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**Cross-Cultural Communication Styles in Multinational Companies in Malaysia**

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Abstract

This study sought to explore cross-cultural communication among multinational companies in Malaysia. The following communication styles were looked at: Dominant, Dramatic, Contentious, Animated, Impression Leaving, Relaxed, Attentive, Open, Friendly, and Communicator Image. The study looked into how communication styles varied across industrial sectors (petroleum/chemical, electrical/electronics, hospitality, machinery and equipment, and textiles and garment) and socio-demographic variables like marital status, age, race, nationality, monthly salary, length of service, work category and type of industry. The study involved workers of multinational companies (MNCs) in Malaysia who were holding managerial or supervisory positions as well as non-managerial or non-supervisory job classifications. In assessing communication styles, Norton's (1978) Communicator Style Measure (CSM) was used. A total of 335 employees from 37 companies completed the questionnaire for this research, the data of which were analyzed using the SPSS at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that as a whole group, Friendly communication style prevailed. There are statistically significant differences in communication styles of respondents grouped by age, marital status, length of service, work category, type of industry, monthly salary and length of service. Recommendations for this study are offered and elucidated.

***Keywords:*** Communication, Communication Styles, MNCs

### Introduction

The world has seen advances in technology by leaps and bounds in the last few decades. These technological advances have made business increasingly global. As commerce becomes more global, greater numbers of people are conducting business across national and cultural boundaries. Companies are establishing operations in overseas countries and markets. Such practices are challenging employees who find themselves suddenly transferred to countries where they are ignorant of the language and culture (Frey-Ridgway, 1997). As this trend is expected to continue in the foreseeable future, there is a need to communicate with people from other cultures. Malaysia, dubbed by the government as a 'Truly Asia' society with a multi-ethnic population of about 23 million, is no exception to this. With aggressive advocacy and awareness programs initiated by the government, Malaysians are becoming more appreciative of their diversity, and capitalize this in promoting racial integration and socio-economic development.

Globalization and aggressive foreign direct investment, combined with domestic restructuring, have dramatically changed the workforce of many companies, not only in Malaysia but also elsewhere. Tung (1997) states that multinationals are also increasingly dealing with cultural issues in domestic markets as workforce diversity increases. In such circumstances, both multinationals and indigenous firms are faced with the challenge of responding in an equitable and ethically acceptable manner to diversity and cultural differences issues (Moghaddam, 1997). As the world gets "smaller", more and more people are spending time living and working away from their home country, giving rise to greater face-to-face contact among people from very different cultural backgrounds (Brislin, 1981).

People from different cultures have different habits, different values, and different ways of relating to one another. These differences are a major source of problems when people of different cultures try to communicate. Unfortunately, people tend to view the ways of their culture as normal and the ways of other cultures as bad, wrong, peculiar, or such (Lesikar & Flatley, 2002).

To understand each other's culture, there is a need to get to the root of the styles of communication that individuals possess and practice constantly. How "dramatic", "dominant", "open" or "friendly" people are, may be perceived differently by different cultures in association with the respective values of the culture. Thus, communication styles that reflect sensitivity to these cultural differences need to be taken in and adapted to integrate harmony and success at work in a culturally diverse environment.

### Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this research was to look into cross-cultural communication among multinational companies (MNCs) in Malaysia. Specifically, it attempted to determine the communication styles in these multinational industries. Answers to the following questions were sought in this study:

1. Which of the following communication styles prevail in MNCs in Malaysia: (a) Dominant, (b) Dramatic, (c) Contentious, (d) Animated, (e) Impression Leaving, (f) Relaxed, (g) Attentive, (h) Open, (i) Friendly, (h) Communicator Image?
2. Are there statistically significant differences across each of the communication styles of the respondents when grouped by: (a) age; (b) marital status; (c) race; (d) nationality; (e) monthly salary; (f) length of service; (g) work category; (h) type of industry; and (i) type of company?
3. Are there statistically significant relationships between each of the communication styles and (a) age, (b) marital status, (c) race, (d) nationality, (e) monthly salary, (f) length of service,

(g) work category, (h) type of industry, and (i) type of company?

### **Communicator Style Constructs**

#### **Dominant**

Dominant, as a style variable, pervades the communication literature and encompasses a wide range of semantic and operational meaning. A person with a low dominant style score tends to misperceive the communication styles of others. A study conducted by Bowles, Pausenberger and Massie (2003) showed the emergence of two groups: a group with a predominantly dominating style, and a group with an avoiding style. The dominating communicators had higher self-esteem and the avoiding communicators had lower self-esteem.

#### **Dramatic**

The dramatic communicator manipulates exaggerations, fantasies, stories, metaphors, rhythm, voice, and other stylistic devices to highlight or understate content. Dramatizing, which is probably the most visible style component, serves a profound, complex, often unconscious, often intentional, interactional communicative function. When a person communicates in a dramatic way, the simple literal meaning of the message is transformed. (Norton, 1983: 65).

