Digital Communication in Organization for Millennial Employees: Need for Guidance from Direct Supervisors

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A B S T R A K

Salah satu ciri generasi milenial adalah penggunaan teknologi ekstensif dalam kehidupan mereka, karena sejak lahir mereka sudah mengenal teknologi. Di dunia kerja, banyak perusahaan berupaya menyediakan sistem teknologi canggih, termasuk dalam komunikasi organisasi, untuk membuat karyawan milenial mereka lebih produktif dan loyal terhadap perusahaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pandangan karyawan milenial tentang bagaimana komunikasi digital bagi mereka serta kebutuhan komunikasi mereka di tempat kerja. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui dua sesi diskusi kelompok terarah dengan delapan belas karyawan milenial di salah satu perusahaan Badan Usaha Milik Negara. Analisis tema digunakan untuk mengidentifikasi aspek-aspek yang menonjol dalam diskusi kelompok terarah tersebut, berdasar pendekatan induktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan karyawan milenial berpandangan jumlah program aplikasi digital yang diberikan oleh perusahaan terlalu banyak, karena mereka hanya menggunakan satu hingga dua program yang dibutuhkan saja. Program lain yang disediakan hanya dimiliki untuk memenuhi kewajiban yang ditetapkan oleh manajemen tanpa pernah dimanfaatkan secara optimal. Di sisi lain karyawan milenial berpandangan mereka minim mendapatkan arahan dari atasan langsungnya. Mereka mengharapkan informasi yang tersedia secara digital dapat didiskusikan bersama dengan atasannya sehingga mereka mendapatkan arahan yang membantu mereka bekerja secara lebih efektif dan produktif. Mereka juga mengharapkan arahan dari atasannya terkait bagaimana mereka dapat meningkatkan kinerja dan arah pengembangan karirnya. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan peran penting komunikasi dari atasan dalam mengarahkan dan memotivasi karyawannya, melengkapi media komunikasi digital yang tersedia, Bentuk dan dinamika komunikasi dengan atasan yang sesuai dengan karakteristik kedua pihak dan bisa melengkapi komunikasi digital yang ada perlu digali lebih lanjut dalam penelitian berikutnya.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that millennial generation is digital savvy. Technology become a part of their everyday life since they were born (e.g., Howe & Strauss, 2000). When they enter workplace as employees, it is expected that millennials employees would be more comfortable with digital communication in organization. As consequences, in order to manage millennials employees effectively and make them well engaged with the organization, many organizations make effort to provide high technology system of organizational communication in the workplace to facilitate the need of millennials employees (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Dhurkari, 2017; Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007). While many studies have indicated the importance of digital communication for millennials employees, not much attention has been given to the needs of millennials for other aspects of communication. This study aims to explore millennials employees' perceptions of how digital communication practices they have experienced as well as their communication needs in the workplace.

Organizational communication has a strategic role to share information for all organizational stakeholders. Share of information and meaning transmission are the core of organizational social system. The functions of organizational communication are to develop mutual understanding, frame of references and fields of experiences (Kuhn, & Kopczynski,

2019). Digital communication become more popular channel used for organizational communication as the result of technology advancement with digital basis. It is implemented for vertical, horizontal, and lateral internal communication practices (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Particularly for millennial employees, they prefer to use digital media to communicate. Hajah and Siahaya (2017) determine the effect of instant messenger usage to internal communication by using the quantitative method. The results showed that there is a significant and positive effect by the instant messenger usage to employee communications. It showed that instant messenger could accommodate employee communication, particularly for job-related formal communication. However, there are some information that do not convey through instant messenger, particularly the informal communication, such as regarding employee motivation, delivering the thoughts and feelings of employees, and the settlement of the conflict with fellow employees. Therefore, organization should encourage instant messenger usage in informal communication, relating to motivate employees through instant messenger, to create a good working relationship and increase employee relations. Research done by Adam and Kartikawangi (2018) which add video conference as a tool, supported that findings, especially the use of instant messenger. It shows that the utilization of Instant Messenger and Video Conference in Internal Communication were assessed positively and able to facilitate the needs of communication in the organization. Meanwhile, Lestari and Hartanti (2018) explain that digital communication also effective in communicating message for behavior change. Their research was on internal public relations campaign program which use internal audio and visual media. The result shows that the campaign affect positively and significantly contributes to the behavioral change.

