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Balancing Bureaucracy and Communal Values in Diffusing the Innovation Process: Strategic Communication Challenges from the Malaysian Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The transmission of agricultural messages such as innovation in agricultural settings requires good planning from a strategic communication viewpoint. Moreover, there has been a call from various quarters that demand a holistic approach to solve this miscommunication issue. Thus, this study aims to understand the experiences of senior officers who are in charge of managing transmission of agricultural knowledge and training in various agriculturally based organisations. In-depth interviews were conducted with experts representing local and federal research-based and execution agencies. The data were analysed thematically. The interview protocol was developed from a literature review and tested on an expert who was also in the field of agriculture. The findings indicate that the bureaucracy system negates transfer of technology to the recipients, while communal culture presents as stimuli for successful diffusion of innovation. Thus, balancing bureaucracy and communal values offers a positive impact on the transfer of new technology to the recipients. The results offer a new understanding on the complexity of transfer of innovation knowledge and practices in terms of planning and implementing phases faced by the officers. To add, within the context of the study, top-down and bottom-up communication strategies need to be realigned to ensure the sustainability of effective innovation transfer in Malaysia. Future research could address the different scope of communication aspects in these organisations and extend our in-depth interview approach to various officers at national and regional levels.

Keywords: *Bureaucracy, communal values, strategic communication, experts, innovation.*

INTRODUCTION

Strategic communication is vital in spearheading innovation via an institution. Most researchers in the field of innovation have highlighted that one of the main elements in ensuring success in innovation adaptation is developing communication strategies (Sjödin, 2019; Tumbo, Mwalukasa, Fue, Mlozi, Haug & Sanga, 2018). Communication in this context can be defined as a platform in planning, leading, organising and coordinating appropriate messages to receivers, that would enable them to understand the message and implement the relevant strategies in practice. In the context of global and local policies, experts have been emphasising on the importance of aligning policy to practices (Jones & Kimura, 2013, Mohamed Arshad, Mohd Noh, Luong, Ismail, Ibragimov, Che Omar, Ho, Tumin & Ahmad Shaharudin, 2020). Studies in innovation that focus on communication aspects have highlighted several matters such as achieving performance success (Nwabueze & Mileski, 2018), leadership and inclusive communication strategy (Salazar & Lant, 2018), founder's syndrome (Boustani & Boustani, 2017) and network sustainability (Nasiri, Alleyne & Yihui, 2016). These studies suggest that communication is one of the important factors that

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contribute to innovation success in various settings. Thus, in the context of this study, there is a need to understand the challenges of imparting knowledge and practices from the perspective of strategic communication. In other words, what are the challenges of managing transmission of agricultural knowledge and training onto the recipients from a strategic communication perspective?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this research, innovation is defined as new ideas, knowledge and practices that will enhance the existing products, services and practices of a community, organisation and authority (Areed, Salloum & Shaalan, 2021). Communication strategy has been suggested as an effective means for political and organisational development, and is used extensively via both mass media and social media.

Today, the farming community faces various challenges in its effort to increase agricultural yields, which in turn will increase monthly income (Mohamed Arshad et al., 2020). Every problem encountered has to be handled and resolved wisely without involving high cost increases. Along with this comes the various ideas and methods to be practised in order to solve the problems faced by farmers, particularly the modern need to implement innovations in the agricultural sector and recycle raw materials domestically. Living standards will increase in line with the state's economic and export potential if more agriculture is industrialised (Abdulloev, 2020).

It is challenging for agricultural sectors across the world to keep abreast of the rapid developments in knowledge, science and technology. Nonetheless, it must be achieved, in a situation where access to the relevant knowledge is made easier from the standpoint of technology, but perhaps more difficult financially.

Facebook and Twitter have been found to be the most popular social media platforms used by agricultural and rural development stakeholders in Ontario (Chowdhury & Odame, 2013) as they are flexible tools for fostering active links and passive relationships in personal and professional networks. In addition, these two open platforms also make it easy for people to find and share information and provide an opportunity to see and interact within strong and weak relationships. Local food stakeholders essentially have the potential to use social media to create and strengthen networks that enable the process of interaction, relationship building, knowledge sharing and inclusive collaboration. However, study findings show that the Internet and social media, and their use by local food stakeholders alone may not be able to create a space for interactive and inclusive communication (Kaushik, Chowdhury, Odame & van Paassen, 2018). Rather, success depends on the strategic use of social media by different stakeholders that help them fulfil and complement their interests (Nicholson, Nugroho & Rangaswamy 2016). The findings show that social media is able to bring beneficial goods and services to organisations and individuals, and creates an inclusive innovation network, including small-scale actors such as farmers, families and small businesses. This effort can be applied if social media is used as a form of online interaction that also encourages offline and face-to-face interactions, and does not merely produce passive online interactions.

