



## **Managing Cross Culture Diversity: Issues and Challenges in Workplace**

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 5 May 2022  Accepted: 1 August 2022  Published: 17 August 2022	This study is focused on describing the horizontal communication among employees with ethnic country diversity in the communication process and examining the barriers to communication as well as efforts made by the employees in resolving horizontal communication conflicts. The data collection technique used is a focus group discussion of structured interviews with three Indonesian and three Foreign employees. The interviews were done by dividing the employees into two discussion groups according to their ethnicity to answer the same research questions. The results show that the horizontal communication process between employees is going well and needs to be influenced by the diversity of employees in terms of ethnicity. Barriers to horizontal communication between employees are communication barriers in terms of employee psychology and semantics. Efforts made by employees in overcoming horizontal communication conflicts are by compromising. However, Indonesian employees tend to make efforts to integrate the implications of this study following the results of the research, which stated that employees' ethnic diversity did not directly affect the continuity of horizontal communication among employees in the company.
<b>Keywords:</b> Employee, Ethnic diversity, Horizontal communication, Communication among employees	
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### **1. Introduction**

The demands of a multicultural workforce today are forcing large American companies to increase the number of employees from various ethnicities, races, and countries (Griffin, 2004). However, the balance of workforce diversity until now is something that American companies still need to achieve. The demand for workforce diversity has become essential in a company or business organization and Indonesia. One

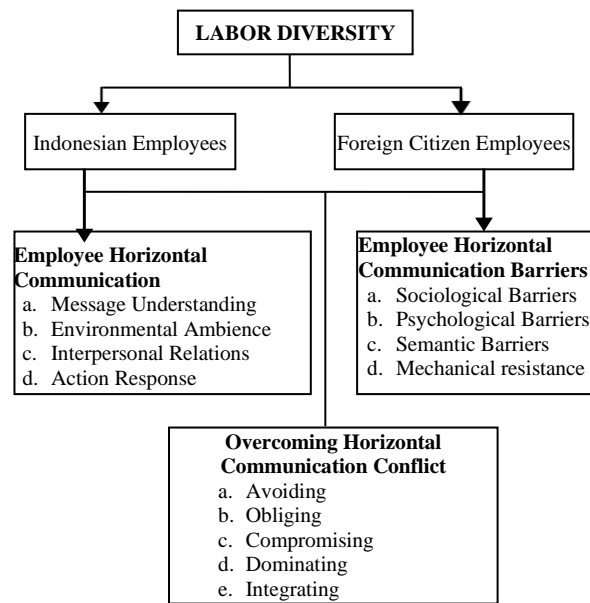
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of the objects of the diversity dimension of the workforce that is most commonly found in companies in Indonesia is the ethnic diversity between Chinese and Javanese ethnicities, considering that the relationship between these two ethnicities is often described as a minority and majority relationship (Warnaen, 2002). One of the phenomena of inter-ethnic relations between the workforces was found in a study conducted by Prasidyamurti & Wahyuni (2013) at the Schlumberger company, which found that employees at the Schlumberger often experienced problems due to ethnic and cultural diversity among employees, such as workforce adaptation, language barriers in communicating, to communication misunderstandings between employees that cause disputes.

The diversity of the workforce, if managed wisely, will give birth to a dynamic and integrative potential (Kusumah, Marjanto, Rostiyati, & Ernayanti, 2007). One of them is by building effective interpersonal communication. Communication can be regarded as a form of social interaction within the company, which is a bridge between employees and as well as employees and leaders (Effendy, 2007). However, building effective interpersonal communication in a work environment with a diverse workforce takes work. Mathis & Jackson (2006) said that the diversity of the workforce in a company could not be denied negative sides, such as difficulty in communicating and increasing tension and conflict in the workplace. Diversity also brings differences in communication styles, which often create misunderstandings (Washington, Okoro, & Thomas, 2012).

This research was conducted at an international school in Medan, Indonesia because the school found a higher intensity of employee interaction with more diverse aspects of employee ethnic differences. This study aims to analyze the process of horizontal communication between employees in the presence of ethnic diversity and nationality descriptively. The communication referred to in this study is effective horizontal interpersonal communication between fellow employees, both verbal/vocal and non-verbal. In this study, effective forms of horizontal employee communication refer to Suranto's (2005) theory, namely in terms of understanding the message, atmosphere environment, interpersonal relationships, and response to an action. According to Suranto (2005), horizontal communication barriers are sociological, psychological, semantic, and mechanical barriers currently or have occurred due to ethnic diversity. This research is also to analyze employees' efforts to overcome horizontal communication conflicts within the company, such as avoiding, complying with, compromising, dominating, or integrating conflicts due to these barriers, as described in figure 1 as follows.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