In addition to digital savvy, according to Twenge and Campbell (2008), millennials also have unique characteristics of higher self-esteem and higher narcissism, compared to other generations on the workplace. With these two traits, millennials employees would have higher expectations on working environment, particularly on having meaningful job demand, receiving constructive feedback, and having

opportunity to make influences for an organization they work for. Millennials employees are also characterized by their proactive behavior in actively looking for valuable information in their workplace (Guo, Xiong, Zhang, Tao, Deng, 2020). Among those expectations, constructive feedback is part of organizational communication practices, related to the communication between supervisor and their subordinates. Therefore, it is assumed that millennials employees also have a salient need for receiving guidance and constructive feedback. While supervisor has a higher status, more power, more information and the possibility to exercise control, the relationship between supervisors and their staffs was sometime problematic. Openness and trust are not easy to build in this relationship (Neinaber, Romeike, Searle, & Schewe, 2015), while millennials employees need to have a supportive relationship with their direct supervisor so that they can receive guidance and feedback from them (Li, Harris, Boswell & Xie, 2011).

LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY
Literature review

Organizational communication involves several aspects: communication climate, organizational integration, corporate information, media quality, supervisory communication, horizontal communication, personal feedback, and subordinate communication (Downs & Hazen, 1977). When employees perceive organizational communication practices in their workplace, those aspects would be interpreted both separately for each aspect and in dynamic relations among each other's, based on their needs and experiences.

For example, communication climate is related to the extent to which communication practices in an organization motivates and stimulates employees to meet organizational goals. Therefore, communication climate is basically related to the whole aspects of communication practices in the organization.

Furthermore, Dowling (2016) shows the importance of internal communication in building corporate reputation. He develops a model in which internal communication plays

significant role in employee perception on the organization.

The positive perception will

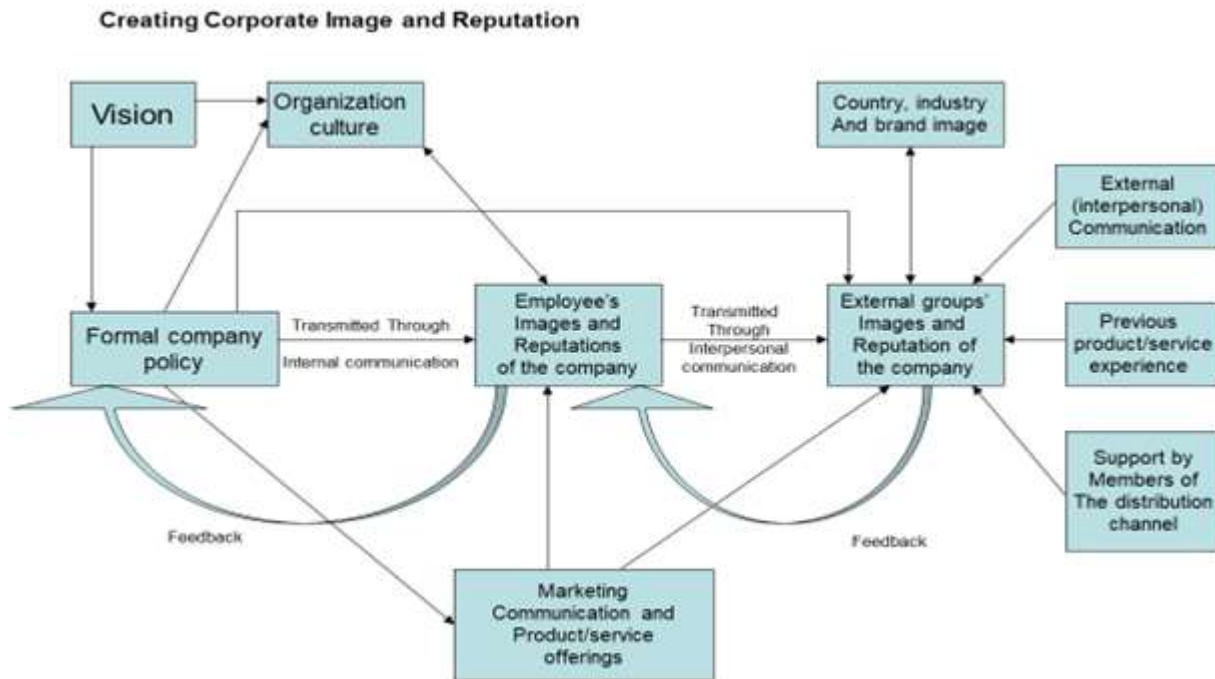caried out in external communication of the employee. It is influencing the way they engage with stakeholders.