The dramatic style often gives away true feelings. Sometimes the person deliberately dramatizes to satirize, devalue, disown, deflate, or ruin the literal meaning. In most instances, dramatic communication works because the receiver knows how to process the underlying or double meaning suggested by the sender. Both people interactively share premises that give form to the message (Norton, 1983: 66).

#### **Contentious**

The contentious communicator is argumentative. No psychological literature specifically addresses itself to the domain encompassed by this variable. The variable emerges as one closely associated with the dominant style, but potentially entailing negative components (Norton 1983: 67). This style involves being argumentative, often over trivial issues, along with being overly precise to the extent that the conversation hangs up on small, unimportant points while the important issues are missed. These behaviors both inhibit further communication and prevent dialogue. It would be useful for a person to develop judgment in recognizing when it is necessary to stop a conversation and insist on clarification because an important point is at issue and when it is better to ignore a comment that one disagrees with because bringing the other person to one's exact way of thinking is not essential to one's goal (Coeling & Cukr, 2000).

#### **Animated**

According to Norton (1983), physical, nonverbal cues define the domain of the animated sub-construct. By definition, an animated communicator provides frequent and sustained eye contact, uses many facial expressions, and gestures often.

#### **Impression Leaving**

Impression leaving, as a style variable, is relatively not researched extensively. The concept centers around whether a person is remembered because of the communicative stimuli he or she projects. Impression leaving has been regarded as important to the communication process. Gibson (1985) stated that the speaker must appear to be convincing or the impression with the receiver would be one of distrust.

#### **Relaxed**

The relaxed style can signal multiple messages. On one hand it suggests calmness, peace, and serenity and on the other, it suggests confidence and comfortableness. The lack of tension in each signal may give form to the message in markedly different ways (Norton, 1983: 69; Opt &

Loffredo, 2003). Lasden (1985) found that a good sense of humor, or a relaxed style in communication, was either important or very important to 105 data processing executives surveyed.

### **Attentive**

According to Norton (1983), attentive style is manifested essentially as feedback showing responsiveness. Most often, the attentive style is associated with the auditor role. Attentiveness was defined as a function of posture, verbal behavior and eye contact (Norton & Pettegrew, 1979). The attentive style signals the willingness to provide feedback, the willingness to be responsive. The willingness itself is a form of feedback. However, the specific information embedded in the feedback can carry complex and dense message, including instructions, commands, or directives. Because of these reactive possibilities inherent in attentive style, it has the capacity to draw distinction (Norton, 1983: 160-161).

### **Open**

Behavior associated with the open sub-construct probably includes communicative activity that is characterized by styles that are conversational, expansive, affable, convivial, gregarious, unreserved, unsecretive, somewhat frank, possibly outspoken, definitely extroverted, and obviously approachable. Stylistically, the open communicator readily reveals personal information about the self in communicative interactions. The counterpart of this notion is manifested in the poker-faced individual who is hard to read (Norton, 1983: 70-71).

### **Friendly**

The friendly communicator confirms, strokes, and positively recognizes others (Notarantonio & Cohen 1990). In a study conducted by Garko (1993), managers were found to be friendlier when persuading subordinates who were perceived to be attractive in terms of communication styles rather than those with unattractive styles. They also employ friendliness when gaining compliance from subordinates.

### **Communicator Image**

According to Norton (1983) this sub-construct represents an overall evaluation of the person's perception of whether the self is a good communicator. When analyzing an individual's communicator image what is being studied is, that individual's perception of his or her communicative ability based upon his or her own criteria. This shows whether an individual perceives his or her stylistic norm as being a contributor to effective communication (Parrish-Sprowl, 1994).

## **Methods**

### **Research Design and Respondents**

This research was descriptive in nature. It attempted to assess, describe, and compare communication styles in cross-cultural working environments. The survey-type study involved workers of multinational companies (MNCs) in Malaysia who were holding managerial or supervisory positions as well as non-managerial or non-supervisory job classifications. The respondents covered were those from the petroleum/chemical, electrical/electronics, hospitality, machinery and equipment, and textiles and garment industries. Specifically, there were 37 (30.33%) out of 122 targeted MNCs in Northern Peninsular Malaysia (Kedah, Penang, Perlis) that were utilized as units of analysis. Of this number, 20 (54.05%) were in the electronics/electrical sector; 4 (10.81%) in the chemical/ petroleum sector; 5 (13.51%), machinery and equipment; 6 (16.22%), textiles and garment; and, 2 (5.41%), hospitality sector. A total of 335 employees was involved in the research. According to Gay (1976), the minimum acceptable size for a descriptive research is 10 percent of the population.

### **The Instrument and Data Analysis**

In assessing communication styles, Norton's (1978, in Downs, et al., 1988) Communicator Style Measure (CSM) was adopted and utilized in this investigation. This is a 50-item, 5-point Likert-type (responses ranged from "strong agreement" to "strong disagreement") instrument that measures communication styles along 10 sub-constructs defined in the preceding section-- Dominant, Dramatic, Contentious, Animated, Impression Leaving, Relaxed, Attentive, Open, Friendly, and Communicator Image. Five (5) items reflect each sub-dimension.

