

Unboxing the Power of Communication in Empowerment Process

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment is one of the popular concepts in the field of social science and community development. In Indonesia the word empowerment is started to be used in 1998. Recently many empowerment projects were implemented in Indonesia but most of them failed to achieve their goals. The question then what causing empowerment program fail? Many factors lead to the program fail, however in this paper the focus of discussion will be the power of communication in empowerment processes. Empowerment is a process where individuals, groups and communities may obtain control over their lives. The empowerment process is an effort to reduce powerlessness by equipping people with self-awareness, self-competence, self-confidence, self-determination and perceived access to. To accelerate these effort, communication plays important roles. Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one person or group to another. Similar to empowerment: the process to transfer power from one person or organisation to others. Through effective communication people feel more empowered, developed a sense of belonging and responsibility. Most importantly, when the the communication process are open, people feel more comfortable with the relationship developed by change agent. As a result, they have feeling being empowered. The powering process. Consists of two mirror-image that show dialectical processes such as empowering and overpowering (disempowering). The process will undergo empowering when change agent communicate clearly, honestly, caring, valuing, respecting others and affirming, enhancing and growing, these will lead to people being free, having self-control and independence and will become over powering/disempowering if communication unclear with distortion, objectifying, devaluing, diminishing, negating, constricting and subsuming these will lead to feeling of being controlled, dominated and make them dependence.

Keywords: Empowerment, communication, development, Indonesia

Introduction

Empowerment is basically motivational process for individual's in order to experience of feeling enabled (Carlton, 1987). According to Thomas & Velthouse (1990) psychological empowerment focuses on intrinsic task motivation. According to Zimmerman (1990) psychological empowerment act upon peoples' feeling of being empowered. Feeling being empowered can be developed through effective and empowering communication process (Brown, 2002).

To empower people means to transfer power, thus one aspect of empowerment is to make people have *personal influence* that make people able to see choices in their life (Avidov-Ungar, 2017). Personal influence can be achieved when people believes that they can affect serounding, through self-determined behavior. Another aspect is competence or feeling "able" that they can perform the job competently Bandura (1982) called its *self-efficacy*. Feeling of self-efficacy is based on the peoples' belief that they are capable to carry out the activities skills and finally success, (Gist, 1987). Another facet of empowerment is when people see that their action *meaningful* in their life. They will perform when they perceive that they are meaningful to others.

Psychological empowerment actually influence the way people thinking about their ability to influencet social condition and political systems in their serrounding. It will form a self

perception including competence, meaningfulness, self determination (choice) and perceived control. According to Sprietzer (1995) this dimensions of empowerment together foster how people perceive their job. This also sufficient form of cognitions to understand psychological empowerment. Moreover, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) broadened the work of Conger and Canungo's (1988), where they stated that empowerment is the process of increasing intrinsic motivation. Four cognitions developed by Conger and Canungo (1988) similar to Sprietzer's (1995) of an individual's orientation to his work role namely meaningfulness, self-efficacy, choice and impact. According to Zimmerman (1995) access to information, support and resources are also considered as constructs that form peoples' feelings being empowered.

Psychologically the objective of empowerment is to make people have higher feeling of having competency, value, and control over the surrounding that affect their life. This is a process of how to raise consciousness and critical thinking which is important in order to understand factors causing powerlessness in the past (Zimmerman, 1995). Embedded in psychological empowerment factors is how people perceive that reality is constructed by social interaction. Based on peoples' understanding of the reality and the possible consequences if they acting on it, people started to be able to see the opportunities and possibility to change such as, to fight or to retreat, to seek help or provide assistance; (Zimmerman, 1990). However, psychological empowerment can not be achieved through individualistic process, because it is strongly influenced by the social and political interaction within the community. Zimmerman (1990) and Chavis and Wandersman (1990) indicates that psychological empowerment refers to the process of how people able to increase personal power, interpersonal power, or political power thus they can take measure to improve their life situations (Miguel, 2015). Wilson (1996) claims that peoples' feeling of being empowered and change in individual is a prerequisite for community and social change and empowerment.

Through out the country, it was recorded that since the reformation era in 1998, many empowerment programs have developed to cope with harsh sociopolitical situations and the realization that conventional (old traditional) developments and social services are deficient (Suadnya, 2006). The fact that empowerment programs often fail to achieve their goals and peoples' expectations. The question is why this happened? Did communication to increase feeling of being empowered matter? This paper describes the power of communication in empowerment processes based on the literature review.

