THE INFLUENCES OF CORPORATE CULTURES ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

It is proven that corporate cultures have a great impact on productivity, job satisfaction, and turnover. This study, through ethnographic and textual analysis, aims to investigate the influences of corporate/organizational cultures (Cooke & Szumal, 1993) on management and business communication. To form a comprehensive, holistic, and in-depth understanding of the organizational culture and its direct and indirect effects on professional communication in the workplace, participant observations were conducted, interviews were carried out and interorganizational and intraorganizational textual data was collected from an educational institute. The ethnographic and textual analysis revealed that the act of adaptiveness to the organizational culture shaped the communicative practices, the linguistic structures, and the behavioral norms of the place discourse community. As the employees were bound by the rules and regulations, they made direct and indirect references to the policies using referential intertextuality, functional intertextuality, and conventional formulaic expressions. As the employees were also bound to be supportive, friendly, and respectful, they strived to use proper opening and closing markers, positive and negative politeness, and affiliative humour to create a positive environment and reduce stress. Employees also used ellipsis, substitutions, hedges, and emoticons to mark excitement in conversations and writing. The study revealed that organizational cultures influence business communication through shaping the *"I think"*, *"I feel"*, and *"I act"* attitudes in different situations.

Keywords: Corporate Culture, Management, Language, Business Communication, Textual Analysis, Discourse Community

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1. INTRODUCTION

Institutions, according to North (1991), are "the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction" (p. 97). These institutions are formed "so that people who share a common set of values or interests can work together towards achieving that common objective" (Gabriel, 2003, p. 106). This is important, as the collective work of the group is better than the individual work. In this regard, organizations are characterized, according to Gabriel (2003), by the people or the employees of the origination, their common objectives, and the structure they develop.

The daily practices in institutions are governed by formal and informal rules (North, 1991). The formal rules are usually written and enforced by an external authority. These include "constitutions, laws, and property rights" (North, 1991, p. 97). Informal rules, however, evolve as a result of human interactions and these include the code of conduct, unwritten conventions, and behavioral norms (Kasper & Streit, 1998). Unlike the formal rules that are enforced by an external authority, informal rules, which set the obligations between society members, are written and enforced by the institution. They are adopted as institutions find them and the objective they try to achieve valuable (Skoog, 2005). The employees who do not abide by the formal rules are formally sanctioned, whereas those who do not abide by the informal rules are sanctioned through social feedback (Kasper & Streit, 1998).

As formal rules are set and enforced by external authorities, the focus in this study is directed to the internally set and enforced informal rules as they govern the social obligations and interactions within the community. It is proven that these informal rules, in general, and organizational cultures, in particular, influence productivity and turnover in organizations (Abbas, Khan, Ishaq, & Mehmood, 2020), but do they influence organizational/business communication? Do they enforce using different language/communication patterns in different situations? This study aims to answer these questions. Specifically, using ethnographic and critical textual analysis, this study aims to examine the influence of organizational culture on language use.

The critical perspective to language studies examines language use in relation to the context. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), for example, views language as a social practice in which the context of language use has a primary role to play (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2000). It is perceived that the discursive practices have major ideological effects (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In critical genre analysis (CGA), however, language use is examined as a product of institutionalized and conventionalized practices and procedures (Bhatia, 2010). These institutional practices and procedures are reflected in the professional and organizational practices of the discourse community. These procedures influence the disciplinary conventions of the discourse community using the genre. Examining the influences of the institutional practices is usually carried out using ethnographical methodologies (Bazerman, 1994; Devitt, 1991; Miller, 1994; Swales, 1998). The influence of the disciplinary conventions on language use, however, is examined in relation to the implicitly understood and unconsciously followed and the explicitly enforced conventions that govern the use of language in the institution (Bhatia, 2004).

