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This paper attempts to investigate the Western proposition on the communication preferences of male and female employees in a Malaysian organization. Based on the literature, Western scholars suggest that male employees prefer working communication with their superior that will allow them to accomplish their jobs. On the other hand, female employees prefer relationship communication with their superior in order to maintain and develop their relationship with their superior. Our findings show the combinations of working and relationship communication emerging from Malaysian male and female respondents. The consequences of these findings are discussed and elaborated.

Keywords: Superior-subordinate communication; Working relationships; LMX theory and gender

In the daily operations of an organization, the members involved cannot avoid communicating. Without communication, organizations cannot survive and continue their operation (Hickson, Stacks, & Greely, 1998). Through

Hassan Abu Bakar (MSc, Corporate Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia), Bahtiar Mohamad (MSc, Corporate Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia), and Che Su Mustafa (PhD, Universiti Utara Malaysia) are all attached to the Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages, at the Universiti Utara Malaysia. Correspondence to: Hassan Abu Bakar, Faculty of Communication and Modern Languages Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia. Tel: 604 928 6701; Fax: 604 928 6706; Email: abhassan@uum.edu.my

communication, organization members exchange information to progress their tasks and to achieve organizational goals. One of the important elements in organizational communication research is the study of superior–subordinate communication, which is also known as supervisory communication. Various researchers have shown that effective supervisory communication can help organization members achieve job satisfaction and to be more fully committed to their organization. Some communication scholars suggest that effective superior–subordinate communications in an organization can also contribute to its effectiveness (Krone, 1992; Kramer, 1995, 2004; Lee, 2005; Lee & Jablin, 1995).

Gender does affect communication behaviors in the superior–subordinate relationship (Varma & Storh, 2001; Wood, 2002). With respect to this issue, this study explores the perceived differences for male and female subordinates regarding superior–subordinate communication dimensions that affect working relationship quality with an immediate superior. In this regard, Dienesch and Liden (1986) argue that individual characteristics such as gender, race, and educational background may be related to superior–subordinate relationships, and may help establish the quality of the relationship that a subordinate develops with his/her superior (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Gefen & Straub, 1997; Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998). Though few cross-cultural studies have dealt directly with male and female interactions with their superior (Burleson, 2003; Varma & Storh, 2001), past studies tended simply to compare gender differences in high and low context culture. Although this approach yields interesting results, it still leaves an important issue unresolved; that is, we need first to explore empirically whether a culture that is categorized as being in high or low context really exhibits tendencies consistent with high or low context cultures on relevant dimensions. In particular, how do perceived differences of male and female subordinates regarding superior–subordinate communication dimensions affect working relationship quality with an immediate superior in a high context culture such as Malaysia? The contention presented in this paper is the need for diversity in the workplace to be actualized as much as advocated, and to acknowledge how the ways in which males and females within high context culture respond to work relationships with their superior during their daily interactions could be essential for organizational competitiveness (Varma, Srivinas, & Stroh, 2005).

Malaysia Overview

Malaysia is a multicultural country in which the major ethnic groups are Malays, Chinese, and Indians. They cooperate harmoniously in their everyday living. Each of these ethnic groups maintains its own ethnic identity, practicing their own cultures, customs, behavior, the language they speak, norms, values, and beliefs (Abdul Rashid & Ho, 2003). Generally, all these ethnics groups in Malaysia are motivated by their affiliation to groups, families, and individuals. In addition to this, Malaysians respond better to productivity increases if they see benefits ensuing, not only to the organization, but also to their family, community, and nation

(Asma, 1992). Asma (1992) also notes that Malaysians expect their leaders to act as role models who are spiritually and religiously in tune with constituents. Malaysians practice diplomacy and indirectness in their daily communication. They also uphold the value of self-respect or face, politeness, and sensitivity to feelings. Moreover, they place a higher value on relationships. Kennedy (2002) stresses that Malaysian people place specific emphasis on collective well-being and display a strong humane orientation within a society that respects hierarchical differences and gives priority to maintaining harmony.