The literature has shown that trust is the main factor prioritised by rural people in order to build networks online (Townsend, Wallace, Smart & Norman, 2016). They are more comfortable getting to know each other offline before moving the relationship online (Pan, Cui & Qian, 2020). It is suggested that organisations should build a strong presence and

connections among rural people through publicising various programmes that promote local food, sharing job openings related to local foods, organising and supporting advocacy events, and through newsletters. Chowdhury and Odame (2013) concluded that the use of social media by agricultural and rural development stakeholders does not meet the expectations of communication for innovation. This is because the use of social media is selective and aimed only at creating consumer interest in buying and processing locally produced fresh vegetables and fruits. It is not demonstrated with an open attitude by engaging in discussion on controversial topics, such as environmental impact and health-related food issues (Kaushik et al., 2018), as the organisational communication and institutional culture that are practised by top-down, hierarchical and rules-based public-sector organisations influence their use of online communication tools (Kamruzzaman, Chowdhury, Odame & Sarapura, 2019). In fact, the utilisation of an interaction 'tone' that does not invite discussion on controversial topics or encourage regular interaction of an ongoing dialogue would exclude farmers and farm families from receiving important attention. Therefore, the current trend of following an information 'push-out' strategy (Pieterson & Ebbers, 2020) while communicating issues related to food and agriculture not only limits the practice of communication between stakeholders and related farmers, but also hinders the innovation process to be conveyed. To comprehend how and why things happen on the ground, we must focus on the stakeholder perspective. It is vital to engage stakeholders as they represent the core of the social setting.

Stakeholder theory from the communicative perspective, which is a theory on change in organisational communication, is deemed suitable for this particular study. It caters to a wide perspective on how an organisation can anticipate, coordinate and reflect on change that affects the life of the organisation. Stakeholder theory emphasises on how a stakeholder impacts the organisation or institution. Freeman (1984) advocated the importance of aligning organisational needs with stakeholders' needs. There are three main assumptions of the theory, namely: 1) Stakeholders' network affects and influences the success of institutional planning and implementation, 2) Sensitivity to stakeholders' needs ensures the success of institutional and organisational goals, and 3) Values determine the success of the focal organisation. This stakeholder communication theory of change was proposed by Lewis (2019), whose main concern was regarding stakeholders' perspectives on providing the most appropriate feedback and reflection on the evolution of change in an environment and onto the institution. The theory argues that each stakeholder plays an important role in providing reflection on how matters can be resolved based on their experiences and exposure. In the context of this study, this theory is used to understand the phenomena of imparting innovation ideas and practices among the targeted recipients, from experts' perspectives.

Stakeholders in this study setting are the local communities who are the targeted recipients of innovative agricultural knowledge and practices. The agencies have been actively engaged with the community and working within the realms of bureaucracy culture of the respective institutions.

Bureaucracy and Innovation

The development of agricultural practices is vital to cater for the rising needs among the human population. This development solely depends on effective and efficient knowledge generation, intensiveness and know-how transfer among agricultural stakeholders (Šūmane, Kunda, Knickel, Strauss, Tisenkopfs, Rios, Rivera, Chebach & Ashkenazy, 2018). The objective of efficiently and effectively generating, intensifying and transferring knowledge is basically

to innovatively produce the needed agricultural products to serve the targeted population and create a 'balanced socio-economic' environment, which transforms to enhanced Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Musakanya & Maphela, 2019). Meanwhile, scholars believe that innovative products cannot occur without guided rules, codes or regulations, known as bureaucracy (Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner & Höllerer, 2017; Mazzucato, Kattel & Ryan-Collins, 2020).

Ensuring the effective formulation and implementation of policies would involve doses of bureaucracy (Demortain, 2020). Innovativeness involves individual and team creativity, which enhances firm competitiveness, economic gain and social and environmental friendliness, and adds value to farm produce and farming processes (Walder, Sinabell, Unterlass, Niedermayr, Fulgeanu, Kapfer, Melcher & Kantelhardt, 2019). Nevertheless, evidence from earlier literature reveals that the innovative process needs to be guided by bureaucratic processes.

