Language, emotions and school transformation

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Abstract:

Emotions, language, and change are inter-connected and dependent on each other. The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyze the role of language on emotions. In addition, the role of emotions on change are also explored. Two transformed schools were purposively selected as cases. From each schools, leader and thirteen teachers with and without administrative responsibilities were selected as sample for data collection through purposive sampling. The tool used for data collection was a semi-structured interview. The data was analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. The findings indicated that the language is used to communicate two types of emotions as positive emotions and negative emotions and emotions are used to mobilize, manage direct, and facilitate the process of change.

Keywords: Emotions; Language; Transformation; Schools

Introduction:

Emotions, language, and change are inter-connected and dependent on each other. Language influences emotions (Lindquist, Gendron, Satpute, & Lindquist, 2016) and emotions trigger acceptance and readiness for change or transformation (Klarner, Klarner, Todnem, & Diefenbach, 2011). The interaction between psychology and linguistic is more highlighted and prominent in recent literature (Majid, 2012). However, this study is an attempt to explore the interaction between psychology, linguistics and management. There is limited literature on exhibition of emotions at school related to inter-relationship inside the school (Denham et al., 2012).

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, it analyses the role of language on emotions. Second, the role of emotions on change or transformation in two Malaysian schools that have transformed in terms of extensive change in structure, functions, organizational beliefs and practices.

1. Review of Literature

I.   Emotions

Goran and Negoescu (2015) define emotion as "the feelings each individual can recognise in themselves, by introspection, or assign to others" (p. 1606). Emotions play the role of maintaining and regulating internal and external systems of humans (Blount, 1984). Two important terms having same meanings have been identified while explaining emotions namely emotional intelligence and emotional competencies (Gendron, 2005). Emotional intelligence is described as an awareness

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of emotions in oneself and others, also the ability to regulate and monitor them (Goleman, 2001; Koman & Wolff, 2008). It is the prowess to perceive and express emotion, adapt emotions, reason with emotions, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). In fact, it is the ability or competency that lies between mind and heart or in other words between cognition and emotions (Goleman, 2001). Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso(2004) developed four-factor model of emotional intelligence. The first factor is 'perceive emotions' that is the ability to identify emotions in others through their facial and body expressions, language, sounds, and behaviours. The second factor is to 'use emotions to facilitate thoughts'. It is the capacity of direct thinking to important information and approach problems differently. The third factor 'understand and analyse emotions' it is the capacity to analyse and appreciate emotions as well as understand their outcomes. The last factor is to 'manage emotions' which involves the capacity to manage emotions in terms of individual's self -knowledge, goals and social- awareness. These factors can also be considered as self-awareness, relation-management, self-management, and social-awareness (Gendron, 2004; Goleman, 2001).

II.   Language and Emotions

"Emotions serve internal regulatory functions for individuals, and their expression, reflective of internal state, are adaptive within a social framework through their communicative value for members"(Blount, 1984, p. 129).

In everyday life, most of our time is spend in speaking to others and listening others view also analyzing and categorizing the information transferred by others or us. Sure enough, these social interactions are more than only conversations. These conversations are modes of translating our emotional state as well (Belin, Belin, Fecteau, & Be, 2014). Emotions (such as happiness, anger, joy, fear, disgust, pride, affection, jealousy, contentment etc.) are internal state of a person that are manifested (externally) facially or vocally (Blount, 1984). However, language plays an important role in translating such emotions (Castros & Lima, 2010; Lindquist et al., 2016). Emotions and language interact at many levels of structure including sound pitch to spoken words, grammar or its appearance in a particular discourse (Majid, 2012). In addition, for successful and clear communication, the emotional prosody such as voice tone, is essential to perceive the emotional state of the speaker (Belin et al., 2014; Castros & Lima, 2010; Kotz, 2009). Language is also used for communicating emotional experiences and perceptions and shaping nature of such emotions (Lindquist et al., 2016; Lindquist, Maccormack, & Shablack, 2015). Lindquist et al.(2016) gave following assumptions on relationship between emotions and language:

1.   Emotions are constituted by language
2.   Emotions are expressed by language
3.   Emotions are controlled and melded by language

Thus, language has strong effect on all factors of emotions that are self, relation, self-management and social-awareness.

III.   Emotions and Organizational Transformation

Emotions are essential part of today's complex and challenging workplaces (Gendron, 2004). These are more prominent at time of transformation (Kelchtermans, 2005). Because "transformation includes endings; there is a sense of loss, dying, denial, fear, anger, and resistance" (Levy & Merry, 1986, p.172). The process of transformation cannot be understood without grasping underlying emotional forces (James, 1999; James, Connolly, Dunning, & Tony, 2006). James et al. (2006) argue that emotions have been given less importance by the researchers, despite its noteworthiness in schools. "Understanding the origins, movement, and effects of these emotions can be very helpful both in understanding schools as institutions and in guiding leadership and management actions" (James et al., 2006, p. 38).