Empowerment Defined

Empowerment is one of the popular concepts in social and development sciences (Troyna, 1994, Rappoport, 1981). There are many meanings attributed to the term, however it is often generally used without specifying what is meant in a certain context. Horochowski and Meirelles (2007) write about a big concept of empowerment that refers to different context, different usages, different intellectual and political perspectives as well as different types of interventions carried out. The discussion about empowerment definition will start from early use of word empowerment.

Since 1976 when Solomon (1976) recommended the use of empowerment approach in social work for African American communities, Berger and Neuhaus (1977) used the term

empowerment as a guide for public policy reform, Rappaport (1981) suggested the adoption of empowerment over prevention, researchers, program administrators and policy makers in the United States, and the word empowerment had become widely used. In the mid of 1990s empowerment become a buzz word and has been used by many disciplines and sectors of the community such as development workers, community organisers, policy makers, educators, sociologists fieldworkers, political scientists and psychologists alike. This has resulted in various definitions of the word empowerment because they all have particular emphases to the components that they consider relevant to their expertise, job and situation with exclusion of others. Since then the concept of empowerment become one of the most used and sometimes misused concepts in academic discourse (Ungar, 2017).

Empowerment has different meanings to different authors and in different contexts (Bailur et al, 2018). For example Itzaky and York (2000) stated that as a concept that has been use widely to help professional, empowerment should be formulated as it has been recognized under several guises for many years. Authors such as (Barker, 1991; Powers, 1994; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; Titi and Singh, 1995, Marshall, 1998 and World Bank 1999) perceive empowerment as a process, while other defines as a product or outcomes (Artkinson, 1999; Friedmann, 1992). More over (Hess, 1984; Rapp, Shera and Kisthardt, 1993; and Hegar, Hunzeker, 1988 and Speer and Peterson, 2000) perceive empowerment as approach to social work practice and aim of the social work research.

Social work definition of empowerment is focusing on the empowerment as a means to the realization of peoples' rights (Barker,1991). This definition implies that the importance of the empowerment is on how to improve community's ability to negotiate with external agent to get their right. In this context empowerment is the tool to enable community to build and increase their self-confident to have their voice heard thus they can participate in community action..

Barker (1991) clearly stated that the fundamental characteristic of empowerment is the process to help individual or group to gain relevant legal authority and political control. This was evident in developed countries where the central government has withdrawn from providing direct service and strengthening individuals and groups or private and semi private companies to provide services to the communities. The government tried to reduce it control on community activities and let them to act accordingly as to empower them. However, this empowerment was seen cynically by some people as an attempt to reduce government responsibility and in the same time to minimize government expenses by encouraging non-government initiative.

The World Bank views the empowerment as the transfer of power and control over decision as well as resources to communities and organization (World Bank, 2005). Its emphasis on empowerment is to enable community to influence and control over livelihood as well as resources. The main goals of the World Bank is to create independence and free community to formulate agendas and its affair through capacity building. Thus the only resources needed to be transfer to such community is fund. This definition focusing on capacity building with the outcome is capabilities of the community, competence and skill to control and manage resources.

Social psychologists (Zimmerman, 1995; Friedmann, 1992, Rodrigues, 2017) have seen the empowerment as more personal and individual level. These authors define empowerment as a

psychological state of the people as a result of their participation in collective action. In this view the social relation becomes crucial as they can contribute to individual state of empowerment.

From these definitions empowerment can be seen as a process. As a process Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as a process to increase feeling of competent within community members by identifying factor that causing powerlessness and the way of removing by both formal practice and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. Within this definition, empowerment can be done through awareness of environmental factors that create powerlessness, competence development, removal of those factors and increasing access to information.

Furthermore, in the development discourse, the concept of empowerment has evolved concurrently with the concept of bottom-up approach to development. Within this context empowerment means strengthening the meaning and realising the principles of inclusiveness, encourage participation the relevant stakeholders in a process, transparency and accountability with provides legitimacy to any process and decision achieved and held in common with notions of democracy and sustainable development (Titi and Singh, 1995). This definition implies that empowerment includes the process of enabling people to understand the reality of their environment that include economic, social, cultural. Political and ecological aspects, which in turn they can participate to influence the environment that shape their life.