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyses the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research on organizational culture and its influences on language use. Section 4 provides the results and the discussion. Section 5 concludes the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational culture, according to O'Donnell and Boyle (2008), "gives organizations a sense of identity and determines, through the organization's legends, rituals, beliefs, meanings, values, norms and language, the way in which things are done around [there]" (p. 4). As such, it is a "pattern of basic assumptions" that are used to "perceive, think and feel" in organizations (Schein, 1985, p. 9). The culture of the workplace is not created instantly; it is developed over time. In this regard, the responsibility of the leader is to establish and manage the organizational culture (Schein, 2009). It is perceived that creating and managing the organizational culture is "the only thing of real importance that leaders do" (Schein, 2009, p. 11) in organizations.

Organizational culture is prominent in the success or failure of organizations (Deal & Kennedy, 2000). According to Kilmann, Saxton, and Serpa (1985), organizational culture may have a positive or negative impact on the employees and the performance of organizations (Borkowski & Meese, 2020; Ala, 2020). It has a positive impact if it directs the employees in the right direction; however, it has a negative impact if it directs employees in the wrong direction. In this regard, cultures that have a positive impact on organizations are "good cultures" that value teamwork, honesty, customer service orientation, and commitment to the organization (Baker, 1985). These good cultures also value adaptability to new regulations, technological development, and strains of growth (Baker, 1985, p. 10), which have a positive impact on the performance and the success of the organization. Organizational cultures that do not value these norms, however, have a negative impact on the performance and lead to the failure of the organization.

Throughout the years, organizational and management scholars have identified and studied different types of organizational cultures (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Cooke & Lafferty, 1987; Cooke & Szumal, 1993; Handy, 1976). Cooke and Szumal (1993), for example, identified three general types of organizational cultures that are the constructive cultures, passive-defensive cultures, and aggressive-defensive cultures. Constructive cultures are the cultures that encourage staff members to work together so that they achieve their organizational goals. Constructive cultures include the humanistic-encouraging culture, which requires the employees to be supportive and constructive; affiliative culture, which emphasizes interpersonal relationships; achievement culture, which values accomplishing tasks; and self-actualizing culture, which values creativity and innovation (Cooke & Szumal, 1993).

Passive-defensive cultures, however, are those cultures that value interacting with staff members in a way that does not affect their positions or security in the institution. This general type of culture includes dependent culture, in which members do only the tasks that they were asked to do; avoidance culture, in which organizations do not reward success but punish the mistakes of the employees; conventional culture, in which the staff members are expected to follow the rules and regulations; and approval culture, in which members are expected to avoid conflict and maintain a good interpersonal relationship, at least superficially (Cooke & Szumal, 1993).

Aggressive-defensive cultures, according to Cooke and Szumal (1993), are cultures in which the staff members carry out tasks in an aggressive manner to protect their positions and status. This type of culture includes power culture (Handy, 1976), in which staff members act upon the power inherited in their organizational positions; competitive culture, in which the employees must work against one another to "outperform" the other employees; perfectionist culture, in which staff members are expected to avoid mistakes and carry out all tasks in a perfect manner; and oppositional culture, in which the employees who confront and criticize the work and actions of other employees are rewarded (Cooke & Szumal, 1993).

Because organizational culture influences the daily practices of the employees (Al-Abdullat & Dababneh, 2018), it also influences the language used (Fancher, 2007). This is the case as language is the main method of passing the culture on (Spradley, 1979). The organizational culture of institutions, according to Bate (1990) is encoded in the language used. This latter point is significant for this study. As this study investigates language use in institutional practice, the investigation of the organizational culture, which comprises the norms, values, meanings, and language in organizations (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008), provides insights into why the employees of the educational institution that is the subject of this study use language the way they do (Bhatia, 2004).

In Malaysia, it is believed that the most successful companies are the companies that have constructive and positive cultures. Companies like Air Asia, VLT, and Midvale make sure that the working environment is full of positive vibes. These positive vibes can be created by reducing formality and making sure that employees enjoy their work and feel free to be themselves. This according to Chu (2015) is the secret behind the success of these companies. On the other hand, companies that destructive cultures do last for long. They lose employees and close down soon after.