The industrialization process since the 1970s in Malaysia has created many employment opportunities for women. For instance, female participation in the labor force has increased from 45.8% in 1990 to 47.1% in 2000, compared to 37.2% in 1970 (Department of Statistics, 2002). In addition, the Malaysian government's active role to promote equality has resulted in more women obtaining the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the labor force (Mansor, 1994). Studies indicate that Malaysian female employees demonstrate a strong aspiration to enhance family income and a need to increase the standard of living of the family. Such aspiration is enabled by the cooperation they receive from their partners (Tuan, 1998).

Superior–Subordinate Communication

Superior–subordinate communication behaviors refer to processes and interactions that have been practiced by superiors towards subordinates with the objective of achieving task objectives and maintaining their relationships (Miles, Patrick, & King, 1996). In an organizational setting, superior–subordinate communication has been broadly defined as an exchange of information and influence among organizational members where one of those members has official authority to direct and evaluate other members of organizational activities (Jablin, 1979). Clampitt and Downs (1994) refer to superior–subordinate communication as upward and downward communication with superiors, including openness to ideas and listening to problems.

Katz and Kahn (1978) conceptualize and expand the basic components of communication (source, receiver, channel, and message), while specifying the direction of information flow in terms of superior–subordinate relationships. They suggest that communication between supervisor and subordinate contains five types of information: (1) job instruction, (2) job rationale, (3) procedures and practices, (4) feedback, and (5) indoctrination of goals. Meanwhile, communication from subordinate to their superior mainly contains: (1) about themselves, their performance, and their problems, (2) their co-workers' problems, (3) organizational practices and policies, and (4) what needs to be done and how it can be done (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Based on Katz et al.'s (1978) notion of superior–subordinate communication, Huseman, Hatfield, Boulton, and Gatewood (1980), through a series of qualitative and quantitative studies, developed seven types of communication that occur in

superior–subordinate relationships, namely: (1) direction, (2) information, (3) rationale, (4) feedback, (5) positive expression, (6) negative expression, and (7) participation. Hatfield and Huseman (1982) later tested these types of superior–subordinate communication and they found that these seven types of communication have significant impact on subordinates' job satisfaction.

In reviewing the development of superior–subordinate communication, Danserau and Markham (1987) argued that superior–subordinate communication is a complex phenomenon where it involves various types of communication within the dyad. To reflect this, Miles et al. (1996) employed and tested Huseman et al.'s (1980) seven types of superior–subordinate communication. Miles et al. (1996) found four separate dimensions of superior–subordinate communication behaviors that can reflect working and social communication in superior–subordinate relationships, namely: (1) positive relationship communication, (2) upward openness communication, (3) negative relationship communication, and (4) job-relevant communication. Positive relationship communication focuses on superiors seeking suggestions from subordinates, being interested in them as people, relating to them in a casual manner, and allowing them to contribute input on important decisions. Upward openness communication is characterized by the opportunity to question a superior's instruction and to disagree with a superior. Negative relationship communication deals with superiors ridiculing subordinates and criticizing them in the presence of others. Job-relevant communication includes a superior's feedback on performances; information includes a superior's feedback on performance, information about rules and policies, job instructions, work assignments and schedules, and goals.

Numerous studies have explored superior–subordinate communication as a variable that influence various organizational outcomes (Yrle, Hartman, & Galle, 2002, 2003). For example, several studies have demonstrated that superior–subordinate communication has a positive impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, & Lesniak, 1978; Schwiger & Denisi, 1991), performance appraisals (Nathan, Mohrman, & Milliman, 1991), and influence on relationships between managers and workers (Page & Wiseman, 1993). Consistent with these studies, this study adopts and to explore superior–subordinate communication as independent variable that will influence working relationships between superior and subordinate.