Organizations with strong emotional capital consist of committed and effective members. Emotionally intelligent leaders help in developing emotionally strong teams which can uplift team effectiveness (Koman & Wolff, 2008). Emotionally strong organization are capable of controlling and maintaining their emotions in order to prop up healthy organizational environment. Emotions work as analytical tools for understanding the emotional investment of the teachers as moral, ethical and political identity in school (Reid, 2009). Moreover, school leaders and teachers ideology can contribute positively towards students emotional satisfaction and stability (Reid, 2009).

To summarise, language effects almost all emotional factors. The emotions are constituted, expressed, controlled and melded by language. On the other hand, emotions influence the process of transformation and change. Thus, emotions play intervening role between language and transformation. Figure 1 presents relationship between language, emotions and organizational (school) transformation.

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Figure 1: The Interaction between Language, Emotions and Transformation

2.   Methodology

This study is part of an extensive study based on exploring the factors contributing in school transformation in selected transformed schools in Malaysia. The data was collected from two purposively selected schools that have experienced extensive change in terms of structure, functions, organizational beliefs and practices. For data collection, from each schools, leader and thirteen teachers with and without administrative responsibilities were selected for data collection through purposive sampling. The tool used for data collection was a semi-structured interview. The data was analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The interviews were transcribed and codded. However, were re-coded again to analyze the relationship between language and emotions through recorded interviews. The reason behind this type of data analysis was to analyze the tone and

pitch of voices along with information provided by the participants. Atlas.ti 8, as qualitative data analysis software, helped in coding the recorded audios.

3. Findings

I. Interaction between Language and Emotions

The data analysis revealed that emotions could not be separated from language. While answering interview questions, different type of emotions were being reflected. There were two main themes identified as expressing positive emotions and negative emotions.

a) Positive emotions

   The positive emotions such as self-esteem, fervor, happiness, joy and affection were some of the emotions found in the data. The participants were found to be stressed and laughed, while sharing their positive emotions or feelings. For example, a teacher stressed, "I heard from a few schools that their teachers tend to be picky with their friends. But I think [stress] most of the teachers here will not be like them and that is a good thing". Another teacher added:

   Here we have more family like environment where we care for each other [stress] regardless we are male or female. We do share our problems that we face in our homes among colleagues in WhatsApp groups, we share, sometimes we are joking around and sometimes we tease each other [laughing].

   The statements above indicate how emotions are expressed through language. It shows the participant's satisfaction, appreciation and relief to be among their friends in the school by comparing them with other schools where teachers do not have emotionally sound systems. Similarly, another teacher shared:

Once our Head got an email from a parent that I am teaching well. I do not know at that time the Head was so happy that she send it to all teachers. She praised me and at that time, I was so impressed [laughing].

   I do not bring my personal feelings [laughing] in my school. Sometimes my mood is not ok in the morning so when I enter the school and I find the happy faces of children I forget everything.

In these lines, the teachers are sharing their satisfaction and happiness after getting recognition from her head. In addition, there were various quotes in the data where participants' satisfaction was being reflected. This claim is substantiated through the quote below:

   I would say the best thing here is administration. They are very open to new ideas. They are able to help you out and sort you out. The other thing is students. They are from very unique background. Here most of the students have been exposed to different cultures. Because they travel a lot so they are adaptable to changes. It is quite different compared to other schools.

b) Negative Emotions

   The data analysis also revealed that the participants also talked about some negative or back-breaking emotional experiences. Anger, fear, anxiety, depression were some negative emotions that were discussed by the participants. Mainly, the

participants 'experienced negative emotions due to workload, students' disciplinary problems and parents non-serious attitude towards school and their children' education. Head of first school shared that sometimes they have had very stubborn parents who make the life of school head and teachers very worrisome. She discussed a case of fighting between two students where father of one student took the case to police and made lot of troubles for school. Similarly, a teacher from second school mentioned that teachers go through frustration when "some of the parents come and scold teachers".

About students related issues teachers reflected that due to some naughty and non-serious students they have experienced slump and depression. Such students make troubles for the teachers to teach as well as cause troubles for teachers such a vandalism to their cars, in classrooms and in cafeteria. A teacher while sharing her anger said, "The principal may go and spent time with naughty boys. She suggests us that we need to understand how to control our students like a car. But few students are …[well leave it]".