Having the above in mind, this study aims to fill a gap concerning investigating the influences of the organizational culture on language use. In particular, this study aims to investigate the following:

1. What are the influences of the organizational culture on language use?

2. Does the act of adaptiveness to the organizational culture influence the behaviour of employees in organizations?

3. METHODOLOGY

As this study investigates the influences of the organizational culture on language use, some ethnographic and textual data was collected from EMIN (a pseudonym), an educational institute in Malaysia.

EMIN is an educational institute in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It has two main colleges that are the College of Business and the College of Information Technology. It has more than 3000 students who are a mix of local (Malaysians) and international students. The college employs more than 70 employees who are management, lecturers, and administrative staff. EMIN also employs a number of part-time lectures as well. Before collecting any form of data, we approached the President of EMIN and we explained to him the nature of the study and the required data. He agreed to the condition of using the data for the sake of the study only and using a pseudonym to replace the name of the institute. We agreed and he signed the consent form. After that, we started contacting the employees and asking them to send me their textual data. They also agreed on the condition of replacing their names with pseudonyms and signed the consent form. A couple of lecturers refused to participate in the study. We excluded them and deleted all email chains they were part of.

The ethnographic data was collected in the form of participant observations and interviews. We have realized that we moved around offices and talked more to the employees of all departments we created new friendships and built professional relationships with the majority of the employees. At the end of the observation period, we had questions that we needed answers for. This led to contact with a number of employees who hold different positions. We have had conducted interviews with the director of the studies, the head of the postgraduate studies, an admission employee, and a lecturer. The interviews were semi-structured. We came up with a list of questions but we gave room to the interviewees to express themselves. We did not follow the sequence of questions that we prepared in advance. We followed up with ideas to make sure that we have a holistic understanding and interpretations of some observed behavior.

In regards to the textual data, we have collected email messages, letters, memorandums, and notes. The collection period lasted for three months. At the end of the collection period, we received more than 500 emails, 10 letters, 7 memorandums, and 18 notes. We were glad to receive a big number of emails as emailing is the main method of business communication in the institute. Emails have written features (AlAfnan, 2016, 2017) as they also have spoken features (AlAfnan, 2014c) that are reflected in the use of paralanguage and non-verbal cues (AlAfnan, 2018). We reached saturation as we started receiving a big number of texts that discuss similar ideas.

The messages were categorized following AlAfnan's (2014a, 2014b) email genres. The reference into the genres of workplace emails is carried out in relation to the four genres of emails presented by AlAfnan (2015a, 2015b, 2015c). The genres are the discussion genre, inquiry genre, courier genre, and informing genre. This study is mainly a descriptive and interpretive qualitative study. Clearly defining qualitative research is not an easy task (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, some researchers have striven to give insights about this holistic description of events (Stainback & Stainback, 1988), which intends to interpret, describe, or come to terms with the meaning. For Shank (2002) qualitative research is "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (p. 5). That is, qualitative research is an inquiry into how participants make sense of their experience. This inquiry is systematic as it is rule-governed, planned and public, and empirical as it examines how this query is grounded in the world of experience (Shank, 2002). Unlike quantitative research which follows "the meaning in general", qualitative research follows the "meaning in particular" (Dornyei, 2007, p. 27) and trails a "flexible and a context-sensitive micro perspective of everyday realities of the world" (p. 29). In this sense, qualitative research is "interpretive and

naturalistic" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It examines the phenomenon under investigation in its natural settings to interpret or make sense of how the participants view their world.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The institutional or the organizational culture comprises the "distinctive norms, beliefs, principles and ways of behaving that combine to give each organization its distinct character" (Arnold, 2005, p. 625). That is, the institutional culture is the practices used by the discourse community to achieve their targets. In investigating the institutional culture, Bhatia (2010) suggested using "narratives of experience that are drawn from key practitioners within these institutional cultures" (p. 397). Given that the researcher was a member of the discourse community, the investigation of the institutional culture in this study was carried out using participant observation and formal and informal interviews. The interviews were carried out with six members of the discourse community who were the assistant academic director, two heads of department, two administrative staff, and a full-time lecturer. Once asked about the institutional culture of the institution and the expected behavior from the employees to fit in the institution, all seemed to agree on being helpful and friendly. The administrative staff and the lecturer also mentioned the controlled and hierarchal culture. Even though some researchers have argued that institutions have a single organizational culture (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Quinn & McGrath, 1985), others believe that they have several cultures that might even be conflicting cultures (Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Handy, 1993; Schein, 2009). According to Handy (1993), institutional goals are better served when institutions have several or mixed cultures. Thus, humanistic-encouraging (supportive), affiliative (friendly), and hierarchal (controlled) institutional cultures seem the shared programming of mind (Hofstede, 1980) in the educational institution.

