaged in the communication. Downward communication is concerned with information about work instruction, methods to carry out duty, availability of new technology, feedback about work performance, opportunity for personal advancement, policy of organization and objective of work. On the other hand, upward communication is concerned with information about work that has been done, work that need to be done as duty, employees’ problems related to work, information needed, method to conduct performance appraisal and to complete various duties.
In addition, supervisor-subordinate communication also includes the communication climate, the by-product of interaction pattern between supervisor-subordinate communication. In this study, communication climate refers to openness and trust between the supervisor and the subordinate, the supervisor’s support and the subordinate’s participation.

1.7.5 Organizational Commitment

Lincoln and Kalleberg (1996) identify organizational commitment as a work-related attitude, which has an important bearing on employee participation and performance. It is a complex behavior, which is intertwined with social, cultural, economic and psychological attributes.

Organizational commitment in this study is based on the definition given by Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974). Organizational commitment involves (a) an internalization of the organization’s values; (b) a willingness to focus strong effort toward helping the organization achieve its goals and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization. The three dimensions above are further characterized into three factors by Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982, cited by Adnan Baharom, 1999). The first dimension refers to the commitment of identification, the second dimension refers to the commitment of involvement or participation and the final dimension refers to the commitment of loyalty.

1.8 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on supervisor-subordinate communication, which is confined to downward communication, upward communication, trust, openness, support and participation; with relevance to employees’ organizational commitment.

The generalization of the results across organizations should be taken with caution due to certain constraints. First, the respondents of the study are confined to service industry and geographically centered in Kuching City. Second, there may exist extraneous variables that are interrelated and interwoven with commitment, such as motivation, employee relationship and job satisfaction, which are out of the scope of this study. Third, the results are method-bound because there is no common measure of commitment (Morris & Sherman, 1981). Finally, the employees being studied (those selected to answer the questionnaires) may tend to give a ‘socially desirable’ response.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses several organization theories such as classical theory, humanistic theory, system theory and try to relate them with communication in the organization. Then, it will look into the organizational communication in terms of communication process, communication networks and communication climate, as well as the background of organizational communication audit. This study focuses on interpersonal communication, organizational commitment and the related theoretical concepts. It covers the related topics and issues of past literature and studies written by authors of related fields.

2.1 Theories Related to Organizational Communication

Many theories have been advanced to explain how communication is performed in an organization. These theories examine the structure of an organization in relation to its communication techniques, and have had significant influences on organizational practices. The following section will discuss about the classical, humanistic and system theories related to organizational communication.

2.1.1 Classical Theory

The classical theory emphasizes structure, rules and control, and includes bureaucracy theory, scientific management theory (O'Hair et al., 1998) and administrative theory (Hicks & Gullett, 1975 cited by Kreps, 1990), in which bureaucracy theory identifies the primary structure of hierarchical organizations, administrative theory deals with macroscopic issues of organizational design and strategies for developing structure and establishing order in complex organizations, while scientific management deals with microscopic issues of management practice and task design in order to increase organizational efficiency (efficient organizational operation) and productivity.

Classical theorists assume that people take part in organizationally designated activities solely for the tangible rewards they receive in return - usually financial. Communication serves to establish managerial control, which is almost exclusively downward and the content is also almost exclusively work-related, whereas social activities are not generally sponsored by employers, nor are they discussed at work (Andrew & Baird, 1992). Classical theory is over mechanistic and impersonal, unsuited to the development of workers as human beings with needs rather than 'parts' of the machine (O'Hair et al., 1998).

2.1.2 Humanistic Theory

As human beings are the very essence of social organization, therefore simply avoiding the influence of human beings in an organization is an obvious limitation of the classical theory. Thus, humanistic theory begins to draw attention and gains its popularity by arguing that the major long-term motivation of human beings for joining and working for organizations is to facilitate their personal development, growth, and self-actualization (Krep, 1990) which are just as important as the tangible financial rewards.
Krep's (1990) argument is supported by Hawthorne Studies (O'Hair et al., 1998). Both studies showed that communication, as expressed in the forms of informal groups, supervisors' demonstrated interest, encouragement, praise, recognition, and the ability to form relationships on the job, are more effective than economic incentives in enhancing workers' productivity and morale. A close examination from Deyo (1976) shows that single females in Singapore are more concerned about the intrinsic rewards or 'on-the-job rewards' (the work, social relations such as close and person-oriented supervision and warm personal relations with coworkers; and working conditions). While most of the married females stress on the extrinsic rewards which are experienced 'off-the-job' (money and benefits). Unfortunately, O'Hair et al. (1998) discover that the satisfaction of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards does not necessarily increase the workers' productivity, in other words, satisfied workers might be unproductive. Hence, it was followed by another most influential motivational theory that stresses on human resources approach.

The human resources approach has dual goals: increased employee satisfaction and morale and encourages subordinate participation in all levels of the organizational decision-making. It emphasizes both upward communication which is actively encouraged through various suggestion systems (like departmental meetings, and other communication events) and incentive or award systems; and downward communication which is used to keep employees informed of current events and to provide them with instructions and guidelines for behavior. However, a common shortcoming is revealed from both the classical and humanistic theories and this void is filled by adding a third element: environment, to the management and labor elements, under classical and humanistic theories, respectively. The emphasis on environment brings to the emergence of system theory.
2.1.3 Systems Theory

In systems theory, if one person in an organizational team is absent or fails to do her or his share of the work, the entire team suffers (O'Hair et al., 1998). This relatedness is termed interdependency, which gives rise to the concept of synergy. Synergy is the phenomenon whereby the combined talents, energies, abilities and knowledge of organizational members are greater than the sum of the isolated efforts of individuals.

Based on the system theory, communication occurs at various levels within the system. There is communication between and within the subsystems, and between the system and its environment. This communication enables the various parts of the system to coordinate their activities. So, system theory explains the dynamics of organizational communication (O'Hair et al., 1998; Andrew & Baird, 1992).