On this note, scholars have developed an interest in examining the influence of bureaucracy and innovativeness (Hermans, Geerling-Eiff, Potters & Klerkx, 2015). Findings on the relationship between bureaucracy and innovation have yielded mixed evidence, with most scholars believing that bureaucracy hinders innovation (Eidt, Pant & Hickey, 2020; Karo, 2018; Perez-Gracia, Awada, Calvo, Amaral, Arkenau, Gruenwald, …, & Douillard, 2020). Some earlier scholars, however, viewed bureaucracy as counterproductive to innovation, especially among agriculturally based firms, as the bureaucrat acquires more labour to perform operations. Hence, they operate at a slower pace, employing a labour-biased approach in production (Beqiraj, Fedeli & Tancioni, 2019). Meanwhile, the innovation process is a complex process that needs some degree of flexibility, fluidity and rigidity in accessing the market and resources. Accessing the resources and market using the innovation process might include gaining access to information via technologies not limited to the use of the Internet and social media (Bronson, 2019; Janc, Czapiewski & Wójcik, 2019) or disrupting the pre-existing (hierarchical) information flow, thus creating an engaging atmosphere between agronomic actors (Bronson, 2019). An innovation process might also refer to the transfer of indigenous knowledge, crop varieties and circulation of resources between regions (Trippl, Grillitsch & Isaksen, 2018), guided by a flexible or innovative bureaucracy that considers the external environment (Courtade, 2020; Demortain, 2020).

The relationship between bureaucracy and innovation in the agricultural sector or industry has received some attention from researchers worldwide. Studies that have been conducted include Bronson (2019) with Niggli, Andres, Willer and Baker (2017). However, research on agricultural innovativeness is still in its infancy and more is needed to enhance its development. Niggli et al. (2017) argue that by doing so, disempowered communities will be empowered and communities will witness enhancements in healthy food production; likewise, eco-functional practices will be intensified. Other advantages include integrating economic, social and technological dimensions of innovation and enhancing partnerships between agricultural stakeholders, namely farmers, policymakers, scientists and advisors (Niggli et al., 2017). Also, a study by Eidt et al. (2020) suggests employing and promoting transformational agricultural intervention to curb the counter effectiveness of bureaucracy not limited to power hierarchy, that hinders agricultural intervention and marginalises disempowered communities in agricultural innovativeness.

Contrary to the reported advantages of bureaucracy, Walder et al. (2019) found that bureaucracy inhibited individual sustainable innovativeness among Austrian farmers. Likewise, Lakitan (2019) warned of the imminent danger of counter-innovativeness, and was sceptical regarding the influence of bureaucracy on innovation in agriculture. He cautioned that bureaucracy might counter the desired innovation if the relevant smaller farmers' needs are not considered; this is likely to increase the probability of widening the gap between the capacities of small local farmers and the developed agricultural-based technologies.

Over the years, scholars have supported the relationship between bureaucracy and innovativeness in the agricultural sector. They believe that bureaucracy reduces corruption and wastage of resources and produce, thus creating a sustainable agricultural process and a viable socio-economic society (Vitari & David, 2017). Vitari and David (2017) explored several management theories to seek how bureaucracy would support innovation and encourage sustainability among permaculture firms. They found that the needed factors are giving preference to long term objectives, emergent coordination and inclusive or collective wisdom during the decision-making process, as well as intrinsic motivation.

In summary, evidence from the reviewed literature reveals that the relationship between bureaucracy and innovation among agriculturally based farms are highly correlated, complex and complementary. The literature also indicates that innovation among agriculturally based firms is guided and complemented by bureaucracy in order to maintain the innovative standard and to lower the risks associated with innovation, specifically with agricultural technologies (autonomous machinery), resource control, information and market distributions. Likewise, to achieve an effective innovation process for an effective and optimal approach, a flexible and fluid bureaucratic process is required.

Collectivism and Innovation

In recent years, the agricultural sector has witnessed a great deal of transformation. For example, there has been a migration from traditional farming to mechanised farming, technological usage, production of genetically modified plants and animals, green agriculture, and agricultural sustainability (Madureira & Torre, 2019). All these transformations would not have been possible if knowledge was not shared (Anand, Centobelli & Cerchione 2020). Insights from the available literature reveal that innovativeness among farmers is a product of two distinct human attributes: collectivism and individualism. The contributions of these attributes to agricultural innovativeness have been examined over the years (Adnan, Nordin & Abu Bakar, 2017; Buggle, 2020; Yatribi, 2020).