At first glance, the definitions of empowerment seems differences, but careful assessment of these definitions shows a considerable communality and agreement leads to a comprehensive definition of empowerment. In this paper empowerment is considered a long term process of improving competence, self determination, locus of control (power), meaningfulness, access to information and resources so that the individuals, groups, organizations or communities has stronger sense of self efficacy, self-determination, locus of control, critical awareness and access that lead to independent and self-reliance.

Empowerment Process

In individual level empowerment is similar to psychological empowerment (Brown, 2002). It is a process of gaining control over and influence of decision, strategic and operating outcomes in their daily life and participation in the community (Ashforth, 1989; Kieffer, 1984), self-efficacy or competence to perform activities (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990); Ozer and Bandura, 1990; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988), self-determination to select, regulate and start actions (Deci et al, 1989), access to information , meaningfulness (Goldenberg, 1978; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

The objectives of psychological empowerment is to enhance feeling of confidence, value, competence and control over serounding (Kroeker, 1995, Rodrigues,2017). He claims that the process of increasing consciousness and critical thinking are important factors in order to understand the causes of powerlessness in the past and present. This critical awareness is a crucial part of the empowerment process. Zimmerman (1990) points out that by understanding the reality and the possible consequences that may accurs if people acting upon it, the powerless may start to foresee the opportunities for change. By means of this process empowerment is expected

to retain.

Empowerment as a process means through with powerless get control over surrounding that affect their lives. To be confidence and empowered, powerless not only need to acquire new competency and skills but they must be able to analyse their surrounding (Kieffer, 1984) and deeply understand personal system of social interaction, reorienting and reconstructing for further actions (Lord and Hutchison, 1993). Stappes (1990) perceive these as a developmental process.

As a process according to Conger and Kanungo (1988) empowerment as is the way of powerless obtain feelings confident and competent in the community by identifying and analysing element that causing powerlessness. Arnesen-Trunzo (2015) suggests by removing those factor through capacity building and training, powerlessness may start to have feeling of being empowered. Accordingly Conger and Kanungo (1988) developed five steps of empowerment process in the community, which start with analysis and diagnosis of situation including factors that causing feeling of powerlessness in the community; then change agent apply some techniques and skills to remove such conditions that causing powerlessness; providing capacity building to improve competency and self-efficacy using four sources that are enhance attainment, vivid and explicit experience, verbal and non persuasion and encouragement. Powerless will get feeling of empowered by strengthening their measure to perform and belief of their personal competency. As a result the effect of the treatment are noticed through the demonstration of initiation and persistence of behaviour to complete the task and objectives.

Two years later Thomas and Velthouse (1990) developed a cognitive empowerment model of empowerment based on Conger and Kanungo's model (1988). Similar process were developed by Thomas and Velthouse (1990). Their model started from the analysis and reflection of the task, which lead to job satisfaction and finally guide behaviour. Cognitive empowerment model starts with situation analysis, comprehensive assessment of the tasks, interpretation and diagnosing the ways to carry out the tasks, task assessments, intervention and behaviour. The three component of cognitive empowerment model will influence and shape the task assessments coincide with the psychological elements of empowerment, impact, competence, meaningfulness and choice of the individuals. Finally intervention can be carried out to begin in empowering community. These two models of empowerment process were basically developed for workplace empowerment in organization. However it can be a generic model that may applied in other discipline.

The Role of Communication in Empowerment Process

Communication has a major role in human life. Normally, interpersonal communication is controlled by moralistic and value judgments (Mulyana, 2010, Changara, 2011). Even in the first meeting or observation, people simply judge another person with certain objectives such as good, bad, right, wrong, genuine, fake. People also often diagnose, compare, demand, complain, blame, that may make other people ashamed. The habit of using various adjectives in observations and adverbs in terms of explaining the actions hinder communicator from open and empowering communication.

empowering communication or empowering communication is a way of communicating which accelerate the flow of information that needed to transfer power and resolve

differences and gain similarities (Bandari, 2020; Arnesen-Trunzo, 2015). It helps powerless identify common needs and shared values, encourages powerless to use language that raising goodwill, and avoid to use language that cause to resentment or lowers confidence and self-esteem. Empowering Communication focuses on compassion to motivate and encourage, rather than develop fear, guilt, blame, or shame (Miller, 2007). It emphasizes is to take personal responsibility for people's choices and improving the quality of the relationships as their objectives (Houchens, 2020).