4.1. Humanistic-encouraging culture

One main characteristic of EMIN is the humanistic-encouraging culture. Humanistic-encouraging culture, according to Cooke and Szumal (1993), is a constructive value in the workplace as it inspires the employees to be supportive, constructive and share information with each other. Office layout in the institution has made this a built-in value in the character of every single employee and lecturer in the institution. Offices in EMIN are arranged on the departmental level using an open-office plan (cubicle farms). Some believe that this open office layout encourages oral inter-departmental communication including personal contact and information sharing among the employees (Sanders & McCormick, 1993). Work in EMIN is carried out on the departmental and institutional levels. If a staff member or a lecturer is not sure about an issue, he/she usually asks his colleagues or the management, who would most likely help. This is a value that new staff members appreciate in the institution. According to Ms. MA, who joined the institution three years ago, the employees in her department are very helpful and supportive. She stated that *"working here is also okay for me. In my department, we work together. If I need something, I ask one of the staff, and they do it for me. If I am not sure about something, I also ask. We always work together"*. Recalling her early days in the institution, she added, *"when I first came here, I didn't know a thing, I always asked other staff and they always helped me"*. Mr. DS, a full-time lecturer, also seems to agree with Ms. MA that staff members in EMIN are supportive and share information. As we insisted, he gave us an example. *"Okay"*, he said, *"remember when I prepared the MQA document; I wasn't sure about a few things, so I told Mr. VK about it. He said don't worry, that day he called me for a meeting and I found there Ms. MAR so we discussed it together"*. In this meeting that Mr. DS recalled, there were three employees, as he mentioned, Mr. VK, the assistant academic director, Ms. MAR, the registrar who has long experience in dealing with the MQA, and Mr. DS, the lecturer who needed some clarifications.

This sense of sharing information and being a supportive and constructive employee was also evident in email exchanges. In fact, 36 percent of the email messages were exchanges of information and ongoing discussions. On the other hand, 33 percent of the email messages were requests and replies to these requests, which show a supportive workplace environment. In discussion email chains, the writer of the initiating email presents an issue that he/she wants to discuss. In reply, the recipient of the email usually provides suggestions, explanations, or clarifications. As chain 1 shows (see below), the writer of the initiating email, Mr. VK, is openly in search of *"suggestions"* regarding a *"short course"*. As a supportive employee, the respondent, Ms. BP, gave a general suggestion in the second email and a detailed suggestion in the fourth email in response to the input or clarification made by the writer of the third email.

Respondent 1 (Mr. VK)	*Respondent 2 (Mr. BP)*
1. Subject: short course Hi Ms. BP, We have international students who came two months after the semester start. They can't join their classes at this time, any suggestions? VK	*2. Subject: Re: short course* Dear VK, I guess we could easily do 7 weeks, short sem on Academic Skills. They may attend at least 8hrs per week. BP
3. Subject: Re: short course Ok good, we also need to give them orientation as well.	*4. Subject: Re: short course* OK, Week (1): Orientation, getting to know Malaysia and Malaysian Culture Week (2–7): Study Skills — Dr. SP or myself, Computer Skills — David, Academic Writing — English lecturer. 2–3 days, not more than 8 hours per week. Any suggestions??