According to Norton, the construct validity and content validity of the CSM have been determined by comparing the structure of the questionnaire in different studies (see Norton & Pettegrew, 1979) which showed consistency across several studies. Likewise, internal reliability coefficients for each sub-construct were established using 500 cases. Moreover, in order to determine how particular items of sub-constructs would cluster and to determine the dimensionality of the sub-constructs, the CSM was tested among 1,086 samples. Overall, the instrument is reliable (coefficients range from 0.37 to 0.82) and hence, was utilized for the purpose of this research. CSM is divided into two parts. Part One of the research instrument asked respondents about their socio-demographic profile (age, marital status, race, nationality, monthly salary, length of service, work category, type of industry, and type of company) and the second part deals with the questions/statements on communication styles.

The present researchers administered again, for pilot-testing, the CSM in order to identify its suitability in the Malaysian work environments, especially across the five sectors or industries chosen, as well as to determine further reliability and validity. The trial administration was done utilizing 100 graduate students of Universiti Utara Malaysia in the Sintok (main campus) and Sungai Petani centers. They were chosen not only because of their proximity but also because of their availability as potential respondents who are actually working in certain industries. In Sungai Petani, for instance, at least 80 percent of the students are working professionals or executives who are affiliated with MNCs in the state of Penang or Kedah.

The results of the pilot-testing revealed an overall Cronbach alpha of 0.841, while the sub-constructs had the following alpha coefficients: Dominant – 0.712; Dramatic – 0.658; Contentious – 0.725; Animated – 0.811; Impression Leaving – 0.840; Relaxed – 0.792; Attentive – 0.634; Open – 0.662; Friendly – 0.893; and Communicator Image – 0.853.

Responding to the CSM takes about eight (8) minutes, and scores denote the respondent's self perception of one's most and least preferred communication styles.

The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS at 0.05 level of significance.

## **Results**

### **Communication Styles of Respondents**

The data on communication styles of respondents as a whole group are shown in Table 1. As the data disclosed, Friendly communication style ( $M = 14.57$ ) emerged as the most prevailing communication mode among the employees of multinational companies surveyed. This finding seems to be a good indication of a smooth interpersonal interaction in the companies surveyed. This is closely followed by the Attentive communication style ( $M = 14.41$ ), which corroborates with the amiable prevailing communication mode. Although it may not necessarily follow that an attentive communicator is a friendly communicator, the data suggest that the affable and pleasing communication environment was effective in building an attentive and focused mode of communication. Communicator Image ( $M = 13.45$ ) was ranked third, indicating that the respondents somehow put some degree of consciousness on how they would project themselves when communicating.

## Communication Styles 7

The least preferred communication style observed in the industries covered was the Open approach ( $M = 11.70$ ), followed by Relaxed ( $M = 11.94$ ) and Contentious ( $M = 12.05$ ) approaches. It might be that in the industries covered, confidentiality of information and related company records and data are highly upheld, hence, being “open” in communication is not encouraged due to some possible drawbacks that may result as a consequence of disclosing any sensitive issues or talks.

### Differences in Communication Styles

This segment presents the findings on statistically significant differences in the communication styles of respondents when categorized according to (a) age, (b) marital status, (c) nationality, (d) length of service, (e) work category, (f) type of company, (g) race, and (h) type of industry.

The t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to analyze the data. For comparison purposes, the median was used as the “cut-off” point for grouping arbitrarily the respondents. This was done to ensure that the groups compared would be “allocated” a reasonable and equitable number of respondents per category.

**Table 1: Communication Styles of Respondents as a Whole Group**

Communication Style	Mean	Rank	Standard Deviation
Friendly	14.57	1	2.22
Attentive	14.41	2	1.99
Communicator Image	13.45	3	2.38
Impression Leaving	13.36	4	2.27
Animated	13.35	5	1.88
Dramatic	12.55	6	2.74
Dominant	12.11	7	2.46
Contentious	12.05	8	2.45
Relaxed	11.94	9	3.33
Open	11.70	10	2.09

### (a) Communication Style and Age

As shown in Table 2, age differences were found in the Attentive, Friendly, and Communicator Image of the respondents. Specifically, the findings revealed that those in the older group ( $M = 14.76$ ) tended to be significantly ( $t = - 3.14$ ;  $df = 309$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) more attentive than their younger counterparts ( $M = 14.08$ ).

**Table 2: Differences in Communication Styles of Respondents by Age**

Communication Styles	Age Group	n	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Dominant	Younger (< 33 yrs)	154	11.99	- 1.09	307	.275
	Older (33 & above)	155	12.28			
Dramatic	Younger (< 33 yrs)	152	12.63	0.23	314	.817
	Older (33 & above)	164	12.56			
Contentious	Younger (< 33 yrs)	146	12.21	1.04	304	.299
	Older (33 & above)	160	11.92			
Animated	Younger (< 33 yrs)	151	13.24	- 1.29	305	.197
	Older (33 & above)	156	13.51			
Impression Leaving	Younger (< 33 yrs)	153	13.12	- 1.90	311	.058
	Older (33 & above)	160	13.61			
Relaxed	Younger (< 33 yrs)	150	11.79	- 0.83	309	.406
	Older (33 & above)	161	12.11			
Attentive	Younger (< 33 yrs)	149	14.08	- 3.14	309	.002**
	Older (33 & above)	162	14.76			
Open	Younger (< 33 yrs)	149	11.58	- 1.24	308	.215
	Older (33 & above)	161	11.88			
Friendly	Younger (< 33 yrs)	156	14.16	- 3.28	319	.001**
	Older (33 & above)	165	14.96			
Communicator Image	Younger (< 33 yrs)	153	13.16	- 2.55	309	.011*
	Older (33 & above)	158	13.83			