According to Rosenberg (2015) there are premises of empowering communication namely people are simply trying to meet their needs. They also think that it will be more prestigious to meet the needs through cooperation rather than aggression. People naturally enjoy contributing to the well-being of others when they have opportunities and ability to do so. Based on this three assumptions communicator in empowerment program must be able to create empowering communication to empower their target. The purpose of Empowering communication is to develop more personal satisfaction in relationship, meet the needs in such way that honor and respect some ones values and the values of others, this will help people free from previous unsatisfying experiences and develop new relationships.

Empowering communication builds independence and confidence for participants. This will lead to development of self-motivation and increasing ownership (Rosenberg, 2005). Putting these in place will reassure them that they can do what they think the best without fear of others may criticise them. Thus it create room for capacity building and power attainment. According to (Azgin, 2018) in empowerment process extension agents must hold in mind that people basically need to be accepted, recognised and appreciated by others. As a result people will feel valued and appreciated by other people in their surrounding

According to Maslow (1954) the basic need of all people are the need to be accepted by their friend and people in their surrounding. The Acquired Needs Theory suggests that human beings are born with the need for affiliation and to develop close relationships with others, such as the leaders, family and friends (Daft, 2002). It is useful for extension agents or communicator to recognize this reality and respond to it accordingly by developing empowering communication that admired and recognise targeted communities. This will result in empowered communities due to the abilities of extension agents to let the people know that she or he believe in them. Extension agent must develop empowering communication that intentionally causing the communities feel valued and recognised (Wren, 2005).

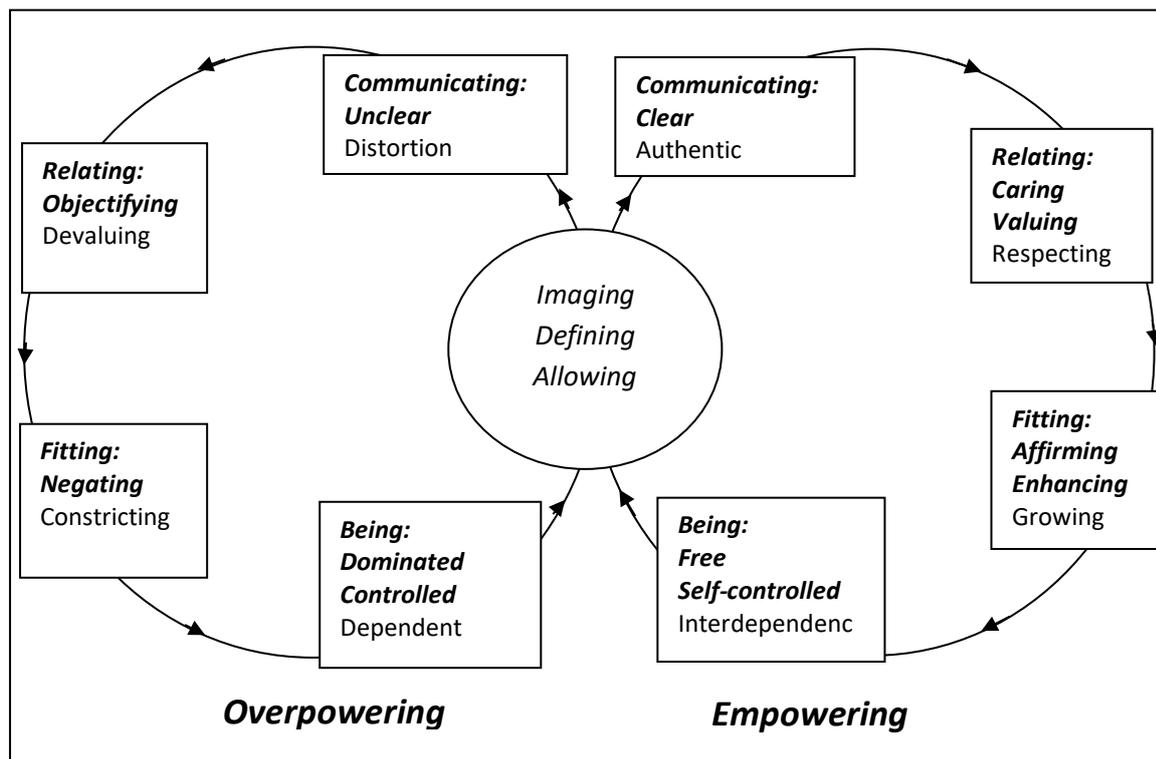
Cummings & Worley (2004) noticed that people are proud if they are recognised. Furthermore they claim that the best ways to motivate communities is by providing extrinsic rewards such as public praise and awards. If this can be carried out by extension agents, the people will recognise that extension agents care about them. Giving people attention is not only an effective way to empower and develop people, but also one of the most affordable approaches extension agents can do. Valuing and recognising communities costs nothing to extension agents, but it will make communities feel adherent to them. For the extension agent empowering communication must be developed as their mission to to make themselves as a stars and create love harmony in the communities (Chamber, 1995). Give them attention and

communicate to them how much they mean to you and to the success and sustainability of the program is the key in empowering communities.

