

Critical Review of Habermas' Communicative Action: Implication on Organizational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

An organization is a conglomeration of individual cultural practices and not just a system of human beings acting and interacting with each other (Dy, 1997). This communion can either result to thought conflict or agreement. Presently, conflict is more observed within the organization. In response, this critical action research aimed to situate Habermas' communicative action among leaders' role in unifying organizations. Hermeneutic analysis found that Habermas emphasized dialogue and open communication as unifying agents for interpersonal relationship and solidarity within the organization. He clarified that leaders should consider the organization as an integral part of family relationship where every member is heard equally. Moreover, empowerment and encouragement among members of the organization were emphasized as contributory factors to strengthen the organization. Lastly, competent leaders systematically and orderly organized and deliberate things along with the other members in the organization. Hence, leaders' self-reflection and effective communication provides a better way of social and organizational formation and transformation. Leaders, therefore, must equip themselves with the necessary skills and techniques on communicative administration for the good of the organization. There is a must to change the view of society born from labor into a society which grows from interaction of people living and dreaming together.

Keywords - Sociology, Communication, Organization and Management, Critical Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the social structure provides us with a better analysis on the society's cultural practices. It further provides us a picture of how social relations interact in the socialization process within a social structure. This reflects the reality that society is not just a mere conglomeration of individuals in a situation but a system or systems of human beings acting and interacting with each other (Dy, 1997) in a productive process.

Many sociological experts and social scientists viewed these interactions of individuals differently. Movements and developments of society were interpreted through various sociological perspectives – functional, structural or conflict. Famous among others in the field of social evolution is Karl Marx (2011).

Marx's emphasis is on class conflict as constituting the dynamics of social change, his awareness that change was not random but the outcome of a conflict of interests, and his view of social relations as based on power. He stressed that the force transforming latent class membership into a struggle of classes is class interest. Out of similar class situations, individuals come to act similarly. They develop mutual dependence, a community, a shared interest interrelated with a common income of profit or of wages. From this common interest classes are formed, and for Marx, individuals form classes to the extent that their interests engage them in a struggle with the opposite class. His was a conflict view of modern (nineteenth century) society (Rummel, 1977).

However, upon deep reflection, Jürgen Habermas, a 20th century philosopher, formulated his own perspective on social development different from that of Marx. Habermas (2001) introduced his own theory – the theory of communicative action – which tries to explain the development of society in a more rational way. He emphasized on the importance of communication for social cooperation and development.

Moreover, the distinguishing feature of the human species for Marx is that it uniquely raises itself above nature by virtue of the fact that human beings produce their own means of material subsistence. In other words, human society materially reproduces itself—developing the means to clothe, house, and feed itself—by engaging in social cooperation in the struggle to conquer the forces of nature (Owen 2002).

Being in the competitive world where chaos and a lot of misunderstandings reign, it is but proper for leaders and managers to think for better ways to develop deep communication for better understanding and cooperation among members in the organization. It is almost a daily experience that because man is competitive by nature, influence and manipulation rule over equal integration of opportunities. It is then very important for our modern leaders to learn models of peaceful integration of the various needs and demands of their constituents. Habermas provides us a simple way. Thus, this study.

FRAMEWORK

This study applies as theoretical framework the Habermasian principle of ‘communicative action’ and ‘consensus’ through deliberation and reasoning.

Habermas, in his *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, defines the concept of communicative action as follows: “Communicative action can be understood as a circular process in which the actor is two things in one: an initiator, who masters situations through actions for which he is accountable, and a product of the transitions surrounding him, of groups whose cohesion is based on solidarity to which he belongs, and of processes of socialisation in which he is reared” (Habermas, 1981).

Communicative action in this sense is the one type of action that Habermas says uses all the human ways of thinking, and language. This combination will allow school governance stakeholders to understand and agree with one another and to make plans for common action. The act of coming together and agreeing (communicative action) takes the place of revolution as a mode of change (Mabovula, 2010).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to appreciate better how Habermas’s theory on communicative action can be applied to the daily experiences of leaders in integrating the social, economical, and professional demands of its constituents. Specifically, this will deal on the following subjects: (i) Habermas’s View of Society; (ii) Habermas’s Concept on Social Labor; and (iii) Habermas’s stages of communication as Mechanism of Crisis. Understanding this will allow every individual to live rationally rather than aggressively in dealing with various professional and personal needs.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive-narrative study is a critical action research which utilized all available relevant literatures of Habermas' reconstruction of Marx's Dialectical Materialism. From the identified thirty-four (34) books, articles, periodicals and journals surveyed, there are only eight (8) books, articles and journals considered as reliable and authentic source for narrative analysis. Some philosophy experts helped the identification of resources to ensure the genuineness and meaningfulness of the data.