Working Relationship Quality

Researchers have built up several conceptualizations of human relationships at work (Gabarro, 1990; Reinsch, 1997). The conceptual foundation of this research draws in Gabarro (1990), who conceptualizes working relationships as a type of social relationship that places greater emphasis on occupation proficiency. In describing the development of intimacy or maturity in superior–subordinate relationships, Gabarro argues that a working relationship normally develops in four stages. The first stage is

orientation. This stage involves initial sizing. It is also known as the introductory stage between new members of an organization and their superior. The second stage is known as exploration. This stage involves both subordinate and superior learning about each other's goals, roles, and priorities. The third stage is testing. This stage involves superior and subordinate working through unresolved differences to develop the foundation for trust and influence between each other. Finally, the stabilization stage involves effort and activities in maintaining existing relationships. In summary, this perspective clarifies working relationships as characterized by low self-disclosure and the variation of superior–subordinate trust, intimacy, and maturity.

In a working environment, who organizational members interact with can strongly influence occupational proficiency (Reinsch, 1997). In addition to this, Gabarro (1990) noted that organizational members' perceptions of working relationships also depend on the issues of mutual trust. The mutual trust in dyad relationships is concerned with work performance, goals, and roles. In most cases, the relationship between superior and subordinate depends on mutual task performance, particularly as task performance is a reflection of the other person's expectations.

We argue that the leader–member exchange (LMX) model of relationships is consistent with the perspectives on working relationships. This is because LMX theory enables the researcher to capture the dyadic working relationship between a superior and his or her subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Therefore, this study takes on the LMX model to explain working relationships. The LMX model proposed by Graen and his colleagues explains how the relationship between superior and subordinate develops as a result of their workplace interactions (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994; Graen, Wakabayashi, Graen, & Graen, 1990; Liden & Graen, 1980). This model speculates that, because of time pressures, the leader can develop close relationships with only a few of his/her key subordinate(s) (the in-group), while sustaining a formal relationship with the rest of his/her group (the out-group). This means that since the leader is ultimately responsible for the whole group's performance and productivity, he/she relies heavily on formal authority, rules, policies, and procedures to obtain ample performance from the out-group (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Research has shown that the relationships developed in these dyads form rather quickly and tend to remain stable over time (Graen & Cashman, 1975).

As a result, leaders tend to develop and maintain working relationship ranging from high quality relationship and low quality relationship. High quality working relationship is sometimes referred to as cadre, or partnership demonstrated by a high degree of mutual positive affect, loyalty, respect, and proficiency in their work. In contrast, low quality working relationships are mainly governed by their work contract (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Research suggests that superior–subordinate in high quality working relationships received the superior's support and guidance. Furthermore, subordinates who have a high quality working relationship with their superior demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction and performance, lower levels of turnover, and, most importantly, better quality of assignments. On the other hand,

superior–subordinate in low quality working relationships may result in simple contractual relations, higher levels of supervisory control and directives, lower levels of subordinate satisfaction, higher levels of subordinate turnover and less desired assignments (Liden & Graen, 1980; Liden, Graen, & Hoel, 1982).

If this concept of LMX quality is expanded, it explains variations in superior–subordinate communication behavior. For example, research suggests that superior–subordinate communication patterns in high quality LMX relationships demonstrate "open" communication exchanges in which subordinates are afforded greater amounts of trust, confidence, attention, inside information, negotiating latitude, and influence without remedy of authority. In contrast, low quality LMX relationships are "closed" communication systems, in which superiors use formal authority to force the member to comply with a given role (Jablin, 1987; Mueller & Lee, 2002). As a consequence, subordinates in low quality LMX relationships are limited in their opportunities to influence decisions, and, for this reason, complaint their superior's resistance, unresponsiveness, and languor in their attempts to affect change (Cashman, Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1976).

Many researchers have clarified specific communication behaviors and activities that occur between superiors and subordinates in different LMX relationships (Fairhurst, 1993, 2001; Lee, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005; Lee & Jablin, 1995). In particular, research supports the observation that high quality LMX superior–subordinate working relationships display different interaction patterns and attitudes between superiors and subordinates (Mueller & Lee, 2002). Superiors and subordinates engaged in different levels of LMX display behavior, such distinguishing in aligning, accommodating, and polarizing discourse patterns (Fairhurst, 1993). They vary in the frequency in their communication (Johlke & Duhan, 2000, 2001; Krone, 1992). They also adopt different persuasive strategies, impressions of management, or ingratiation strategies to attempt upward influence (Krone, 1992). Besides that, research also suggests that superiors and subordinates at different levels of LMX engage in various relational maintenance and communication strategies (Lee & Jablin, 1995; Waldron, 1991), and form different attributions to explain and interpret critical performance incidents (Wilhelm, Herd, & Steiner, 1993).