In empowerment process, the worst and most ineffective communication is when extension agents condemn and criticize people if they make mistakes. Carnegie claims that instead of condemning people, it is better to understand them and try to find out why they do it. This measure will be more profitable and intriguing rather than criticising them (Carnegie, 1981). This attempt is not easy, therefore extension agents should learn how to respond to their people in a positive and and empowering manner. Communicating negatively may result in more negative behaviour. Extension agents should always strive to do empowering communication that indicate kindness and love towards other people without expressing anger and hostility. Positive reinforcement is vital when leading and developing people. People more likely to repeat their behaviour when they are rewarded and recognised for their excellent work (Daft, 2002).

One good example of empowerment process that based on empowering communication can be seen in the nursing sector. According to Brown (2002) the empowering process in nursing organization is created through facionate communication. She develop two mirror image that shows dialectical model of empowerment process. One side of the mirror indicates the empowering processes wwhile the other side shows overpowering processes. Four steps of empowering communication process are deficted in a cyclical ways in each side of the mirror. Those four steps communicating, relating, fitting and being. Meanwhile the inner cycle of this process is the intrapersonal process where people trying to imaging, defining and allowing, before they start to communicating. In this model Brown indicates that the empowering and overpowering processes are going in the same time during the process as two sides of coin (see figure 1).

The process of empowerment based on Brown's mdel begin with the reflection of the relationship among people in the community. They start by imaging their relationship with their serrounding, defining their replationship situation and make judgement and from this judgment then people allowing them to behave in future communication processes. According to Brown (2002) this process of empowerment will undergo either to empowering or overpowering. The process is then go through the four steps mentioned previously.



Adapted from: Brown, C.L. (2002), A theory of the Process of Creating Power in Relationship

The above model is reflecting the communication strategies in empowerment program. This strategy clearly indicates that a facilitator in an empowerment program must put people at the center of development. According to Pfeiffer and Veiga (1999), putting people first is the best strategy in developing organizational success, while Chambers (1995) claims that putting people first also creates participatory, empowering, and sustainable development.

Habermas (1984) indicates that communicative action refers to actions directed by mutually agreed norms based on mutual expectations between interacting subjects using symbols. In this way, empowering communication becomes the starting point to empower people. Communicative Action Theory claims for indicators for success, namely truth, rightness, authenticity / honesty (sincerity) and comprehensibility. This claim is similar to the empowering process introduced by Brown (2002). Any effective communication must achieve the fourth claim of "communication competence" (Hardiman, 2009).

In a participatory development program, the presence of communication is basically intended to contribute to the development process, especially in order to accelerate the adoption and diffusion of innovation as well as to empower participants (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). However, in an empowerment program, empowering communication is intended to increase the ability of the community to communicate, both between individuals, individuals with groups, and between groups. With the increase in communication skills, people have become accustomed to networking so that they are more independent and creative. This is what is called empowerment communication, a communication process that humanizes people, is participative, and gives voice to those who have been unable to speak (voicing the

voiceless). Thus empowerment communication is a participatory communication process (Mulyana, 2010). The communication model is convergent, which means trying to get a reciprocal understanding among communication participants in attention, understanding and needs. This convergent communication approach is very effective in community-based development planning. In addition, this approach will pave the way for the growth of creativity and community competence in communicating their ideas that lead to independence (empowered people).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that communication play significant role in empowerment proces. The process will be empowering when change agent comunicate clearly, honestly, caring, valuing, respecting others, affirming, enhancing and growing, these will lead to people being free, having self-control and independence. However if change agent communicate unclear with distortion, objectifying, devaluing, diminishing, negating, constricting and subsuming these will lead to feeling of being controlled, dominated and make them dependence (overpowering).

Change agent need to be carefull in the empowerment process particularly in communicating with those to be empowered. They must prepare themselves with communication skills to be able to communicate in empowering way. They must be prover in selecting empowering dictions in communication processes.

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