

**Strategic stakeholder communication within
international organisation: The case of ASEAN, Laos
and the implementation of the ASEAN's strategic plan**

BY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of International Communication

Unitec Institute of Technology

2014

DECLARATION

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This thesis entitled: “**Strategic stakeholder communication within international organisation: The case of ASEAN, Laos and the implementation of the ASEAN’s strategic plan**” is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the United degree of Master of International Communication.

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

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- ◆ The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with Unitec regulations and policies.
- ◆ Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Ethics Committee.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to extend a sincere thank you to my primary supervisor Deborah Rolland for her dedication, support and guidance as well as valuable comments during the research and this has been greatly appreciated. I also wish to thank my secondary supervisor, Dr. Giles Dodson, for his contribution and comments.

Next I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to all Unitec staff I met during my study, especially the staff from the international student office, library, learning centre, and research and postgraduate office for their support through this study.

I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to the key Lao government officials and to the key Lao media persons who gave me assistance and support during the conducting of this project. I also would like to thank the respondents in MOFA, MOIC, and Lao businesses in Vientiane who undertook the questionnaire for this study and contributed their valuable views and opinions.

I would like to thank NZAID for providing me with the opportunity to study at Unitec- without their support this project may not have been completed.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Phounsavath Sombounkhanh, who has supported and inspired me so far, along with my wonderful wife, Souksavanh Sombounkhanh, and my lovely son, Phoutsavanh Sombounkhanh who have been very supportive and understanding of the work and amount of time that I have spent for this research thesis. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

It is very important that stakeholders of an organisation should understand the vision, policies and strategic plan of the organisation that they are working for, or are involved with, in order for the strategic plan to be implemented effectively, and the organisational goals to be achieved successfully.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) is a regional organisation with the nature and scope of international governance (an inter-governmental organisation) that was established on the 8th of August 1976 and consisted of 10 member states. ASEAN is a prominent organisation in the world. ASEAN has created a strategic plan named “ASEAN’s Vision 2020 strategic plan”, the plan aimed at building a single community by 2020 based on three pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. It is very interesting to do research on how ASEAN’s strategic plan is being communicated to its stakeholders. ASEAN has multiple stakeholders both internal and external, and it also has many levels of stakeholders, for instance, inter-governmental level, governmental level, private sector level, and the general public level. This project focuses on the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint (the AEC Blueprint). This research examines the stakeholder communication that has taken place between ASEAN Secretariat and the Lao government, and the Lao government and wider society.

The literature review for this research begins by considering key concepts of stakeholder theory, strategic communication, stakeholder communication, examples of stakeholder communication in international organisations, and media roles in organisational communication process.

Both a quantitative and qualitative approach were followed with the objective of gathering data from participants (the Lao ministries, Lao media and Lao businesses). The interviews and questionnaires focus on addressing the main research question and the aim of this study. Six interviews were conducted with key Lao officials from MOFA, MOIC, MICT, and LNCCI. Four interviews were conducted with key Lao media persons from two main Lao newspaper agencies, the Lao National Radio, and the Lao National television. A total of 130 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in paper copy format for voluntary participation to MOFA and MOIC; and 75 copies of questionnaires were distributed to Lao businesses in Vientiane. A high

percentage of responses was received and the data collected from the survey provides information about participants.

After analysing the results of this study, it can be concluded that there is a contradiction between quantitative and qualitative data. The results of the qualitative findings are not backed up by the results of the quantitative findings. The results of quantitative findings revealed that the majority of the respondents (both Lao officials and Lao businesses) were not satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to them, while only key Lao government officials who work or are involved with the ASEAN matters were satisfied. However, the general Lao government officials and Lao businesses still need appropriate communication channels to be used to communicate and access the AEC information. The responses from survey questionnaires of both Lao officials and Lao businesses also revealed that the Lao government had problems in engaging and informing Lao officials and Lao businesses regarding the AEC. Although, the Lao government has followed the communication plan indicated in the AEC Blueprint, but they are not being very successful in meeting the information needs of their stakeholders.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IOs	international organizations
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEC	ASEAN Secretariat
APSC	ASEAN Political-Security Community
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ASCC	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOIC	Ministry of Industry and Commerce
MICT	Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism
LNCCI	Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
CLMV	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research project will investigate strategic stakeholder communication within an international organisation. The researcher will evaluate and assess strategic stakeholder communication, using the case of ASEAN (an international regional organisation), the Lao government and implementation of the new strategic plan based on the political, economic and socio-cultural community development within South East Asia.

For many decades, states have used formal international organizations (IOs) to manage both their interaction and international conflict. States frequently use IOs as vehicles of cooperation. IOs can foster cooperation and political and economic integration or dialogue amongst states or entities (Abbott & Snidal, 1998). International organizations are at the heart of many global issues today; the main problems for international economics and politics are also problems for international organisations (Hurd, 2010). O. R. Young (1997) states that “International organisations provide important administrative services during agenda setting and negotiations. States can use them as an arena for developing norms in the issue area” (p.95). Young explains that international organisations are able to serve as an arena for state and non-state actors to make statements about the significance of a problem and about the kind of solution that they prefer.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a good example of an international regional organisation and provides a useful case study. ASEAN is now facing the greatest challenges of its 40 years of existence. According to ASEAN Secretariat (2009), ASEAN has set a strategic goal that is to “transform ASEAN into a stable, prosperous, and highly competitive region with equitable economic development, and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities (ASEAN Vision 2020)” (p.21). This goal has been articulated as a central component of ASEAN’s Vision 2020 strategic planning document. The communication of ASEAN’s strategic goals therefore provides an opportunity for research to evaluate strategic stakeholder communication within an international context. More specifically, the researcher will examine stakeholder communication processes as they apply to Laos, a member-state of ASEAN. The research will explore and evaluate how Lao ministries and Lao media communicate the ASEAN’s strategic plan.

AEC Blueprint and its communication plan

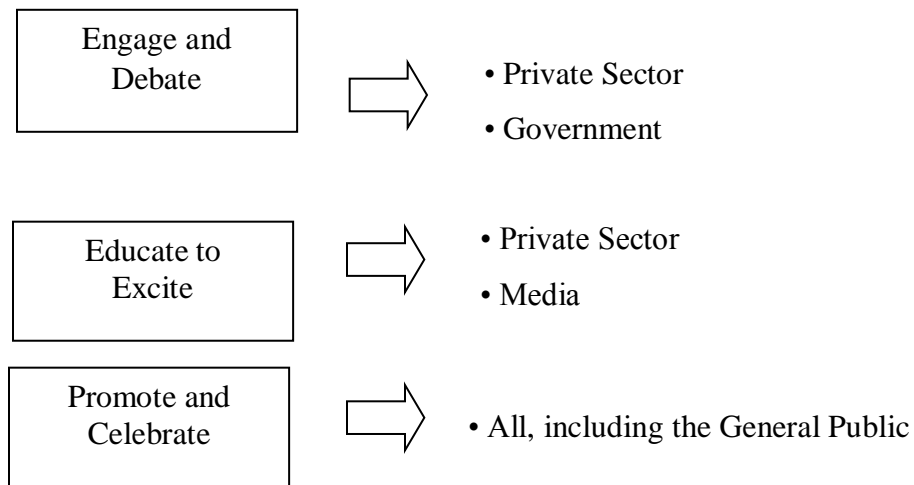
As contained in the ASEAN Vision 2020, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is established in order to achieve higher levels of economic dynamism, sustained prosperity, inclusive growth and integrated development of ASEAN. The AEC strategic plan or the AEC Blueprint is created and adopted by the heads of state/government of ten ASEAN member countries, made in the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II in Bali, Indonesia, on 7 October 2003. The AEC Blueprint intends to transform ASEAN into a single market and production base, a highly competitive economic region, a region of equitable economic development, and a region fully integrated into the global economy (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b).

In order to be successful in building the AEC, ASEAN requires involvement by all stakeholders in the integration process. In addition to the involvement of all stakeholders in the formulation of the Blueprint, ASEAN has identified the need for a good communication programme. Contained within the AEC Blueprint is a communication's strategy seeking to build greater public awareness of the AEC in all ASEAN countries as well as to keep all stakeholders, including the business communities and people of ASEAN, informed of the progress of this community building.

There are four actions on the communication section in the AEC Blueprint, these include: (1) Launch of a comprehensive communications plan to explain to the government officials, key stakeholders and the general public the objectives, benefits and challenges of the AEC; (2) Develop a regional platform for open discussion and sharing information in implementing the ASEAN Economic Community; (3) Member Countries shall set up a mechanism at the national level to regularly report the outcome and issues of the integration process; and (4) Create an AEC communications website that would provide an additional channel to reach communities at large, where stakeholders can provide feedback and respond to ASEAN economic initiatives (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b).

The ASEAN Secretariat has created a communication's plan to explain to the government officials, key stakeholders and the general public the objectives, benefits and challenges of the AEC, "The AEC Communication Plan". In the Plan, there is a strategic approach for AEC Communications called "The three-pronged approach to stakeholder outreach", this plan is rolled out to deliver messages about the AEC to target audiences, and this program prioritizes

government, the business community, and first-tier national media and select foreign publication as the primary stakeholders. See the outline below.



Source: ASEAN Secretariat (2008b)

Engage and Debate, the first pillar of the strategic framework focuses on direct outreach to members of the business community and government agencies. The objective of engagement is to encourage the airing of concerns, the collection of opinions and suggestions regarding the delivery of accurate information on the AEC and its benefits. It focuses on dialogue with business community, government agencies, academics, and general public in a seminar/workshop format (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b).

Educate to Excite, the second pillar of the Plan’s strategic approach focuses on educating businesses and the general public by communication of the AEC information via the media program – in print such as 1-page print advertisements and banner advertisement, on radio spots, PSAs (public service advertisements) on TV, and online. This also aims at reaching out to media across the region on an ongoing basis by organising seminars and press releases for media people from all ASEAN member states in order to educate them on the AEC implementation status and benefits of the AEC (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b).

Promote and Celebrate, a central element to demonstrating the success of the AEC is going beyond informing stakeholders of what the AEC aspires to do, and showcasing concrete benefits by the promoting and celebrating of the achievements under “AEC Winners Circle” program. This program is simply run by a media program asking for views and opinions from stakeholders

that remain hesitant or sceptical about either the benefits, or the potential, for full AEC implementation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b).

1.1 Context and Unit of Analysis

This project will focus on the implementation of ASEAN's Vision 2020 strategic plan, and specifically, the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint (AEC Blueprint). The research will examine the stakeholder communication that has taken place between ASEAN Secretariat and the Lao government, and the Lao government and wider society in order to examine the effectiveness of the communication strategies undertaken as part of the AEC Blueprint strategy.

The project will implement a mixed methodology approach by surveying and interviewing key research participants. These participants will be key Lao stakeholders who are involved with ASEAN matters, particularly, Lao ministries, officials and Lao media. Data collected from key Lao stakeholders will be used as evidence to evaluate the communication and implementation of the AEC Blueprint.

1.2 Case study background

ASEAN is a regional organization (intergovernmental organisation) that was established on the 8th of August 1967 by Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand (the five original member states). There are currently ten member countries, the five member states were joined thereafter by Brunei Darussalam in 1984, Viet Nam in 1995, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008a). The fundamental principles that govern ASEAN member states are found in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation that was signed on 24 February 1976 during the first ASEAN Summit. These principles include non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of differences or disputes in a peaceful manner; and mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations (Keling, Som, Saludin, & Ajs, 2011).

The vision of ASEAN is to build a single community by 2020 based on three pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-

Cultural Community. In order to achieve the goal, ASEAN has to cooperate and communicate effectively within its 10 member states and external stakeholders (ASEAN Secretariate, 2009). Within ASEAN, there have been many areas of cooperation such as commerce, culture, defence, health, human rights, law, social media, tourism, university network, and youth development and so on. Also, ASEAN, as a single bargaining entity created external relations with Australia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, United States, and the UN. Furthermore, other important frameworks of cooperation were created such as ASEAN +3, East Asia Summit (EAS), Ambassadors to ASEAN, and ASEAN Dialogue Coordinator (Wilang & Teo, 2012).

Although, all ten member states have agreed to create a single community and support the promotion of political and economic unity, there are continuing areas of tension between member states. According to Hidekata (2006), there are many issues in the 2015's ASEAN Single Community reflecting each country's diverse foundations that include: different government ideologies and structures, distinct cultural backgrounds and origins, educational system disparities, demographic data, and human rights issues; internal bloc conflicts on territorial disputes, mistrust, and consensus approach in decision making; and external factors such as globalization, regional imbalances and the lack of an engagement mechanism.

It is therefore challenging for ASEAN to communicate with both its internal and external stakeholders effectively in order to support its policies or strategic plan. Therefore ASEAN must possess and employ a well-developed strategic communication plan and choose the appropriate communication channels.

Within the context of Laos as a member-state of ASEAN, the communication among Lao stakeholders is even more challenging, especially, the realisation of the regional agreements at the country level. To be more specific, the communication among the Lao ministries and involved parties regarding the AEC.

1.3 Focus of the project

As stated in the case study background, ASEAN has multiple stakeholders both internal and external, and it also has many levels of stakeholders, for instance, inter-governmental level, governmental level, private sector level, and the general public level. This research project will

look at the issues of the governmental level by exploring the ongoing practices and channels of communication of the middle management level including Lao state media such as the main Lao newspaper agencies, the Lao national TV, and the Lao national radio. Consequently, the project will be evaluating the ongoing practices and channels used in communicating AEC Blueprint to its key stakeholders, particularly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce that are mainly responsible for the implementation of the AEC Blueprint and their audiences, for instance, ASEAN related government officials and the Lao business community.

1.4 Rationale and Purpose

It is very important that stakeholders of an organisation should understand the vision, policies and strategic plan of the organisation that they are working for, or are involved with, in order for the strategic plan to be implemented effectively, and the organisational goals to be achieved successfully.

It is important to understand how an international regional organisation like ASEAN communicates with its stakeholders. This is specially the case with ASEAN as it has articulated the strategic goal of forming the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. Pitsuwan (2011) points out that “what is important is that communicating ASEAN to its people and businesses should be a two-way process, and should be mainstreamed in all ASEAN work..... A vibrant ASEAN Community will certainly benefit our partners and the world too, and bring ASEAN to the global community of nations” (p.146). ASEAN is a prominent organisation in the world. ASEAN has a total land area of more than 4.46 million sq km, and a combined population of 600 million people, and its total trade amounted to 2 trillion USD in 2010 (Pitsuwan, 2011). The proposed research is therefore timely as it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of ASEAN’s communication across stakeholder groups - ASEAN itself, Lao government and the Lao media/public.

It is very important for the researcher to understand the mechanism of ASEAN, particularly, how ASEAN communicates with both its internal and external stakeholders. This is also very important for the researcher’s professional career. As the insider, the researcher will be working on the issues pertaining to ASEAN and can work well in this area. In addition, the researcher has better access to information and data collection. After finishing the project, the researcher will be

knowledgeable on ASEAN matters, especially, on the aspect of stakeholder communication. The researcher will be able to apply skills and knowledge gained from this project to his real work.

1.5 Research questions

The research question to be explored and investigated in this thesis is:

“How effectively has the ASEAN’s strategic plan (AEC Blueprint) been communicated to Lao stakeholders through communication strategies identified in the AEC Blueprint?”

To explore this research question further and offer a comprehensive conclusion to this research question, the following sub-questions have been developed. Throughout the planned investigation, an in depth examination of each of these questions will employ a sequential procedure to answer a set of sub-questions that support the process of answering the main research question. These question are:

- 1) How have the Lao government and the ASEAN Secretariat been communicating regarding the AEC matters?
- 2) How has the Lao government been communicating or disseminating information about the AEC to its stakeholders (ASEAN related government officials and Lao business community, and general public)?
- 3) What challenges has the Lao government faced in communicating with or connecting to its stakeholders?
- 4) Has the communication strategy of the Lao government been effective in meeting information needs of its stakeholders?
- 5) What has been the experience of the Lao media with communication reports of the AEC?

1.6 Thesis Outline

This thesis is presented in six chapters.

Chapter one provides an introduction to the research study. It introduces the broader topic and provides the case study background, focus of the project, rationale and purpose of the study; it includes the research questions that frames the shape of this project.

Chapter Two critically reviews a wide range of the relevant literature. Aspects discussed in this literature review are: stakeholder theory, strategic communication, stakeholder communication, and stakeholder communication in international organisations.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology and design approach. The chapter explains the data collection and analysis method employed in this research study and it concludes by considering the ethical implication of the research.

Chapter Four lays out the finding and results drawn from the data collected and analysed in the field research.

Chapter Five provides an in-depth interpretation and critical analysis of the results of this research.

Chapter Six concludes this thesis and offers a synthesis of the research. Limitations of the research, directions for further research and a closing statement.

1.7 Chapter summary

Chapter one provides an overview of this research to give readers direction about what they can expect to read in the following chapters. It started with an introduction to the research study which is about general ideas of strategic stakeholder communication within an international organisation. Next, it was followed by the case study background about ASEAN and its strategic plan. Then, the focus of the project looks at the issues of the governmental level by exploring the ongoing practices and channels of communication of the middle management level of ASEAN (the Lao government) including Lao state media. The rationale and purpose of the study provides the reason why it is important for the researcher to conduct this study. Finally, the research questions will assist readers to understand and frame the shape of this study.