Being a supportive and constructive employee in an organization also requires encouragement (Cooke & Szumal, 1993). This practice was noticed in the email messages as the employees strived to encourage other employees and students to accomplish their tasks and praise the ones who accomplished their tasks. This was carried out by several methods such as recognizing the hard work of other employees and students as in *"Very good job done"*, showing confidence in the abilities of the others as in *"…he would send me his module assignments by courier from out of the country… . I'm sure that you too are very capable and will do the same"* and inspiring others as in *"So now's the time to get back to your books to swot for exams, want straight As"*. As the excerpts above show, the employees were supportive in terms of noticing and praising the achievements of other employees and motivating the students to study hard and complete their assignments. In the excerpt, the writers used modifiers to intensify or emphasize the adjectives *"good"* and *"capable"*. In *"very good job done"*, the adverb modifier *"very"* modified the adjective modifier *"good"* to intensify the noun *"job"* to exemplify great interest and applause for the taken action. In *"very capable"*, the modifier also intensified the adjective *"capable"* so it reflects great confidence in the abilities of the students. Generally, these emails included high involvement between the communicators as they mainly used the first and second-person pronouns *"I"* and *"you"* (Biber, 1988) to reflect the personal nature of these emails. Their style was mainly informal as the writers used substitutions (i.e., "do the same") and contractions (i.e., "I'm", "now's"), which reflect the writing-like-speaking nature of these email messages.

4.2. Affiliative culture

Affiliative culture, according to Cooke and Szumal (1993), suggests placing a high priority on interpersonal relationships. The members are expected to maintain a friendly work environment and cooperate regarding the different issues that they face. They should also be open and sensitive in terms of organizational needs so that satisfaction is achieved (Klein, Bigley, & Roberts, 1995). The affiliative culture was among the first values that grabbed our attention in the workplace. We straight away noticed that the top management, lecturers, and staff members were friendly and willing to help. They even took the initiative to explain issues. We still remember the first conversation that we had with the director after my appointment. He congratulated us for being appointed to the institution, explained our duties, and took us to our office. That same day he treated all employees for lunch. This good impression did last until now. Other staff members are also friendly and open in their relationships with each other and with students. They always share their food in the pantry. As we go there to prepare some coffee, we overhear them *"chitchatting"* about organizational and personal issues. Most of the *"chitchats"* that we overheard were discussions about institutional issues or activities, light gossip about students, other staff, lecturers, and directors. They also share their experience of where to find delicious food, drinks, and the latest mega sales in the town. Their relationship with the students is not different. Students may walk into the offices to have a discussion, request a document, or meet lecturers

without an appointment. We never have heard a complaint from a student regarding an unfriendly attitude. Given that EMIN is a private educational institution, the students are customers (Tang, 2012) and need to be treated with respect.

This friendliness in interpersonal communication at the institution was also reflected in the email. The employees maintained the affiliative culture in their internally and externally exchanged emails, which can be observed in the intensive use of positive politeness (Ambady, Koo, Lee, & Rosenthal, 1996; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Positive politeness, according to Pilegaard (1997), is normally used in business communication to maintain a friendly work environment and build a cooperative business atmosphere. In the emails, as the writers debated an issue in several emails, they noticed and attended to the recipients by acknowledging their previous emails and showing exaggerated interest in their actions using modifiers as in *"thank you very much for your very gracious emails"*. The use of the conversational phrase *"thank you very much"* (Simpson-Vlach & Ellis, 2010) intended to attend and notice the action of the recipient, sending the email. The exaggeration, however, was carried out using an adverb *"very"* and adjective *"gracious"* as premodifiers to intensify the noun *"email"* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Besides, the employees, in their email messages, attempted to *"assert common ground"* by using a *"creaky voice"* (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 119) by including the sender and the recipient in an activity even though the recipient only is referred to as in *"OK, let's stop celebrating and focus on completing the assignments"*. In this excerpt, the use of *"let's"* implies that the writer and the recipient are included in the activity, *"completing the assignments"*. However, as this email was written by administrative staff in the institution to a student, the use of *"let's"*, therefore, functions as a "personal-centre switch" (Brawn & Levinson, 1987, p. 119) strategy to minimize the imposition and create a friendly correspondence.