- Habermas, J. (1975). *Legitimation crisis* (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press. (Original work published in German in 1973.)
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- Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984 and 1987) (German edition, 1981).
- Jürgen Habermas, "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism," in his *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), pp.130-77. (The essay was published in German in 1976.)
- Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1972) (German edition, 1968).

Thereafter, logical classifications of data were made under the different heads focusing on the theme of investigation. Interpretation, description, comparison, appraisal, cross examination, and thematic analysis of different ideas or concepts

in the context of major questions under consideration were the main qualitative analytical technique observed by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Salient Findings

Habermas's View of Society/Institution

Habermas believed that we are confronted today not only by system theory's intellectual repression of the discursive structure of social life, but also by the real repression of processes of reaching understanding in favor of systemic forms of integration. Evident to this is the market or the bureaucratic state, which to a certain extent function behind the backs of the participants and achieve their ends by means of steering mechanisms.

The aforementioned system, often times creates not a cooperative and productive environment, instead, it compromises individual views for the sake of bureaucracy which tries to govern individuals. Thus, Habermas tried to reconstruct society from a chaotic industrial revolution to a society evolve from the communicative aspect of each individuals. He tried to change the view of society born from labor into a society which grows from interaction of people living and dreaming together. Here in this aspect grows the value of language.

Habermas once said, "Language is a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power" (Cooke, 1997). Here, language as a means of organizing society is not use as a power to dominate but categorized as a tool of undamaged inter-subjectivity which reconciles differences and unites visions of people within the structure.

This language unifies the organization or institution into a more profound socialization which leads to a quality production. It is an action which elevates individual from being a simple mean of production in an industrialized culture as espoused by the Marxian society to a person which manages, controls and operates the mode of production.

Figure 1 reflects how Habermas as stipulated by Dy (1997) considers language as a medium of utterances for norms of production and socialization. It is the focal subject of unity in an institution. Moreover, it plays a constitutive role with regard to institutional norms and customs : it is only through the articulation of language that institutional norms and purposes can also be changed.

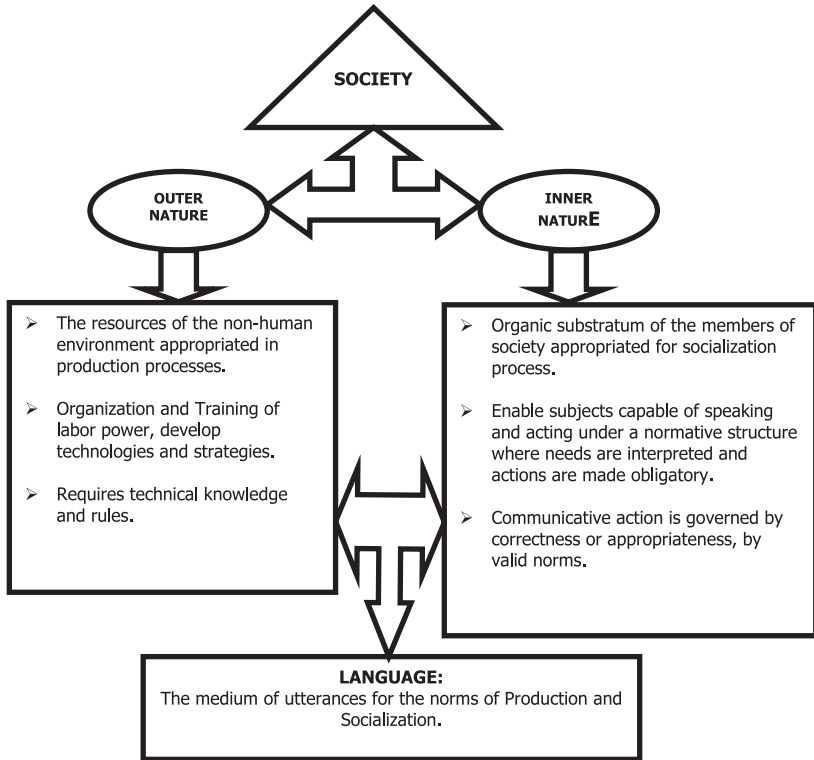


Figure 1. The Role of Language in the Society (Dy, 1997)