Collectivism and innovativeness among agriculturally based firms have effectively and efficiently produced the desired results when the firms concerned joined forces on innovation platforms by combining their traditional knowledge, organisational skills and business interests (Fieldsend, Cronin, Varga, Biró & Rogge, 2020). However, Madureira and Torre (2019) contend that although researchers have attempted to investigate collectivism between developed and rural areas, limited studies have laid out how technologies can be transferred from urban areas to less developed farming areas, or how policy governing both areas can encourage collectivist behaviour among agricultural stakeholders.

Some primary objectives of transferring knowledge are to enhance innovation and sustainability through a production process that is effective and efficient, and to increase the transfer of agricultural knowledge (Mtega & Ngoepe, 2018). Collectivist engagement requires access to information and partners' engagement as vital elements for a successful innovative

experience (Ortiz, Orrego, Pradel, Gildemacher, Castillo, Otiniano, Gabriel, Vallejos, Torres, Woldegiorgis, Damene, Kakuhenzire, Kasahija & Kahiu, 2013). Hence, lack of interaction between farmers, national, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other agricultural stakeholders inhibits farmers' access to the needed information, market and services, technologies, organizations, as well as the networks to enhance agricultural innovativeness (Ortiz et al., 2013).

Research has revealed that several factors contribute to knowledge sharing among farmers in the agricultural business. These factors are not limited to cultural values and motivational factors such as reward sharing elements of behavioural theory, that include farmers' attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Adnan et al., 2017; Buggle, 2020; Yatribi, 2020). In fact, factors such as accessibility of knowledge channels, affordability of communication tariffs, availability of ICT tools, ownership over communication tools and government intervention also influence the choice of knowledge channels and transfers among stakeholders in the agricultural business (Mtega & Ngoepe, 2018). Furthermore, Adnan et al. (2017), who applied the theory of planned behaviour, concluded that considering farmers' attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control can transform non-economic benefits to agricultural profitability.

Farmers with collectivist information or knowledge sharing elements have historical evidence ascertaining their ancestors' engagement in such actions (Buggle, 2020). Nevertheless, the author argues that such descendants are less likely to be engaged in Agric-based activities in recent times, despite having historical evidence. On this note, a recent meta-analytic study by Yatribi (2020) has shown that farmers' individualistic characteristics are empirically witnessed as a significant factor that predicts technology adoption decisions agriculturally. In a case analysis, da Rosa Pires, Pertoldi, Edwards & Hegyi (2014) presented innovation among rural Agric-businesses and posited that rural farmers differentiate, innovate and position their farm produce by combining technological engagement via eCommerce and cultural-historical evidence to communicate their products to end-users. These rural farmers successfully compete against urban counterparts through alternative business modelling by combining available technology, location-based attributes, product differentiation, direct customer contact, unrelated partnerships and product accessibility.

Additional evidence from Hannachi, Coleno and Assens (2020) point to the importance of a collectivist culture among agricultural stakeholders. The collectivist approach gives agricultural stakeholders collective bargaining power and also makes cooperatives and unions have multi-stakeholders' dialogues and self-organisation (Hannachi et al., 2020). Aside from the stated importance of the collectivist approach, scholars such as Sacchetti and Tortia (2020) and also Petit, Muneret, Carbonne, Hannachi, Ricci, Rusch and Lavigne (2020) note that agricultural stakeholders sometimes use a collectivist approach for individual motives to find natural solutions to agricultural issues such as flooding and pest control, and monetary and nonmonetary gain by capitalising on the rules and regulations. In this regard, Sacchetti and Tortia (2020) remarked on continuous communication and engagement in the learning process in a collectivist society.

