

# Exploratory Analysis of Interaction Factors on Crewmembers Performance in Malaysian Independent Film Industry

Vimala Perumal<sup>1+</sup>, Hamisah Hassan<sup>2</sup>, Jusang Bolong<sup>3</sup> and Mohd Nizam Osman<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Multimedia University

<sup>2</sup> University Putra Malaysia

**Abstract.** Filmmaking is a collaborative process, a team effort. Besides technology, films are part of social institutions as well. Films are the collective creation of a number of separate individuals, each contributing with creative input, unique talents, and technical expertise to the project. The crewmembers represent the backbone of the production machine. The search for the right support group behind the camera is as important as finding the right actors to flesh out the story. The aim of this research is to present a detailed and exploratory analysis and evaluation of the interaction factors influencing the performance of crewmembers in independent film industry environments, through the Social Exchange Theory (SET) perspective. An in-depth interview will be carried out with filmmakers who are currently active in the independent film production. After complete identification of such factors, the film industry can utilize the findings into providing more fruitful atmospheres for filmmaking, particularly in Malaysia, that can be followed by other successful productions.

**Keywords:** Film industry, Interaction factors, Social exchange theory, Crewmember performance

## 1. Introduction

Currently, the creative industries in Malaysia, especially the independent (or “Indie”) film industry, are receiving much popular attention. Developed in just less than a decade, the Malaysian “Indie” scene has a very collaborative feel; they distinguish themselves from previous Malaysian filmmakers by the collaborative way they operate: helping to edit, produce, shoot and write each other’s films (Mutalib, 2005; Perumal & Woods, 2007; Khoo, 2007; Ahmad, 2008). “Indie” films are really a test of friendship and trust. Communication is a vital part in the making of a film. Individuals who interact with each other frequently are more likely to be productive than those who interact less. Through interaction, problems are solved, deals are made, conflicts resolved, feelings expressed and many other issues are settled. This is a common view, since “Indie” filmmaking has neither the facilities nor the budget of mainstream films. (Reagans and McEvily, 2003; Perumal & Woods, 2007; Ahmad, 2008). The Malaysian film industry, however, is rarely analyzed as anything other than a cultural artifact. The role of the influencing interaction factors on the production crewmembers’ performance in film industry has not yet been the subject of concerted academic researches, especially in Malaysia. However, the data from this particular study is useful for formulating a future research schema for the film industry and more generally in describing the factors affecting the crewmembers’ interactions and individual performance during the process of filmmaking.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Malaysian Independent Film Industry

Malaysian independent cinema is very young as compared to mainstream cinema, which has started since 1933. Increasingly, these “Indie” filmmakers have made their presence felt by winning many awards at various international film festivals (Ibrahim, 2009), for an instance, “Flower In The Pocket” by Liew Seng Tat won the New Currents and the KNN Audience Awards in Pusan International Film Festival, VPRO Tiger Award at the 37th International Film Festival Rotterdam 2008, “Le Regard d’Or” (Golden Gaze) Award at the 22nd Fribourg International Film Festival 2008, and the Jury prize (Lotus du Jury) at the 10th Deauville Asian Film Festival 2008, Grand Prize City of Lisbon at the 4th Indie Lisboa. Undeniably, the success or failure of a film project lies in crewmembers’ performance in their ability to collectively carry out the director and producer’s

<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: + (60133883719); fax: +(60383125554).  
E-mail address: (vimalaperumal@gmail.com).

vision of the script and the film. The collective energy and creative input is responsible for the project being produced (Rea and Irving, 2001). The success of independent filmmaking, in recent years, is not just the cheap digital technology available to them but also the undeniable and tremendous amount of efforts of the crewmembers is the main reason which is acquired by good communication (Ahmad, 2008; Ferriani, Corrado & Boschetti, 2005; Perumal & Woods, 2007), cohesiveness (Ferriani et al., 2005), trust (Blair, Grey & Randle, 2001; Perumal & Woods, 2007), affective commitment, effort, friendly relationship (Blair et al., 2001; Perumal & Woods, 2007), sharing knowledge, idea and experience (Perumal & Woods, 2007). The independent filmmakers worked in a close-knit group, helping out each other's productions with a limited budget and mostly was self financed or by grants secured from overseas and yet won many award internationally. Philipsen (2009) emphasized that "Film research usually focuses not on the production, but on the texts. Educational theory has been primarily concerned with the processes rather than the results of learning. Sadly, in media research, there is no tradition for focusing primarily on the sender of a film and the production of it. However this scenario is changing in the European context, whereby work done by the Director of Research, Ian W. Macdonald focuses on the creative processes among screenwriters. Researchers are beginning to consider filmmaking processes as a possible focal point where notions of negotiation and constraints interact in the development of the film".