> *Ex. 5: 2.14. Pretty sure that you have your hands full :) when shall I come over for material collection?'*
> *Ex. 6: 2.24. I am sorry you have had this problem.*

As the employees were involved in requesting, which is a face-threatening act (FTA) (Trosborg, 1994), the writers strived to reduce the imposition and maintain a friendly atmosphere. To reduce the imposition, the writers mainly used the showing sympathy and understanding strategy. This strategy was used in the requesting emails as in *"Pretty sure that you have your hands full :) when shall I come over for material collection?"*, and the responding to request emails as in *"I am sorry you have had this problem"*. In example (Ex. 5) above, the writer shows an understanding that the recipient is busy; this, however, did not stop her from enquiring. Given that the emails are exchanged in an institution, ignoring a job or a task because of FTA is not accepted as this leads to unfinished business. Therefore, the showing understanding technique in *"pretty sure you have your hands full"* meant to minimize the imposition and create a pleasant atmosphere before making the request. This technique was also supported by the use of the smiling face emoticon to reflect a lively non-verbal sympathy. In example (Ex. 6) above, which is taken from a responding to request email, however, the writer showed sympathy by making an apology.

Ex. 7: 6.57. Please study hard and study smart, we want all to pass and distinction holders to buy us lunch!!!
Ex. 8: 3.97. Had two minutes to spare, so perhaps it's better to send them off to you so that you can work on the weekend... please find attached.

The influence of the affiliative culture was also found in several emails that intended to deliver attachments and/or inform about general issues. Even though these two types of emails do not require a reply, the writers maintained a friendly outlook of these messages by using a sense of affiliative humor. Affiliative humor, according to Romero and Curthirds (2006), helps create a positive environment in institutions and reduces stress. This type of humor in the emails was presented in the shape of light practical funny expressions that intended to draw a smile on the face of the reader as in *"please study hard and study smart, we want all to pass and distinction holders to buy us lunch!!!"* (Ex. 7) above and *"Had two minutes to spare, so perhaps its better to send them off to you, so that you can work on the weekend... please find attached"* (Ex. 8). In example (Ex. 7) above, the writer, who is administrative staff, sent this excerpt as part of an informing email message to give the students their final exam timetable. The use of *"distinction holders to buy us lunch!!!"* was not a serious demand from the administrative staff, but a light moment to draw a smile and ease the tension of the students. In example (Ex. 8) above, this is the delivery message was sent by the head of studies to a lecturer, the writer, a close friend, and sent the mark sheets so that the lecturer could key in student marks. The whole task can be accomplished in a few minutes. Building on a close relationship, the writer made use of some affiliative humor to creatively send the mark sheets at an unpleasant time. As the two excerpts show, the emails that included affiliative humor were mainly informal as they included instances of conversational deletion, *"had two minutes"*, hedges, *"perhaps"*, dots ellipsis, and multiple exclamatory marks which marks excitement (Colley et al., 2004). This, in effect, explains the main purpose of using hybrid discourses in the discussion and inquiry email messages that were sent to students or were internally exchanged.

4.3. Hierarchical culture

The hierarchical culture was also perceived as one distinguishing norm of the educational institution. Hierarchical culture, according to Cameron (2007), is a formalized and structured culture that enforces rules and places great consideration on technical issues (Denison & Spreitzer, 1991). The institutions that exercise hierarchical culture usually favor control as they desire stability and cohesion rather than adaptability and spontaneity (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008). This is noticed as an authority and decision-making is based on the position of the employee (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; De Mooij, 2011).