The following chapter provides the literature review associated with key concepts of stakeholder theory, strategic communication, stakeholder communication, and examples of stakeholder communication in international organisations. This will provide a conceptual framework to develop the research methodology for this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theories depend on different foundation moral approaches, based on analysis on ideas of fairness and reciprocity. Central to most interpretations of the theory is the idea that stakeholders are interdependent with theory and able to forge symbiotic relationships. Stakeholder awareness is very crucial; therefore, an organization has to recognize the local community and various stakeholder groups in order for mutual benefits to take place. (Gibson, 2012; Podar & Jancic, 2006).

Stakeholder theories are understood as an alternative view to the neo-classical economic theory of the organisation (Hendry, 2001). Stakeholders theories introduce the perception that in a monopolistic-competition environment, those operations that provide nothing more than an organisation's self-interests can have a negative or even harmful, influence on society (Casidy, 2003). The stakeholder theories argue that an organization will be observed by the society where it is located through various interactions with its stakeholders. They embrace the view that an organization is observed as an entity through a group, or a chain of implicit and/or explicit interactions, between itself and individuals and other organisations. According to the stakeholder theories, organisations are involved in the social system and are forced to enter or exchange interactions with different social subjects (Casidy, 2003). Therefore, the organisation's management must balance different stakeholders' interests and align them with the organisation's strategic goals (ibid).

2.1.1 Underlying assumptions

The ideas of stakeholder management was initially introduced by Freeman (1984) in a book named "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach" where he presented the idea that corporations have stakeholders and outlined the basic features of the stakeholder concept. Since the publication of Freeman's classic book, many other books and articles emphasising this concept have been written. Examples of the classic articles in the field are written by Donaldson and Preston (1995); Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997); T. J. Rowley (1997); and Frooman (1999). Increasingly, stakeholders are not just referred to in academic texts, but also through mainstream media and government communication (Friedman & Miles, 2002).

The use of the stakeholder theory approach is described as a powerful means of understanding the organisation in its environment. This approach intends to widen the management’s vision of its roles and responsibilities beyond the profit maximisation function. (Mitchell et al., 1997). Donaldson and Preston (1995) detailed that the stakeholder model concluded that all persons, or groups with legitimate interests, participating in an enterprise do so to get benefits and there is no pre-set priority of one set of interests and benefits over another. Therefore, stakeholder theories argue that beside stockholders there are other external constituencies involved, including communities, community groups, trade unions, trade associations, environmental groups, governmental group, governmental bodies, associated corporations, prospective employees, prospective customers, and public at large, that need to be taken into consideration. Figure 1 presents the conventional stakeholder model of an organisation (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

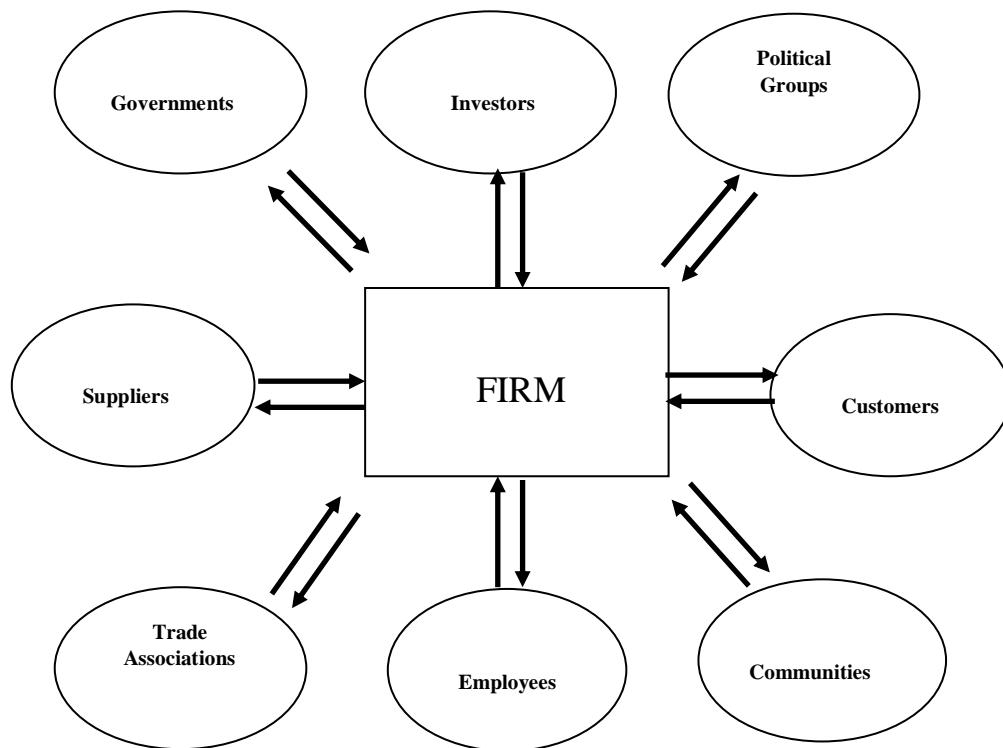


Figure 1. The stakeholder model of a firm (Donaldson & Preston, 1995)

The basic idea of stakeholder theory is that the organisation has relationships with many constituent groups and it can engender and maintain the support of these groups by considering

and balancing their relevant interests (Freeman, 1984; Jones & Wicks, 1999). Jones and Wicks (1999) outline the basic premise of stakeholder theory as follows:

- ◆ The corporation has relationships with many constituent groups (stakeholders) that affect or are affected by its decisions (Freeman, 1984);
- ◆ The theory is concerned with the nature of these relationships in terms of both processes and outcomes for the firm and its stakeholders;
- ◆ The interests of all (legitimate) stakeholders have intrinsic value, and not one set of interests is assumed to dominate the others (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson & Preston, 1995);
- ◆ The theory focuses on managerial decision making (Donaldson & Preston, 1995)

Overall, a central and original purpose of stakeholder theory is to help managers to understand stakeholders and strategically manage them (Freeman, 1999). The managerial importance of stakeholder management has been emphasised in many studies that demonstrate just treatment of the stakeholder that is associated with the long term existence of the organisation (Carroll, 1991; Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1984; Jawahar & McLaughlin, 2001; Mitchell et al., 1997; T. J. Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003; Savage, Nix, Whitehead, & Blair, 1991).

While having its origins in strategic management, stakeholder theory has been applied to many areas and presented and used in a number of ways that are quite different and involve different methodologies, concepts, types of evidence and criteria of evaluation (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). As the interest in the concept of stakeholder is growing, the perspective on the subject is increasing (Friedman & Miles, 2002). In order to clarify the conceptual ambiguity in the field, Donaldson and Preston (1995) have developed a well-known and debated classification of stakeholder theory. They argue that stakeholder theory consists of three distinct alternative aspects: descriptive/empirical, instrumental and normative.

Descriptive/empirical theory is applied to describe and sometimes also to explain specific organisational characteristics and behaviours. Therefore, this aspect describes and explains how organisations and their managers truly perform.

Instrumental theory, in turn, indicates the relationships between stakeholder management and an organisation's performance purposes, such as profitability and growth (Berman, Wicks, Kotha, & Jones, 1999; Ogden & Watson, 1999). Thus, this perspective informs us what is happening if a stakeholder management approach is applied. Recently, growing empirical literature has investigated the association between social and environmental consciousness and the profitability of organisations, for instance, Ruf, Muralidhar, Brown, Janney, and Paul (2001).

Finally, normative theory is connected with the identification of moral or philosophical guidelines for the management of organisations and describe how managers should deal with stakeholders. In other words, this perspective emphasises the moral propriety of the behaviour of organisations (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Donaldson and Preston's (1995) typology is criticised and alternative approaches are presented (Kaler, 2003). Following the earlier work of Donaldson and Preston (1995), Jones and Wicks (1999) divide research in stakeholder theory into two broad types: first, social science-based theory, including an instrumental and descriptive/empirical approach. Second, ethics-based theory, focusing on normative issues and linking stakeholders to corporate social responsibility and ethics discussion. They continue by introducing convergent stakeholder theory, which merges normative and instrumental elements and indicates how managers produce morally sound approaches to business and make them work. Steuer (2006), in turn, separates stakeholder theory into three different perspectives: corporate, stakeholder and conceptual. Following Steuer (2006), the corporate perspectives deals with how corporations manage stakeholders, the stakeholder perspective deals with how stakeholders try to influence the organisation, and the conceptual perspective investigates how particular concepts such as common good or sustainability, associate with business-stakeholder interactions.

2.1.2 The stakeholder concept

There are many conceptualisations and definitions of stakeholders ranging from broad to narrow views. According to Freeman (1984), a stakeholder is defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievements of the organisation's objectives" (p. 46). This is the most classic but rather broad stakeholder definition. This broad view is based on the acknowledgement and empirical reality that organisations can certainly be essentially affected by, or vitally affect, almost anyone (Mitchell et al., 1997). The definition of Freeman is broad in the sense that it does not indicate the stake or relationship that stakeholders have with the

organisation. Nor does the definition take a stance on whether the claims of the stakeholders are legitimate or not. However, Goodpaster (1991) points out that the definition of Freeman implies two types of stakeholders that are strategic and moral stakeholders.

A prior definition of stakeholders applies an instrumental viewpoint and associates stakeholders with the survival of the organisation, as stakeholders are “those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist” (Aaltonen, 2010, p. 27). This definition narrows stakeholders to those groups who are relevant in terms of the organisation’s economic interest. In contrast, Clarkson (1994) defines stakeholders through risks, he points out that voluntary stakeholders take some form of risk resulting in the investment in the form of capital, human or finance, something of value, in an organisation. Involuntary stakeholders are placed at risk resulting from an organisation’s activities. However, there is no risk, if there is no element of risk. Clarkson’s (1994) statements on involuntary stakeholders signify that in order for one to be a stakeholder, a relationship with the organisation is not necessary to be actual, but it can also be possible. In other words, a stakeholder might be influenced or is possibly a future influencer of an organisation.

Savage et al. (1991) define stakeholders by their interest and ability to influence the organisation; according to the authors, stakeholders get benefit from the organisation’s actions and the ability to influence it. Brenner (1993) in turn focuses on the legitimacy of stakeholder relationships in the stakeholder definition of having some legitimate, non-trivial relationship with an organisation, such as exchange transactions, actions impacts, and moral responsibilities. This definition emphasises the nature of relationships between stakeholder and the organisation that Freeman’s (1984) definition does not mention.

The relationships between stakeholders and the organisations are also defined either more broadly or more narrowly. According to Hill and Jones (1992), some stakeholder definitions narrow stakeholders to only those who participate in exchange relationships. These views apply a strategic perspective and accentuate the fact that organisations have only limited resources and limited time that they can use to deal with their stakeholders. Therefore, it is in the interest of management to indicate and pay attention to those stakeholders who are relevant in the organisation’s economic interests. Stakeholders are also defined through their informal relationships and moral claims towards the organisation. These views consider the development and sustainment of moral relationships with stakeholders as the organisation’s responsibility.

Thus, such views look like the ideas of corporate social responsibility and intersect with the ethics literature (Upchurch, 1998).

Early literature has introduced many different types of stakeholder categorisation schemes. According to Savage et al. (1991), stakeholders are divided into claimants and influencers and considers the potential of stakeholders to threaten or cooperate with the organisation. Stakeholders are also divided into internal and external stakeholders (Eesley & Lenox, 2006; Freeman, 1984). Examples of internal stakeholders are employees, customers and stockholders, while examples of external stakeholders are community activists, media, advocacy groups and other nongovernmental organisations. Clarkson (1995) divides stakeholders into primary and secondary stakeholders. Secondary stakeholders are not directly associated with the organisation because they lack a formal contractual bond with the firm or direct legal authority over the organisation (Eesley & Lenox, 2006). In turn primary stakeholders, such as employees and customers, are in a direct association with the organisation. This is the case, for example, for governmental organisations. There is a high level of interdependence between the corporations and its primary stakeholders. In turn, secondary stakeholders are not directly engaged with economic activity, but are still able to influence an organisation (Clarkson, 1995; Savage et al., 1991).

Claims, moral and legitimate, are regularly focused on connections with secondary stakeholders, as the organisation has responsibility for the their well-being, or they carry a moral or legal claim on the organisation (Langtry, 1994), or persons or groups with legitimate interests and important aspects of organisational activity (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Moreover, stakeholders are also divided into strategic and moral stakeholders. Strategic stakeholders are considered to have influence over the organisation. Therefore, the management of their interests is very important (Freeman, 1984). According to Frooman (1999), Moral stakeholders are those who are affected by the organisation, as those who are either resource providers for the organisation, or those who are dependent on the organisation. In contrast, Fassin (2009) criticizes earlier conceptualisations and categorizations for ambiguity and advises that the difference should be made between stakeholders, stake-watchers and stake-keepers. Fassin (2009) also points out that stakeholders are those who have a concrete and real stake in an organisation. Stake-watchers, in turn, do not really have a stake themselves but they protect the benefits of real stakeholders. Examples of stake-watchers are unions and community pressure groups. Finally, stake-keepers are the

independent regulators who have no stake in the organisation, but they have influence and control such as government, regulatory agencies and certification organisations.

2.2 Strategic Communication

Barrett (2008) defines that “communication is the transmission of meaning from one person to another, or to many people, whether verbally or nonverbally” (p.3). Washington State University (2014), in turn, defines that “communication is the study of how people convey information, a resource vital not only in the world of media, but in such varied fields as business, government, and human services” (p.1). A skilled communicator will choose and maximize the use of the channel most appropriate to the achievement of the goals that are being pursued. According to Quintanilla and Mallard (2008), there is overwhelming evidence that indicates good communication skills are necessary to being productive and successful in an organisation.

Strategic communication is defined as deliberate and purposeful communication by a professional communicator to advance the mission of an organisation. Organisation is defined in its broadest sense to include not only corporations and non-profits, but also activist groups, political parties, and organisations promoting social change (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Vercic, & Sriramesh, 2007) . Tindall and Holtzhausen (2011) argue that strategic communication is comprised of six specialties that are commonly found within organisations.

The six specialties include: (1) management communication, the purpose of this specialty is to facilitate the orderly operations of the organization. Also, to promote understanding of an organization’s mission, vision, and goals; and to supply information needed in day-to-day operations, including customer and vendor transactions and customer and staff training (Hallahan et al., 2007); (2) marketing communication, the purpose of which is to create awareness and promote sales of products and services. Also, to attract and retain users and customers, including intermediaries in distribution channels. Among nongovernmental organizations, and other not-for-profit organizations, marketing communication incorporates fundraising and development of communications (ibid); (3) public relations is to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key constituencies. This includes consumers and customers, as well as investors and donors, employees and volunteers, community leaders, and government officials (ibid); (4) technical communication, the purpose of which is to educate employees, customers,

and others to improve their efficiency. It involves reducing errors and promoting the effective and satisfying use of technology when performing tasks important to the organization (ibid); (5) political communication is to build political consensus or consent on important issues involving the exercise of political power and the allocation of resources in society. This includes efforts to influence voting in elections as well as public policy decisions by lawmakers or administrators. On the international level, this includes communications in support of public diplomacy and military stabilization (ibid), and (6) information/social marketing campaigns are to reduce the incidence of risky behaviours or to promote social causes important for the betterment for the community (ibid).

2.2.1 Models of communication

As a concept, communication is interpreted broadly. However, there are two major models of communication that predominate discussions within professional and academic circles. Both are relevant to strategic communication, the two models are as follows:

First is the so-called transmission model of communication, the concept of this model is the one-way emission of information. This model of communication emphasises the transmission of signals via a channel with a limited feedback capacity (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Critics of the model argue that this communication approach is too sender oriented and understates or ignores the important role of receivers in the process (Hallahan et al., 2007).

Second is an interactive model of communication. This model involves the creation and exchange of meaning between the parties in a communication activity. The roots of this interactive approach is in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1972). Also in the cybernetics theory of Wiener (1948) that illustrates how communication processes can be seen in terms of action and reaction. In a similar vein, Bauer (1964) points out that the role of audiences is as active processors of information, and Thayer (1968) describes the differences between synchronic and diachronic views about the communication concept.

The interactive model is similar to the ritual model of communication. In the ritual model, communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is created, maintained, repaired, and transformed (Carey, 1989). Bell, Golombisky, and Holtzhausen (2002) concisely describe that the transmission model asks questions about how the information is transmitted from here to

there across distances. The ritual model asks question how we manage to get along together overtime. The ritual model helps us explain how we create shared reality and culture in social groups, including in organisations.

2.2.2 Strategic organisational communication

Shockley - Zalabak (2009) states that strategic organisational communication relates to the ability to analyse a situation, choose the appropriate communication strategies, and operate those strategies effectively. Strategic communication is therefore goal-oriented, based on knowledge, and is a result of considered, deliberate decisions. Shockley – Zalabak explains that although strategic communications are generated by various individuals and groups within an organisation, they usually comprise messages selected by management and tend to be objective and biased (i.e. representing the organisational views). Although sometimes the one -way communication (originating with management) occurs, however, strategic communication at its most effective level is in fact a two-way, transactional process (ibid).