Further evidence observed in the literature points to the significant role of government intervention in ensuring innovativeness among agricultural firms. Government interventions could be in the form of agricultural policies, subsidies, assistance, laws, regulations or partnerships targeted towards agricultural innovation and sustainability (Hermans et al., 2019). Also, intervention might be in terms of creating storage facilities,

providing pesticides, agricultural machinery or the needed workforce, or creating markets for agricultural stakeholders (Relf-Eckstein, Ballantyne & Phillips 2019). Furthermore, government intervention may be counterproductive, especially if: 1) the policies or intervention programmes lack specific capabilities; 2) there is incoherence in institutional frameworks formulation; 3) the implementation of the intervention lacks proper communication to the affected or targeted agricultural stakeholders; or 4) physical and knowledge infrastructures are inappropriate (Lamprinopoulou, Renwick, Klerkx, Hermans & Roep, 2014). Aside from the individualistic and collectivistic approach, another dimension of collectivism and innovation is the socio-technology nature (Rezaei, Safa, & Ganjkhanloo, 2020). Although the socio-technology approach towards collectivist innovation in agriculture is interwoven with policy, the elements of intervention, technology and agricultural stakeholders' collaboration are vital in ensuring the success of innovation diffusion in a community (Hatimtai & Hassan, 2018; Hermans et al., 2019).

Both bureaucracy and communal values represent concerns of scholars on depicting how and why innovation, knowledge and practices are hindered in respective communities.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilised an in-depth interview method. The researchers interviewed 5 experts in agricultural-based organisations. They were chosen based on specific criteria namely, working experiences, administration position and engagement with communities. Thus, this type of sampling is categorised as purposive sampling. The informants were from local and federal research-based and execution agencies. They have more than 5 years of working experiences, hold administrative positions and are actively engaged with their respective communities. The interview protocol was developed from a literature review and tested on an expert who was also in the field of agriculture. The expert had both government and industrial experiences, held top positions in relevant agricultural related agencies and had been actively involved in agriculturally based communities for more than 20 years. Table 1 indicates the background information of the experts including gender, year and discipline of study and ethnicity of the participants (Table 1).

Table 1: In depth Interviews – Informants' Information

Informant	Working experiences	Agencies
Informant 1	20 years	Federal
Informant 2	25 years	Federal
Informant 3	20 years	Local & Federal
Informant 4	20 years	Federal
Informant 5	30 years	Local & Federal

Examples of the questions asked in the interviews are: How does the organisation convey the knowledge/science/practicality of innovation to the prospective recipients of innovation? (Communication strategy used), What are the challenges in delivering innovation to the recipients of innovation and What are your suggestions on effective communication strategies in delivering innovation to potential recipients of innovation?

The interviews were conducted virtually via online platforms and face to face sessions. English and Malay were used interchangeably during the interview. The transcriptions were translated to English and were checked by the research team to ensure the authenticity of data. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour, and was transcribed and evaluated in detail by the researchers. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis. The procedure was as follows: the data were gathered and the researchers read them based on the interpretation of the research objectives. Then, the codes of the themes were identified based on the research objectives. The process of naming and identifying the themes were done concurrently in order to ensure the themes were agreed upon by the researchers. Once the coding and themes were finalised, the researchers prepared the written report.

RESULTS

Two themes emerged from the data in response to the research aims: (1) the bureaucracy system tends to hinder innovation diffusion, and (2) communal values determine the acceptance of innovation among the targeted recipients. Both themes exhibited reality on the ground, and what follows is a description of the themes and their dimensions.

Bureaucracy

Balancing bureaucracy is indeed a challenge for the transmission of innovation in this context. Bureaucracy refers to the government system that governs and monitors the policy on innovation transfer. The experts interviewed had strong views on this matter. They argued that bureaucracy can be seen as both a positive and negative platform in managing diffusion of innovation in the country, state, district, and eventually in the villages. However, bureaucracy tends to negate innovation in an agricultural setting. As illustrated by Informant 1:

> It is about the land. The main factor is participation in government schemes … there must be a land grant. Land grant … young people do not have land. Therefore, what could have been done … most lands are controlled by the state, thus the federal government needs to intervene and help the interested young farmers to rent the lands for agricultural purposes.

He repeatedly emphasised:

> We are trying to approach the state government. However, sometimes, federal and state have different interests. For example, when the state government has secured certain projects, the state has its own plan. Therefore, it is kind of different from the federal approach

The main concern of experts on this bureaucracy system is that the system is rather rigid as each stakeholder (federal and local governments) have different jurisdiction in terms of land, project planning and budget allocation. It is a structural issue where the existing bureaucracy system tends to be less supportive when it comes to spearheading innovation knowledge and practices to the targeted recipients.

Another expert, Informant 2, also supported this aspect:

> There is a government policy, … There also are constraints, a lot actually, depending on what we convey … the top policy, whether they see the interest from the agency itself or (whether) there are financial constraints…..The main reason is the business reason. It is difficult for us to say because it involves policy.