The hierarchical culture in the institution is not a general and absolute norm. It is needed to maintain leadership, control, and institutional commitment (Dale & Fox, 2008). The employees and the lecturers in the three departments have the authority to discuss issues with students, give or receive information, and make commitments as long as it is related to their institutional duties listed in their contract of employment. Issues that are beyond the institutional duties of an employee, however, should be directed to the authorized personnel. *"This is a serious matter"*, Ms. BP proclaimed. For example, annual leave applications must be submitted two weeks in advance. They have to be approved by the head of the department, first, and then directed to the assistant academic director for final approval. Even if the head of the respective department approved the leave, the assistant academic director may decline it. Mr. VK, the assistant academic director, agrees that hierarchal culture is a feature in the institution; however, he explained that this culture is used as a method of controlling practices. *"For leaves"*, he clarified, *"sometimes MQA or MOHE want to visit us, but the heads of department don't know. I can't give leave* [pause] *I also tell the person why I can't give, they understand"*. Regarding extensions to submit assignments, the heads of department are the only personnel authorized to approve or reject the applications. The lecturers do not have the authority to extend the due date for submitting an assignment. They need to discuss the issue with the head of the department before giving extensions. *"It is complicated [laughs]"*. Ms. BP, the head of studies declared, *"At the beginning of every semester, we set the dates and inform our external partners and external examiners about it, you know that. So to change, we need to request their approval, we can't just do it"*. Besides, as the institution has quite a large number of international students, the registrar is the only authorized person to approve or reject students' leave requests. Even the head of the respective departments should not approve leave for a student without the approval of the registrar. Even though these practices slow down the progress of work in times, they, however, regulate the procedures and processes. Over some time in the institution, new employees and students alike get used to these practices and positively take them as they learn who to contact regarding what issues. Also, the orientation session at the beginning of every new semester plays a big role in educating new students about the rules and regulations and the right person to contact regarding their respective issues.

Ex. 9: 6.62. Regarding the extension, please contact Ms. BP. I am sure Ms. BP would like to know, do you have any particular reason for it.
Ex. 10: 2.24. I am forwarding your email to Xxx.

The influence of this hierarchical culture was prominent in the email messages. The communicative practices in the emails reflected the formalized and structured nature of the workplace (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991). As per the usual practice, the writers of the email messages directed the students to the employee/department in charge of their inquiries. This practice was carried out by directing the requester to the authorized person, as in example (Ex. 9) above, or by forwarding the email to the authorized person, as in example (Ex. 10) above. The excerpts in examples (Ex. 9 and Ex. 10) are taken from inquiry email messages sent to unauthorized personnel. In reaction, the administrative staff, in example (Ex. 9), directed

the requester to the right person to contact regarding the issue, "extensions". Even though she is an employee in the respected department, she did not approve, reject, or promise personally to carry the request to the head of the department. She merely advised the requester to contact the authorized person and advised him to prepare a good and valid reason to support his request, as she knows the rules and regulations. Similarly, in example (Ex. 10) above, the administrative staff forwarded the requesting email to the authorized employee as she does not have the authority to respond to the request. To keep the requester informed, she notified him about the action. In fact, the majority of the "request1-request2-reply-thanking" (RRRT) pattern in inquiry email chains was a result of requests received by unauthorized employees. The second request in the pattern stands for forwarding the requesting email to the authorized employee. These practices in inquiry email messages reflect the hierarchically formalized and structured practices in the institution.

> _Ex. 11:_ 5.11. _We do not offer students direct entry to the Diploma part 2._
> _Ex. 12:_ 5.55. _You are required to follow the instructions…_

The hierarchical culture of the institution was also reflected in rule enforcement (Zammuto & Krakower, 1991). This practice was particularly common in discussion and informing email messages. The writers of informing email messages intended to notify or advise a group of recipients regarding a general interest issue or update. The tone of these emails was mainly direct and formal to enforce the rule and reflect on the power of the sender as in example (Ex. 12). This type of message, as mentioned earlier, had a passive tone regarding participation and negotiation. The recipients were expected to follow the instructions. This was obvious in the use of the passive voice constructs as in _"you are required"_ (Ex. 12) to enforce the proposition and reflect the "leading role" (Ching, 2011, p. 524) of the sender. Rule enforcement in informing email messages was also apparent in the extensive use of suasive verbs in passive voice formulaic expressions as in _"please be informed"_ and _"you are informed"_ and the imperative mood as in _"please note"_ followed by the rule. The direct, imperative, and formal tone in these constructs is intended to enforce the rule and minimize the options of negotiation.