Gender Differences

In addition to the above findings based on LMX quality studies, Dienesch and Liden (1986) argue that individual characteristics such as gender, race, and educational background may be related to LMX, and may help determine the quality of relationships between superiors and subordinates. Liden, Sparrowe, and Wayne (1997), in their review of LMX theory and empirical evidence, suggest that subordinates with same-sex supervisors develop higher quality LMX relationships than subordinates with opposite-sex supervisors. Additionally, there is also some evidence that members of the same gender are predominantly chosen as "in-group" and given selective advantages over opposite gender members who are relegated to

"out-group" status (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroh, 1999). Gender also has been found to influence organizational process and outcomes such as performance ratings, and upward mobility recruitment (Powell, 1987; Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). In addition to these findings, there is also evidence that LMX quality can have a significant impact on the selection of employees' gender for important assignments (Varma & Storh, 2001) and the progression to senior positions (Koshal, Gupta, & Koshal, 1998).

Cross-Cultural Superior–Subordinate Relationships

A great deal of cross-cultural analysis has been based on the seminal work of Hofstede (1980, 2003), in which he examined over 50 different countries searching for cultural differences and similarities. Based on his research, Hofstede proposed five major dimensions where cultures differ: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, and long-term versus short-term orientation. Many of these cultural traits are clearly relevant to the study of superior–subordinate relationships (Hofstede, 1984, 2003). Hofstede's concepts of power distance and masculinity vs. femininity dimensions, for example, are used to identify cultural expectations of superior–subordinate dynamic. Hofstede (1980) suggests that Malaysian organizations' culture indicate high scores for power distance and masculinity–femininity dimensions when compared to Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This result implies superior and subordinate in Malaysia exhibit greater acceptance of autocratic and paternalistic leadership behaviors. In addition, this result also shows that the degree of inequality between people and the degree of gender differentiation in the Malaysia society is higher than Australia, United Kingdom, and United States. In work connected to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Asma and Lim (2001) and Lim (2001) examined these cultural dimensions in various private and public organizations in Malaysia and found similar patterns to Hofstede, where there is high power distance and gender differentiation in the Malaysian organizations.

Another significant cross-cultural study, explicitly examining cultural differences and their relationship with leadership effectiveness, has also been recently released. The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (Ashkanasy, 2002; Kennedy, 2002) elaborates and expands upon Hofstede's findings. This study was even more exhaustive, collecting data from 62 different societies over a seven-year period, and examining differences over similar cultural dimensions, including power distance. However, Kennedy (2002) argues that acceptance of power distance in Malaysia is less extreme than in Hofstede's (1980) original work and in that of Asma and Lim (2001) and Lim (2001) when compared to other countries involved in the GLOBE study. Kennedy (2002) further argues that even though Malaysia can be considered as a culture with high power distance, it is balanced with strong human orientation in the superior–subordinate relationship. Furthermore, effective leaders in Malaysian organizations are expected to show compassion while

using more of an autocratic than a participative style (Kennedy, 2002). However, consistent with Hofstede's work, the GLOBE study also shows that gender egalitarian exist in Malaysian organizations and this implies that gender differentiation in Malaysian organizations is very high.

With regards to gender differences one study in Malaysia organization indicates that women, when compared to men, do not perceive equal opportunities for advancement after recruitment (Koshal et al., 1998). However, in Western organizations there is evidence of gender differences in some communication behavior studies (Fairhurst, 1986, 1993; Wood, 1993; Wood & Inman, 1993). In particular, some studies suggest that male and female members may have different communication expectations with their leader. For example, women tend to develop more elaborate or sophisticated communication techniques than men to handle others' emotions and feelings (Burleson, 2003; Kunkel & Burleson, 1999). Additionally, some scholars view that women value close relationships for their emotional and expressive qualities and men mainly conceptualize close relationships in terms of their instrumental features. Thus, we can expect that females use conversations or communication as a primary vehicle to create and maintain intimacy and connectedness with their superior. Men, on the other hand, use conversations as a socialization process. Thus, they have a tendency to use conversations or communication as tools for getting things done, for accomplishing instrumental tasks, for conveying information, and for maintaining their autonomy with their superior (Wood, 1993; Wood & Inman, 1993).

