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## The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Interpersonal Communication Skills in Disaster Management Context: A Proposed Framework

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the relationship between emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication skills in the context of disaster management in Malaysia and to provide a conceptual framework for the future research. This paper also discusses some previous studies on emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication skills and disaster management in Malaysia that constitute the building of the conceptual framework. The main aim of the framework is to outline the relationship between emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication skills in Malaysian disaster management context.

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*Keywords:* Emotional intelligence; interpersonal communication skills; disaster management

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### 1. Introduction

Disaster management can be described as the managerial function charged with creating the framework within communities to reduce vulnerability to cope with disaster (MENA, 2008). There are four principles of disaster management namely; comprehensive, progressive, integrated and professional. Reeves (2011) explains that the first principle of disaster management is that disaster managers should consider and take into account all hazards, all phases, all stakeholders and all impacts relevant to disasters. The second principle is about disaster manager's

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anticipation on future disasters for taking preventive and preparatory measures to build disaster-resistant and disaster-resilient communities. The third principle is about disaster manager's task to ensure unity of effort among all levels of government and all elements of the community. The final principle of disaster management explains disaster manager's value on a science and knowledge-based approach based on education, training, experience, ethical practice, public stewardship and continuous improvement. The purpose of disaster management principles is to make sure that disaster agencies and society can work together in order to face and recover from the effect of disaster that might influence the physical and psychological aspect of the society (Pathirage, Baldry & Seneviratne, 2010).

In Malaysia, there are three levels of disaster management based on the National Security Council (NSC) Directive No.20 and Fixed Operating Regulations (PTO). In each level, there are organizations that have been given specific tasks. Among the organizations or departments that are involved include the Department of Social Welfare (DOSW), National Security Council (NSC) and Ministry of Defence. In level I, organizations ensure synchronize actions and human capability in order to provide news to the media. In level II, organizations must be able to provide clear assistance such as financial aid, social support and human resources to the community. In the third level, organizations or departments must determine the national disaster management policy, finance, assets and human resources.

This paper discusses the terms and principles of disaster management and the brief explanation regarding level of disaster management in Malaysia. It also discusses the literature on disaster management in Malaysia that involves emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication among disaster agencies workers.

## **2. Disaster management in Malaysia**

The Inland Major Disaster Management Mechanism, under the National Security Council of the Prime Minister Department, was formulated in May 1994 to coordinate all emergency agencies and handle relief activities during any major land disaster incidents. The policy statement for disaster relief operations is entitled the National Security Council Directive 20, which took effect on 11 May 1997.

The main goal of Directive 20 is to put in place a systematic emergency management program that can seeks to mitigate the effects of various hazards, to prepare for measures which will preserve life and minimize damage to the environment, to respond during emergencies and provide assistance, and to establish a recovery system to ensure the affected community return to normal. Among the types of disaster covered under the Directive 20 are natural disasters such as floods, storms, droughts and mud-slides as well as major industrial accidents such as fire and explosion; collapse of buildings and railway accidents.

On 26th December 2004 Malaysia was shocked by the tsunami incident, one of the most deadly disasters in modern day era. Malaysia disaster authorities were unprepared where there was no single warning issued by the authorities despite three hour lag between earthquake and the impact of the first tsunami on the shore of Langkawi (Peek & Fothergill, 2008). According to Brown (2005), disaster management in Malaysia needs to improve the quality of leadership among leaders and workers at disaster management agencies so that they can make fast and correct decision. He also explained the systematic communication between organizations and also between organizations and society needed to reduce the effect of tsunami and other disaster.

## **3. Emotional intelligence**

In the recent decade there has been a matter of debate in the literature regarding emotional intelligence definition and the concept on how emotional intelligence should be used in the correct way (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008). One of the earlier scholar that produce the concept of emotional intelligence is Thorndike (1920) who coined the definition of "social intelligence" as the ability or skills in term of understanding other people emotions and how one person can manage the other person. In 1940 Wechsler introduce emotional intelligence terms which state that emotional intelligence is something that can be influenced by others' behaviour and those who want to influence others must understand their own emotion first (Bar-on, 2006).

The interest in studying emotional intelligence grows and become more popular in 1990s and further refined in 1997. Mayor and Salovey introduce the definition of emotional intelligence that later on being popularized by Goleman (1995). Goleman defines emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express

emotion; the ability to generate feeling that what one person feel and think about their feeling; the ability to understand their own or others' emotion and have knowledge regarding the emotional and the ability to regulate emotions and promote emotions (Mayor & Salovey, 1997).

Previous studies conducted by Hess and Bacigalupo (2011) about human behaviour related to emotional intelligence can be applied and practically use in order to improve individual and group decision making. The main focus of the research is about identifying the most systematic and practical approaches of emotional intelligence utilization to the decision making. It can also contribute in instructing and helping decision makers to maximize the pertinent of emotional intelligent skills to improve decision making. The result of their study show that organizations and person can take favour from emotional intelligence to enhance their decision making process.

Research that has been conducted by Noorhafa and Ferlis (2010) examines the relationship between emotional intelligence, job satisfaction and organizational commitment among workers. It also looks into workers' age and its relations to organizational commitment. A total of 67 workers from government organizations participated in this study. The result shows that emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with job satisfaction and organizations commitment. The result also shows that workers are satisfied with their job and how the organizations treated them.