Clampitt, Dekoch, and Cashman (2000) describe communication strategy as the macro-level choices and trade-offs executives make, depending on their organisational goals and judgement about other's reactions, which serve as a basis for action. Clampitt et al. contend that organisational leadership confronts continuing pressing problems such as keeping quality employees, tackling organisational cynicism, and making a dynamic, evolving workplace. They suggest that a communication strategy should be able to provide a hedge against employee cynicism by assuring that opposing opinions about decisions, practices, or policies are properly channelled.

There are three different approaches in the organisational communication process, these approaches are presented as ways to understand the process of organisational communication and used as frameworks to help analyse specific organisational situations, experiences, and problems (Shockley - Zalabak, 2006). The first of which is the Functional approach. This approach helps us understand organisational communication by describing what messages do and how they move through organisations. The second approach is the Meaning-Centred approach that is the way of understanding organisational communication by discovering how organisation reality is generated through human interaction. The last approach is the Emerging Perspectives, and this

approach asks questions about communication as a constitutive or basic process of social construction (ibid).

2.2.3 Internal communication

Shockley - Zalabak (2009) states that internal communication is the function that is responsible for the effective communication within an organisation, including states. The function of internal communication often deals with the subject matter of daily interactions. The function is planned and formalized communication. It is prepared and disseminated information by communication professionals to and for internal organisation members.

Internal communication specialists are involved in a wide range of activities. They seek input from employees through surveys, interviewed, meetings, or other methods. They communicate the organisation's mission, objectives, strategies, and programs through training activities, or the preparation and dissemination of newsletters, manuals, pamphlets, and other publication. Internal communication specialists establish formalised structures to improve the quality and flow of organisational communication and manage all communication designed to help the organisation achieve its strategic objectives. They increasingly use Intranets, the Web, and numerous video interactive systems to provide information and solicit input (Shockley - Zalabak, 2009).

Welch and Jackson (2007) identify four dimensions of internal communication. The first dimension is line management, it occurs at every level within an organisation. Line management communication involves matters concerning employee roles and the impact of their personal communication. Second is team level internal communication involving employees and managers in a team situation and as such can be considered as peer-to-peer or employee-to-employee communication in a group setting (ibid). Third is project level communication involving colleague working on particular projects and it is two-way communication. The aims of this type of communication centre on delivering specified project or team goals and communication in networks and small groups (ibid). The last dimension is internal corporate communication. This dimension is very significant as it emphasises communication with all employees. The internal corporate communication dimension is defined as communication between an organisation's strategic manager and its internal stakeholders (Forman & Argenti, 2005; Kress, 2005; Saks, 2006).

2.2.4 External communication

The goals of external communication are to facilitate cooperation with groups such as suppliers, investors and stockholders, and society at large. Public relations plays an important role in external communication. Public relations has a multifaceted role. One of the main problems in arriving at an agreed definition is the immensely wide scope of public relations (Harrison, 2011). The activities that are just some of those conducted under the umbrella of public relations include: media relations, internal communication, social media, community engagement, stakeholder relations, marketing communication, sponsorship, event management, issues management, crisis communication, government relations and lobbying, international communication, website development, and financial relations (ibid).

Almost all large organisations have a public relations department. Public relations is considered as an important part of maintaining the organisation's image and of communicating its messages to its stakeholders, and general public. A very important, central model of public relations was developed by James Grunig (Argenti, 2007). Grunig's four models of public relations include: Press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical (Argenti, 2007; Harrison, 2011).

The earliest model of press agency and publicity was used mostly during the late Victorian era and in the early years of 20th century. Exponents tended to engage in publicity, and promotional and exhibition events. This model for public relations is still used today. PR consultancies engage in press agency every day in traditional and new media to promote their client's products and services. Promotional stunts and activities creating publicity are used for concerts, exhibitions, public displays, sporting events, and cinema and theatre shows (Argenti, 2007; Harrison, 2011).

The public information model is used by many companies, government agencies, associations, not-for-profit organisations and educational institutions. Organisations conforming to the public information model conduct communication programs, especially using publicity to push news about their organisation and its products or services (Harrison, 2011). The public information concept developed in the 1900s as press agents like Ivy Lee encouraged big business to be more open to public scrutiny (ibid). In this kind of public relations, an organisation relates information about itself, but importantly in this model the information about the organisation is true. No

effort is made to hide the truth of an organisation. This model is the most popular model of public relations practised today (Argenti, 2007).

Two-way asymmetrical model, asymmetrical communication, is characterised by advocacy persuasion or presentation of the organisation's claims. The two-way asymmetrical model dates back to the 1920s. Mass communication techniques were starting to evolve at that time, partly aided by the introduction of radio and, later television (Harrison, 2011). Advances in the field of persuasion and propaganda had come out from World War I, along with recent developments in social science concepts such as public opinion (Laskin, 2009). The model of asymmetry is "public relations communication where corporate messages - truthful and accurate news - are communicated but, nevertheless, generally favour the organisation, hence the term 'asymmetry'." (Argenti, 2007, p.319).

The final model of Grunig's public relations models is two-way symmetrical. It is two-way communication that comprises a full dialogue with stakeholders. As a result of the dialogues, the organisation's management is likely to change its attitudes and behaviour as it hopes the other parties are doing. This is a spirit of interchange that organisations believe that they can get more of what they want by providing the public some of what they want (Harrison, 2011). Argenti (2007) points out that symmetry is unique because it practices equal communication between the organisation and the audiences. He explains that the symmetrical model is different from the asymmetrical model. In the asymmetrical model, the organisation makes a conscious effort to listen to and respect the audiences enough to adjust their business practices to benefit the audiences as well as the organisation. In the symmetrical model, an organisation will listen to the audiences involved with it and work to satisfy their audiences, as well as to benefit of the organisation.

2.3 Stakeholder communication

2.3.1 The importance of stakeholder communication

There is no doubt that communication with stakeholders can make tangible benefits for the organisation because a more positive relationship is created. Research illustrates that when people have a greater awareness and understanding of an organisation, they will be more favourably disposed towards the organisation than people who are only somewhat familiar with

or just know the name (Harrison, 2011). For example, research has found that good stakeholder relations can sustain an organisation's benefits over a long period. A high stakeholder relations rating predicts an organisation will be able to move out of a negative position faster during the process of recovery (Choi & Wang, 2009; Godfrey, Merrill, & Hansen, 2009). It is very important for ASEAN member-states to communicate the ASEAN's strategic plan to their stakeholders effectively in order to realise their vision by 2020, particularly, the priority pillar (the AEC) by 2015.

2.3.2 Stakeholder analysis

The organisation's communication professional is encouraged to think strategically about key stakeholders' concerns, map out their values and power bases, and make decision to support and strengthen the alignment of organisational strategies with the most influential stakeholders (Belasen, 2008).

There are three steps in stakeholder analysis. The first step, mapping key stakeholders, key stakeholders are classified as primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders include: regulators, customers, investors and affected community. Primary stakeholders have a legitimate interest in the organisation's goals as well as an immediate, continuous, and powerful impact on executive decision and policymaking processes (Belasen, 2008; Schraeder & Self, 2010). Secondary stakeholders include: community at large, they are indirectly influenced by the organisation (Belasen, 2008; Franch, Martini, & Buffa, 2010).

The second step, highlighting their relative base of power. Organisational stakeholders will be prioritised based on three attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency (Belasen, 2008). According to Page (2002), power refers to the stakeholders' ability to structure the context of executive decision. Legitimacy is the scope to which stakeholders' relationship or claims with the firms are rightful. Urgency is the degree to which the stakeholders claim immediate attention. When stakeholders have all three attributes, they will be provided priority.

The last step, evaluating how the organisation performs against stakeholders' perceptions or criteria of effectiveness. This step is very important in collecting feedback about stakeholders' general satisfaction level and whether the organisation tries to meet their expectation (Belasen, 2008).

In order to realise the AEC by 2015, ASEAN has mapped its key stakeholders as stated in the AEC Blueprint. The primary stakeholders of ASEAN are the ten member-states that have power and legitimacy in making decision and issuing policies, but they must have consensus. Private Sectors and general public are secondary stakeholders of ASEAN in realising the AEC.

2.3.3 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement focuses on the need for engagement to be “far reaching, inclusive and balanced” (Amaeshi & Crane, 2006, p. 249). Greenwood (2007) states that stakeholder engagement is the process of involving individuals and groups that are affected by the activities of the organisation in a positive way; it is a process of consultation, communication, dialogue and exchange. Cumming (2001) points out that stakeholder engagement aims at improving of an organisation’s social and ethical accountability and performance. According to Sloan (2009), stakeholder activities such as dialogue are means by which to assess stakeholder engagement.

Effective stakeholder relationship management can be achieved by engaging in dialogue and building relationships with as many different groups (Preble, 2005). Swift (2001) states that engagement is the act of managing the relationship between the organisation and different stakeholders in order to enhance the effectiveness of the decisions, strategies and behaviour. An organisation’s success depends on creating real dialogue with its diverse stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Therefore, Hughes and Demetrious (2006) maintain that dialogue is at the core of stakeholder engagement given that the process allows managers to find ways to evaluate, address and balance stakeholder demands.

2.3.4 Stakeholder dialogue

Stakeholder dialogue refers to “engaged, inclusive and respectful interaction” between stakeholders on their particular view based on “values, perspectives and experiences” (Greene, 2001, p. 182). Dialogue is identified as an important communication channel between stakeholder and organisations to “develop a more progressive form of engagement and understanding” (Burchell & Cook, 2006, p. 212). Therefore, dialogue involves the breaking down of entrenched positions and the loosening of assumptions (Burchell & Cook, 2008).

According to Stead and Stead (2000), through dialogue organisations can create patterns that allow underlying assumptions to be openly brought to the surface and questioned. They add that using dialogue as the basis for the way an organisation interacts with its internal and external stakeholders. An organisation can implement the process of dialogue to establish communication

channels with stakeholders in order to maintain the relationship between the organisation and shareholders (Stead & Stead, 2000). Dialogue is a way of enhancing stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes and a collaborative means of resolving conflict by exploring diverse viewpoints (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003).

Podnar and Jancic (2006) state that stakeholder theory draws attention to dialogue and communication with different stakeholders, and argues that communication is the only way to accomplish understanding and balance between the organisation and stakeholder interests. Cumming (2001) describes dialogue as a two way process of consultation, listening and sharing views between the organisation and everyone that has a legitimate stake in the organisation. According to Kaptein and Van Tulder (2003), using stakeholder dialogue can advance the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders “from one of confrontation and competition to one of consultation and co-operation” (p. 209).

The main aim of stakeholder dialogue is to build trust and increase public awareness, provide insights that enable policy makers to make political choices in an argued and informed fashion (Kerkhof, 2006). Stakeholder dialogue is multifaceted and that there are a variety of issues, one can expect a significant difference in the quality of the dialogue process (Pedersen, 2006). Dialogue between the organisation and stakeholders is therefore seen as a far more interactive process of stakeholder engagement. It involves the breaking down of “existing assumptions” and the development of new ways of learning (Burchell & Cook, 2006, p. 213).

2.3.5 Stakeholders and organisational legitimacy

The concept of organisational legitimacy emphasises that many dynamics in the organisational function are not from technological or material imperative, but they are from cultural norms, symbols, beliefs, and rituals. Organisational legitimacy represents the confirmation of these values, norms and expectations that are socially constructed within society. Legitimacy is very important for an organization’s survival (Colleoni, 2013). Ethical expectations have risen along with a set of social responsibilities that organisations are now required to fulfil by the different groups of stakeholders in society (Moreno & Capriotti, 2009).

Massey (2001) points out that legitimacy is managed successfully when “organization actions are perceived as being consistent with stakeholders’ expectations” (p. 156). There are three types of legitimacy the first of which is pragmatic legitimacy, this type of legitimacy will be conferred by

the audiences via direct exchanges and based on their self-interests and determination of practical consequences (Colleoni, 2013). If the organisation satisfies stakeholders' utility, they will support the organisation. For this reason, corporate social responsibility (CSR) rhetorical strategies to improve the organisation's pragmatic legitimacy will underline the benefits of being committed to CSR (Marais, 2012).

The second type is cognitive legitimacy. Cognitive legitimacy is reached when an entity becomes embedded in taken-for-granted assumptions (Colleoni, 2013). This occurs when stakeholders are provided with enough information to understand or value organisation's activities and positioning on CSR. To develop cognitive legitimacy, it is essential to give examples of actions implemented by the organisation in order to provide stakeholders tangible proof of its true CSR commitment (Marais, 2012).

The last type of legitimacy is moral legitimacy. Moral legitimacy reflects a positive normative evaluation of the organisation and its activities (Colleoni, 2013; Marais, 2012). Stakeholders consider an organisation as legitimate if it shows ethical behaviour and the attributes of good citizenship (Marais, 2012). In this case, communication should have an emphasis on values and moral principles (Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008). By doing so, organisations are able to create strong stakeholder engagement based on a common set of shared values and affection. The significance of such rhetorical choices may increase in cases of organisational crisis, such as economic downturns, financial difficulties, strikes, environmental pollution or even ethics scandals, and this strategy can help the organisation to protect its image and actions (Marais, 2012).

2.4 Examples of stakeholder communication in international organisations

2.4.1 Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) and Stakeholder Engagement

Intergovernmental Organisations, also known as international governmental organisation (IGOs) are organisations whose members include at least three states that have activities in several states, and whose members are held together by a formal intergovernmental agreement (Margaret, Karns and Karen, & Mingst., 2004; Neligan, Blagescu, & Kovach, 2003). IGOs are actually different in size, structure and scope. IGOs engage with their stakeholders those individuals and communities who are affected by IGO policies and projects through forums, committees, conferences and consultations (Neligan et al., 2003). In many ways NGOs are more

powerful at conveying and shaping public opinion than states and have become so adept at media campaigning that they are a force that IGOs can no longer ignore (ibid).

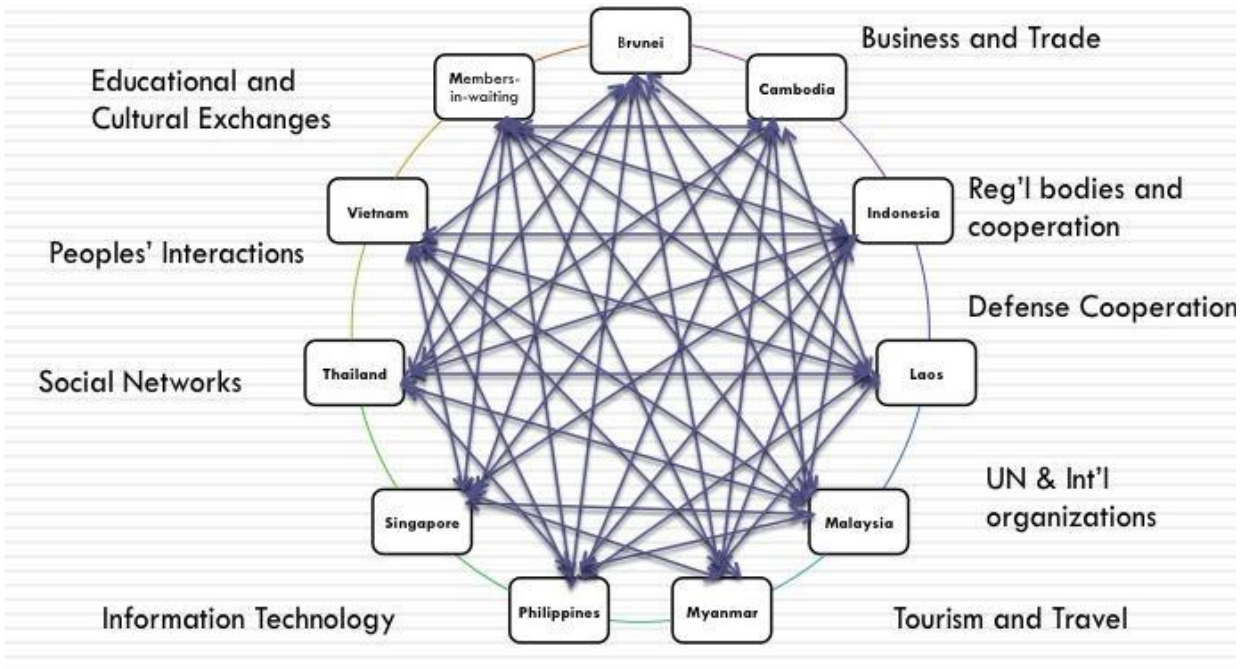
2.4.2 ASEAN communication model

The Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) is a regional organisation; it is an inter-governmental organisation that was established on the 8th of August 1976 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008a). However, there is very little research on the ASEAN communication model. According to the dissertation of Bui (2011) on the topic of Public diplomacy in ASEAN and the case of Vietnam and Singapore he states that, there are three dimensions of ASEAN public diplomacy. The first dimension relates to communicating ASEAN's goals and values. This dimension includes ASEANWEB and the use of media technologies with member states' communication plans, communicating through elites' speeches, joint statements after meetings and publications being the most important channels for ASEAN to disseminate information, activities and goals. The second dimension includes dialogues and exchanges to broaden mutual understanding and to breed better relationships by applying a concept of multi-track diplomacy. Track I: diplomacy involves the exchange of ideas and opinions through both for formal and informal dialogues; Track II: involves diplomacy and the participation of research community; and Track III: relates to diplomacy and involvement of ASEAN's general public. The last dimension is for ASEAN projects and the engagement of stakeholders, for example, the adoption of ASEAN Charter in 2007 and the commitment to form an ASEAN Community in 2015.