Hypotheses

Following the logic of LMX model, it is possible that there could be a difference between male and female subordinate expectation regarding the communication behaviors of a superior. It is also probable that these differences will have an impact on the quality of their working relationship. Burleson's (2003) study of interpersonal communication supports these propositions. He found that women rate ego, support, conflict management, comforting, and regulative skills as significantly more important, whereas men rate narrative and persuasive skills as significantly more important. Therefore, it is more likely that female subordinates will employ relationship communication to develop and maintain their working relationship with their superior; on the other hand it is more likely that male subordinates will adopt work communication to develop and maintain their working relationships with their superior (Lee, 1999). Specifically, female subordinates could be expected to use more relationship communication in order to have higher working relationship quality with their superior, while male subordinates could be expected to use more work or job communication in having higher working relationship quality with their superior (Johlke & Duhan, 2000, 2001; Krone, 1992; Mueller & Lee, 2002; Varma & Storh, 2001).

The studies reviewed above demonstrate the importance of communication in determining and influencing superior–subordinate working relationships. However,

only a few research studies could be identified which explicitly addressed employees' communication preferences in specific cultural settings. It is likely that in Malaysia's organization context, men expect more job-relevant and upward openness communication while women expect more positive and negative relationship communication in achieving higher working relationship quality with their superior. This is because, in the Malaysian cultural context, gender differences are very strong. Additionally, the leaders in Malaysia tend to use more autocratic style with strong human orientation. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1a. Positive relationship communication has a positive impact on working relationship quality with a superior for female employees.

H1b. Negative relationship communication has a negative impact on working relationship quality with a superior for female employees.

H1c. Upward openness communication has a positive impact on working relationship quality with a superior for male employees.

H1d. Job-relevant communication has a positive impact on working relationship quality with their superior for male employees.

Method

Respondents

Respondents in this research are primarily employees of a large semi-government corporation and its subsidiary in Northern Peninsular Malaysia. The semi-government corporation (SGC) is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance. Survey packets were sent directly to 317 management employees. The sample $n = 231$ (72.8%) in various SGC subsidiaries. The rationale for choosing this sample is that all respondents reporting to a specific supervisor perform an essentially identical role. Approximately 64.5% ($n = 149$) are male and 35.5% ($n = 82$) are female. This sample distribution reflects the industry norm for SGC in Malaysia. The majority of the respondents (80.1%, $n = 185$) are support staff and the rest (19.9%, $n = 46$) are under the management and professional category. Approximately 8.3% ($n = 19$) respondents have worked for the organization for less than one year, 21.2% ($n = 49$) for between one and three years, 25.5% ($n = 59$) for between four and six years, 24.7% ($n = 57$) for between seven and ten years, and 20.3% ($n = 47$) for more than ten years in their current organization.

Measures

The English language version of working relationships by Liden and Graen (1980), and superior–subordinate communication by Miles et al. (1996) were used to obtain data. This follows the preference of other researchers who also used English language questionnaires instead of other local languages on Malaysian subjects (Bochner, 1994; Furnham & Muhiudeen, 1984; Schumaker & Barraclough, 1989). The reason is that Malaysians, especially those involved in the business sector, are fluent in

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities of Variables.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Working relationships	23.67	5.02	(0.87)				
2. Positive relationship communication	19.64	4.88	0.718*	(0.81)			
3. Upward openness communication	10.25	1.86	0.783*	0.446*	(0.70)		
4. Negative relationship communication	9.17	2.74	0.110	0.424*	0.633*	(0.69)	
5. Job-relevant communication	37.57	8.55	0.690*	0.728*	0.224*	0.061	(0.86)

*Significance at 0.05 and 0.01.

the English language (Lim, 2001). Details of instrument used in this study are as follows.