## **2.2. Social Exchange Theory**

One of the most important conceptual models for recognizing the workplace behavior and dealing with interactions between people including behavior, affection, products, and communications from societal psychological view is Social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). This conceptual model has a long record of study and has been applied in a lot of disciplines (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), furthermore, the roots of this conceptual model go back to at least the 1920s (e.g., Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1925). Consequently, components and processes of SET have been checked by scholars who have applied this model in many ways via a variety of constructs and labels (Lau & Cobb, 2009; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Molm, 2003). Among the different forms of exchange, there are two general forms that have attracted the most attention. One form is described as more explicit, formal, carefully negotiated and contractual type of association. The other form is described as a less formal, more tacit type of exchange based on significant relational connection and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). These two forms are labeled as "negotiated" and "reciprocal" exchange by Molm (2003), Flynn (2005), Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005). The main focus of this study is on the reciprocal exchange. Negotiated exchange contains the explicit specification and exchange of assets among parties. More concrete and tangible goods and services are more suitable for this type of exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). There is neither explicit negotiation, nor a direct exchange among parties in Reciprocal exchange. One party puts in resources to other party with no expectation of a "quid pro quo" and mostly has a blurred and unclear idea – if any at all – concerning whether and when reciprocation occurs or what form of that will occur (Flynn, 2005; Molm, 2003). On the other hand, reciprocal exchange involves less "enforceable" resources like recommendation and information (McAllister, 1995; Lau & Cobb, 2009) and more symbolic and particularistic resources (Foa & Foa, 1980). The interaction factors of this research are reciprocal exchange in nature due to their informal and implicit form of exchange rather than negotiated exchange.

## **2.3. Crewmembers Performance**

Group member's performance directly or indirectly affect results of projects. If good performing has been done in groups, the outcomes will be more acceptable and if bad performing happens, it leads the projects to failure. Also, the outcomes of filmmaking projects are strongly dependent on the crewmember's performance. In this study, some of interaction factors, which influence the performance of crewmembers are investigated. According to the results of the in-depth interviews that had been done with production crewmembers especially with the directors and producers, it is found that the interaction factors have significant influence on performance of crewmembers.

## **3. Findings & Analysis**

The film production crew provides a series of recorded interviews. The anecdotal responses have been studied and the comments organised according to:

### **3.1. Trust**

The organizational studies which are focusing on performance, have come up with trust as a central construct (Kramer, 1999; Lewicki, Wiethoff, & Tomlinson, 2005; Colquitt, Scott & LePine, 2007). Trust is an important harbinger to the exchanges, which are tied to many performance outcomes, which makes trust as a critical factor to the social exchanges. One of the interviewees described the role of trust between team members as:

*“Some of the filmmaking equipments are really expensive, and some of them may even be rented for a particular job. Therefore one should be extra cautious while working with the facilities. If some of the crewmembers are not reliable, careful enough or by any means not trustworthy, leaving the job to them or working with them may be next to impossible. Imagine if only one of the recorded tapes gets lost, it would be a disaster. Lack of trust automatically induces a great amount of stress and pressure on the key members”.*

### **3.2. Cohesiveness**

Filmmaking is considered as a collaborative offer and cohesiveness between team members lead them to success. There should be a single coordinating sensibility that dominates the work of art, when a film is a coherent work rather than a scramble of individual gestures (Ferriani et al., 2005). One interviewee emphasized that:

*“Members should feel the team as their second family and work location as their second home. They should understand that their work is not an individually performed task, but it is a teamwork that requires their cohesiveness in all matters and situations. The success and failure is for the entire group, not only for certain people. When there is a sense of tendency to be together and working with each other during the projects, they consider each other as members of one family that need each other support to solve the problems; and that the solution does not come from individuals but by being together cohesively they will be successful.”*