The context of emotional intelligence in disaster management is imperative since emotional intelligence can play a big role in improving disaster management (Fambrough & Hart, 2008). As disaster management agencies faced with different needs, wants and characteristic of disaster victim when disaster happens, these may be the source of anger and stress. However as a service delivery agency to society, disaster management agencies are required to provide excellent service to the disaster victim even though stress and anger are present. Their service should satisfy the need of the victim because it can determine the quality of the service and can reduce the effect of the disaster on the society. Thus, emotionally intelligent disaster management agencies workers could deliver better service to the victim as they have good ability to handle stress and can understand their and others' emotion better and make correct decisions (Gabel, Dolan & Cerdin, 2005).

#### **4. Interpersonal communication skills**

Interpersonal communication skills refer to the ability of an individual to communicate cooperatively in groups, either verbal or non-verbal and someone who have an effective interpersonal communication skills and sensitive to the feelings and the emotions of others around him (Gardner, 1983). Generally, communication skills are divided into three elements namely interpersonal communication skills, intrapersonal communication skills and nonverbal communication skills. Communication within the meaning of interpersonal skills can be categorized as listening, asking, speaking, giving feedback, language, attitude change and behavior, appearance and nonverbal communication (Abdullah & Ainon, 2005).

Hackman and Johnson (2004) in their research define the role of interpersonal communication skills in management for public managers, or someone that is in charge in organization and who are interested in building and learning how to communicate more effectively. Victorious organization depends on clear communication based on various technologies. Leaders interact with an environment consisting of various human resources. The result of this research show that efficiency of organization handling any crisis management depends upon how the leader of the organization react to the current situation and the way he or she communicate with his own staff and with the society.

A research has been conducted by Banipal (2006) about the role of interpersonal communication skills and information management aftermath of hurricane Katrina in providing efficient and effective respond to huge scale disaster management and to explain the performance of interpersonal communication skills and information management during hurricane Katrina. This study has been held in Gulf Coast area in United States. The result shows that in critical situation there are a lot of factors that will disturb the communication process among organizations or communication inside the organization itself. When Katrina hurricane happens, disruption of electricity interrupt the communication effectiveness and makes information management and SAR task requires (search and rescue) more time to be launched. It also shows that with a lack of effective interpersonal communication skills and information management the leader of rescue and search team did not have enough information about the geography of the Gulf Coast city, the landmark of the town and makes the rescue operation longer.

Another research that has been conducted by Pathirage, Seneviratne, Amaratunga and Haigh (2012) is about how

to manage disaster through knowledge of interpersonal communication. This study indicates the importance of knowledge in interpersonal communication skills that will be a major factor in order to manage disaster effectively. The research has identified the literature review about disaster management and semi interview among organizations that are involved in disaster management. The findings of this study show that the need of updating knowledge about interpersonal communication skills, leadership style and information management among disaster management agencies will influence the agencies dealing with disaster in order to make society feel more secure and safe.

Therefore, communication interpersonal skills are one of the factors that can provide disaster management agencies with good service and information about the disaster. Based on the study that been done by Pittiwa, Bartolomei and Rees (2007), it was found that good communication skills among disaster agencies and disaster victim will help disaster victim to prepare and become more alert before the disaster happens. The study also show that good communication will help victim recover from psychological problem such as stress, trauma and other psychological effect that has been caused by disaster.

## 5. Proposed conceptual framework for the relationship between the variables

From the literature review, it is determine that emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication skills have not yet been studied in the context of recent disaster management in Malaysia. Therefore, a framework could be proposed in accordance with the disaster management in Malaysia as in Figure 1. Based on the framework, emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication skills have been predicted to have significant role in order to improve the effectiveness of disaster management in Malaysia.

This conceptual framework suggests the independent and dependent variables for future research. The independent variables represent the ability and skills of disaster management agencies before and when the disaster happens and how the skill and ability will be applied in the process of recovering from disaster. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is the effectiveness of disaster management before, during and after the disaster. The skill and the ability of emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication show by workers from various agencies that involve in disaster management will affect the effectiveness of disaster management in Malaysia.

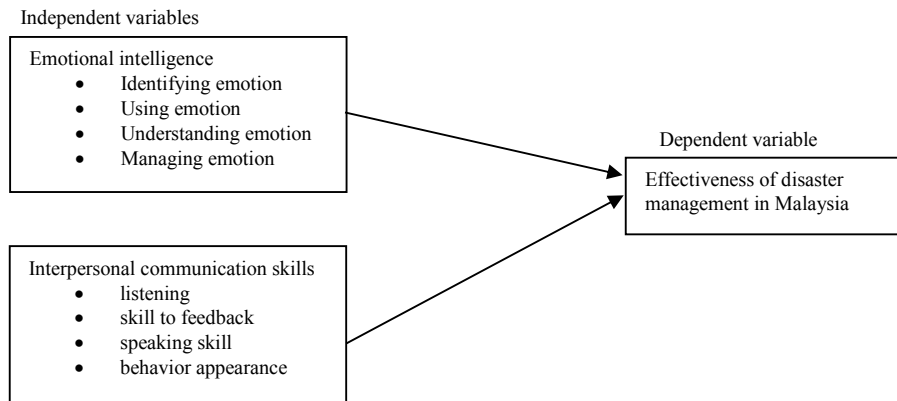


Fig. 1. A conceptual framework describes the relationship between variables.

## 6. Conclusion

The main focus of this paper is to explain the relationship between emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication and disaster management in Malaysia in terms of the importance of how disaster management agencies play its role in order to tackle the stressful event. Later on, the conceptual framework will be developed based on previous studies related to disaster management for future research in order to contribute to the effectiveness of the disaster management agencies when preparing and handling the tough situation and to provide physical and psychological support to the disaster victim.

The benefit of this study if successfully implements will help disaster management agencies to understand the importance of getting well prepared among disaster management agencies. It also contributes to a better and effective disaster management strategy when disaster agencies interact with victims.

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