Creating Corporate Image and Reputation

Figure 1. Creating Corporate Image and Reputation
Source: Dowling, 2016

However, employees also can perceive each aspect of organizational communication. For example, organizational integration refers to the degree to which individuals' employees receive information about their immediate work environment, while corporate information is related to information received about the whole organization.

Digital communication is perceived on the aspect of media quality, as one among many media/channels used in the organizational communication practices. It is interpreted as the extent to which communication channel and media are well organized and whether information deliver through the channels is clear and useful. Perceiving of media quality is also related to the level of information richness delivered by media/channels used in the organization (Miller, 2015).

The quality of the upward, downward, and horizontal communication in organizational practices are also being perceived by employees. Horizontal communication is usually related to the extent to which communication among coworkers is productive,

accurate and free flowing, including informal communication and grapevine. Vertical communication (upward and downward) refers to supervisory and subordinate communication. Subordinate communication is related to the quality of upward and downward communication of subordinates, while when it is related to supervisor will be the aspect of supervisory communication (Downs & Hazen, 1977; Miller 2015).

Supervisory communication refers to the quality of the upward and the downward aspects of communication with superiors, including guidance and feedback receive from direct supervisors. Supervisor development feedback is among a major part of supervisory communication. It is defined as beneficial and valuable information and guidance given by direct supervisor to facilitate employees with skill, work abilities and career development (Li, Harris, Boswell & Xie, 2011). Feedback is an essential role of supervisor to facilitate the enhancement of employees' performance (Morgeson et al, 2010).

Guidance and development feedback from supervisor are usually perceived by employees as supervisory supportive behavior, while feedback is also being a separate meaningful aspect on personal feedback, which refers to information particularly concerning how employees' performance is being evaluated. Furthermore, employees also need to perceive their supervisors as being open and approachable to build a healthy communication climate (Derue et al, 2011). This has impact on trust in the supervisor and loyalty toward the supervisor (Guo, Xiong, Zhang, Tao, Deng, 2020). The communication between supervisor and their employees has been indicated to be related to employee commitment and organizational effects (Abu Bakar et al, 2010). This communication also has impact on shaping the organizational environment (Fairhurst, 2008). However, such communication is circular and dynamic, which needs active participation from both the supervisors and their employees (Kramer & Crespy, 2011).