Source: Suranto (2005); Ting-Toomey & Chung (2005)

## 2. Literature Review

The studies on cross-cultural diversity and intercultural communication have been discussed previously by Gonzalez & Simpson (2021); Grossman, Campo, Feitosa, & Salas (2021); Hasan, Rehman, & Zhang (2021); Henderson, Barker, & Mak (2016); Nguyen (2021); Pikhart (2014); and Rao (2012). Most studies highlighted a remarkable finding; for example, Nguyen (2021) stated that local students should be more proactive in using proper accommodation strategies to connect with international students. Meanwhile, Pikhart (2014) is convinced that we have little chance of success in the global world if we do not understand intercultural communication. Then, Odunayo & Ng (2021) said that many human characteristics contribute to the diversity and including these characteristics results in numerous benefits in an active community.

Gonzalez & Simpson (2021) expressed that a diversity viewpoint aids in understanding partners as a social group and their inclusion in the workplace. In contrast, a person-environment fit perspective aids in describing partners' compatibility with their work surroundings in terms of organizational expectations and partners' needs. In addition, cross-cultural collaboration needs are not going away and will only increase in complexity (see Grossman et al., 2021; Henderson et al., 2016). Lastly, Rao (2012) examined that religious diversity has created much political conflict and bloodshed in society (e.g., the recent blasts in Mumbai), but many differences have been reconciled in the workplace over time.

Based on the previous studies, this current research aims to analyze and describe the diversity of the workforce in terms of employee communication based on communication indicators, employee communication barriers, and efforts to overcome horizontal communication conflicts.

## 3. Method

This study used a descriptive method with a qualitative approach to understanding what phenomena were experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception,

motivation, action, and so on, by describing them in the form of words and language in a context. Natural specialties and utilizes various scientific methods (Moleong, 2010). It was done employing direct interviews using a focus group discussion model so that the viewpoints and opinions of employees are the main focus of this research.

The sampling technique used is the non-probability of the purposive type sampling, namely by selecting research subjects based on specific criteria set by researchers (Kuntjojo, 2009). The primary informants in this study were employees who worked in the company's office, which consisted of three Indonesian employees and three foreign employees. The criteria for resource persons who will be the subject of this scientific research are office employees who have worked for a minimum of two years, have the same average salary, and have the same position or position. The determination of the prominent resource persons in this study was carried out with the Human Resource manager one week before the interview process, and data collection was carried out.

The primary data sources are opinions, voices, and perspectives of employees regarding the research topic are the results of direct interviews with six employees using the focus group discussion model. The secondary data sources used in this research are company profile books and employee documents obtained during the initial survey. Data collection techniques were carried out using non-test techniques in the form of interviews, which aimed to obtain research data conducted at the company's office. The interview method used is structured interviews with the parties who will be determined as research subjects. Focus group discussions are used by dividing the speakers into small discussion groups so that in the interview process, they can generate ideas, information, and points of view from the speakers more freely and openly. Focus group discussions are a form of discussion designed to elicit information about the wants, needs, points of view, beliefs, and experiences desired by the participants (Bader & Rossi, 2002; Paramita & Kristiana, 2013).

The same interview questions were done into two groups of resource persons in a particular room for approximately two hours. They lasted for two days, namely the first resource group on the first day and the second resource group on the second day. The interview process took place in a relaxed and informal atmosphere, aiming to produce answers to research questions in an open, honest, accessible manner based on the perspectives and experiences of the employees personally. The interview process using a focus group discussion model with resource persons from different countries has been arranged from the beginning to be carried out separately. The first group consists of Indonesian employees, and the second group consists of foreign employees..

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. *Employee Horizontal Communication Process***

The horizontal communication process that occurs between Indonesian employees and employees of foreign countries found that no special procedures were needed in conducting horizontal communication so that it took place freely and openly. Indonesian employees and employees from foreign countries have proven that the horizontal communication process carried out through interpersonal relationships has so far been going well. Vertical communication will only occur if the communication is a decision making or to discuss internal problems within the division that influence long-term employee performance. The results of this analysis statement are supported by the results of interviews with two groups of resource persons who unanimously describe the horizontal communication process that takes place in the organizational environment.