The instrument used to assess superior–subordinate communication behavior includes 24 items modified by Miles et al. (1996). These items represent eight types of message developed by Huseman et al. (1980). The eight message types are: feedback, rationale, information, direction, negative expression, positive expression, participation, and upward openness. Each type is represented by three questions and each item is measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale.

The measurement of working relationship quality in this study relied primarily on scales from LMX theory (Liden & Graen, 1980). In a review of LMX research, Dienesch and Liden (1986) identify the characterized working relationship quality as perceived contribution (amount, direction, and quality of work-oriented activity), loyalty (voicing support in the presence of third parties), and effect (feelings). This study employs their 14-item scale to measure working relationship quality. Each item is measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Prior to the actual study we conducted a pre-test study among respondents in the organization. The pre-test conducted sought to determine the degree of stability, trustworthiness, and dependability of the measurement used in this study, as there is very limited study of superior–subordinate communication and relationship in Malaysian organization settings. Results of the pre-test show Cronbach's alpha for positive relationship communication is 0.81, upward openness communication is 0.70, negative relationship communication 0.69, job-relevant communication is 0.86, and the working relationship quality scale shows that Cronbach's alpha is 0.87.

Before testing the hypotheses, data were also tested for coding/data entry errors, and tests for normality were conducted for each of the survey items as well as the constructs that were created by computing individual items. Tests for normality included kurtosis measures, skewness measures, and visual inspection of histograms. The majority of items appeared to be within normality. Kurtosis measures are below one. Skewness measures are around zero, and analysis indicates normal-shaped histograms. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for superior–subordinate communication dimensions and working relationships.

Table 2 Ordinary Least Square (OLS) between Superior–Subordinate Communication and Working Relationship Quality.

Superior–subordinate communication	Working relationship quality
Male	0.628*
Female	0.776*

Notes: $N = 231$; *$p < 0.05$.

Results

Data were analyzed by using multiple regressions to test the relationship between superior–subordinate communication and working relationship quality concerning the male and female respondents' score. Multiple regression techniques were chosen because they allow researchers in social science to deal with complexity in human behaviors (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). The central idea of the multiple regression method is that it is used to test the relationship between a dependent variable and two or more independent variables (Greene, 2003). Thus, using a multiple regression technique we can also determine specific independent variables that have a major impact on a dependent variable in the case of the superior–subordinate communication dimensions on working relationships quality.

The hypotheses deal with the relationship between superior–subordinate communication behavior and working relationship among male and female respondents. Positive relationship is predicted. Results of a simple regression analysis suggest that there is a significant positive relationship between superior–subordinate communication and working relationship quality for male respondents ($r = 0.628$, $p < 0.005$), while results from female respondents show there is also significant relationship between superior–subordinate communication and working relationship ($r = 0.776$, $p < 0.005$). Table 2 displays the findings of the relationship between superior–subordinate communication and working relationship for male and female respondents. The results suggest that there is a direct relationship between superior–subordinate communication and working relationship quality for both male and female respondents. Specifically, it indicates that communication with a superior has a high correlation with working relationship among female respondents, while for the male respondents it has a moderate correlation (Guilford, 1956).

Since this first test finds a significant positive relationship between superior–subordinate communication and working relationship quality for male and female respondents, further tests were generated to test whether the specific communication activities for male and female employees can influence their working relationship with their superior (Hypotheses 1a, b, c, and d). It is predicted that for female subordinates, positive relationship communication and negative relationship communication have an impact on working relationship quality. We also predict that upward openness communication and job-relevant communication have a positive impact on working relationship quality with a superior for male

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analyses of Superior–Subordinate
Communication and Working Relationships Quality for Male Employees.