Arguing on this issue, Informant 3, pointed out that streamlining the needs of federal and state-based agencies is crucial as miscommunication would be a huge issue on the ground:

> For example, our institution wants to do a large-scale project, right? However, there are over 30 to 40 people …. For example, like us at HQ, we can concentrate on one thing, right? But when at the district level, we have a straw project, we have to take care of the machinery project, we.... At the same time, we are development agents, we have to approach farmers, entrepreneurs. Then we have to look at pests and diseases…. The scope of work is too much, we cannot concentrate on those things

Ultimately, the policy changes and this will have an impact on the transformation of innovation. As Informant 1 aptly expressed, "An industry will end, a new industry will come, politics will change crops, now oil palm will change to bamboo." His viewpoints was supported by other experts as they voiced the similar concern on how policy affects the administration system and where all work forces have to address the latest interest of federal government. Bureaucracy system rather than facilitating innovation progress tend to be a barrier in propagating innovation knowledge and practices to respective communities.

Communal Values

Understanding communal values is the thrust of innovation acceptance among innovation recipients. One has to understand how the community works, what their values are and why the recipients normally accept or reject change that is introduced to them by outsiders. All the experts agreed that the only way to introduce change was by getting recipients' support for change itself. As illustrated by Informant 1:

> We have a collaboration with the Department of Orang Asli (Indigenous) Development because we want to find areas outside the villages that have challenges with oil palm plantations, rubber, … so we go in ... inland. What we are doing now, we are working with the Department of Orang Asli Development to tackle this matter. From the Department of Orang Asli Development, we will get permission and they (the officers) will inform the inner circle, the community leaders ... so, we will also meet the leader of the community to give confidence in what we want to convey, what items we want to teach, what things we want to share…. Sometimes we also have to understand the local socio-culture. We can't just do it one off. So, from there, I just know that the village head will issue a list…from there we will approach these farmers, we will gather them, from there we will visit because … in the application form, we actually have a field inspection requirement…. We have

> the privilege to … bring government allocation, we can decide on this matter. At the same time, we also train our staff to assess their ability to work for the agricultural sector.

Engaging with the community in order to understand their values will win their hearts. Thus, the community appreciates officers who work hard to get to know them and are able to understand why and how they react to new technology in their everyday life. As Informant 1 further elaborated:

> I take this social relationship as an example related to indigenous people. As an example, 10 years ago, I went into an aboriginal area to convince them about some technology, until we succeeded. To put it simply, we took a chance and slept at the aboriginal village, drank tea with the people. This does not mean that we do not draw the line somewhere…. But to be nice to them to that extent. Not to mention we sleep in farmers' places. Where there are no hotels and homestays, we will sleep in farmers' houses. Those are all the things that we would do.

Being acclimated to the culture is important:

> The basics are the same … in terms of process because usually the staff is almost the same ... yes, from the local area. For example, if I go to Batu Pahat, I can speak in Javanese. I speak Javanese. Even the Bagan Datuk area now is a Javanese area, even in Baling there is a Javanese area in the middle of it. I can ... if I have to … communicate in that way. I also take care of Kelantan. Sometimes we have to talk a little bit about what we all take for granted. Basically, it is like that. We will communicate, but sometimes in terms of jokes, in terms of rapport (with the farmers) according to the situation there, we will usually get a guide.

To gain trust, officers have to self-reflect on how to get acquainted with the community values, because in order to change the farmers' mindsets, one has to know their values inside and out. It is best to understand what the farmers' fears are in facing change in their everyday lives. In other words, to ensure the success of innovation, one has to make the effort to grasp the grassroots problem, that is, the community problem. According to Informant 3:

> I think the best thing is to be guided directly to the agricultural entrepreneurs. Like the example we went to visit ... I was very involved in this Agro-based Industry Entrepreneurship Programme, where we knew what we wanted and the stakeholders knew their needs. Sometimes with this entrepreneur … we wanted to change his mindset because his mindset was like this: if he wanted to do this project, he would say he wanted only what was sufficient for him, he did not set his mind for global.... But in that situation, we wanted to change his mind so we had to motivate (ourselves) a lot. Like I said, if possible, we would focus.... This farmer entrepreneur… we wanted him to progress. What

> we needed to do… we upgraded him (with) a workshop, in terms of his mindset, the way he had to market the products.