According to the report of Wilang and Teo (2012), the ASEAN Communication Model captivates the dynamic written and/or spoken communication happening between and among member states. Core in the model are the rods that connect all ten-member states within the bloc including the members-in-waiting nations. The numerous rods represent the bilateral and multilateral interaction between and among ASEAN member nations. Bilateral communication is close when two countries come together to negotiate on a certain treaty and/or agreement. Meanwhile, multilateral interaction usually happens annually during the ASEAN Summit when all the government heads of member states assemble for a retreat. Outside the web are instances where bilateral and/or multilateral communications occur. Within ASEAN, internal organizations are established in different themes: commerce, culture, defence, health, human rights, law, social media, tourism, university network, youth development and so on. ASEAN, as a single bargaining entity created external relations with Australia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, United States,

and to the UN. Other entities were created such as ASEAN +3, East Asia Summit (EAS), Ambassadors to ASEAN, and ASEAN Dialogue Coordinator.

Figure 2: ASEAN’s Communication Model (Wilang & Teo, 2012)



2.5 Media roles in organizational communication process

It is important to organisations to remember that they operate within communities, in which they have substantial audiences. Media is one of their key audiences (Wells & Spinks, 1998). Thus co-operation with the media is essential and the key to succeeding in establishing as well as maintaining relationships with the media. This is all down to communication skills and attitude of individuals. Khodarahmi (2009) states that communication is an art and a science. It is art because a human being creates and delivers its purpose. It is a science, because we learn and experiment stuff; where we can give solutions to complexities. This is about innovativity and creativity as basic principles of gathering attention of the media for what organisations may have to say to their public. Wells and Spinks (1999) discuss that organisations employ various communication channels to reach their target audience by following “effective communication systems” principles. Bland, Theaker, and Wragg (2001) argue that good media relations would

contribute to strategic objectives of organisations; in which various channels need to be utilised by organisation for fulfilling their strategic purposes.

E. Young (1984) suggests that media network is an opportunity to every organisation to communicate information to the public. Thus, well established media relations offer organisations and businesses a higher exposure to publics and community. W. Zikmund and D'Amico (1995) argue that press releases create a favourable image in the public minds; which would benefit the long-term strategic vision of an organisation.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed five major literature themes. Part one commenced with a critical review of stakeholder theory. Part two examined strategic communication, models of communication, strategic organisational communication, and internal and external communication. Part three reviewed the importance of stakeholder communication, stakeholder analysis (three steps in stakeholder analysis), stakeholder engagement, stakeholder dialogue, and stakeholders and organisational legitimacy (three types of legitimacy: pragmatic, cognitive and moral). Part four is about stakeholder communication in international organisations by reviewing how IGOs engage with their stakeholders and exploring the ASEAN Communication model. The last part is about media roles in organisational communication process.

This review of literature pertaining to the research topic assisted the researcher with identification of issues to frame the research questions and to select the research method.

The next chapter will discuss and consider the research methodology that will be adopted in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the method of data collection employed in this research and the rationale behind it. Different research method characteristics are discussed in making the decision about which methods are best suited for this study. There is a summary of the approach chosen for collecting the appropriate data required to answer the research question and sub-questions mentioned in Chapter 1. This chapter describes the quantitative approach and qualitative approach in relation to the overall research objective. It also describes the data collection employed in this research, including the questionnaire and semi-structure interview. The final section of this chapter will briefly discuss the procedure of data analysis and finally the ethical implications.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Quantitative approach

The quantitative approach is defined as a survey data collection approach that allows researchers to study in breadth and collect data about many aspects of phenomena from many participants or respondents (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). This approach addresses research objectives through empirical assessments that entail a numerical measurement and analysis approach (W. G. Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2010). Bryman (2012) and Saunder, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) state that a quantitative research study relates to the deductive approach that has a relationship between theory and research study. Theories are from the existing data and then set out to test or prove which are based on hypothesis and experimentation. The direction of research study is from general to specific.

When making an initial decision to undertake research, it is very important to begin with a clear idea of which methodology is going to be used. This step will help researchers to design the research in a specific way so that the requisite data can be gathered and analysed in order to meet its purpose (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Collis & Hussey (2009) state that when researchers start to think about their research methodology, they need to think about the differences between qualitative and quantitative research. Neither qualitative nor quantitative research methodology is necessarily better than the other, for they each have their own strengths and weaknesses. When

choosing a particular methodology, it is necessary to be able to identify what these strengths and weaknesses are (Delahaye, 2005; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

According to Collis & Hussey (2009, p.7), “a quantitative approach is objective in nature and concentrates on identifying the meaning of phenomena”. Thus, a quantitative approach involves collecting and analysing numerical data and applying statistical tests to extract meaning from that data. As Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) point out quantitative research generates statistics through the use of large scale survey research, using methods such as questionnaires and surveys. In other words, a quantitative approach allows a wider scope of study, including a greater number of subjects as well as enabling a stronger generalisation of results.

A quantitative approach implies the use of samples that will provide an adequate number of responses to make sure there is sufficient data in order to find out workable solutions to business problems. Furthermore, the quantitative approach is also a very common method for collecting and collating data on human characteristics, and is therefore a favoured methodology among social scientists (Delahaye, 2005; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In the case of the proposed research, samples will be taken from Lao officials at different ministries who are involved with ASEAN matters.

A written questionnaire is the most widely used data collection method in quantitative research. The questionnaire should be designed for ease of respondent use, and the explanations of what the respondent is required to do should be clear and easy to understand. Furthermore, the period of time needed to complete questionnaires should not be long, otherwise respondents may lose interest in later questions; and research objectives must be strongly connected to the questionnaire to enable effective data collection, analysis, and evaluation (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Cresswell, 2003). The questionnaire designed for this study is easy for respondents to understand and take approximately take 10 minutes to complete.

3.2.2 Qualitative approach

Bryman (2012) and Saunder et al. (2012) state that the qualitative approach is a research study that normally places emphasise on words rather than quantification in gathering and analysing data. The qualitative approach aims at exploring social relations and describes reality experienced by participants (Adams, Karns, & Raesde, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that the qualitative approach is associated with interpretive and naturalistic approach to its

subject matter. This means researchers study matter in their natural setting, intending to interpret or make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Sekaran & Bougie (2010) suggest that qualitative research methods focus primarily on the kind of evidence, that people tell you and what they do, that will enable you to understand the meaning of what is going on. Their greatest strength is that they can illuminate issues and turn up possible explanations: essentially it is a search for meaning. Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009) also support this view, stating that qualitative research is conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a 'field' or life situation. These situations are typically 'banal' or normal, reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organisations.

Saunders et al. (2009) go on to say that the strength of qualitative data is that it focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what real life is like, adding that the strength of qualitative data is their richness and holism, with strong potential for revealing a complex emphasis on people's lived experience.

There is a common belief that qualitative research focuses on problem insight, and that it provides a deeper understanding of social and environmental phenomena. Qualitative research can get closer to interviewees' views by applying a more detailed form of questioning (Delahaye, 2005; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005).

According to Coleman and Briggs (2002) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a qualitative research is suitable for examining individual situations in order to collect rich and in depth data. L. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011a) mentions that qualitative research "provides an in depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meaning, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours" (p. 219). Cresswell (2002) points out that the choice of approach depends on "whether the intent is to specify the type of information to be collected in advance of the study or to allow it to emerge from participations in the project" (p.17). The emphasis implicit in the research questions set for this study is to seek the perspectives of key Lao officials whose work relate to the ASEAN matters associated with the communication and dissemination of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) to Lao stakeholders.

A qualitative approach is useful in this research in order to explore the underlying reasons behind the problem being researched. In-depth interviews with key persons were conducted at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Information, Culture and

Tourism, and Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In addition, in-depth interviews with key persons of Lao media were also conducted (in-depth interviews with two key persons of two Lao newspaper agencies, one key person of Lao National Television, and one key person of Lao National Radio). This kind of methodology ensures that the problems and questions can be explored in depth before the design of a confirmatory questionnaire interview. The main reason for conducting this type of in-depth interview is that key persons in the three Lao ministries and Lao media are best placed to understand the importance of the integration of ASEAN as a single community, especially, the implementation of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint).

3.3 Method of data collection

3.3.1 Surveying/questionnaire

According to O'Leary (2010), "surveying is the process of collecting data by asking a range of individuals the same questions related to their characteristics, attributes, how they live, or their opinions through questionnaire; and surveys are everywhere" (p.181). O'Leary points out that surveys can conduct in market research, political polling, customer service feedback, evaluations, opinion polls, and social science research. Surveys are conducted in order to understand and know what the masses are thinking. The researcher conducted a survey in order to explore how Lao stakeholders think and understand ASEAN matters and ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint).

The researcher distributed a total of 130 copies of the questionnaire to Lao officials who are working or involved with ASEAN matters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce; and a total of 75 copies of the questionnaire to Lao businesses in Vientiane. Denscombe (2007) says that a research questionnaire is about gathering information by asking people on points related to the research. The questionnaire is designed to gather information that can be used subsequently as data for analysis.

According to J. Rowley (2003), a well-designed questionnaire is very important in order to encourage respondents to participate fully and honestly as well as for collecting accurate and useful data. The structure of the questionnaire should be carefully thought through and laid out in a simple form using clear and commonly understood language so that it can be understood by a target respondent (Delahaye, 2005; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In addition, the questionnaire

should strongly connect to the research objectives and the questions should cover the issues in order to collect and analyse the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

Following Collis and Hussey (2009), the questionnaire will be divided into three parts, moving from the easiest to the most difficult, and will therefore begin with the demographic questions, continue on into knowledge questions, and conclude with attitude questions. In this research, the questionnaire is designed for two groups of respondents, the questionnaire for Lao officials and the questionnaire for Lao businesses. Each type of questionnaire consists of 11 questions and it is divided into three parts. The first part involves three general questions; the second part has six questions on communication practices; and the last part has two open ended questions. The open ended questions are designed to get the respondents' attitude to the communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) (see Appendix 2).

In the questionnaire for Lao officials, the first part consists of questions about gender, age and level of education of Lao officials who participated in the project. The second part comprises questions about the frequency that participants receive the AEC information from the ASEAN Department of MOFA and MOIC, and how the respondents receive the AEC information from the ASEAN Department of MOFA and MOIC; the satisfaction with channels through which the AEC information has been communicated or disseminated to them; the seminars about the AEC; the understanding on the AEC; and the perspectives of the participations on the importance of the AEC for all ASEAN member states, the Lao government, businesses and inventors; and for Lao people in general. The last two questions in part three are open ended questions relating to concern about the implementation of the AEC and the recommendations.

In the questionnaire for Lao businesses, the first part consists of questions about gender, business working experience and the business sector of participants. The second part comprises questions about the source of information about the AEC that is useful for participants; how the respondents get the AEC information; the satisfaction with channels that the AEC information has been communicated or disseminated to Lao businesses; the seminars about the AEC; the understanding about the purpose of the AEC; and the perspectives of participants on the importance of the AEC for their business. The last two questions in part three are open ended questions relating to their concern about the implementation of the AEC and their recommendations to help the AEC communicate effectively with businesses.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interview

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with two key persons from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); two key persons from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC); one key person from the Ministry of Information, culture and Tourism (MICT); one key person from the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI); two key persons from two Lao newspaper agencies (Vientiane Mai Newspaper and Pasaxon Newspaper); one key person from Lao National Television; and one key person from the Lao National Radio. Denscombe (2007) states that with semi-structured interviews the researcher has a clear list of issues, or questions, that need to be addressed and answered. This allows interviewees to develop ideas and speak more widely on issues raised by a researcher. Answers are open-ended, and they focus on interviewees' elaborating points of interest.

The reason why the researcher chooses this approach is because it helps the researcher to gain many benefits such as the following:

- Get in depth of information
- Develop insights
- Gain informants' priorities
- Have flexibility
- High response rate
- Validity
- Therapeutic

According to O'Leary (2010), semi-structure is "the use of a flexible structure. Interviewers can start with a defined question plan, but will shift in order to follow the natural flow of conversation. Interviewers may also deviate from plan to pursue interesting tangents." (p.195). The semi-structure interview is aligned closely with the unstructured interview in terms of purpose although it is a mixture of both structured and unstructured interview (Hinds, 2000). Carno (2003) points out that the semi-structure interview is the richest source of data. It is seen as "a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information" (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 269).

3.3.3 Secondary data

According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007), secondary data includes both quantitative and qualitative data and they are used principally in both descriptive and explanatory research.

Secondary data has three main subgroups that are identified as documentary data, survey-based data, and data compiled from multiple sources.

The use of secondary data has both positive and negative sides, with the main advantage being a massive saving in both time and money resources. It is obviously much less expensive to use secondary data than to collect the data yourself, and much of the data collected by government survey and respected international organisations will be useful and reliable for researchers. This in turn allows researchers more time to think about aims, issues, data analysis and data interpretation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). However, using secondary data also has disadvantages, for example it may have been collected for a purpose that does not fit the needs of the current research. Moreover, to access secondary data might be difficult in instances where they have been collected for commercial purposes (ibid).

There is some useful secondary data in Laos collected by international organisations and the Lao government, and this data will help make this research easier both in terms of time and money. For example, some data can be accessed via the website <http://www.asean.org> and for collecting hard documents the researcher can visit the offices of these organisations in Laos. However, in order to do this the researcher needs to show them some evidence for instance, a letter from Unitec or student ID. The researcher collects secondary data (soft documents) while the researcher is conducting the research. For the hard documents such as ministry materials/documents/policies are gathered by the researcher while collecting data in Laos.

3.3.4 Population Sample

O'Leary (2010) states that “sampling is the process of selecting elements of a population for inclusion in a research study. Many samples attempt to be representative: that is, the sample distribution and characteristics of all findings to be generalised back to the relevant population” (p. 162). As Neuman (2003) argues, one of the aspects of the purposive sample is that it exists when a researcher wants to target particular personal data for an in-depth investigation. “The purpose is less to generalize to a larger population than it is to gain deeper understanding of types” (Neuman, 2003, p. 213).

It is impossible for the researcher to gather data from every element within a population. Selection of the sample is based on the purposive sampling strategy since the overall aim of this research is to look at specific aspects of the communication implementation part of the ASEAN's strategic plan. Therefore, the researcher has explored people who work or are involved with

ASEAN matters in MOFA, MOIC and Lao businesses who are members of LNCCI, then the researcher distributed those copies of the questionnaire to be completed. The researcher used Handpicked Sampling Model in order to conduct the survey and interview; this means the researcher has a particular population in mind which are key officials and general officials who work on the ASEAN matters regarding the communication implementation part of the ASEAN's strategic plan in MOFA and MOIC, and also key persons who work in the Lao media. The survey was started from the researcher's workplace (MOFA), after that, it was conducted at MOIC, and LNCCI.

The researcher has selected and conducted in-depth interviews with two key persons from MOFA; two key persons from MOIC; one key person from MICT who is mainly responsible for the communication of ASEAN's strategic plan in Laos; one key person from LNCCI; two key persons from two Lao newspaper agencies (Vientiane Mai Newspaper and Pasaxon Newspaper); one key person from Lao National Television; and one key person from the Lao National Radio.

The reason why the researcher has chosen samples from MOFA, MOIC, MICT, and LNCCI is because these organisations are closely involved with the implementation of the AEC. The key persons from Lao media (Newspapers, TV, and Radio) are samples that are best for disseminating the information on the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC) to Lao general public.

3.4 Data analysis

Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland (2006) point out, data analysis involves a transformative process in which raw data is turned into findings or results while Neuman (2003) refers to data analysis as "examining, sorting, categorizing, evaluating, comparing, synthesizing, and contemplating the coded data as well as reviewing the raw and recorded data" (p. 448). This research will use a mixed methods research such as semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires.

❖ Semi-structured interviews

According to Lee and Lings (2008), qualitative data analysis can be conducted by many methods. Researchers are central agents in the analysis process that can be practiced in a persistent and methodical fashion. However, this study has applied four analytical steps by adapting from the suggestion of Wilson (2010) such as transcribing the data; reading and generating categories, themes and patterns; interpreting the findings; and writing the report.

☞ The first step – due to using semi-structure interviews (a qualitative approach), all the interview data was captured by audio recorders. This can help the researcher to be familiar with the data and organise it into a manageable form (Wilson, 2010). When the researcher finished each interview, he then transcribed it into written content as soon as possible, this helped the researcher recall all important points during the interview. It is then translated from Lao into English by the researcher. The total interviews by the researcher and common concepts from the discussion are identified and grouped together. Memos and notes are conceptual in the purpose, they are useful in considering the need for clarifying and improving upon any aspect of a study (Miles & Humberman, 1994; Suanders et al., 2012).

☞ The second step – the researcher has to read, identify key points, themes and patterns that emerged from undertaking the interviews and then begin coding. Coding and techniques were employed in association with grounded theory in order to analyse the data from the semi-structured interviews. It is noted that coding is the starting point for most forms of qualitative data analysis (L Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Lofland et al., 2006). Coding has its process of sorting the data into various categories that organise it and render it meaningful from the vantage point of one or more frameworks or sets of ideas (Lofland et al., 2006).