Predictor variable	B	$SE\ B$	β	t	p
Positive relationship communication	0.560	0.109	0.579	5.131	0.000*
Upward openness communication	−0.041	0.203	−0.018	0.051	0.840
Negative relationship communication	−0.340	0.145	−0.224	−2.349	0.021*
Job-relevant communication	0.143	0.054	0.255	2.627	0.010*
$R^2 = 0.501$					
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.482$					
F statistics $= 25.88^*$					
Degree of freedom $= 144$					

*$p < 0.05$.

subordinates. In order to test these propositions, multiple regressions were used. In each regression model, working relationship quality was regressed against the four communication dimensions, i.e. positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, negative relationship communication, and job-relevant communication. Regression weights and multiple correlations for male and female respondents are displayed in Tables 3 and 4.

The overall pattern of results in Tables 3 and 4 indicates a significant relationship between superior–subordinate communication and working relationships for both male and female respondents. Results show that all four superior–subordinate communication dimensions are significant predictors for working relationship quality for males, $F(4, 144) = 25.88$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.501$. For females, $F(4, 77) = 48.84$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.671$. These results provide support for past research (Goldhaber et al., 1978; Jablin, 1979) as well as providing support for the current hypothesis that communication from superiors correlates significantly with subordinate working relationship quality. The test reveals that all four superior–subordinate communication dimensions are significant predictors of working relationship for both male and female employees.

Our main investigation aim is to determine the communication patterns between male and female employees that influence their working relationship with their superior. As mentioned earlier, we predict female employees will place more emphasis on relationship communication; thus, positive relationship communication and negative relationship communication will be a significant predictor relationship with their superior. On the other hand, male employees will place more emphasis on instrumental communication; therefore, we predict upward openness communication and job-relevant communication will be significant predictors of the relationship with their superior. Table 3 indicates that for male respondents positive relationship communication, $t(148) = 5.131$, $p < 0.05$, negative relationship communication, $t(148) = -2.349$, $p < 0.05$, and job-relevant communication, $t(148) = 2.627$, $p < 0.05$, have significant impact on working relationship quality, with almost 50.1% variance in working relationships. For female respondents, analysis in Table 4 reveals only positive relationship communication, $t(81) = 4.303$,

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analyses of Superior–Subordinate Communication and Working Relationships Quality for Female Employees.

Predictor variable	B	$SE\ B$	β	t	p
Positive relationship communication	0.584	0.136	0.545	4.303	0.000*
Upward openness communication	−0.449	0.282	−0.134	0.936	0.115
Negative relationship communication	0.157	0.206	−0.069	0.273	0.449
Job-relevant communication	0.207	0.071	0.345	2.936	0.008*
$R^2 = 0.685$					
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.671$					
F statistics $= 48.84^*$					
Degree of freedom $= 77$					

$^*p < 0.05$.

$p < 0.05$, and job-relevant communication, $t(81) = 2.936$, $p < 0.05$, have significant impact on working relationship quality, with almost 68.5% variance in working relationships.

Discussion

This study suggests that superior–subordinate communication behavior plays an important role in influencing work relationships. As can be seen in Table 3, for male employees positive relationship communication, negative relationship communication, and job-relevant communication show a significant relationship with working relationship quality. Thus, only Hypothesis 1d was supported. Our analysis also shows in Table 4 that for female employees only positive relationship communication and job-relevant communication have significant impact on working relationship quality with their superior. Thus, only Hypothesis 1a was supported.

This finding shows an important aspect of communication behavior and working relationship in the Malaysian organizational context. For male employees in Malaysian organizations, relationship communication (positive and negative relationship communication) and job-relevant communication play an important role in influencing and perhaps in determining their work relationship with their superior, while for female employees only positive relationship communication and job-relevant communication were inportant. Thus, there is discrepancy between our findings and prior descriptions of superior–subordinate communication and relationships in the literature. A focus on instrumental communication in influencing relationships with their superior was prominent for male employees, while relationship communication was the focus for female employees. This finding has interesting implications. First, this study demonstrated that Malaysian male and female employees use both instrumental and relationship communication in determining and influencing their working relationship with their superior. Finding that male employees in Malaysia reported more positive

