

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

The global communication art is the most dramatic and most fundamental of all mankind achievements. Man is able to think in the abstract, and this invaluable possession has been translated into various gifts of civilization; in other words, we know it as the transmission of thought and the application of all aspects of either oral or written communication procedures. All viewpoints of knowledge such as sciences, arts, history, and geography as well as the relationship of an organization, government, and law are accumulated, stored, and transmitted through language process (Schneider, Donaghy, & Newman, 1975). The communication process is the most consistent activity of all kind of work or business. As we know communication is the process where people share thoughts, ideas, and feelings with each other in the ways of common understanding (Hamilton & Parker, 1997).

In business organizations, the process of communication is intertwined and interwoven throughout the whole web and woof of organizational activities and also touches everybody, from the president, the vice president or even the general managers down to the mail messengers. These communicative activities run and flow through every department including all sections of operations. In an organization, we can see people communicating in many possible circumstances with many possible techniques and devices. For example, people may talk to each other face to face, talk over the telephone, dictate messages or even engage in reading information from printed documents and memoranda. In other rooms, we may see groups of people “talking it over”. Some may be listening, speaking, and taking notes on what was being said. According to the situation mentioned, business seems to be an extensive panorama of individual and group communication with others through each possible channel and device (Schneider, Donaghy, & Newman, 1975). In fact, we cannot overlook that organizations consist of people and that the decision they make in daily life can affect their organizations, customers, other workers and their own fate in the organization. In order to make successful decisions of employees themselves and their

coworkers at work, communication skills are necessary. Thus, organizational success relies on the communication skills of its employees (Hamilton & Parker, 1997).

Due to the changing world and higher competition, political, technological, and sociological forces are coming together in order to herald a new and extremely different global economy. Many international companies invest a lot of money in other countries worldwide so that they are able to extend their business networks. Thailand is one of many developing countries that is widely open to international investment. As we can see, there are plenty of multicultural firms located in every industrial zone of Thailand. In fact, the word “*multicultural*” or “*multicultural company*” means a firm, especially a very large one that operates business in many different countries (Jonathan, Kathryn, & Michael, 1995). Hence, in a multicultural company, there are people from various countries working together. However, working with a person who has a different background, nationality, language, and culture is not easy and causes considerable communication problems.

Although communication is a crucial part of human life, communicating (perfectly) is difficult, especially intercultural communication that is an interaction between strangers. According to the Conflict Research Consortium of the University of Colorado, communication problems, or misunderstanding, are the crucial causes leading to conflicts. It is also reconfirmed that poor communication skills result in misunderstanding and conflicts. Therefore, people cannot communicate as openly or accurately as they usually do in normal situations when relationships are strained.

Communication problems can emerge from various factors like the sender, the message, the channel, the environment, or the receiver. It is difficult to make communication through one's first language effectively, so what about communicating by speaking a language that is not one's mother tongue? For example, a Thai staff member of the purchasing department took a longer time than usual to make her American vendor understand what kind of spare parts her company needed since the staff member did not understand some technical terms that her vendor tried to communicate. Besides, the different culture and language, either verbal or nonverbal, are additional factors that can cause communication failure and conflict (Duangkamon Panyasirikul 2006). For example, an American boss was not content that his new Thai secretary lost eye contact when talking with him. Another example

of communication failure happening in a multicultural firm is an English engineer did not understand a Thai staff member's words because of wrong pronunciation.

Successful communication is hard work because effective communication involves more than just talking and speaking (Hamilton & Parker, 1997). As the world of business is changing, both new and experienced companies including their staff should know and understand global and foreign operations, societies, cultures, and communication styles so that they are able to be successful in their business.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Since there are problems probably occurring during oral communication between Thai and foreign employees when working together at the same workplace, this study aims to investigate the problems mentioned and to verify the answers to the following research questions:

1.2.1 What are (the causes of) specific communication problems when Thai employees deal with foreign employees in their workplace?

1.2.2 How are these communication problems solved by Thai employees when they communicate with foreign employees in their workplace?

## **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.3.1 Main Objective**

To find out and understand what the specific communication problems are when Thai employees deal with foreign employees within the same workplace.

### **1.3.2 Sub-objective**

1. To explore the solutions to these communication breakdowns based on the part played by Thai employees who have to communicate with foreign employees in their workplace.

## 1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Communication Problems** are the incidents that cause trouble and difficulties during the procedure of sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings from one person to another by using spoken English. These problems may bring communication to a halt and may lead to a temporary blockage to communication.

**Thai Employees** are Thai people who graduated from educational institutions in Thailand and work with the international or multicultural companies located in Thailand.

**Foreigners** are the workers who came from other countries to work in the international or multicultural companies in Thailand such as United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Canada, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and so on.

**Multicultural Companies** are both private companies from overseas countries having branches, offices, and factories located in Thailand and organizations having foreigners working together with Thai employees (private and government ones). These companies consist of people from different countries working together including Thai people.

**Benchmark Electronics Company** is an Electronics Manufacturing Services provider located in Ayutthaya province. It specializes in the production of finished electronic products for many major U.S. medical device original equipment manufacturers (OEM).

## 1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research is a study of the possible factors that can cause communication problems for Thai employees when communicating with foreign employees in Benchmark Electronics Company in Ayutthaya province. The Thai employees mentioned can be the people from different positions and departments such as the officers or the managers in the purchasing departments, the personnel departments, and so on. They might have graduated with a certificate, diploma, and bachelor degree or from an upper level, but all of them have to always communicate or deal with foreign employees by using English. However, their communication experiences of speaking English were used to compare the results of this study. According to this

study, there might be some respondents who may not have intended to answer the questions because of no time, mood or temper.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research aims to track and study the causes of oral communication problems of Thai employees who have to communicate with foreign employees at Benchmark Electronics Company. In addition, the study aims to understand how communication problems generally affect the operations and collaboration among Thai and foreign employees in the company as well as exploring the Thai employees' suggestions of a solution to these communication problems. Due to a limited number of subjects, the study outcome may not be enough to determine the overall problems. However, the results and suggestions from the study will be useful for Thai employees who work and have to communicate with foreign employees in the same company or organization. Thus, those employees can use the results and suggestions in this study as a guideline or body of knowledge and apply them to resolve the possible oral communication problems so that they are able to succeed at work and boost their organization's achievements.