\* Significant at .05 significance level ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Significant at .01 significance level ( $p < .01$ )

In other words, the conversations of the older group would be “more structured, coherent, accurate, efficient, and dialectic.” This attentive style also “entails an influential, participant process”, (Norton, 1983: 156). This may suggest that the older respondents are more attentive as they probably assume higher positions in their organizations. Likewise, the findings showed that the “older” respondents displayed a significantly higher mean score (14.96) than the “younger” respondents in terms of Friendly communication style, indicating a “friendlier” communication style compared to the latter ( $t$ -value =  $- 3.28$ ;  $df = 319$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). This finding seems to suggest that Attentive and Friendly communication styles are closely related. The communicator who is attentive also usually displays a friendly style by “acknowledging, encouraging, deliberately reacting to, and accommodating others.” (Norton, 1983: 80). The friendly style may be closely associated with leadership and possible social status and these two attributes are likely to belong to older respondents rather than to the younger ones.

Moreover, the older group ( $M = 13.83$ ) tended to be more particular with their communication image when compared to the younger group ( $M = 13.16$ ). It means that more of the older respondents evaluate themselves as good communicators compared with the younger respondents. This finding was statistically significant at 0.05 significance level ( $t$ -value =  $- 2.55$ ;  $df = 309$ ;  $p = 0.011$ ). It supports the above findings in that the older group which portrays a good Communicator Image is friendlier as they find it “easy to interact with others” (Norton,

1983: 72).

**(b) Communication Style and Marital Status**

Table 3 shows that it was only in the Communicator Image sub-dimension did communication style vary significantly. Specifically, the findings revealed that those who were married (M = 13.66) were more particular about “images” in communication when compared to their single counterparts (M = 13.05), and this difference was significant at 0.05 significance level (t = 2.18; df = 318; p = 0.030). This could be due to the “married” status being associated with a higher level of maturity. It also correlates with the earlier finding that the older group of respondents show a better communication image than their younger counterparts.

**(c) Communication Style and Nationality**

*For the purpose of this research, nationality was dichotomized into two only, namely Malaysian and Non-Malaysian. This was due to the small number of respondents representing other nationalities; hence, the categories were collapsed into two only.*

**Table 3: Differences in Communication Styles of Respondents by Marital Status**

Communication Styles	Marital Status	n	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Dominant	Married	207	12.25	1.35	316	.178
	Single	111	11.86			
Dramatic	Married	212	12.50	- 0.43	322	.667
	Single	112	12.64			
Contentious	Married	209	12.07	0.25	313	.806
	Single	106	12.00			
Animated	Married	206	13.41	0.80	313	.425
	Single	109	13.23			
Impression Leaving	Married	205	13.42	0.67	317	.501
	Single	114	13.25			
Relaxed	Married	206	12.07	0.90	318	.371
	Single	114	11.72			
Attentive	Married	211	14.54	1.60	318	.110
	Single	109	14.17			
Open	Married	208	11.82	1.35	317	.178
	Single	111	11.49			
Friendly	Married	215	14.69	1.38	328	.168
	Single	115	14.34			
Communicator Image	Married	208	13.66	2.18	318	.030*
	Single	112	13.05			

*Significant at .05 significance level (p < .05)*

Of the communication styles identified in this study, none of them showed significant differences by nationality. In other words, whether the respondents were Malaysians or non-Malaysians, their Dominant, Dramatic, Contentious, Animated, Impression Leaving, Relaxed, Attentive, Open, Friendly, and Communicator Image communication styles would not differ significantly (p > 0.05).

**(d) Communication Style and Length of Service**

For comparison purposes, the respondents’ length of service was arbitrarily categorized into the shorter (less than 8 years) and longer (8 years and above) groups based on the median

**Table 4: Differences in Communication Styles of Respondents by Length of Service**

Communication Styles	Length Of Service	n	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Dominant	Shorter (< 8 years)	150	12.14	0.43	308	.667
	Longer (8 & above)	160	12.02			
Dramatic	Shorter (< 8 years)	150	12.49	0.05	314	.964
	Longer (8 & above)	166	12.48			
Contentious	Shorter (< 8 years)	143	12.41	2.24	304	.026*
	Longer (8 & above)	163	11.79			
Animated	Shorter (< 8 years)	143	13.52	1.49	306	.137
	Longer (8 & above)	165	13.19			
Impression Leaving	Shorter (< 8 years)	150	13.30	- 0.27	308	.791
	Longer (8 & above)	160	13.37			
Relaxed	Shorter (< 8 years)	147	11.52	- 2.01	309	.046*
	Longer (8 & above)	164	12.29			
Attentive	Shorter (< 8 years)	146	14.22	- 1.50	309	.135
	Longer (8 & above)	165	14.56			
Open	Shorter (< 8 years)	148	11.59	- 0.87	308	.384
	Longer (8 & above)	162	11.80			
Friendly	Shorter (< 8 years)	153	14.39	- 1.33	319	.184
	Longer (8 & above)	168	14.72			
Communicator Image	Shorter (< 8 years)	149	13.28	- 1.17	309	.245
	Longer (8 & above)	162	13.59			