### **3.3. Communication and Collaboration**

In a production project, it is necessary for the group members such as; editor, cinematographer, production designer and composer to fully understand the intentions of the director, which will only takes place under a good communication schema, to avoid misunderstanding (Ferriani et al., 2005). In order to attain higher performance in filmmaking, the director will have to collaborate with a group of other creative people who not want to just take the orders. Team members want something out of it beyond helping director reach his/her goals. Even if the director or producer over pays the crew lucratively, they will definitely not get the best efforts out of them unless with collaboration guidelines and great communication skills. One interviewee quoted:

*“Collaboration and Communication” are crucial for team members and play the role of the backbone of every filming crew. It is the Good Communication in the team that avoids misunderstandings and therefore apprehending the wrong ideas. Good Communication and collaboration is a level in which, every one in the group understands his/her duties, according to the schedule. They are not afraid to express their creative new ideas and solutions. There should be a “question and answer” process that provides a suitable situation for discussion. The talking should not be like a one-way road that only certain main people speak and others obey unconditionally. Two-way discussion can lead to making better decisions. The result of good communication and collaboration is that nothing will be missed, in addition to a lot of time and budget that is saved, and finally everyone in the team knows precisely what the director wants. From the good communication and collaboration, so many other factors will be exploited such as; trust, friendship, commitment and so on and so forth.”*

### **3.4. Relationship and Friendship**

Crewmembers stated that having a good working relationship is the most important factor for them to work with each other repeatedly (Blair et al., 2001). Previous researches show that good relationship is one of

the influencing factors on job performance to achieve better results (Lau & Cobb, 2009). One interviewee explained about the relationship among team members as:

*“Team members should rely on each other, as in a warm relationship condition, they can work better together. Writing a contract does not guarantee a great teamwork to achieve good results but warm relationship and friendship between members can lead to a great team working and collaboration. By good relationship, they can understand each other better; and also help each other in special situations. Producers and directors should try to break the ice in the team by joking with members, laughing... to provide a friendly situation and maintain a nice relationship among them. It is because of these relationships and friendships that usually most of the team members would prefer to work together repeatedly in a fixed group.”*

### **3.5. Sharing Idea and Experience**

During the film production, working with and meeting a large scope of individuals of all types of background are inevitable, this cannot be done without interaction with others. Sharing idea and experience are needed because they become exhausted after a while, they should interact with people and exchange opinions in order to keep them on the feet (Perumal & Woods, 2007). One interviewee stated that:

*“The best way to solve the problems during shootings is sharing ideas and experiences. The idea can come from absolutely anyone; plus all ideas are welcome, even the “stupid ideas”, may come useful as they might trigger a new idea or thought in someone else. I always tell to my crew members, not to be afraid of sharing and expressing your thoughts with me even when you think that it might sound like a stupid idea, as the stupidity in that may trigger something new in my mind. If you do not encourage sharing ideas and experiences among team members, in emergency conditions for instance when a difficult problem is raised, they may not be eager to share their experience with you to solve that problem, therefore you will be forced to put off the take which obviously puts you behind by messing up the schedule and of course may bear tremendous amount of financial loss.”*

### **3.6. Commitment**

The concept of commitment can be mentioned as one of the most important factors in examining the relationship among members and organizations (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). According to Meyer and Allen (1984), commitment is defined as a social exchange of behavior to gain benefits that will be admired and appreciated by others. Findings show that projects with committed members achieve exclusive results and significant performance (Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe & Stinglhamber, 2005; Luchak & Gellatly, 2007). Findings show that projects with committed members achieve better results and higher performance in contrast with those projects with less committed members. One interviewee mentioned:

*“There will be times that the timing or schedule becomes so tight that you should be going to have to ask the crew to make sacrifices to be present at the location for shooting; these are the times that without commitment and devotion, the whole project may become compromised. Commitment does not only come from the contract, but it usually comes from the member’s passion toward the work. When you love your job, you will be committed to it unknowingly.”*

## **4. Conclusion**

This study presented and validated a multi-facet model for Malaysian independent filmmaking industry to help in understanding the behavioral factors contributing to crewmembers performance through Social Exchange Theory (SET). The result of this study can help film productions to achieve better performance by enhancing the factors and by considering them through reciprocal exchange model. Findings from interviews show that interaction factors such as; trust, communication and collaboration, relationship and friendship, commitment, sharing idea and experience and cohesiveness have significant influence on crewmembers performance.

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