relationship communication, negative relationship communication and job-relevant communication, while female employees reported more positive relationship communication and job-relevant communication, is suggestive of the types of communication that may be useful in a leader–member exchange theory explanation, that is, male and female employees in Malaysia use both instrumental and relationship communication in influencing the working relationship with their superior. Second, this finding is noteworthy for global management practice. For managers who intend to work in Malaysia, this result indicates that the relationship and instrumental communication that they will have with their male and female subordinates in Malaysia will be critical in affecting and perhaps in effecting their working relationships. The three communication dimensions significantly influencing working relationship quality were positive relationship communication, negative relationship communication, and job-relevant communication. If the results are generalizable, minimizing negative relationship communication and increasing positive relationship communication and job-relevant communication should have a positive effect on the working relationship quality with their male subordinates. Further increasing positive relationship communication and job-relevant communication should have a positive effect on the working relationship quality with their female subordinates.

These apparently contradictory results raise some intriguing possibilities, as Hypothesis 1b was not supported for female employees and Hypothesis 1c was not supported for male employees. However, our findings suggest that both male and female subordinates employed both instrumental and relationships communication in influencing their working relationship quality with their superior. One explanation for this is that female employees in Malaysia have indicated that they have a strong desire to supplement family income and a need to improve the family's standard of living (Tuan, 1998). As such, this also may influence female employees to adopt work thinking like that of their male counterparts. Male employees, in addition to these two dimensions, also report that negative relationships communication has an impact on developing and maintaining working relationships with their superior. This result is consistent with the assumption advance in the GLOBE study on Malaysia that it is generally Malaysian to uphold the value of self-respect or face, politeness, and sensitivity to feelings, and to value relationships (Asma, 1992). In addition to this, Western managers should understand that Malaysian employees display a strong humane orientation within a society that respects hierarchical differences and gives priority to maintaining harmony (Kennedy, 2002). They do not accept any behavior such as ridiculing subordinates or criticizing them in the presence of others from their superiors.

Conclusions and Limitations

Because this study used only one organization in Malaysia, it represents a limited test on the communication–working relationships quality relationship and

a homogenous sample of employees performing similar tasks. Even this limited test, however, suggests that communication does affect working relationships. The next step is to assess the external validity of the obtained results by replication of the study in other Malaysian organizational settings, and other tasks at hand. For example, future research should test whether a similar effect can be found in multinational organizations or private organizations operating in Malaysia, e.g. whether employees in Japanese or American-based organizations in Malaysia are similar to or differ from those in public or private Malaysian-owned organizations.

We also note that, because this study derives from one source—the employees—there is a possibility of common method biases existing in the study. Thus, future research should consider obtaining data from multiple sources. For example, rating of working relationship quality could be obtained from managers. Our results are encouraging in associations between superior communication behaviors and working relationships; however, additional dimensions of superior communication behavior need to be considered. Such additional research may play a vital role in developing understanding about when and whether superiors should deviate from ''best'' communication behaviors. If further research identifies superior communication behavior dimensions such as the Hatfield and Huseman (1982) communication instrument such as coordination, participation and expression, which may lead to information that could provide helpful indications of best communication behavior for superiors to maintain their working relationships.

Additionally, we are also aware there are some limitations in LMX quality scale used in this study. Thus, for those who are interested to continue with the study, the use of the LMX-7 (Liden & Graen, 1980) or LMX-MDM (Liden & Maslyn, 1998) scale would provide better explanation of working relationship quality in organizations. Positive relationship communication and job-relevant communication should have a positive effect on the working relationship quality with their male subordinate.

In sum, this study represents an initial research effort to identify male and female communication behaviors (positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, negative relationship communication, and job-relevant communication) which will influence the quality of the superior–subordinate working relationship. This investigation is also the first to focus on specific communication behaviors in a Malaysian organizational setting. The results of this research suggest that male and female employees in Malaysia use both instrumental and relationship communication in determining their working relationship quality with their superior. This situation also suggests that superior–subordinate communication dimensions employed in this study are practiced in the organization. Even though this will have only a small effect on the organization, from the context of dyadic relationship, it will produce major effects on their relationships because, at this level of communication, superior–subordinate will execute policies from the top management. Therefore, a harmonic relationship between superior and subordinate will smooth the flow of information from top to bottom.

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