\* Significant at .05 significance level ( $p < .05$ )

(8.00). As presented in Table 4, significant differences could be observed in the communication styles of respondents when grouped by length of service ( $t = 2.24$ ;  $df = 304$ ;  $p = 0.026$ ).

Specifically, the findings indicated that those with shorter ( $M = 12.41$ ) length of service tended to be more Contentious in their communication style than those with longer ( $M = 11.79$ ) years of service. The communicator who is Contentious is supposedly argumentative and it is said to be closely related to the Dominant style (Norton, 1983; Coeling & Cukr, 2000).

In addition, the data also disclosed that those with longer ( $M = 12.29$ ) working experience displayed a significantly more Relaxed communication style when compared to those with shorter ( $M = 11.52$ ) working experience ( $t = -2.01$ ;  $df = 309$ ;  $p = 0.046$ ). There seems to be a correlation with the finding above that longer service equals being less Contentious and more Relaxed. This could be due to the reasons mentioned in the previous page. Therefore, the Relaxed style suggests “calmness, peace, serenity, confidence and comfortableness” (Norton, 1983: 69; Opt & Loffredo, 2003).

### **(e) Communication Style and Work Category**

Work category in this research was categorized into managerial (e.g., head or supervisor of a department) and non-managerial (no administrative or supervisory work). The findings, shown in Table 5, revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the communication styles of respondents. Specifically, the data disclosed that those with managerial work ( $M = 13.86$ ) tended to be significantly ( $t = -3.31$ ;  $df = 309$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) more Impression Leaving in their communication style when compared to those with no managerial job ( $M = 13.01$ ). The findings could be explained by the fact that interpersonal communication is very much a part of a manager’s role as he or she expends a lot of time to it (Hyman, 1980, in Geddes, 1992) as compared with those handling non-managerial jobs.

Likewise, the data showed that those holding managerial jobs ( $M = 12.61$ ) tended to exhibit a more Relaxed communication style than those with no managerial responsibilities ( $M = 11.49$ ) ( $t = -2.95$ ;  $df = 310$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ). This could be attributed to the less volatile nature of their work and the stability of their positions. It could also be gleaned from Table 5 that the same group of respondents (those with managerial work) showed a significantly more Attentive communication style than their counterparts (those with no managerial work). The former obtained a mean score of 14.75 while the latter had a mean score of 14.14, the difference of which was significant at the 0.01 significance level ( $t = -2.72$ ;  $df = 311$ ;  $p = 0.007$ ). Again, this is not surprising as the nature of their work requires their attention. Respondents with managerial work ( $M = 14.87$ ) also differed significantly ( $t = -1.97$ ;  $df = 320$ ;  $p = 0.050$ ) in the Friendly component of their communication style when compared to those with non-managerial job ( $M = 14.37$ ). Since the managerial respondents are found to be more relaxed than their non-managerial counterparts, it is not surprising then, that they are friendlier as they are less stressed out.

Moreover, the data indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the communication style of those with managerial responsibilities ( $M = 13.82$ ) and those with non-managerial work ( $M = 13.13$ ). The former were significantly more particular about Communicator Image than the latter ( $t = -2.54$ ;  $df = 310$ ;  $p = 0.012$ ).

**Table 5: Differences in Communication Styles of Respondents by Work Category**

Communication Styles	Work Category	n	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Dominant	Non-Managerial	182	11.97	- 1.21	309	.226
	Managerial	129	12.31			
Dramatic	Non-Managerial	184	12.33	- 1.72	314	.087
	Managerial	132	12.86			
Contentious	Non-Managerial	179	12.05	- 0.02	305	.988
	Managerial	128	12.05			
Animated	Non-Managerial	179	13.25	- 1.33	306	.183
	Managerial	129	13.53			
Impression Leaving	Non-Managerial	182	13.01	- 3.31	309	.001**
	Managerial	129	13.86			
Relaxed	Non-Managerial	183	11.49	- 2.95	310	.003**
	Managerial	129	12.61			
Attentive	Non-Managerial	183	14.14	- 2.72	311	.007**
	Managerial	130	14.75			
Open	Non-Managerial	182	11.69	- 0.25	311	.799
	Managerial	131	11.75			
Friendly	Non-Managerial	188	14.37	- 1.97	320	.050*
	Managerial	134	14.87			
Communicator Image	Non-Managerial	181	13.13	- 2.54	310	.012*
	Managerial	131	13.82			

\* Significant at .05 significance level ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Significant at .0 significance level ( $p < .01$ )

**(f) Communication Style and Type of Company**

In this study, there were two types of company examined: multinational and non-multinational. The former was said to be multinational if it was operating in three or more countries, including Malaysia. If the company was operating in two countries only, including Malaysia, it was classified as non-multinational. The findings showed that of the various communication styles identified in this study, none of them showed significant differences by type of company. In other words, whether the respondents were working in multinational or non-multinational companies, their Dominant, Dramatic, Contentious, Animated, Impression

Leaving, Relaxed, Attentive, Open, Friendly, and Communicator Image communication styles would not differ significantly ( $p$ -values > 0.05).