All the aspects of organizational communication described above are related not only to informational dimensions which employees receive comprehensive information about what to do the job well but also to relational dimension to facilitate employees to have a positive working environment. While informational dimensions usually link to employees' job performances, relational dimensions have impact on job satisfaction (Pincus, 1986). Therefore, it is important for understanding the need of communication of millennials employees and their perceptions of how organizational communication practices. Effort for facilitating millennials employees' preferences for organizational communication practices would have a meaningful impact on both their job performance and their job satisfaction. This research is post-positivist which use Pincus' Communication Satisfaction Outcomes Research Models (1986) with qualitative data. Figure 2. Shows Pincus' model as reference. This approach also supported by theoretical framework of communication satisfaction (Down and Hazen, 1977) as well as Miller (2015) as describe above.
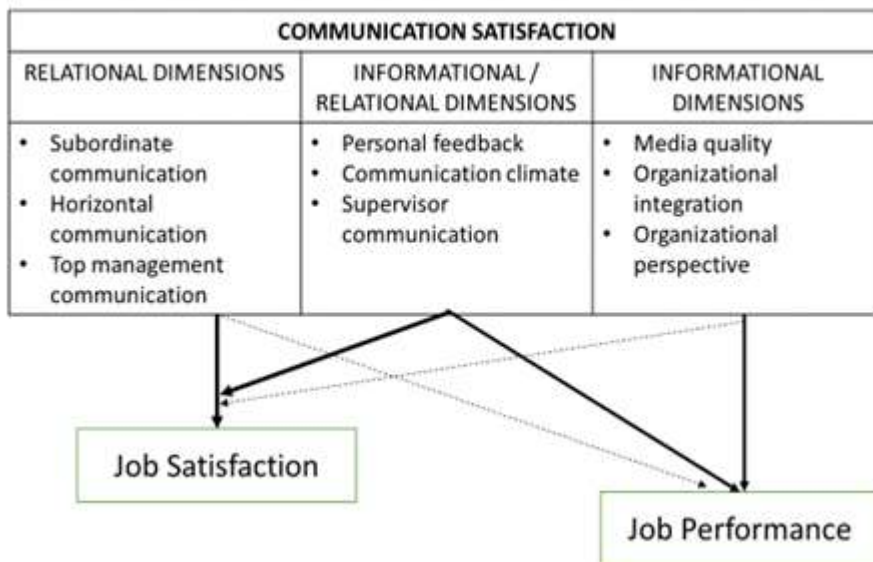

Figure 2. Communication Satisfaction Outcomes Research Model
Source: Pincus, 1986

Method

As post-positivist research, qualitative approach was used in this research because it aims to explore elaboratively the unique participants' interpretations of their experiences and needs (Berg, 2017). The perceptions and the unique needs of millennials employees on organizational communication practices, particularly related to digital communication were explored through focus group discussions. Focus group discussion was used to give opportunity for participants to have interactions with other participants on sharing their needs and experiences (Berg, 2017). Eighteen millennials employees working in the group of national owned corporation were participated in the two series of focus group discussions conducted in the present study. They were selected using purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2014) from 993 millennials employees participated in the communication effectiveness survey conducted by the company. Millennials employees who perceived less effectiveness of organizational communication on the survey and were willing to participate on the focus group discussion were recruited. The first group consisted of ten people (6 males and 4 females from various divisions), while the second one involved eight people (4 males and 4 females from various divisions). Each group discussed the same issues. The used of two different group was to keep the optimal size of the group so each participant could have optimal opportunity to contribute on the discussion as well as to facilitate the time availability of the participants. Each of the focus group discussion took an average 110-minute duration of discussion.

The theoretical framework of communication satisfaction (Downs & Hazen, 1977) was used for the discussion guidance; however, the discussion topics were exploring general experiences of the participants on organizational communication practices with highlight more on digital communication as the central issue on this study. The main topics discussed involved participants experiences of organizational communication practices, including their experiences of using of digital platforms, and their needs and expectations of organizational communication practices.

The discussions were all recorded as audio.

Initially, all audio-records of the discussions were transcribed as written documents. Two authors read and coded the verbatim of focus group discussion data independently. This strategy was used to ensure validity of interpreting the data using inter-rater data analysis (Patton, 2014) Inductive approach was used to code the data (Berg, 2017). Therefore, code was developed based on the data, and then being linked to the theoretical framework. Thematic descriptive analysis was used to analyze the meaningful theme (Berg, 2017). When there was disagreement between the two authors on the coded, the disagreement issue was discussed until reaching agreement. Sometimes the two authors need to revisit previously coded papers again for the discussion. This process was implemented to ensure credibility of the findings, based on triangulation of data analysis (Patton, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicated a number salient and meaningful themes from the two groups of FGDs of millennials employees about their perceptions of digital communication and their needs of communication practices in the workplace.