Bryman (2008) further asserts that coding assists the development of emerging theories or categories which then inform the next set of data collection. It involves reviewing transcripts and field notes and breaking them into chunks of varying size, including words, phrase, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting (Bryman, 2008; Miles & Humberman, 1994). Coding also enables the researcher to identify similar information, and to search and retrieve the data in terms of those items that bear the same code (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011b).

According to Wilson (2010) and W. G. Zikmund et al. (2010), coding could be a key word, theme or category. Therefore, thematic coding was employed as a central strategy in order to analyse and identify common themes from the data (Denscombe, 2007; Lofland et al., 2006). Researchers can use thematic coding with many types of data that focuses on specific acts, conversations, reports, behaviours, interactions, activities, contexts, settings, conditions, actions, strategies, or practices (L. Cohen et al., 2011b). Bryman (2012) points out that qualitative analysis should have series of codes because it helps researchers to sort the information into a

variety of categories. The data in this study was formatted and coded for analysing key themes that enabled to the research question and objectives to be addressed.

The researcher collected data by conducting semi-structure interviews with six Key Lao Government Officials, and they are coded as KLGO1 – KLGO6. Moreover, the researcher also interviewed four key Lao Media Persons, coded as KLMP1 – KLMP4. This helped the researcher to easily administer, analyse and organise the raw data into conceptual categories and the creation of themes and concepts. The researcher then used them for analysing the data from the individual interviews. The coding related to decision-making about how specific data is classified or categorised. As a result, the creation of coding reliability was a significant part of the process of the study. Therefore, the researcher has consulted with the supervisors to ensure that the decision on coding is increasing the reliability of the analysis of the data.

☞ The third step – after reducing, coding the data and developing the patterns and categories in previous steps, the researcher evolved a more meaningful understanding of the findings by interpreting (Wilson, 2010). The main task of the researcher in this step is to find connections among categories that the researcher has identified in each transcription. Based on the Saunders et al. (2012) approach, this is about the recognising relationships and developing categories, thus it might make researchers revise their categories and keep rearranging their data due to the fact that they find meaning in their data set. In this step, researchers may divide or integrate categories to focus their analysis (Dey, 1993).

☞ The last step – write up the report, this is the last step of data analysis suggested by Wilson (2010). Thematic coding was employed as a central strategy to analyse and identify common themes from the data. The researcher used KLO1 – KLO6 and KLM1 – KLM4 as letter and number coding of the participations (Lao official and Lao media).

❖ Survey questionnaires

The questionnaire, a quantitative approach, the data gathered from the survey will be analysed by using Microsoft Excel 2013 in order to test the frequency, for instance, the number of Lao officials who are involved with the AEC and the Lao businesses regarding the awareness of the AEC.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are a vital aspect of all research. The conduct of this research project is based on the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) guidelines and the data collection process will not proceed until UREC approval is given (UREC, 2009). The researcher has a professional obligation to guarantee anonymity of participants and make sure that they are not harmed by this research. The researcher is going to protect the participants' right and privacy through the provision of confidentiality (Wilkinson, 2001). L Cohen et al. (2007) identify that the fundamental principle of a research ethic is the informed consent. A formal written request, thus, is made by letter using UREC guidelines to the ministries in Laos in order to gain permission and access.

A description of the research project and a completed application (Form A) were submitted to the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC), New Zealand and approval was obtained, for the period of time from 05 September 2013 to 30 June 2014. The file number of this application is 2013-1064. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce allowed the researcher to conduct the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews in their respective organisations (see Appendix 6).

According to Denscombe (2007), the researcher will collect and process data in a fair and lawful way, use data merely for the purpose specified, only gather data that is actually needed, make sure there is an accuracy of data, keep data in a proper manner for a specified time and in a secure place, not distribute the data, and restrict access to data.

Participant consent forms (interviewees), information for potential participants for the interview, information for potential participants for the questionnaire, were required for this research study (see Appendix 3, 4, & 5). These consent forms also informed clearly that the data collected would be stored securely, confidentially and only used for this study. In the final paragraph of the consent forms, the respondents were informed that if they had any queries or concerns regarding to the nature of conducting the interviews, they can contact the researcher or the UREC Secretary. During the research project conducted from 05 September 2013 to 30 June 2014, no issues arose, nor were comments made by any of the participants.

When the researcher finishes interviewing and transcribing the data it into written content, the researcher will then translate the data from Lao into English. After that the translation will be

verified by Mrs Daovone Bouphavanh, a Lao – English translator who has been working in New Zealand for more than 20 years.

3.6 Chapter summary

Chapter three defined and discussed the methodological approach taken for this research project with the rationale of discovering what is best suited to answering research questions. After reviewing various methodologies the researcher decided to combine a quantitative approach, using a survey questionnaire and a qualitative approach, using semi-structure interview as they were most appropriate to answer the research questions.

This research project involved human subjects and it was necessary to ask permission for ethics approval. The Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) has approved the researcher to conduct the project, for the period of time from 05 September 2013 to 30 June 2014. The UREC registration number is 2013-1064.

The following chapter presents the research results and overview of data collected and analysed by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a description and analysis of the data collected in this research study. The purpose of this study is to explore and investigate the ongoing practices and communication channels used by the Lao government (middle management level) including Lao state media such as the main Lao newspaper agencies, Lao National TV and Lao National Radio in order to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by ASEAN and its local Lao officials. This study will evaluate the ongoing practices and channels used in communicating the AEC Blueprint to its key stakeholders, particularly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) who are mainly responsible for the implementation of the AEC Blueprint and their audiences, for example, ASEAN related government officials, the Lao business community and general public.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents the completed questionnaire that explored the opinions of ASEAN related government officials from MOFA, MOIC and Lao businesses. A total of 130 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the MOFA and MOIC, however, only 21 copies of the questionnaire were returned from the two ministries. Of the 75 copies of questionnaire that were distributed to Lao businesses in Vientiane, only 13 copies of the questionnaire were returned. A number of questions in the beginning section of the questionnaire survey for Lao officials asked about individual demographic characteristics of the respondents which included gender, number of years of working experience with the Lao government, and the highest level of education. The beginning section of the questionnaire survey for Lao businesses asked about gender, number of years of business experience, and the type of business. The second and third sections of the survey questionnaires for the Lao officials and Lao businesses are similar; the second section asked about the communication practices pertaining to the AEC; and the last section asked open ended questions regarding concern about the implementation of the AEC and the feedback on the concerns. These data are displayed in tables, graphs and bar charts.

The following section presents the research results and findings of the study project based on six in-depth interviews with key Lao officials and four key Lao media persons. These interviews

with key people not only helped the researcher to answer the sub-questions but also discovered their perspectives and attitudes concerning their communication practices.

4.2 Responses to questionnaires

The survey questionnaire is divided into two categories: the survey questionnaire for Lao officials and the survey questionnaire for Lao businesses.

4.2.1 Survey questionnaire (Lao officials)

This type of survey questionnaire explored the opinions of general government officials (officials who do not work regarding ASEAN matters) from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC). This questionnaire included 11 questions that were divided into three parts. Part one included three questions that asked respondents about their individual demographic characteristics (gender, age and level of education of Lao officials who participated the project), while part two included six questions that asked respondents about their views on communication practices. The last part consists of two open ended questions about concerns of the implementation of the AEC and the feedback of the concerns. A total of 130 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the MOFA and MOIC. However, only 21 copies of the questionnaire were returned from the two ministries.

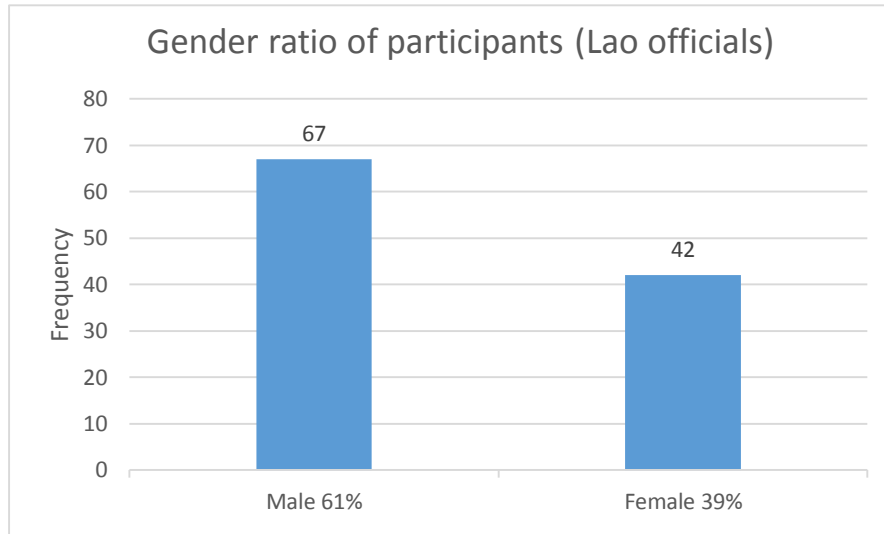
4.2.1.1 Demographic data (Lao officials)

In this section respondents were asked to identify their general demographic information in order to enable readers to get an overall picture of the respondents. There are three questions in this section.

Question 1

Question one asked respondents to state their gender. The results of this question are displayed in Figure 3 and reveals the gender ratio in this research study to be 61% male and 39% female.

Figure 3: Gender ratio (Lao officials)



Question 2

Question two asked participants to identify the number of years of experience in their positions within one of five ranges, less than one year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 15+ were on offer to choose from. The result of questions are displayed in Table 1.

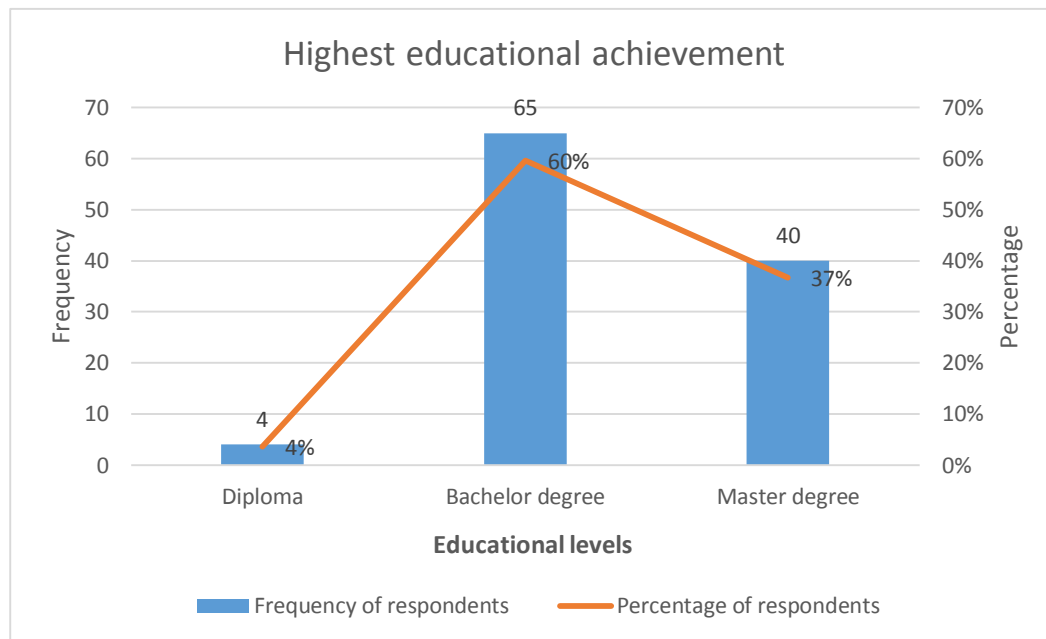
Table 1: Work experience (Lao officials)

Working experience		
Number years of working in experience	Frequency of respondent in working experience	Percentage of respondent in working experience
Less than 1 year	23	21%
1-5	46	42%
6-10	17	16%
11-15	14	13%
15+	9	8%

Question 3

In question three, the last question of the demographic section of this questionnaire, participants were asked about their highest educational achievement within one of three ranges; diploma, bachelor degree, master degree, doctoral degree, and other. The results of this question are displayed in Figure 4 and demonstrate that the highest number of respondents has a bachelor degree (60%), with other participants ranging from diploma (4%), and master degree (37%).

Figure 4: Respondent education achievements (Lao officials)



4.2.1.2 Questionnaire responses (Lao officials)

The questions in this part of the survey are focused on participants' attitudes towards communication practices in MOFA and MOIC. It consists of six questions. In the first question, the participants were asked about the frequency with which participants receive the AEC information from the ASEAN Department of MOFA and MOIC. The second question asked how the respondents receive the AEC information from the ASEAN Department of MOFA and MOIC. The third question asked the respondents' satisfaction regarding channels that the AEC information has been communicated or disseminated to them. The fourth question asked the participants about the AEC seminars. The fifth question asked the respondents about their understanding on the AEC. The last question asked the perspectives of the participations on the

importance of the AEC for all ASEAN member states, the Lao government, businesses and inventors, and for Lao people in general. The participants were also asked to rank, scale and justify their answers and in some questions the participants were encouraged to mark more than one answer.

Question 1

In question one, the participants were asked to identify the frequency that they receive information about the AEC from the ASEAN Department. The results of this question are displayed in Table 2 and indicate the highest percentage of participants receiving the AEC information from the ASEAN Department is once a month 37%, while 23% never receive the information. The percentage of the respondents who receive the information once a week is 12%, twice a week is 7%, every two weeks is 4% respectively. 17% of respondents chose the option “other”, for instance, once a year, every 2-3 months, sometimes, occasionally, every day, and depends on seminar or meeting pertaining to arrangement.

Table 2: Frequency of the respondents receive the AEC information (Lao officials)

How often do you receive information about the AEC from the ASEAN Department?		
Frequency	Frequency of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Once a week	13	12%
Twice a week	8	7%
Every two weeks	4	4%
Once a month	40	37%
Never	25	23%
Other	19	17%

Question 2

Question two asked respondents about channels that the ASEAN Department use to communicate the AEC information to them. The results of this question are illustrated in Table 3 and reveal that 37% of participants received the AEC information from the ASEAN Department by hard copies, by email 10%, by meetings or seminars 10%, by fax 2%, while 11% of participants never receive the information from the ASEAN Department, and 30% of participants chose option “other”. This means they did not receive the AEC information from the ASEAN Department directly, but they accessed the AEC information by themselves via other channels such as TV, radio, internet, newspapers, books, magazines etc.

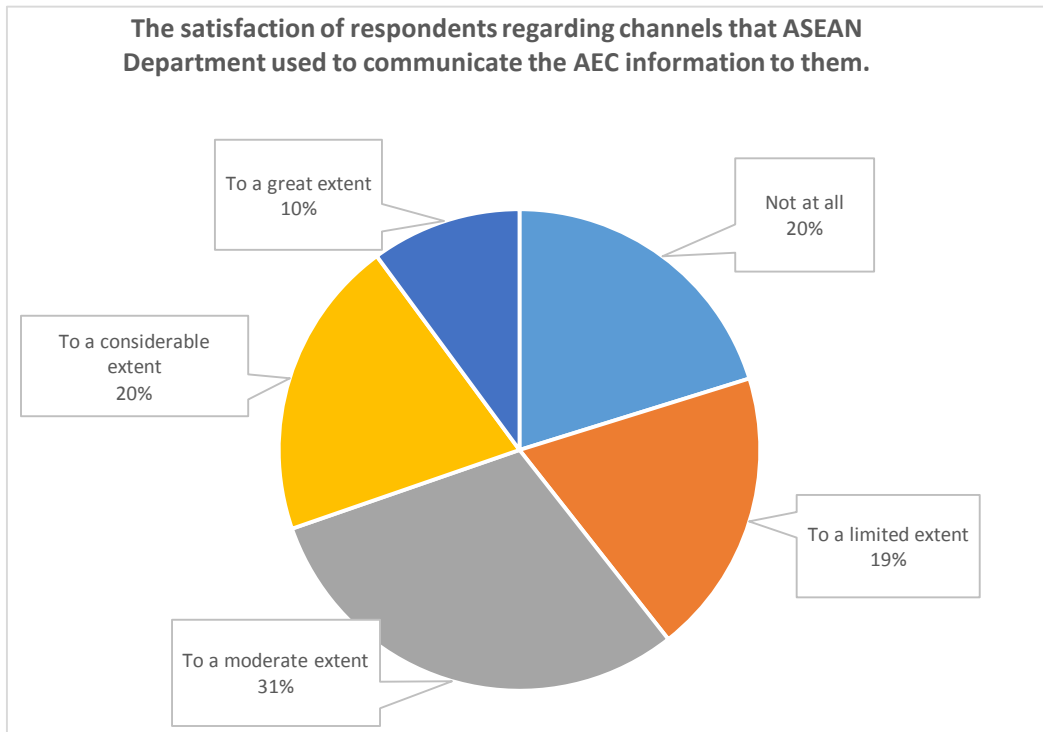
Table 3: Channels that the respondents received the AEC information (Lao officials)

How do you receive information about the AEC from the ASEAN Department?		
Channels	Frequency of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Hard copies	40	37%
Email	11	10%
Fax	2	2%
Seminars or meetings	11	10%
Never	12	11%
Other	33	30%

Question 3

Question three asked respondents about their satisfaction regarding channels that the ASEAN Department used to communicate the information about the AEC to them. The results of this question are displayed in Figure 5 and show that 31% of respondents are satisfied moderately, while 20% of them were not satisfied with the channels at all. 20% had a considerable extent, 19% had a limited extent, and 10% had a great extent respectively.