While discussing stressful and hectic workload in the school participants avowed some negative emotions as well. For instance, a teacher reflected, "we are involved in lot of work and filings". Another teacher claimed:

The culture, the culture of the school is very hectic... the new syllabuses is quite hectic for us because we have lot of writings [reports, lesson plans, files]. We… do many activities here as you can see that every week we have something for the students.

II. Role of Emotions in School Transformation

In case of schools, emotions were mobilized, managed, and directed to facilitate the process of change. The teachers maintained a friendly relationship, as a result, minimized the stress and frustrations and increased their efficiency. They were providing emotional support to the colleagues by listening to their problem and giving suggestions for getting out of it. Sharing with colleagues was considered as the main source of catharsis. "I will talk to them. We will go to café and eat together and talk out what is the problem…" complemented a teacher. "When I have a problem or stress, I say it out loud and some of my friends will listen and discuss about it and after that everything settled (laugh)," claimed another teacher.

Moreover, they had the ability to use their emotions effectively. They also knew how to overcome undesirable thoughts by motivating actions into positive emotions. The teachers used different strategies to control and manage their negative emotions arising from routine life in the school. For example, a teacher mentioned that when she gets hyper on students, she drinks a lot of water to remain calm.

The teachers also indicated that they get emotional support from the school heads. They also give emotional support to the teachers when they have any family issue or school related issues. For example, a teacher discussed that when she was assigned a new responsibility in the school, she was so scared. However, the school leader motivated her by saying, "throw away your scared feeling".

The school leaders altered the followers' behavior and mind-sets by inspiring them through their emotions and engaging in their emotions. Along with engaging their minds, they also appealed and won their hearts. They used emotions as tools to facilitate the process of change. The leader from school A shared her 'secret recipe' for school transformation and said, "In the transformation, actually … I have to win their hearts".

The leader from school B explained:

It's quite essential to win teachers heart and student's heart and likewise the staff around, the guards, cleaner and the canteen workers. Winning heart strategy keeps individual happy and satisfied that eliminates many problems. First, to win heart then to move on is our moto and it really works.

To boot, the teachers took lot of efforts to make canteen neat and tidy also tried to provide all school members healthy food so the school members could enjoy the food. Many plans were in pipeline. For instance, leader from school A wanted to have an open hall constructed for students to avoid sun and rain at morning assembly that makes students and teachers irritated. She also stated that she had planned to provide the teachers more comfortable and cozy environment at their offices by installing air coolers.

The teachers were cognizant about the importance of the students' emotional status. For the reason, they used versatile and different teaching methods to perpetuate their interest in the class. For example, an English teacher shared that once in a week she arranges a musical activity or a game for her students so they might not get bored in the class. A teacher about the emotional status of students said:

There will come a time, as we all are human beings, whereby a lot of emotional breakdowns and emotional outburst takes place among students…anyhow at that time we get ourselves involved but someone who be able to help by being the intermediate to make sure things do not blow up out of proportion…

4. Discussion

Connection between language, emotions and school transformation discussed in this paper are the first step and yet, much empirical work is required. In this study, firstly, it was found that language works as a tool to express and communicate emotional experiences of school members. Moreover, in both of transformed schools, emotions were being communicated and expressed through language. However, the data revealed that the two types of emotions — positive and negative— were being expressed by the participants. The positive emotions help school members in adjustment that results minimum conflicts while negative emotions result less in school participation and higher conflicts among school members, language plays a crucial role either (Hernández et al., 2017). Thus, language should be given importance while studying emotions.

Secondly, it was found that the transformed schools knew the importance of emotions in human's life; therefore, they used emotions as tools to facilitate the process of transformation. Emotions were being used to influence the attitudes,

behaviours and relationships of school members professional lives (Brown, 2003). School members in transformed schools possessed a strong emotional intelligence as they remained aware of their emotions as well as others emotions (Goleman, 2001; Koman & Wolff, 2008). They also managed and regulated their emotions. The leaders in transformed schools were using emotions to form teams, resolve conflicts, and minimise resistance. Actually, they attempt to make school members emotionally ready and strong to accept and enjoy the challenges of change.

Besides, the school members were experienced enough in perceiving others emotions while leaders' emotional well-being was very effective in motivating followers, identifying and promoting the shared values that ultimately helps the school in reaching set goals. Henceforth, the leaders emotionally made the school members ready for transformation. They modified their strategies and practices by making them compatible with the school members' emotional state. Moreover, the teachers were concerned about the feelings and needs of fellow teachers and as well as about students. They were aware of students' emotional states and showing a soft corner for them.

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