**(g) Communication Style and Race**

Of the different communication styles identified in this research, none of them showed significant differences by race. In other words, whether the respondents were Chinese, Indian, Malay, or belonged to another race, their Dominant, Dramatic, Contentious, Animated, Impression Leaving, Relaxed, Attentive, Open, Friendly, and Communicator Image communication styles would not differ significantly ( $p$ -values > 0.05).

**(h) Communication Style and Type of Industry**

Table 6 shows that there were statistically significant differences in the communication styles of respondents grouped by type of industry, implying that there were various styles of communication that occurred in the business sectors covered.

**Table 6: Differences in Communication Styles of Respondents by Type of Industry**

Communication Styles	Type Of Industry	n	Mean	F	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Dominant	Petroleum/Chemical	32	11.78	2.6	31	.031*
	Electrical/Electronics	171	12.38	9	7	
	Hospitality	19	10.84			
	Machinery & Equipment	33	11.42			
		63	12.29			
	Textiles & Garment					
Dramatic	Petroleum/Chemical	32	12.34	1.5	32	.186
	Electrical/Electronics	175	12.60	6	3	
	Hospitality	18	11.44			
	Machinery & Equipment	35	12.14			
		64	13.06			
	Textiles & Garment					
Contentious	Petroleum/Chemical	32	11.75	1.8	31	.127
	Electrical/Electronics	170	12.19	1	4	
	Hospitality	19	12.89			
	Machinery & Equipment	31	12.23			
		63	11.46			
	Textiles & Garment					
Animated	Petroleum/Chemical	31	13.45	1.7	31	.150
	Electrical/Electronics	170	13.49	0	4	
	Hospitality	19	12.74			
	Machinery & Equipment	34	12.74			
		61	13.43			
	Textiles & Garment					
Impression Leaving	Petroleum/Chemical	30	13.10	2.1	31	.074
	Electrical/Electronics	171	13.40	5	8	
	Hospitality	21	12.38			
	Machinery & Equipment	33	13.00			
		64	13.88			
	Textiles & Garment					

Relaxed	Petroleum/Chemical	30	12.40	2.6	31	.032*
	Electrical/Electronics	170	12.11	8	9	
	Hospitality	21	9.71			
	Machinery & Equipment	34	11.88			
	Textiles & Garment	65	12.05			
Attentive	Petroleum/Chemical	32	14.41	2.7	31	.029*
	Electrical/Electronics	173	14.52	3	9	
	Hospitality	18	12.94			
	Machinery & Equipment	32	14.38			
	Textiles & Garment	65	14.55			
Open	Petroleum/Chemical	31	11.52	4.3	31	.002**
	Electrical/Electronics	169	11.70	3	8	
	Hospitality	19	10.00			
	Machinery & Equipment	34	11.94			
	Textiles & Garment	66	12.17			
Friendly	Petroleum/Chemical	33	14.70	2.4	32	.049*
	Electrical/Electronics	174	14.61	1	9	
	Hospitality	21	13.19			
	Machinery & Equipment	36	14.50			
	Textiles & Garment	66	14.86			
Communicator Image	Petroleum/Chemical	31	13.52	2.1	31	.073
	Electrical/Electronics	168	13.63	7	9	
	Hospitality	20	12.15			
	Machinery & Equipment	34	12.97			
	Textiles & Garment	67	13.58			

\* Significant at .05 significance level ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Significant at .01 significance level ( $p < .01$ )

The statistically significant differences were noted in the Dominant ( $p = 0.031$ ), Relaxed ( $p = 0.032$ ), Attentive ( $p = 0.029$ ), Open ( $p = 0.002$ ), and Friendly ( $p = 0.049$ ) communication styles. To identify which industrial sectors differed significantly, the post-hoc Scheffe test was used. In terms of Dominant communication style, those in the electrical/electronics industry ( $M = 12.38$ ) were the most assertive and authoritarian in communication style. The post-hoc test revealed that the respondents in this industry differed significantly when compared to those in the hospitality industry ( $M = 10.84$ ). There were also statistically significant differences in the mean scores of those in the petroleum/chemical, machinery and equipment, and textiles and garment industries, but the differences were not significant at the 0.05 significance level. The differences noted in the mean scores may be attributed to sampling distribution only.