Figure 5: The satisfaction of respondents regarding channels used by the ASEAN Department (Lao officials)



Question 4

Question four asked respondents to mark whether they have been invited to attend the AEC seminars or not. The results of this question are illustrated in Figure 6 and reveal that 62% of participants said “Yes” and 38% said “No” respectively.

For the participants who said “Yes”, 90% of them attended the AEC seminars in Laos mostly organised by MOFA and MOIC; and 10% of them attended the AEC seminars overseas organised by the ASEAN Secretariat, the Embassy of Singapore in Vientiane, and in Thailand. See Table 4 and Table 5.

Figure 6: Responses of participants regarding the AEC seminars (Lao officials)

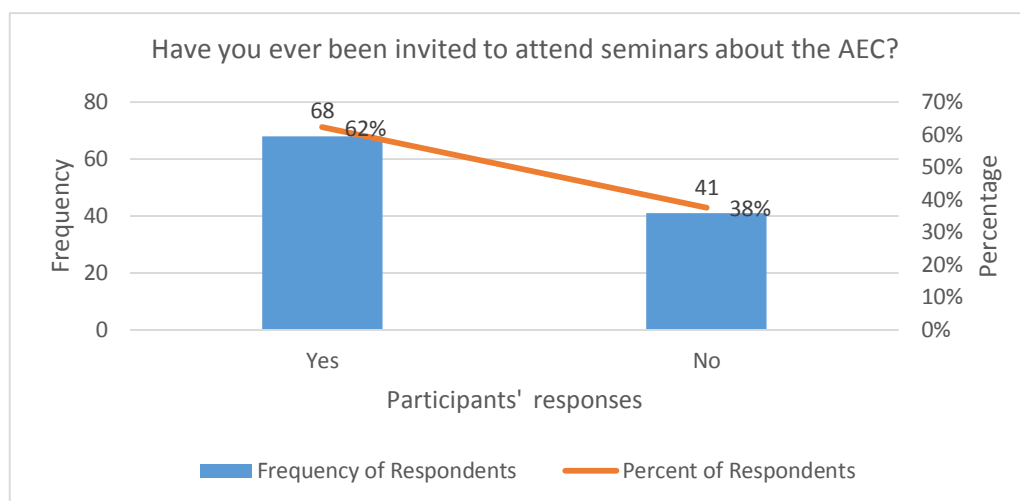


Table 4: Places that respondents attended the AEC seminars (Lao officials)

Places that the respondents attended the AEC seminars	Frequency of Respondents
In Laos	66
In overseas	6

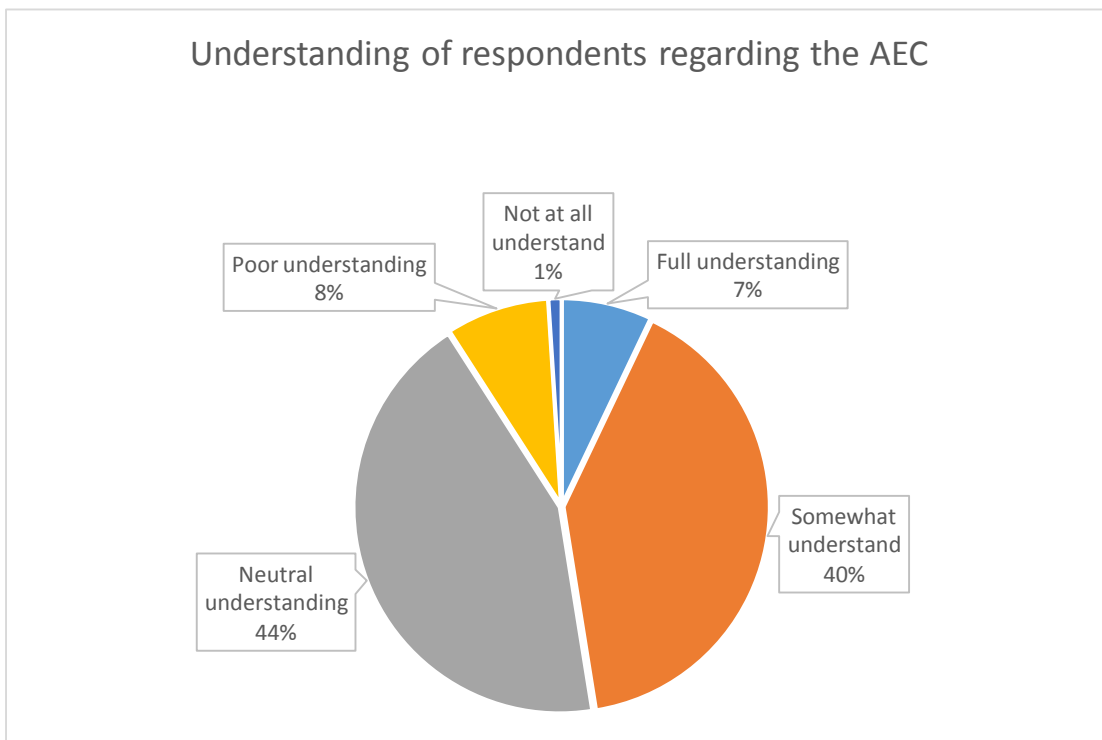
Table 5: The AEC seminar organisers attended by the respondents (Lao officials)

The AEC seminar organisers	Frequency of Respondents
MOFO	53
MOIC	15
ASEAN Secretariat	2
Other: Embassy of Singapore (2), Thai Chamber of Commerce (1), NIDA Thailand (1)	4

Question 5

In question five, respondents were asked to identify their understanding pertaining to the AEC. The results of this question were displayed in Figure 7 and reveal that 44% of respondents had neutral understanding, somewhat an understanding 40%, and poor understanding 8%; while 7% of the participants understood the AEC fully; however, only 1% of participants did not understand the AEC at all.

Figure 7: Understanding of respondents regarding the AEC (Lao officials)



Question 6

Question 6 required participants to rate the importance of the AEC on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates least important, 2 is somewhat least important, 3 is neutral important, 4 is somewhat important, and 5 is very important. This question was designed to ask the participants' opinion regarding the importance of the AEC for all ASEAN member states, for the Lao government, for businesses and investor, and for Lao people in general. Results varied considerably between the statements and the results of this question are displayed in Table 6. When queried about the importance of AEC for all ASEAN member states, 54% of respondents stated that this was very

important, 33% somewhat important, 9% opted for neutral important, while 1% and 3% stated that it was somewhat least important and least important respectively.

When the respondents were asked about the importance of AEC for the Lao government, 47% agreed this is very important, 32% somewhat important, 13% opted for neutral important, while 5% and 4% stated that it was somewhat least important and least important respectively. The importance of the AEC for businesses and investors, 53% of respondents stated that this was very important, 31% somewhat important, 9% opted for neutral important, while 4% and 3% stated that it was somewhat least important and least important respectively. The last statement in this question, asked participants about the importance of the AEC for the Lao people in general, the highest percentage of responses – 31% somewhat important, 25% very important, 30% opted for neutral important, while 9% and 5% stated that it was somewhat least important and least important respectively.

Table 6: Respondents’ opinion regarding the importance of the AEC (Lao officials)

From your perspective, please rate the importance of the AEC (Mark 1 is least important - 5 is very important)					
Important for	Least important	Somewhat least important	Neutral important	Somewhat important	Very important
For all ASEAN member states	3%	1%	9%	33%	54%
For the Lao government	4%	5%	13%	32%	47%
For businesses and investors	3%	4%	9%	31%	53%
For Lao people in general	5%	9%	30%	31%	25%

4.2.1.3 Open ended questions (Lao officials)

The last two questions in part three are open ended questions about the greatest concern about the implementation of the AEC and the feedback from Lao officials who participated in the survey questionnaire. Seventy-one respondents wrote their comments about the greatest concern regarding the implementation of the AEC and 54 respondents expressed their feedback on the implementation of the AEC. Some comments and suggestions overlap between answers to the two questions and they are summarised below:

Concerns about the implementation of the AEC from Lao officials include:

Concerns about effective communication taking place

There are 12 participants concerned about the preparedness of Laos and its population. Laos might not be ready and prepared enough for the implementation of the AEC compared to other ASEAN countries, for example, economic affairs, security problems, laws, transportation, technology, business competition, education, the adaptation of small businesses, etc. There are 7 respondents concerned about limited communication to the public. There is not enough advertising about the AEC. Lao government officials, Lao businesses, and Lao citizen do not know much about the AEC. There is limited accessing of the AEC of Lao people, especially people in rural areas.

Concerns about Lao products

There are 7 respondents who commented that Lao SMEs products had disadvantages in many areas compared to other ASEAN countries, while 5 respondents stated that Lao products could not compete with products of other ASEAN countries because of the quality.

Concern about different regimes

There are 6 respondents who commented that, there are development gaps between the big and small ASEAN member states and the variety of political systems, cultures, economy, etc. Only ASEAN6 have implemented their National Single Window. Laos has not finished establishing the National Single Window to link with the ASEAN Single Window in order to facilitate its trade. Three respondents stated that Lao culture and traditions might be changed after becoming the AEC, lifestyle of Lao people will be affected, the gap between the rich and the poor is expected to be widened, and social problems might be increasing.

Concern about human resource and labour

There are 18 respondents have concerns on human resources development and capacity of Lao workforce, Lao work force cannot compete with other countries because of inefficiency of working skills. While, there are 5 respondents commented that the migration of foreign labour into Laos might affect Lao labours, freely flow without bordering. There might be challenges to meet the needs of Lao labours.

Other concerns

There are concerns that language used in communication is an obstacle, especially international languages (English) (5 respondents). The understanding of the Lao entrepreneurs regarding the AEC, conducting of business, trade, services as well as labour issues (3 respondents). ASEAN might face the financial problem like the Euro zone, even though we do not use the same currency in the region. Tax exemption (4 respondents). There might be a deficit in the Lao economy regarding to the AEC (1 respondent).

Feedback from the Lao officials who participated in the survey questionnaire on the implementation of the AEC implemented by Lao government include:

There should be more advertisements on the AEC in order to make public sectors, private sectors, general public, and students understand more about the AEC. The advertisements could be done by using media such as TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines; by organising seminars for stakeholders and targeted audiences (28 respondents)

The government should emphasise on producing domestic products (the high quality products), reduce regulations that preclude the creation of domestic products. Regulations created for the AEC should provide more support for domestic entrepreneurs. The government should enforce existing laws and regulations, encourage local businesses to improve the quality of their products, and to develop the existing products to meet international standards (5 respondents)

The ASEAN Department should consider more about the dissemination or communication of the AEC to stakeholders by creating more formal and informal channels of communication to disseminate information about the AEC; making stakeholders understand more about the AEC,

what is the AEC in detail, what people could get from the AEC, as well as the advantage and disadvantage of joining the AEC (3 respondents)

Preparation for the AEC is costly for CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam), especially Laos. However, we need to identify our comparative advantages and our drawbacks in order to make Laos as ready as possible to the AEC (5 respondents)

New information about the AEC should always be updated for stakeholders. The related sectors should send the updated information about the AEC and the progress of the implementation the AEC to officials, businesses and general public, especially people in rural areas (3 respondents)

Laos should lay a strategic plan to improve its economy as well as to improve its SMEs and capacity of workers in order to cope with the upcoming challenges. It is good to have all the great plans, but the practice must be good too (2 respondents)

There needs to be awareness raising for possible impacts from the AEC to the Lao business community and general public by providing more budget for AEC public awareness projects, for instance, AEC magazines, promote the AEC via media such TV, radio, etc. This will help Lao people, government officials, businesses people know and understand more about the AEC (2 respondents)

4.2.2 Survey questionnaire (Lao businesses)

This type of survey questionnaire explored the opinions of Lao businesses. This questionnaire included 11 questions that were divided into three parts. Part one included three questions that asked respondents about their individual demographic characteristics (gender, business working experience, and the business sector of participants who participated the project). Part two included six questions that asked respondents about their views on communication practices. The last part consists of two open ended questions about the concerning the implementation of the AEC and the feedback of the concerns. A total of 75 copies of questionnaire were distributed to Lao businesses in Vientiane. However, only 13 copies of the questionnaire were returned.

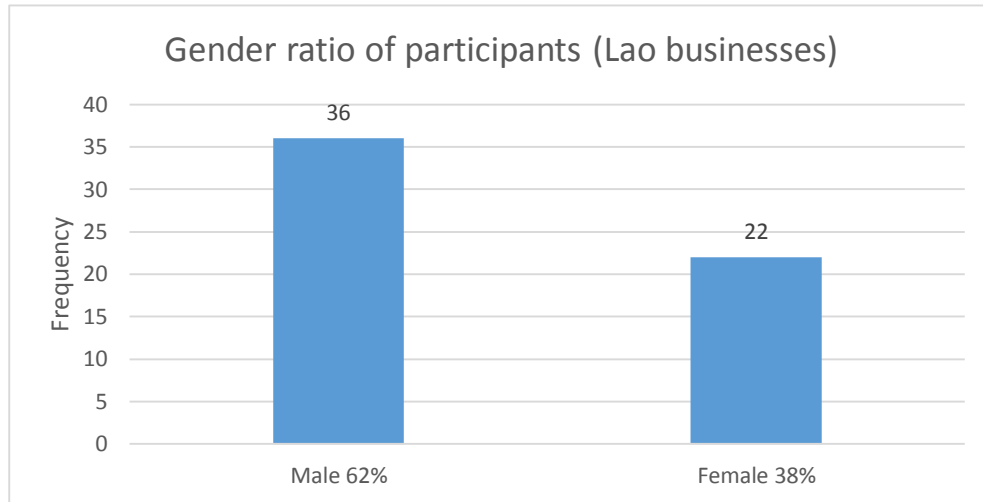
4.2.2.1 Demographic data (Lao businesses)

In this section respondents were asked to identify their general demographic information in order to enable readers to get an overall picture of the respondents. There are three questions in this section.

Question 1

Question one asked respondents to state their gender. The results of this question are displayed in Figure 8 and reveal the gender ratio in this research study to be 62% male and 38% female.

Figure 8: Gender ratio (Lao businesses)



Question 2

Question two asked participants to identify the number of years of their business working experience within one of five ranges, less than one year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, and 15+ were on offer to choose from. The result of questions are displayed in Table 7.

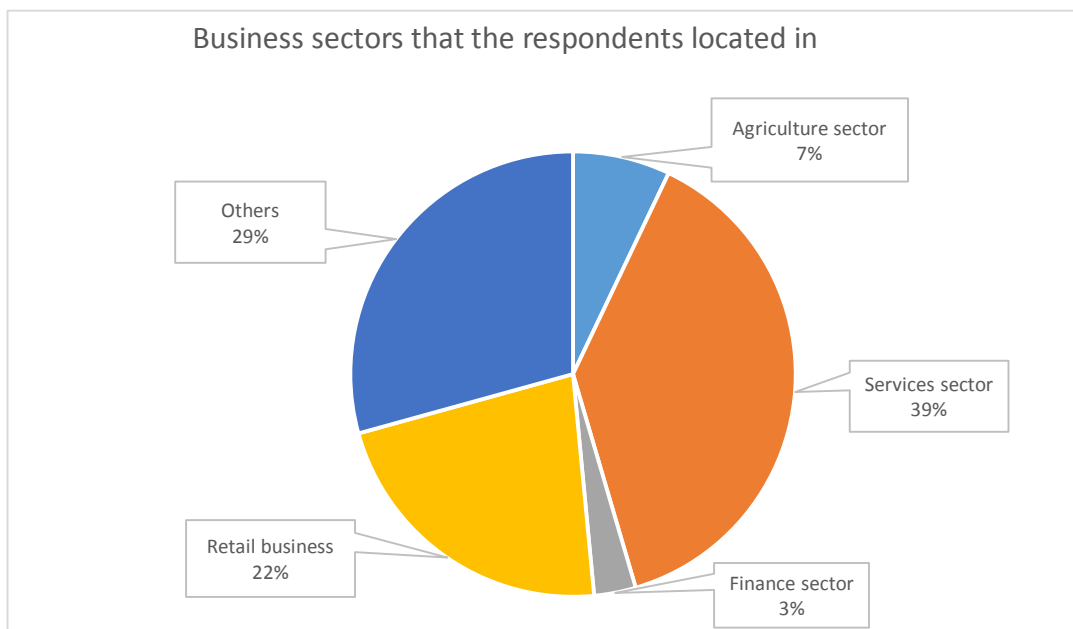
Table 7: Business working experience

Business working experience			
Q	Number years of business working experience	Frequency of respondent in business working experience	Percentage of respondent in business working experience
	Less than 1 year	4	7%
	1-5	21	36%
	6-10	10	17%
	11-15	10	17%
	15+	13	22%

Question 3

In question three, the last question of the demographic section of this questionnaire, participants were asked to identify sectors in which their businesses are located. The results of this question are displayed in Figure 9 and reveal that 39% of respondents are located in the services sector, 22% retail business, 7% agriculture sectors, and 3% in the finance sector respectively, while 29% chose the option “other”, for instance, printing material supplier, electronic supplier, furniture business, construction business, timber business, handicraft business, industry business, garment factory etc.