Digital communication practices in the workplace

Participants in the two groups of FGDs stated the same experience that a bulk of digital programs provided for them by their organizations. With so many programs available, they have many opportunities to access all information in the organization. Therefore, corporate information and organizational integration are perceived positive with transparency and fairness (equal access for all employees). They can access whatever information they want to know about the organization. As two participants put it.

Excerpt 1
"No problem, all info we need about the organization is available, anything, all information is accessible" (P1, male, FGD2).
Excerpt 2
"Almost 100apps available for different purposes, we just need to choose which one that we need" (P2, male, FGD2).

However, most of them did not perceive it as beneficial because they only used one or

two programs for their jobs and the rest causes confusion for them, as follows.

Excerpt 3
"Many programs are available for us, every year there are always new programs available, not beneficial but more confusing. We installed all of them just for formality, because it is compulsory to install. But the program we used remain the same" (P6, male, FGD1)

Moreover, each division tend to have different channel/media preferences. Media preferences of the management sometimes was different from employees' preferences, which may cause communication failures. For instances:

Excerpt 4
"Media preferences was different, for example operational employees prefer to use telegram while office tend to use WhatsApp. So, when operational employees were delivered messages from the office via WhatsApp, most probably they did not read it" (P3, male, FGD1).

Excerpt 5
"Need to identify media preferences from the receiver to ensure communication effectiveness" (P5, female, FGD2).

The findings indicated that while the organization provided them with a bulk of digital programs to support their jobs and to get access of information about the whole business process of the organization, they only utilized one or two applications for everyday working life. The rest of the programs just being installed in their gadget for adherence to the regulation imposed by the management. They also had different media preferences which potentially causes communication failure when the media is different from the channel used by the office/management.

The need of guidance and feedback from direct supervisors

While millennials employees are digital savvy who use heavily digital communication, it seems that they still need high touch communication in the workplace, as shown in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6
"Even though there are a lot of programs, we still need one on one high touch communication when our need and aspiration could be directly addressed. Our ideas not only having space to be delivered and executed, but also being facilitated and directed to be positive experiences and higher achievement" (P9, male, FGD1).

Participants also expressed lack of satisfaction on supervisory communication. Although they are closed enough with their supervisors, but they perceived lack of opportunity to receive guidance and feedback from their supervisors, as mentioned in Excerpt 7 and 8.

Excerpt 7
"We are closed enough, nice to joke around, but only for informal session. Lack of one-on-one personal session with the supervisors to listen our needs and passions" (P6, male, FGD1).

Excerpt 8
"We do not know why we receive that score in performance management. They only told us the score we get, but no explanation about what it means, why we get that score, so we know nothing about our performance and how to improve and develop our performance, even though it has impact on our basic salary increasing and opportunity for promotion". (P3, female, FGD2)

Perceived lack of effectiveness on supervisory communication, particularly on giving guidance and feedback is also related to the lack of effectiveness on personal feedback, because personal feedback is usually received from the direct supervisors. In addition to the supervisor communication behavior, clear and constructive feedback is also the result from the good system of performance management in the workplace. With the good system, supervisors have adequate information to give feedback, especially during performance review for their employees.

Furthermore, with many programs available and a lot of information provided, millennials employees also need their direct supervisors available to discuss which information needed and which information received from the digital platform useful for their job and their career, as shown below.

Excerpt 9
"A bulk of information, which one is important for me, where to find information I need, how to make sense the information. I need guidance. What I find out it is like the organization has already provided this all, you have to find and make it sense by yourself" (P4, female, FGD2).