With regard to Relaxed communication style, those in the petroleum/chemical industry obtained the highest mean score (12.40) followed by those in the electrical/electronics (12.11), textiles and garment (12.05), machinery and equipment (11.88), and hospitality (9.71) industries.

The mean scores suggest that those in the petroleum/chemical industry had the most composed and unruffled style of communication. The post-hoc test pointed out that those in the petroleum/chemical industry differed significantly from those in the hospitality industry in terms of Relaxed communication style, suggesting that the former were more unperturbed in their mode of communication than the latter.

In terms of Attentive communication style, the highest mean score (14.55) was obtained by those in the textiles and garment industry, indicating that they were the most focused in their communication approach. Next in rank were those in the electrical/electronics, petroleum/chemical, machinery and equipment, and hospitality sectors. Their mean scores were 14.52, 14.41, 14.38, and 12.94, respectively. To determine which groups differed significantly in Attentive communication style, the post-hoc test was employed. Findings showed that the differences were found in the communication styles (Attentive dimension) of those in the (a) textiles and garment and hospitality sectors, and (b) electrical/electronics and hospitality industries. The results showed that those in the textiles and garment and electrical/electronics sectors were more emphatic in listening, more particular and concerned with feedback, and had better listening skills (Norton, 1978) compared to those in the hospitality industry.

As regards Open communication style, those in the textiles and garment industry ranked first in their mean score (14.86), indicating that they were the most receptive communicators. Those in the machinery and equipment industry ( $M = 11.94$ ) came second, and then followed by those in the electrical/electronics ( $M = 11.70$ ), petroleum/chemical ( $M = 11.52$ ), and hospitality ( $M = 10.00$ ) industries. The post-hoc analyses revealed that the significant differences in the mean score were found between those in the (a) textiles and garment and hospitality industries, (b) machinery and equipment and hospitality sectors, and (c) electronics/electrical and hospitality sectors. The findings showed that those in the textiles and garment, machinery and equipment, and electronics/electrical sectors were significantly more “conversational, expansive, affable, gregarious, unreserved, somewhat frank, possibly outspoken, definitely extroverted, and obviously approachable” (Norton, 1978: 70-71) when compared to those in the hospitality industry.

In the Friendly dimension, respondents in the textiles and garment industry ( $M = 14.86$ ) were the most amiable in communication style. Those in the petroleum/chemical ( $M = 14.70$ ) came next, followed by those in the following sectors: electrical/electronics ( $M = 14.61$ ), machinery and equipment ( $M = 14.50$ ), and hospitality ( $M = 13.19$ ). The differences were tested using the post-hoc test to find out if they were significant. Results obtained revealed that the difference in the Friendly communication style could be observed between those in the textiles and garment sector and hospitality industry. Friendly communication style, says Norton (1978: 71-72), “ranges in meaning from mere lack of hostility to deep intimacy. Friendly communicators confirm, stroke, and positively recognize others. As such, this style should be a solid predictor of attraction, sociability, leadership, and possible social status.”

### **Relationships Between Communication Styles and Independent Variables**

The findings showed that communication styles were not significantly related to marital status, race, work category, type of industry, and nationality. On the other hand, the zero-order correlation indicated that Friendly communication style correlated positively and significantly with age ( $p = .033$ ). Looking at the partial  $r$ , however, it was interesting to note that the relationship was reversed. A closer examination of the data indicates that when the confounding influence of other variables was controlled using partial  $r$  statistic, age had a negative ( $-.167$ ) and an insignificant ( $p = .071$ ) correlation with communication style (Friendly). In other words,

taking into account the correlation between age and Friendly communication style only, other variables controlled, the relationship was negative and not significant at 0.05 significance level. This discloses a clearer insignificant association of age with Friendly communication style. The statistically significant relationship observed prior to the control of effects of other variables indicated that there were other intervening conditions that moderated the “real” relationship between age and Friendly communication style.

**Table 7: Pearson r and Partial r Correlation Between Communication Styles and Independent Variables**

Communication Styles	Age		Monthly Salary		Length of Service	
	Pearson r (p-value)	Partial r (p-value)	Pearson r (p-value)	Partial r (p-value)	Pearson r (p-value)	Partial r (p-value)
Dominant	-.004 (.969)	-.064 (.492)	.013 (.882)	.017 (.858)	-.011 (.897)	-.039 (.672)
Dramatic	.109 (.218)	.158 (.088)	.154 (.081)	.132 (.155)	.008 (.931)	-.186 (.044*)
Contentious	-.049 (.581)	.056 (.545)	-.180 (.041*)	-.142 (.124)	-.066 (.454)	-.099 (.286)
Animated	.048 (.588)	.044 (.636)	.020 (.821)	-.075 (.418)	.011 (.904)	-.083 (.374)
Impression Leaving	.137 (.120)	-.028 (.768)	.203 (.021*)	.120 (.197)	.146 (.096)	.055 (.557)
Relaxed	.063 (.478)	-.077 (.405)	.258 (.003**)	.216 (.019*)	.071 (.421)	.005 (.959)
Attentive	.149 (.090)	-.011 (.906)	.201 (.022*)	-.018 (.849)	.179 (.042*)	.041 (.659)
Open	.102 (.249)	.064 (.492)	-.044 (.617)	-.156 (.091)	.077 (.384)	.066 (.477)
Friendly	.187 (.033*)	-.167 (.071)	.290 (.001**)	.228 (.013*)	.234 (.006**)	.183 (.047*)
Communicator Image	.125 (.158)	.077 (.410)	.133 (.131)	-.095 (.308)	.109 (.216)	-.069 (.457)