Based on the results of an interview with an Indonesian resource person with the initials NN who revealed that “If we only communicate normally with fellow employees, we usually talk straight away or telephone, but if there is a really complicated problem or for making a decision, we will first communicate it with the principal,” which was agreed by other Indonesian resource persons. Foreign nationals also expressed the same thing with the initials JD and HC, who said that communicating with fellow employees can be done directly, and the procedure for communicating through the managerial or deputy principal is only done for making decisions that affect the division. The horizontal communication process between employees can take place well because a managerial role also facilitates and creates a good communication climate. The managerial party facilitates horizontal employee communication to take place effectively. The interactive communication model between Indonesian employees and foreign nationals is proven to create a horizontal communication process for employees within the company to run well. According to Wursanto (2003), interactive communication is caused by the high intensity of horizontal communication between Indonesian employees and foreign nationals, which is found in verbal and non-verbal communication, such as smiles and greetings. An Indonesian employee resource person with the initials SS said, “I think often, because we meet every day. Every day we have to communicate with them because we work also relate to each other, so every day there must be each other communication. Besides that, we often gather together outside.” One of the foreign national employee sources with the initials JD said, “So, the problem is not because we are from different countries, but because of the ties between divisions. We don’t see skin color or ethnicity. The divisions here are interrelated, so we talk every day, and if that’s the case, just talk about what we need. If we don’t want to talk here just because we are in different countries, when will our work be finished, the work people are interconnected between divisions.”

The other employee resource persons also agreed with the statements of the SS and SL resource persons. It shows that the horizontal communication process can be well established without problems caused by ethnic diversity factors. Forms of Employee Horizontal Communication.

#### *Environment in Communicating*

The environmental atmosphere created when establishing communication relationships between Indonesian employees, and foreign nationals are not influenced by the employee’s ethnic diversity but rather is influenced by inspired by the diversity of levels of the busyness of employee activities. Gradually, the atmosphere in the communication environment can be built by increasing interpersonal relationships between employees and employees, both of Indonesia and foreign countries. It is due to the high intensity of horizontal communication that occurs between fellow employees and the company’s supportive environmental climate, both in terms of the layout of the office space, which makes it easy for each employee to meet face-to-face and the communication climate within the company’s family environment.

#### *Interpersonal Relations of Communicators and Communicators Right*

The interpersonal relationship between communicators and communicants for Indonesian employees and foreign nationals shows an increase, but with a different perception of the relationship. Indonesian employees feel that improving interpersonal relationships in conducting horizontal communication with employees of foreign countries is only limited to professional relations, professionalism, and cooperation in the

field of work. In contrast, employees of foreign countries feel that improving interpersonal relationships in conducting horizontal communication with Indonesian employees can be established up to the scope of friendship, even though employees of foreign countries think there is a less open attitude from Indonesian employees. One of the foreign national employee resource persons with the initials HD said, "If I feel there is no difference. I think that those from different countries or tribes are the same, it's normal. Maybe from those who think we are 'extraordinary', I don't know why. If I've never judged them differently, what I usually get from them is the assumption that dark skinned people are a little afraid of us, white people. Finally delivering them to us, which is a bit shy. Even though we think it's normal." Other ethnic Chinese sources also agreed with this statement with the initials JD and HC, who feel the same way.

#### *Sociological Barriers*

Horizontal communication between Indonesian employees and foreign nationals did not find any horizontal communication conflicts caused by sociological barriers. Instead, it is due to the company's communication climate, which has been familial since the beginning. One of the things that suppress the negative impact due to sociological barriers is the culture of greeting each other each employee carries out to other employees encountered in the company environment, as well as maintaining relationships between employees by continuing to carry out regular horizontal communication within the company.

Furthermore, sociological barriers regarding religious differences were also not found in employee relationships. Sociological obstacles regarding differences in employee education levels are also not found in employees communicating horizontally because all employees have a bachelor's degree. Indonesian employees and foreign nationals generally have the same level of intellectual understanding.

#### *Psychological Barriers*

Horizontal communication between Indonesian employees and foreign nationals is found to have psychological barriers, namely in terms of differences in employees' character in communicating. Based on the study's results, it was found that there were hard employees who were easily provoked to anger when receiving criticism or suggestions from other employees, so communicating with these employees could cause conflict in communication. Based on the results of the interview, it was found that one example of a case that had happened was an employee with an emotional character who received criticism from other employees during a division meeting forum which turned out to make the employee angry. However, on the other hand, the character of employees who often bring personal problems into the company's internal communication is also found and characters with a short and fast speaking style, so communication between employees sometimes becomes ineffective and causes misunderstandings.

#### *Semantic Barriers*

Semantic barriers in terms of language use are found in horizontal communication between Indonesian employees and foreign employees. Indonesian employees are accustomed to using Indonesian in daily communication as one of their cultural values, and foreign employees often use English in everyday conversations. The use of different communication languages sometimes occurs when horizontal communication takes place, resulting in communication misunderstandings and the potential for prejudice.