Reflected also in the diagram is the two natures of society, namely, the inner and the outer nature. The inner nature comprises the organic subject capable of speaking, acting, socializing, and communicating. This is the human environment working under a normative structure and living together under valid norms. On the other hand, the outer nature is the non-human resources necessary for production processes. This involves the needs for training, developments, technologies, strategies, rules, and technical knowledge to maintain and sustain the flow of operations and production in the society. These two natures, in the eyes of Habermas, should properly understand each other's' role through communication. In these ways, the society can live through communication on the necessary things required for development.

From this, we could say that Habermas refers society as an institution by which individuals regulate their interpersonal relationships, and by which solidarity is secured. The social integration of the lifeworld links up new situations with the life world context in the dimension of social space through language; that is, the sociocultural lifeworld supplies new situations with action coordinating functions by providing structures of legitimately regulated intersubjective relations (Owen 2002).

We can therefore say that open communication and integration of needs among individuals in an organization/institution is a must for a peaceful agreement of a cause. Every working personnel differ in needs, and leaders must understand that these needs are from the inner nature of man which longs for security. It is therefore necessary for a leader to have a heart that hear the inner and outer demands of personnel and, one by one, integrate them to formulate certain programs or projects that would respond together these claims.

Moreover, Habermas tried to emphasize that understanding can only be achieve whenever there is an available space, time, and effort for personal, social, and professional conversation. Dialogue, therefore, creates a productive, dynamic, and motivated culture within the organization. Dubrin (2012) stressed that “communication has been described as the glue that holds the organization together. Effective communication is a leader’s most potent tool for inspiring workers to take responsibility for creating a better future.” Looking at the negative side, poor communication is the number one problem in virtually all organizations and the cause of most problems.

Looking at this perspective, a communication can either strengthen or weaken organizations. A challenge therefore is for the leader to mediate and facilitate flows of communication between and among members of the organization making it sure that no other organization members are influenced, manipulated or even compromised.

Habermas’s Concept on Social Labor

After a rigorous study on the different articles, books, and journals which narrates and describes Jurgen Habermas concept on social labor, the following items are the common concept which he espoused in his struggle to establish a distinction between pure labor and interaction.

Table 1. Habermas' concept on social labor

Habermas' Concept on Social Labor	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Social labor is basically essential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The development of a social labor is considered as a result of a communicative behavior. The social organization of labor and distribution precedes the emergence of linguistic communication, and this in turn results to the formation of a free social system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Social labor is associated with family cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The bond which best describes social labor is comparable to the relationship established by family bond. Jurgen Habermas explained that social labor means not only labor processes but also cooperation between individual groups. This elevates man from a consideration of pure animal to a rational being.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The structures of role behavior mark a new evolutionary threshold. Rules of communicative action cannot be reduced to instrumental strategic action (Dy, 1997). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In contexts of social action, the agent intuitively chooses between an orientation towards success and an orientation towards reaching understanding. These types of actions are exclusively defined as strategic and communicative. In strategic actions, agents' plans are coordinated through influence, and in communicative actions, they are coordinated through consensus. Of the two, consensus is preferable than influence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Production and socialization, social labor and care of the young, are of equal importance for the reproduction of the human species (Dy, 1997). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The familial structure is fundamental for the integration of both outer and inner nature. Just as family relation and understanding are strengthened by communication, social labor are also strengthened and reinforced through clear and dynamic communication among individuals in the workplace.