Figure 9: Business sectors of participants



4.2.2.2 Questionnaire responses (Lao businesses)

This part includes six questions that asked respondents about their views on communication practices. The participants were asked to rank sources of information about the AEC that is the most useful for them; identify how they get information about the AEC; the satisfaction with channels that the AEC information has been communicated or disseminated to them; the seminars about the AEC; the understanding on the AEC; and the last question in this part asked the respondents to rate the importance of the AEC for their businesses. The participants were

also asked to rank, scale and justify their answers and in some questions the participants were encouraged to mark more than one answer.

Question 1

Question 1 required participants to rank sources of the AEC information that is useful for them on scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates least useful, 2 is somewhat least useful, 3 is neutral useful, 4 is somewhat useful, and 5 is very useful. This question was designed to ask the participants' opinion regarding the sources of the AEC information that is useful for them, these sources include: TV, radio, online sources, hard copies from ministries, and business colleagues. Results varied considerably between the sources and the results of this question as displayed in Table 8.

When queried about the usefulness of TV, 43% of respondents stated that this was very useful, 21% somewhat use, 24% opted for neutral useful, while 12% and 0% stated that it was somewhat least useful and least useful respectively.

For the usefulness of radio, 24% of respondents agreed that it was very useful, 19% somewhat useful, 28% opted for neutral useful, while 16% and 14% stated that it was somewhat least useful and least useful respectively.

For the usefulness of newspapers, 34% of respondents stated that it was very useful, 21% somewhat useful, 26% opted for neutral useful, while 17% and 2% stated that it was somewhat least useful and least useful respectively.

For the usefulness of online sources, 48% of respondents stated that it was very useful, 21% somewhat useful, 19% chose neutral useful, while 12% and 0% stated that it was somewhat least useful and least useful respectively.

When the respondents were asked about the usefulness of hard copies from the ministries, 28% of respondents stated that it was very useful, 17% somewhat useful, 31% selected neutral useful, while 24% and 0% stated that it was somewhat least useful and least useful respectively.

The last statement in this question asked respondents about the usefulness of the AEC information from business colleagues. 31% of respondents agreed that it was very useful, 16% somewhat useful, 34% opted for neutral useful, while 12% and 7% stated that it was somewhat least useful and least useful respectively.

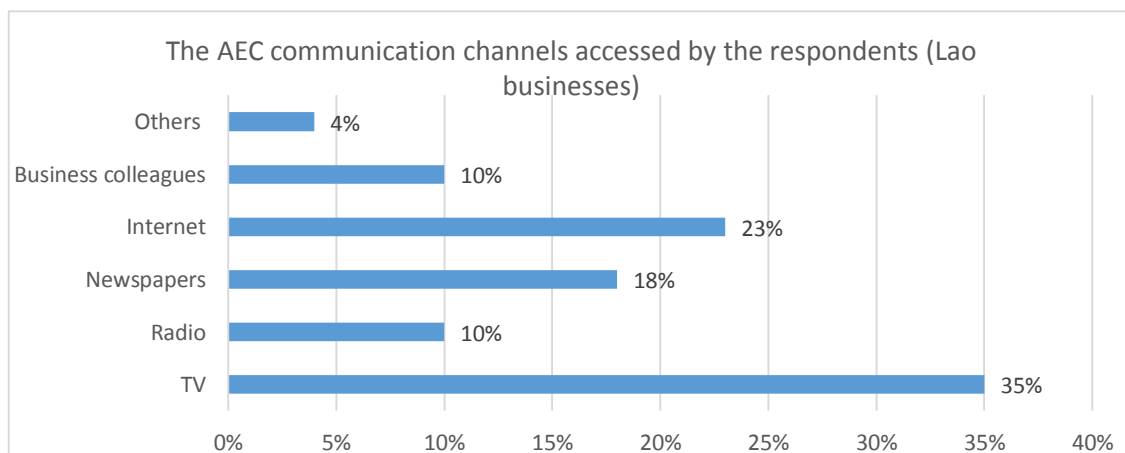
Table 8: Sources of the AEC information useful for the respondents (Lao businesses)

Which source of information about the AEC that is the most useful for you?					
Sources of information	Least useful	somewhat least useful	Neutral useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
TV	0%	12%	24%	21%	43%
Radio	14%	16%	28%	19%	24%
Newspaper	2%	17%	26%	21%	34%
Online sources	0%	12%	19%	21%	48%
Hard copy from ministries	0%	24%	31%	17%	28%
Business colleagues	7%	12%	34%	16%	31%

Question 2

Question two asked respondents about channels that they used to access information about the AEC. The results of this question are illustrated in Figure 10 and reveal that 35% of participants accessed the AEC information via TV, 23% via the internet, 18% via newspapers, 10% via radio, and 10 by discussing and exchanging the AEC information with business colleagues respectively, while 4% of participants chose the option “other”, for instance, meetings/seminars and involved government urgencies.

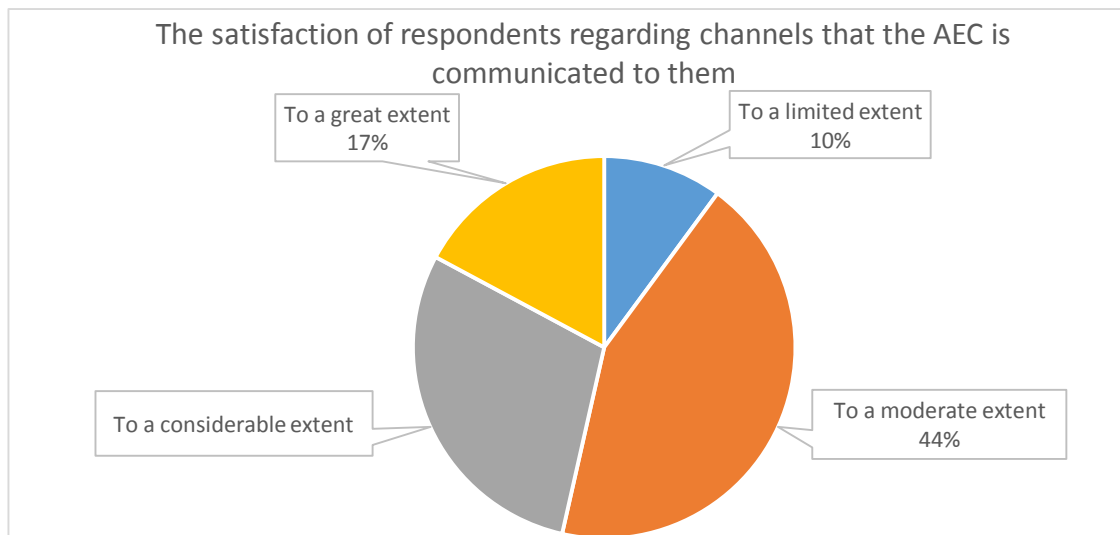
Figure 10: The AEC communication channels accessed by the respondents (Lao businesses)



Question 3

Question three asked respondents about their satisfaction regarding channels that AEC used to communicate with them. The results of this question are displayed in Figure 11 and reveal that 44% of respondents were satisfied moderately, while 29% had a considerable extent, 17% had a great extent, and 10% had a limited extent respectively.

Figure 11: The satisfaction of respondents regarding channels that the AEC is communicate to them (Lao businesses)



Question 4

Question four asked respondents to mark whether they have been invited to attend the AEC seminars or not. The results of this question are illustrated in Figure 12 and reveal that only 38% of participants have attended the AEC seminars, while 62% of them never attend the AEC seminars respectively.

For the participants who have attended the AEC seminar, about 95% of them attended the AEC seminars in Laos mostly organised by MOIC and MOFA; and about 5% of them attended the AEC seminars in overseas organised by ASEAN Secretariat. See Table 9 and Table 10.

Figure 12: Responses of participants regarding the AEC seminars (Lao businesses)

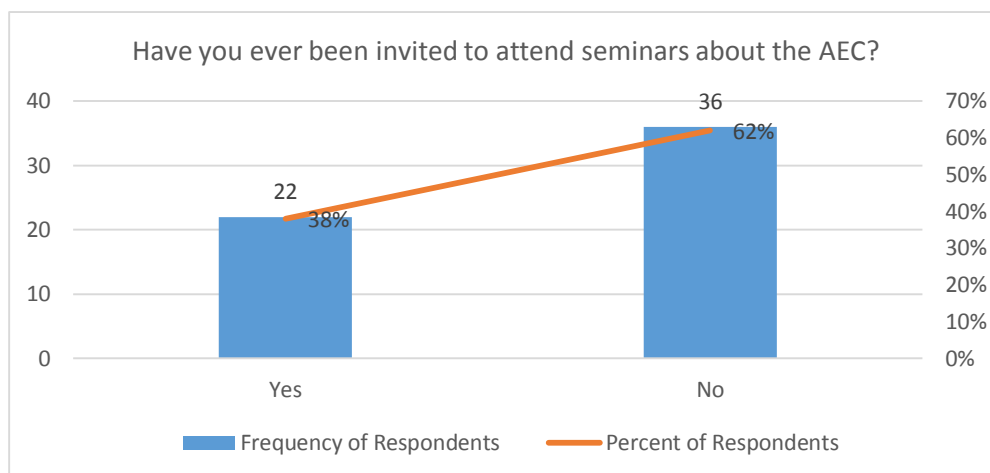


Table 9: Places that respondents attended the AEC seminars (Lao businesses)

Seminar places that the respondents attended	Frequency of Respondents
In Laos	21
In overseas	3

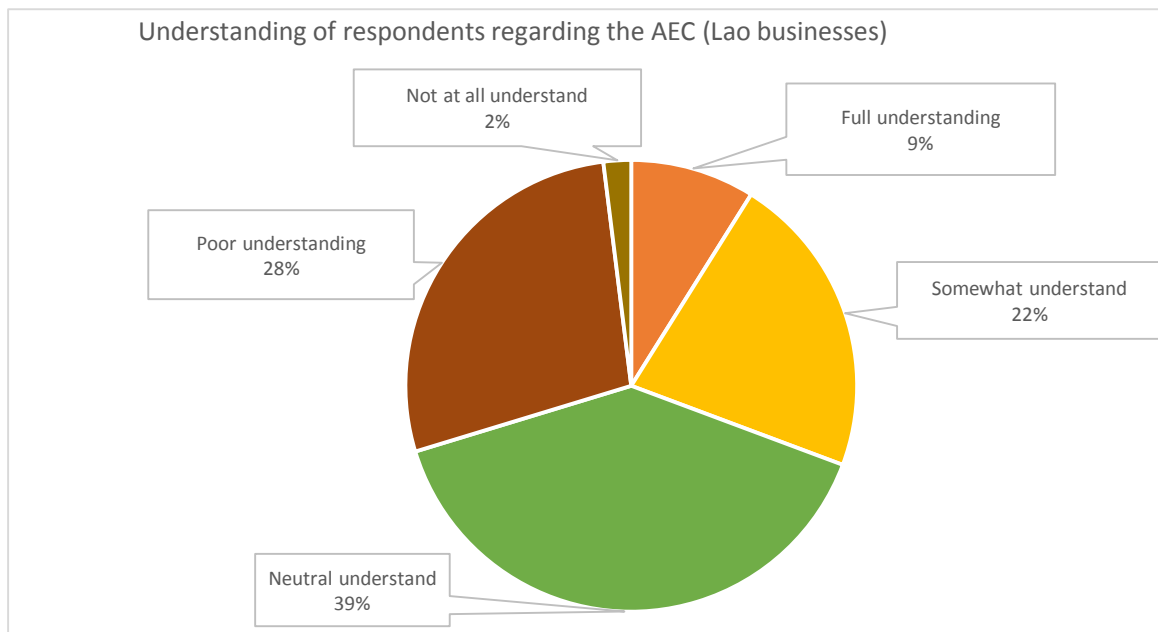
Table 10: The AEC seminar organisers attended by the respondents (Lao businesses)

the AEC seminar organisers	Frequency of Respondents
MOFO	10
MOIC	11
ASEAN Secretariat	3

Question 5

In question five, respondents were asked to identify their understanding pertaining to the AEC. The results of this question are displayed in Figure 13 and reveal that 39% of respondents had neutral understanding, poor understanding 28%, and somewhat understanding 22%; while 9% of the participants understood the AEC fully; however, only 2% of participants did not understand the AEC at all.

Figure 13: Understanding of respondents regarding the AEC (Lao businesses)



Question 6

Question 6 required participants to rate the importance of the AEC on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates least important, 2 is somewhat least important, 3 is neutral important, 4 is somewhat important, and 5 is very important. This question was designed to ask the participants' opinion regarding the importance of the AEC for their businesses. The results of this question are displayed in Table 11. When queried about the importance of AEC for the respondents' businesses, 29% of respondents stated that this was very important, 33% somewhat important, 21% opted for neutral important, while 9% stated that it was somewhat least important, and 9% also stated that it was least important.

Table 11: Respondents’ opinion regarding the importance of the AEC (Lao businesses)

From your perspective, please rate the importance of the AEC (Mark 1 is least important - 5 is very important)	Least important	Somewhat least important	Neutral important	somewhat important	Very important
Important for your business	9%	9%	21%	33%	29%

4.2.2.3 Open ended questions (Lao businesses)

The last two questions in part three are open ended questions about the greatest concern regarding the implementation of the AEC and the feedback from Lao businesses. 34 respondents wrote their comments about their greatest concerns regarding the implementation of the AEC and 36 respondents expressed their feedback on the implementation of the AEC. Some comments and suggestions overlap between answers to the two questions and they are summarised below:

Concerns about the implementation of the AEC from the Lao businesses include:

Concerns about effective communication taking place

There are 5 respondents had concerns on the ineffectiveness of communication of the AEC to stakeholders. The involved parties might not send the AEC information to Lao businesses often enough; Lao businesses might not have a good understanding of the AEC.

Concern about human resource and labour

There are 15 respondents who had concerns about human resource issues, they are worried that there might be insufficient Lao skilled labourers, no jobs for unskilled workers, and that foreign employees will hold important positions in companies.

Other concerns

There are concerns about the Lao basic infrastructure, it is not good enough, especially transportation. Lao businesses might not be ready for the integration, they do not know what their strength is, what challenges they will face, what they should do in order to gain benefits from the AEC. Lao businesses that gain high profits might be taken over by foreign companies. There will be an insufficiency of high quality Lao products for foreign markets. There will be difficulty in the exchanging of marketing information among Lao entrepreneurs. Lao SME entrepreneurs do not have a good understanding about the AEC, and benefits that they can gain from the AEC. There will be problems in the immigration of foreign labours. There will be business competition, particularly, manufacturing sectors. There might be many challenges, and it might be difficult to approach sources of capital. These concerns relate to the consequences for Laos in joining the AEC.

Feedback from the Lao businesses that participated in the survey questionnaire on the implementation of the AEC by Lao government include:

There should be more advertising about the AEC throughout the country for villages, districts and provinces. Businesses should know the current situation and the progress of the implementation of the AEC in order to approach the AEC effectively. This will enable entrepreneurs to understand more about the advantages, disadvantages, challenges and opportunities of the AEC. This can be done by using media such as TV, radio, newspapers, magazines etc.; and Lao businesses should exchange and share the AEC information via the internet (15 respondents).

The Lao government (the involved ministries) should organise more meetings and seminars for Lao business groups in order to provide greater understanding regarding the AEC in detail (3 respondents). MOFA and involved ministries should organise and support the AEC TV program, ASEAN column on newspapers, publish details of the AEC in every business sector in order to make Lao businesses, and the general public to thoroughly understand the AEC (2 respondents). The government and people should know what they will get from the AEC; the government should seek out the problems of its people (2 respondents). The involved parties should report and disseminate the AEC information to the people and businesses in detail, particularly in

relation to import and export businesses. Public relations should be a work priority of the government.

There should be dissemination or communication of the AEC to schools and universities throughout the country from primary school to tertiary school in order for students to be aware of the importance of the AEC. This can be done by inserting the AEC into the Lao educational system (2 respondents).

It is more convenient to use internet to communicate the AEC to stakeholders because it is timely, for instance, email, websites etc. (2 respondents). The AEC should be communicated effectively to businesses via different channels.

Entrepreneurs should learn foreign languages in order to be able to communicate effectively in business dialogue. The government should provide free English classes (2 respondents). Lao businesses should learn more about the AEC in order to approach the AEC effectively. Lao businesses should have solidarity and to work well together.

4.3 Interview results and findings

This section provides a summary of the study findings regarding the individual interviews with six Key Lao Government Officials coded by letters and number as KLGO1 – KLGO6, and four Key Lao Media Persons coded as KLMP1 – KLMP4. The names of participants in this research are anonymous in order to avoid identification and ensure that there is no harm to them. All interviews were related to the experience, understanding and perceptions of the participants regarding communication matters. The interview questions (see Appendix 1, p108) were designed for participants who work and are involved with ASEAN matters, and for Lao key media persons.