Following previous research by Prasidyamurti & Wahyuni (2013) at the Schlumberger company also found the ineffectiveness of horizontal communication between employees of different countries due to differences in language use, analysis of semantic barriers in horizontal communication between employees with ethnic diversity also occurred.

#### *Mechanical Resistance*

Horizontal communication barriers from a mechanical point of view are not found in communication between Indonesian employees and foreign employees. The managerial side implements a working system in the company environment, such as employee seating positions that change every month so they can interact with different employees, a workspace without desk dividers, and a work structure that requires employees to communicate. This results in good horizontal communication between employees of other ethnicities. In addition, communication media facilities such as internal telephone lines at each employee's desk and complete Wi-Fi facilities have supported good communication between employees in the office environment.

#### **4.2. Resolving Horizontal Communication Conflicts by Employees**

Indonesian employees will first try to compromise in overcoming horizontal communication conflicts between fellow employees by finding out the source of the communication conflict and re-communicating with the employee concerned to find the best solution for the horizontal communication conflict. The second action Indonesian employees take if compromising efforts do not see a solution is integrating what each employee intends to achieve a win-win solution.

Employees of foreign nationals also do the same thing in overcoming conflicts in horizontal communication between fellow employees. Compromising is the first action that will be taken to find a solution to the conflict in horizontal communication that occurs. The difference with Indonesian employees is that compromising efforts do not produce a solution. Then foreign employees tend to avoid horizontal communication conflicts by letting the conflict resolve itself or simply giving a smile as a form of non-verbal communication to the employee concerned.

#### **Discussion**

A good horizontal communication process between fellow employees within the organization can improve cooperative relations between employees, the delivery of coordination and task information, and interpersonal relationships between employees (Novinger, 2013). Implementing a management system within the company's environment can run effectively if horizontal communication among employees is also running effectively. Misunderstandings in coordinating tasks to conflicts that can hinder teamwork can be avoided by communication between employees within the company so that communication goes well. Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, & Toth (2010) explained that good horizontal communication within a company could increase the effectiveness and efficiency of company management, maintain internal communication within the company, and develop the quality of human resources. The horizontal communication process between Indonesian and foreign employees has been going well. Prejudice and stereotypes about ethnic diversity are not found in horizontal communication with the employee's ethnic diversity, so communication and cooperation within the company can occur effectively without any suspicion or gaps (forming small groups) between employees of different ethnicities and countries. The horizontal communication process

between employees is going well because of managerial intervention, which specifically regulates systems such as employee seating positions that change every month so that employees can interact with different employees in a workspace without any boundaries. Work structure requires employees to interact in communication, and the organizational culture built is familial. However, sometimes there are still communication barriers that have the potential to cause horizontal communication to lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Horizontal communication that takes place freely shapes the character of employees to be independent have the initiative in working together, and be creative.

Horizontal communication barriers still occur between Indonesian and foreign employees, showing conformity. Efforts made by employees to resolve horizontal communication conflicts show conformity with the theory (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005; Suranto, 2005), although the resolution of horizontal communication conflicts carried out by both Indonesian employees and foreign employees have similarities and differences. The similarity between conflict resolution efforts by Indonesian employees and foreign employees is to make efforts to compromise. Differences in conflict resolution efforts could be seen in the second attempt if the initial attempts at compromising did not produce a solution. Indonesian employees will try to integrate the communication conflict, and employees of foreign countries will tend to be avoiding

## **5. Conclusion**

The horizontal communication process between employees is going well and needs to be influenced by the diversity of employees in terms of ethnicity. This is due to the managerial role in creating a system that supports horizontal communication processes between employees of different ethnicities, as well as a good atmosphere and climate for horizontal communication of employees. Horizontal communication takes place through interpersonal relationships with high communication intensity, both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Barriers to horizontal communication between employees are communication barriers in terms of employee psychology and semantics. Efforts made by employees in overcoming horizontal communication conflicts are by compromising. However, Indonesian employees tend to make efforts to integrate. This research implies that the aspect of employee ethnic diversity does not affect the interaction and horizontal communication relationships between employees.

The different characteristics possessed by each employee and the intensity of communication made by each employee can affect the interaction and horizontal communication relationships between employees within the company environment. Therefore, the management is advised to give better attention to each employee, especially in relations and communication between employees. The management is also advised to continue to improve the company's climate, that is, familial, so that horizontal communication, interpersonal relationships, and cooperation between employees are encouraged so employees can be established better in the future. Furthermore, future researchers should further expand the scope of research, considering that the research carried out has not been fully described in managing cross-cultural diversity in the workplace.

## **Conflict of interest**

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.



### Authors' contribution

The author made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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