The key to success in introducing and sustaining innovation in a community is knowing its community values. As Informant 3 argued:

> Wanting to share that compatibility is a little difficult. The farmers must be accepted in the board meeting ... the new officers should have such a procedure. Sometimes, if there is no sense of goodwill, the management cannot share. So, in this situation, how do we adjust ourselves? This is when our exchange takes place one by one. We have to take 5 to 6 months to get to know the farmers here. The atmosphere they have in the Persatuan Pertubuhan Kawasan (PPK; local farmer's association) is indeed different. If I were in Sungai Limau, it would have its own atmosphere. Here, it is different. Sometimes half of the board of directors are too ... too concerned about taking part, it becomes bothersome in terms of our management. The officers are also unhappy. But now it doesn't matter which PPK is alright. Now we are friends. We look, we look for points of similarity between the directors, farmers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the current research, the experts have expressed that both macro and micro approaches are important to ensure a swift transfer of technology to the targeted recipients. In a developing country like Malaysia that aspires to be a developed country, two aspects need to be looked into seriously: policy enforcement and monitoring and gaining the trust of the community. Studies on innovation transfer in developed and developing countries such as Japan and Ecuador present unique experiences with regards to the transfer of innovation to farmers and business owners who are part of the agricultural network association. Reflecting on the Japanese agricultural reform (Jones & Kimura, 2013), local government support is a key factor that mobilises transformation of agricultural practices and products in the country; whilst in Ecuador, community engagement presents a strong factor that shapes the success of the agricultural movement (Bates, Grijalva & Grijalva, 2020).

Communal values, moreover, represent an important factor that drives acceptance among potential advocators and users of an innovation. The innovation idea must be liked and trusted by both the advocators (e.g., opinion leaders) and the farmers (i.e., the recipients) who will execute the accepted innovation programme. Thus, looking at both sides of the coin, stakeholder theory (Lewis, 2019) rationalises why and how change could happen in a community where there is active involvement of federal and local agencies (representing bureaucrats) and the other stakeholders (the farmers and related networks, e.g., land owners, business agencies and community leaders) who work together to ensure innovation transfer once they believe in an idea of innovation that could benefit the community at large. While experiences in other countries might be different, in Malaysia, land is regulated under the authority of the state, while financial support and technology transfer are derived from federal authorities. Thus, it is important for these stakeholders to collaborate to ensure optimal outputs for both state and national achievements. Communication at this stage must be from Federal to State and from State to Local Districts. A huge bureaucratic movement as

well as diplomacy are required in negotiating the technological and financial assistance as most of the time, these forms of support are from the Federal level. Thus, even when related matters are smoothly negotiated, the issue of acceptance among local farmers remains a challenge. Some are used to old ways of managing their agricultural farms, products and practices.

To request that they agree to accept and execute the latest technology is not easy. Moreover, officers in local agencies are normally transferred from one location to another every 3 to 5 years, and acclimatising with the new culture of the community will not be easy. At this stage, the communication strategies being used by the local and federal agencies are normally face to face meetings and workshops, and digital media campaigns. Problems may arise when a new person replaces the existing officer. Trust needs to be re-established by both parties. As farmers tend to trust officers that they are familiar with, face to face communication such as small group meetings are still preferable for many of them. Nonetheless, before these can take place, the officers must understand the culture of the farmers, opinion leaders and business agencies such as SMEs. Hence, even though going digital is the current trend, the touch of human communication is still necessary in the case of Malaysia. This is what we call finding the middle ground between working from the bottom up and from the top down; in other words, balancing bureaucracy and communal values in manoeuvre communication strategies for innovation transfer in agriculturally based organizations in Malaysia.

This research was inspired by the need to understand the agricultural field in Malaysia from a strategic communication perspective. The findings indicate that balancing bureaucracy and support from the community could enhance the transfer of agricultural technology to the targeted recipients. Therefore, within the context of this study, top-down and bottom-up communication strategies need to be realigned in order to ensure the sustainability of effective innovation transfer in Malaysia.

LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATION

The limitation of this research is that the interviewed experts were from five agricultural organisations consisting of paddy, rubber, cocoa, and agricultural research agencies. Apart from that, three experts were interviewed via an online medium that to certain extent had limited time for interview and connection problems. As a suggestion for future research, it would be interesting to address the different scope of communication aspects in these organisations and extend our in-depth interview approach to various officers at national and regional levels.

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