A large of variety of digital communication provided by the organization does not necessarily mean that millennials employees were satisfied with the effectiveness of organizational communication practices in their workplace. They perceived lack of

opportunity to receive guidance from their direct supervisors. Interestingly, there is still high need of millennials employees to have one on one high touch communication with their direct supervisors. They need their direct supervisors to give guidance to explore and to make sense information received from digital platforms. They also need guidance about their job advancement and career development. For example:

Excerpt 10
"Never have chance of career counselling, we need to be heard to be understood about our need our passion on career, so we have assignment related to our career passion, not necessarily we want to be promoted" (P8, male, FGD2).

Excerpt 11
"Lack of one on one coaching. Not much nurturing climate from our direct supervisors. Mostly only talk about assignment we have to deliver" (P10, male, FGD1).

The findings indicated that digital communication is an important media for organizational communication practices for millennials employees working life. However, direct supervisors are still needed to take care and to give guidance for the millennials employees to know what has to be improved for their jobs and how the direction of their career. The findings showed that there has been salient needs for supportive supervisory communication, which is related to supervisor development feedback. Internal digital communication, especially using apps, even though is very relevant with the era of technology advancement and is important to attract and to retain talent millennials employees as shown in previous studies (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Terjesen, Vinnicombe & Freeman, 2007) cannot be implemented solely in the organizational communication. High touch communication by direct one on one communication particularly with direct supervisor is also needed by millennials employees.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of supervisor development feedback for millennials employees, as also mentioned by previous studies (Derue et al, 2011; Guo, Xiong, Zhang, Tao, Deng, 2020). Supervisors and leaders are still playing an important role on organizational communication practices. The implementation of digital communication cannot substitute supervisors/leaders' roles to give guidance and feedback for their employees. It is even more important for millennials employees who have unique characteristics of high demand on receiving constructive feedback (Twenge and Campbell, 2008). Supervisors of millennials employees need to develop openness, trust and supportive relationship with their employees and focusing on supervisor development feedback. This would enhance millennials employees' satisfaction and their perceived effectiveness of organizational communication practices in the workplace, which lead to productivity and engagement.

The findings also showed that even though digital communication practices are important, the implementation would be more effective when the needs and perspectives of the millennials' employees are considered. For example, convergence of many apps would be good to be developed based on the perspective of millennials employees (Twenge and Campbell, 2008).

CONCLUSION

As the conclusion, millennials employees in this study perceived that digital application used are too much, while at the same time guidance from the direct supervisors are needed. This research offers relevant insight that even though digital communication is important to the organization life recently, human touch is still needed. The roles of leaders/supervisors to give guidance and support for millennials employees remain important to increase work productivity and engagement through communication satisfaction, digitally and conventionally. With intensive digital communication, there might be different type and process of supervisory communication needed which is suitable with the characteristics of millennials employees as well as the digital environment.

Findings of the perceptions and the needs of organizational communication from the perspectives of millennials employees gained from qualitative inquiries is important both for theoretical contribution and practical consideration. For theoretical perspective, this study enriches findings that not only digital communication needed by millennials

employees but also human touch interaction from supervisory guidance and support. For practical implications, this study highlights the importance of exploring in depth the employees' perspectives as the audiences of the organizational communication practices to be able to develop effective organizational communication system.

Moreover, communication between leaders/supervisors and their employees is circular and dynamic, which needs active participation from both the supervisors and their employees. There would be a negotiation processes to build the effective communication suitable for both parties. The supervisors/leaders might come from different generation from the millennial's employees, which have different needs and preferences of communication practices. There is still a variety of generations/cohorts work together in an organization, they might have different perception and preferences on media/channel of communication, including for digital communication. Based on the result of the study, it is suggested that further research may conduct to explore digital communication and supervisory communication perceptions and preferences gap among employees from different cohort of generation. Exploring different perspectives and preferences of each cohorts and their negotiation dynamic processes to develop suitable communication practices will be beneficial to manage organizational communication practices effectiveness, using qualitative inquiries approach.

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