\* Significant at .05 significance level ( $p < .05$ )

\*\* Significant at .01 significance level ( $p < .01$ )

In addition, in the zero-order correlation, significant correlations were noted between monthly salary and the following communication styles: Contentious ( $p = .041$ ), Impression Leaving ( $p = .021$ ), Relaxed ( $p = .003$ ), Attentive ( $p = .022$ ), and Friendly ( $p = .001$ ). The findings suggest that monthly salary was significantly related to these communication styles. However, when the probable confounding effects of other variables were controlled, the relationships changed. Specifically, it was found out that monthly salary did not anymore correlate significantly with Contentious ( $p = .124$ ), Impression Leaving ( $p = .197$ ), and Attentive ( $p = .849$ ) communication styles. In other words, when the possible influence of other variables was taken away, the relationship became insignificant, thus, implying that the statistically significant relationships observed during the zero-correlation could be attributed to the effects of

other uncontrolled variables. The partial  $r$  analyses, or analyses controlling for other variable effects, confirmed that monthly salary was correlated significantly to Relaxed ( $p = .019$ ) and Friendly ( $p = .013$ ) communication styles. This suggests that before and after the possible effects of other variables were controlled, statistically significant relationships really existed between monthly salary and the communication styles (Relaxed and Friendly).

Interesting results were also noted in the relationship between communication style and length of service. In the zero-order correlation, Attentive ( $p = .042$ ) and Friendly ( $p = .006$ ) communication styles showed positive and significant correlation to length of service. When the possible confounding influence of other variables was controlled, Attentive ( $p = .659$ ) communication style became insignificantly correlated to length of service. This indicates that taking into account the relationship between Attentive communication style and length of service only, controlling for other variables, no statistically significant correlation occur. In other words, length of service had nothing to do with Attentive communication style.

After controlling for probable confounding influence of other variables, the findings revealed that communication style (Dramatic and Friendly) was significantly correlated to length of service. The  $p$ -values of .044 and .047 for Dramatic and Friendly communication styles, respectively, support this claim. In other words, making other variables constant, length of service would correlate significantly to Dramatic and Friendly communication styles. Apparently, length of service had a significant influence on these communication styles.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

In view of the findings of the study, the following measures are advanced:

(1) The multinational companies (MNCs) covered in this study need to nurture the amiable and cordial ambience that prevails in their communication in the workplace. The communication style that occurs in the working environment is an indication of a collegial approach in the way the administrative staff and other employees interact with one another.

Whether the company is into electronics/electrical, chemical/ petroleum, hospitality, machinery and equipment, and textiles and garment business, there was a friendly communication climate in the MNCs. This finding implies that in all the MNCs studied, a wholesome fellowship occurred among the personnel. It is therefore recommended that activities that would maintain and cultivate this esprit de corps among the employees of MNCs be periodically conducted and monitored in order to inculcate the spirit of friendship and togetherness. For instance, the companies surveyed may wish to hold an annual party as a get-together affair for all employees regardless of job position, or an educational tour for social and cultural enrichment.

(2) Programs that will strengthen various types of communication should be conducted at reasonable timing and intervals. Special attention may be given to employees who are older, married, have considerable work experience, and are holding managerial work. As found in the study, these variables have strong bearing with communication styles of respondents and therefore should be given attention when drafting group dynamics programs and activities related to communication development in the workplace.

(3) Communication skills, or communicative competence, should be used as a major criterion for employee selection in MNCs in Malaysia. Employers need to identify how creative, convincing, or courteous potential employees are in the way they express themselves during the interview. Special consideration must be accorded to prospective employees who converse not only with a sense of persuasion and credibility but also with gentleness and affection. In a multicultural working environment, it is implied that people exchange views and opinions in

various forms and ways, and hence, a great deal of understanding of their communication modes is necessary to maintain harmonious relationships among the workers. Conducting regular talks or training programs is also highly recommended to ensure that employees are attuned to practical communication models.

(4) MNCs should also train seriously their foreign workers to be conversant and fluent not only in English but also in the local language, Bahasa Malaysia, so that they can relate efficaciously with the local workers and thus, develop better interpersonal relationships. Apparently, proficiency in both languages can encourage openness among each other, better understanding of individual culture, and improve teamwork and cooperation.

For future researches, it is suggested that the scope of this study be expanded to include other MNCs in other States to make the findings more conclusive. Higher rates of participation from foreign workers also need to be worked out in order to make wider and more reliable generalisations. Studies exploring other factors not covered in this study that might have an influence on communication styles, such as organizational climate, self-concept, and communication competence in Bahasa Malaysia and/or English, among others, are also encouraged.

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