As reflected in the table, Habermas' concept on social labor moves away from the conflict society espoused by Marx. He emphasized a social role system that eventually comes to integrate social labor in a human society through linguistic and cultural organization. This, however, requires highly competent individuals, and is crucially dependent on the transmission of competences from one generation to the next. Thus, he maintains that the specifically human mode of reproducing life cannot be adequately described without recognizing the familial principle of organization, alongside the system of social labor. He concludes that, production and socialization are "equally" important for a human species that

reproduces itself through social labor and that depends for its social integration on the interactive competences of a social role system (Fleming, 2012).

On the aspect of leadership, leaders have to ensure that quality services are rendered without compromising the working conditions and relations of the personnel. Just as Habermas believes that society emerges from communication, leaders must also consider that organization grows not from forceful implementation of codes and rules but in the proper communication of goals. Moreover, the development of communicative action reminds every leader that they are part of the organization. They take the role as leaders and model in doing organizational related activities. Habermas clarified that the organization is an extension, expansion, and even considered it as an integral part of the family relationship where every member is heard and catered accordingly and equally.

Leaders, therefore, must not be coercive or compelling towards work. A leader is a true guide who empowers, encourages, and motivates other members of the organization to faithfully perform duties as a contributory factor to strengthen organization.

Leaders see their constituents as not just followers, but rather as stakeholders striving to achieve that same common purpose, vision, and values. These follower and stakeholder constituents have their own individuality and autonomy which must be respected to maintain a moral community. Leader, then, embody the purpose, vision, and values of the organization and of the constituents, within an understanding of ethical ideals. They connect the goals of the organization with that of the internal employees and external stakeholders. Leaders work to create an open, two-way conversation, thereby maintaining a charitable understanding of different views, values, and constituents' opinions. They are open to others' opinions and ideas because they know those ideas make the organization they are leading better (Freeman & Stewart, 2006).

Habermas's Stages of Communication as Mechanism of Crisis

Since Habermas fight on the theory of communicative action tries to negate Marx's conflict society, he must have some processes of communication to oppose violence in crisis. After reading and examining closely the narratives of habermas and his ideology, the following process of communication is formulated.

Habermas' stages of communication reflect the flow of conversation from being individualistic towards the achievement of a social agreement. Through a social conversation, individuals who first are bounded by his own actions

and motives began to consider the needs of others as his/her own needs. This movement starts the reciprocal behavioral expectations of individuals towards a system of social roles. Finally, upon verification of argument and when validity of speeches are attained, agreement of norms and principles will now be justified and established.

Table 2. Habermas' stages of communication

Stages of Communication	Descriptive Characteristics
Symbolically Mediated Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Behavioral expectations of participants are bound to their performative attitude ■ Actions, motives and acting subjects are perceived on a single place of reality (Dy, 1997) ■ One considers the needs of others to the extent that meeting those needs will help him fulfill his own needs
Propositionally Differentiated Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Speaking and acting separate for the first time ■ One can connect a performative attitude of the participant with the propositional attitude (Dy, 1997) of the observer ■ The reciprocal behavioral expectations of participants constitutes a system of social roles ■ Actions and norms separate
Argumentative Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The validity claims of speech acts can be made thematic and argued upon ■ Norms and roles appear in need of justification, their validity can be contested (Dy 1997) and grounded in principles

A competent leader systematically and orderly organized, situate, and deliberate things on the table along with the other members in the organization. Management gurus would always emphasize that managers and leaders need to strengthen the basic skills of planning, organizing, decision making, directing, and controlling to ensure smooth operation in the organization (Barnard, 1968). These are basic skills which defines how effective and efficient the leader or manager is in taking control of the organizations' entire system of work.

Habermas, however, emphasize the strong relationship between communication and action. Both are necessary skills a leader must possess to facilitate differences and individualism in the organization.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this critical study lead towards a conclusion that leaders' self-reflection and effective communication provides a better way of social and organizational formation and transformation. For a society to develop, a mode of open communication is of vital importance for social integration. There is a must to change the view of society born from labor into a society which grows from interaction of people living and dreaming together. In this aspect, communicative leadership creates an organization that welcomes every thought of every member and considers it a unit very important for organizational development. Hence, organizational formation and transformation, just like that of any society, cannot be brought about by coercive leadership and class conflicts but by a bi-dimensional learning process. Class conflicts threaten the identity and integration of society. Learning processes may take a long span of time. In the long run, however, they are the only alternative to violence (Dy, 1997).

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