Rule enforcement in discussion email messages, however, had a different style. Discussion email messages, unlike informing messages, were active in terms of participation. The writers mainly used first person singular and second-person pronouns to represent the self and the other and informal tone as in the use of ellipsis, substitution, hedges, and even emoticons to show lively expressions. However, in case the students wanted to discuss or negotiate a fixed rule or ask for exceptions, the employees usually used a formal style to put-an-end for the discussion and enforce their decision. As an example (Ex. 11) shows, the active voice declarative statement has a formal, direct, and imposing tone to enforce the rule that direct entry to _"diploma part 2"_ is not possible in the institution. The writer also used the institutional

exclusive first-person plural pronoun _"we"_ to imply that the proposition or the enforcement is not a personal stand, but rather an institutional stand that is not negotiable.

As a furtherance of the previous point, rule enforcement, O'Donnell and Boyle (2008) and Zammuto and Krakower (1991) also noted that hierarchical originations focus on and refer to the rules and regulations (policies) rather than the goals and the tasks. This point was also apparent in the emails as the writers made use of referential intertextuality to the rules and regulations as in _"in accordance with our rules and regulations"_ and functional intertextuality by using the "cut-paste" technique (Devitt, 1991) to include the rules and regulations as part of the new text. The emails referred to or included excerpts from the rules, policies, and regulations of exemptions, extensions, and registration. Referential intertextuality assisted the employees to create an intertexts relation between the proposition in the email and the rules and regulations in the general sense. This was a practice in discussion, inquiry, informing, and delivering email messages as a technique to explain the source of enforcement, on the one hand, and convince the recipient and put-an-end for lengthy email exchanges in discussion and inquiry email messages, on the other. The "cut-paste" functional intertextuality, however, was used mainly in informing email messages to make a direct reference to the specific articles of the rules and regulations that govern the practice in the supposed issue. The rules and regulations were referred to as the source of enforcement, which governs the institutional practices, thus, they are not negotiable.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the investigation of the institutional cultures in EMIN, the study investigated why the employees use language the way they do. The employees were bound by expectations that would make them fit members of the discourse community. This bound shaped the communicative and linguistic practices of the employees in the organization.

The employees were bound to be supportive, friendly, and respectful with fellow employees, external partners, and students, which was reflected in the discussion, requesting and responding to request email messages through the use of proper opening and closing markers, positive and negative politeness, and informal and in times conversational language to reflect friendliness and emotional support. This was also reflected in the lengthy exchanges of discussion email messages, in which the employees patiently strived to reach an agreement regarding the discussed issues, and the prompt response to requests so that to keep the flow of work unaffected.

These practices, however, did not include compromising the professional and ethical obligations of the employees. The employees acted with integrity within the power consigned in their positions to keep and safeguard the ethical and professional standards of the institution. This was carried out using referential and functional intertextuality to emphasize the rules and regulations in times, and the use of formal, direct, and sometimes imposing language, in others. This

was the practice in the majority of informing email messages and several discussion and inquiry email messages.

Finally, the employees reflected conformity to diligence in the four types of email messages, in general, and in delivery and informing email messages, in particular. This was the case as the employees took the initiative to carry out the institutional tasks without prior enforcement or a request from a superior. They also requested, responded to requests, and discussed academic and institutional issues faithfully, impartially, and open-mindedly using formal, informal, and even conversational language so to achieve better results for the institution, on the one hand, and to maintain the professional and ethical obligations vested in

them, on the other. The organizational culture did not only influence language use but also shaped how employees think, act and feel in different situations.

This study examined the influences of organizational cultures on business communication in the educational sector. Other studies may look into these influences in other sectors. This will definitely provide a fuller understanding of how informal and implicitly understood rules, in general, and organizational cultures, in particular, can influence intraorganizational and interorganizational communication. This will shed more light on the importance of establishing constructive organizational cultures in organizations, on the one hand, and build a literature of text-in-context in workplaces, on the other hand.

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