4.3.1 Interview results and finding from six key Lao officials

The respondents' opinion about the communication channels used by ASEAN Secretariat and the respondents

When queried about the respondents' opinion regarding the communication channels used between the participants and the ASEAN Secretariat, all participants stated that they did not have

any problems in contacting or coordinating with ASEAN Secretariat. They were satisfied with the way ASEAN Secretariat communicates information to them, especially, communicating via email, it was very effective, convenient and timely. The participants regularly meet ASEAN Secretariat at conferences. The participants can also update information by visiting the website of ASEAN Secretariat.

In general, we do not have any problems in contacting or coordinating with ASEAN Secretariat. Particularly, the communication through email is very effective, convenient and timely; sometimes we use facsimile, sometimes hard copies, in an urgent case we use the telephone, for instance, if the information is not clear and more clarification is required. We often meet staff from ASEAN Secretariat at ASEAN meetings and seminars. We also exchange and share ideas on all ASEAN matters. In addition, the ASEAN Secretariat has its own website to communicate or disseminate information such as ASEAN Updates. (KLG01; KLG02; KLG03; KLG04; KLG05; KLG06).

Communication or dissemination of the AEC information taking place between the Lao government and its stakeholders or involved parties

The respondents were asked about how they communicate or disseminate the AEC information to Lao stakeholders or involved parties. They stated that the information about the AEC is communicated or disseminated to the involved parties or stakeholders by organising seminars and conferences for targeted audiences. Lao media is also a key driver in communicating the information to the involved parties, especially, for the general public. Example of Lao media tools used in communicating the AEC information include Lao National TV, Lao National Radio, Lao newspapers, Lao magazines etc. In addition, stakeholders also get the information by another means such as reports from the ministries, websites of the ministries, and other activities.

We have done well. We organised seminars for the ministries and all provinces in Laos. Moreover, we asked Lao media to help us in this work, for example, Lao National TV, Lao National Radio, Lao newspapers, Lao magazines etc. In addition, the ASEAN matters are also put into the Lao education curriculum. After attending ASEAN conferences, we write reports and send them to our stakeholders, these include: MOFA departments, Department of Foreign Affairs in every province and to Lao embassies overseas. We organised

activities to disseminate the information about the AEC on special occasions such as ASEAN Day. ASEAN officials sometimes conduct a survey by going to bus stations, markets and universities to ask people about their understanding pertaining to the AEC. We also upload the information about the AEC on MOFA website (KLG01).

We have done a lot. We organised seminars for the ministries and all provinces in Laos. For the national conference on disseminating the AEC. We organise conferences 2-3 times per year, and approximately 200-300 people attend the conferences (KLG02).

This is our priority work. In order to approach the AEC, it is not only the central government to implement, it is necessary to communicate or disseminate the information about the AEC to businesses, grassroots level, and general public. Now, we are supported by many projects in communicating or disseminating the information about the AEC. We also asked Lao media to help us in this work, for example, Lao National TV, Lao National Radio, Lao newspapers, Lao magazines etc. We have limitation of budget, but in general we have done well. We organised meetings between public and private sectors to share ideas about the issues. We invited officials from provinces to work and learn from us, so that they can be implemented in the provincial level. We have AEC focal points in each department at MOIC. We can call meetings any time when we need (KLG03).

We organised seminars about the AEC from central level to provincial level. I was invited to present about the AEC. We sent hard copies about the AEC to the National Chamber of Commerce and industry and asked them to disseminate the information to businesses (KLG04).

We do two methods: The first method, we follow the national plan on ASEAN communication. We communicate or disseminate the information about ASEAN through media, especially, on TV and radio; there is an ASEAN program on the Lao National TV named “ASEAN Today”; there is also a thirty minutes ASEAN program on the Lao National Radio that is broadcast two times a week. We have an ASEAN column on the main Lao newspaper (Pasaxon Newspaper). Moreover, Lao magazines also have the AEC topic. The second method is conducted through seminars for targeted audiences such as students in many universities, officials in all provinces and businesses (KLG06).

Barriers and main reasons to effective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) and the feedbacks from the respondents.

All participants comment that there are barriers to effective communication, those barriers are the inefficiency of the capability of human resources who have experience and skills in specific fields to explain to audiences well, and the limitation of budget. However, one participant pointed out that the limitation of budget is a barrier but it is not the main issue, the main issue is the inefficiency of capability of human resources.

The barriers of effective communication are: the inefficiency of capability of human resources who can explain well to audiences, so that they can apply what they have learned into real works; and the limitation of budget, we did not work well with grassroots level who produce products. However, we have gained support from international to do this work. Not only Lao PDR faces this problem, but also other ASEAN member countries (KLG01; KLG02; KLG03; KLG04; KLG05).

The main barrier is the inefficiency of capability of human resources who have experience and skills in specific fields (in all fields and all levels) to explain to audiences well (Persons who are responsible for Public Relations), so that they can apply what they have learned into real works, they normally present issues in general. The issues that are presented did not answer the needs of targeted audiences because they are too general, not specific. For example, in what area businesses should improve, in what sectors businesses should increase or decrease the volumes of products and services. The most important things are medium and grassroots levels, they just start producing goods, they do not know market yet. These can be addressed by organizing training for communicators and media people. Budget is not the main issue. The main issues are themes and communicators who are experienced and skilful in specific fields (KLG06).

The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) does not have enough budget to organize the AEC meetings or seminars for Lao businesses. There should be more budgets for LNCCI in order to promote ASEAN works for Lao businesses, particularly, the AEC. The technology should be improved, especially the Lao information and communication technology (ICT) and the internet speed (KLG05).

The participants also stated that one of the main reasons for ineffective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) is the differences in political regimes and

administration of ASEAN member states, because some countries take long processes to ratify the plan or agreements to be implemented in their countries. This can be addressed by putting the ASEAN's strategic plan into their national socio-economic development plan.

The ASEAN countries have different political regimes and administration. Therefore, it is not easy to accomplish the AEC in the same way smoothly. The main problem is the slowness of the implementation of the plan or agreements, because some countries take long processes to ratify the plan or agreements to be implemented in their countries. The solution is that all ASEAN members have to put the ASEAN's strategic plan into their national socio-economic development plan. All ASEAN countries have to understand and implement the ASEAN commitments (KLGO1; KLGO2; KLGO3; KLGO4).

Understanding of the respondents regarding the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint).

All participants from both groups (key Lao government officials and key Lao media persons) were asked about their understanding regarding the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). It is found that only key Lao government officials have a good understanding about the ASEAN's strategic plan, especially, the AEC Blueprint. They stated that they understood the ASEAN mechanism, they understood how to work internationally, particularly, in the ASEAN frameworks. They have gained knowledge and experiences by attending conferences in various frameworks and contributing to negotiations in both small and big arenas.

For the key Lao media persons, they only understood about the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) in general such as its general purpose and goals. They stated that: *they understood about the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) in general such as its general purpose and goals. They do not know much about its details. (KLMP1; KLMP2; KLMP3; KLMP4).*

The key Lao government officials stated their understanding regarding the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) as follows:

I understand well about the ASEAN's strategic plan, particularly, the AEC Blueprint. I know all about the history of ASEAN and its system, I understand its plan, goals and purposes as well as the cooperation in ASEAN frameworks. I understand that ASEAN secretariat has created a good AEC communication plan, this plan will create

understanding of the benefits of the AEC for all ASEAN member states, especially, the business community, and the plan applies media as the main tool in communicating the AEC Blueprint to stakeholders (KLG01; KLG02; KLG06).

I know what ASEAN wants, I know what the ASEAN member countries want to do on every issue, and I know the stance and attitudes of the ASEAN member countries and ASEAN dialogue partners. I have also shared knowledge and experiences gained from working with ASEAN to my colleagues and Lao officials, for instance, I explained to them how ASEAN works, what areas we should pay attention to, this is for the benefits of our country (KLG01).

I know that the aim of this plan is to create ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. There are four pillars in this plan. The first of which is to make ASEAN become a single market and production base, this means there will be a free flow of goods, services and investments in the region. The second pillar is to make ASEAN become a competitive economic region. The third pillar is to promote equitable economic development, for example, the promotion of SME to order to fill development gaps between old and new ASEAN members. The last pillar is the integration into the global economy, for instance, AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area) (KLG03).

I have been working as a communicator for the Lao government; I help to promote the government's foreign policies, the national socio economic development plan, and the Lao culture to the ASEAN countries. Overall, I help to promote Lao people and the country to foreign countries. Second, I have contributed to negotiations in both small and big arenas, and I have contributed to conferences in the frames of communication, culture, information and media. I have applied the communication strategies stated in the plan to disseminate or communicate the AEC to Lao stakeholders by using Lao media, TV, radio, newspapers, magazines etc. and organising the AEC workshops for targeted audiences throughout the country (KLG06).

The respondents' opinion regarding the benefits of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)

When queried about the benefits of the AEC on the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint), most of participants stated that the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) has brought benefits to all ASEAN member states, particularly, for the Lao PDR because it

corresponds to the socio-economic development plan of Lao PDR. However, each member state has gained different benefits because each country has different economy and has a different development level.

In general, the ASEAN's strategic plan is in accordance with the socio economic development plan of Lao PDR. It is also in accordance with the open policy to cooperate with foreign countries or the foreign policy of Lao PDR. ASEAN does not only cooperate internally, it also opens for external dialogue partners in order to gain their investments, support and assistance. I can frankly say that the volume of foreign trade in Laos is increased, there are more foreign investments in Laos, and the number of foreign tourists has also increased. These lead to the economic growth of Lao PDR that is 8% per year (KLG01).

The AEC Blueprint will be beneficial for all ASEAN member countries. This does not mean every country will gain benefits equally. Each country has a different economy and has a different development level. Each country brought their strength into the negotiation and the creation of this plan. This means some countries might gain a lot of benefits from one area, in contrast, they might gain less benefits from another area. In general, all ASEAN countries have agreed that this plan is a key driver to approach the AEC by 2015, on the basis of all ASEAN countries to have consensus, and this is the principle of ASEAN governance (KLG02).

The AEC Blueprint will be very beneficial. It is clearly stated in the aims of the plan. ASEAN will be a high economic competitive region. The region will be a single market and production base, there will be free flow of goods and services. The production cost is low, consequently, ASEAN will become the destination of the investment of other regions (KLG03).

The AEC Blueprint will be very beneficial, particularly, for Lao PDR as an undeveloped country. This will help Laos gain assistance from external partners, and will help Laos improve the quality of its products in order to meet international standard (KLG04).

I think the AEC Blueprint will be very beneficial, the plan will be a key driver for Laos in order to boost its economy. There will be free flow of goods and services, and there will be tax exemption in some items. In the past tariff was an obstacle of businesses. This strategic plan will stimulate the flow of Lao economy. There will be more cooperation with other

countries. The most important thing is the plan must be adapted to the national socio development plan (KLG05).

Exactly, in order to implement the commitments of ASEAN leaders about ASEAN development it is necessary to create ASEAN Community, especially, ASEAN Economic Community (the AEC). The AEC will be very beneficial, because ASEAN will be a single market and production base. ASEAN will be a big market to export products, and a big market to attract foreign investment and bring benefits to all 600 million people in ASEAN countries. Certainly, all ASEAN countries will gain different benefits. In general, it will be very beneficial for Lao PDR. The policy of the Lao government is to encourage its people to produce goods. Therefore, we have to improve the quality of our products to export overseas what they need. In contrast, we can import and use products of other countries that we cannot produce (KLG06).

The role and responsibilities of the ministries in communicating the ASEAN's vision to the citizen

In accordance with the prime minister's decree, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) have played an importance role in communicating the ASEAN's vision to the citizens in all three pillars, not only ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) but also ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

According to the prime minister's decree on the preparedness to approach the ASEAN Community there are five main works in the decree, one of those is the communication work such as organizing workshops throughout the country. In general, Lao people know more about the ASEAN's vision (KLG01).

The role of MOFA is about communication of ASEAN's vision in general, it is about the SEAN economic connectivity, promotion of Lao culture and Lao foreign policies regarding ASEAN matters. For the details they are conducted by the involved ministries (KLG02).

In general, the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) is responsible for disseminating of useful information to the citizen. In particular, for the ASEAN frame, MICT helps to communicate or disseminate information or news to Lao people about what Laos is doing regarding ASEAN matters, and the progress of the implementation of ASEAN

plan in Laos. In addition, MICT also presents new issues and the future approach of ASEAN in order to help people prepare to enter the ASEAN Community. During the ASEAN anniversary, we organize weeks and months of ASEAN advertising in order to encourage Lao people to be aware of ASEAN (KLG06).

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) is mainly responsible for communicating or disseminating information about the AEC to its stakeholders or the involved parties.

The main aim of MOIC is to communicate or disseminate information about the AEC to its stakeholders or the involved parties, so that they can put it into their development plan. MOIC also disseminates information on how to gain benefits for the AEC. For example, how to promote exported products, how to protect domestic products, and how to promote SME (KLG03; KLG04).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry and Commerce are mainly responsible for communicating or disseminating information about the AEC to their stakeholders, the involved parties, and general public, especially via Lao media such as newspapers, radio, TV etc. (KLG05).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), and Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT) are responsible for disseminating information to the citizen in accordance with their rights and obligations.

MOFA is mainly responsible for disseminating information about ASEAN to Lao citizens from the central level to grassroots level, the dissemination is directed by the minister of foreign affairs, Mr Thongloun Sisoulith (KLG01; KLG02).

MOIC is mainly responsible for disseminating information about ASEAN to Lao citizens from the central level to grassroots levels in accordance with its rights and onus. MIOC also has its own newspaper named “Economic Newspaper” (KLG03; KLG04).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry and Commerce are mainly responsible for communicating or disseminating information about the AEC to the citizen. I have learned that the ministries also went to provinces to disseminate the information to Provincial Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KLG05).

The respondents' opinion on the progress of the implementation of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint).

All participants stated that the implementation of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) is on track, five of six participants said that it is approximately 80% implemented, and one participant comments that it is implemented more than 50%.

Presently, the implementation of the AEC is in the third phase. There are four phases. The first phase is in 2008-2009, the second phase is in 2010-2011, the third phase is in 2012-2013, and the fourth phase is in 2014-2015. It is about 80% implemented (KLG01; KLG02; KLG03; KLG04; KLG05.)

Presently, the implementation of the AEC is more than 50% (KLG06)

4.3.2 Interview results and finding from four key Lao media persons

The role of Lao media in communication report of ASEAN information or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)

Lao media has played an important role in communicating or disseminating the information about ASEAN or the AEC to the Lao citizen. It is the key tool of the Lao national plan on ASEAN communication. The information about the AEC is communicated or disseminated through the Lao media, especially, on TV and radio; there is an ASEAN program on the Lao National TV named "ASEAN Today"; there is also a thirty minutes ASEAN program on the Lao National Radio that is broadcast two times a week. There is an ASEAN column in the main Lao newspaper (Pasaxon Newspaper). Moreover, Lao magazines also have the AEC topic.

Lao media practices in communication report of ASEAN matters or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)

When queried about the frequency of news reports on ASEAN matters or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint), the respondents stated that the ASEAN or the AEC news is regularly reported every week and for events by Lao National TV, Lao National Radio, and Lao newspapers.

We report on ASEAN matters or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) regularly, every week in each event and each meeting (KLMP1; KLMP2). We have an ASEAN column once a week, every Fridays, page 10, the name of the column is “Enter into ASEAN Community” (KLMP2).

We have ASEAN news program named “ASEAN Today” that is broadcast every Sunday, in the morning from 6:30-7:00am via the AM waveband, and in the evening from 6:30-7:00pm via the FM waveband (KLMP3). We report on ASEAN matters in many events such as conferences organised in Laos and overseas (KLMP4).

The participants were asked about what they have reported about ASEAN matters or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). They stated that important activities about ASEAN matters are regularly reported by Lao media such as ASEAN conferences organised in Laos and overseas, and the progress of the implementation of ASEAN community in all three pillars etc.

We regularly report about the preparedness of Lao PDR for the integration into ASEAN Community in 2015 (all three pillars) and important activities such as conferences organised in Laos and overseas (KLMP1; KLMP3; KLMP4).

We mainly report about conferences, the participation of Lao delegates in ASEAN conferences, interviews of the delegates who attended the conferences, the regular guest is Dr. Kiane Phansourivong, Director General of ASEAN Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We also report about the cooperation in ASEAN frameworks (KLMP3).

The respondents were questioned about the emphasis of the reporting on ASEAN matters or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). They answered that the reports are emphasised on every topic of ASEAN conferences, useful laws and policies of ASEAN, interesting topics from papers provided by the Ministries, and the progress of the implementation of the ASEAN community.

We emphasise on administrative mechanism, for example, laws and policies of ASEAN that are favourable to Lao businesses (KLMP1).

We selected from papers that Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry and commerce sent us to post on the column in each week (KLMP2).

The progress of the implementation and the preparedness of Laos in order to approach the ASEAN Community (All three pillars), every topics of ASEAN conferences (KLMP3; KLMP4).

When questioned about the main sources of the ASEAN information that they have approached and used for reports, the participants stated that the information about ASEAN was collected from the host of conferences organised in Laos and overseas, hard copies from related ministries and sectors, from the ASEAN Secretariat website, from their foreign news agency alliance, from ASEAN country members, and foreign media.

Hard copies from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism; related sectors; and ASEAN conferences organised in Laos and from Lao delegates (KLMP1; KLMP2; KLMP3; KLMP4).

From our foreign news agency alliance such as Nhandan Newspaper of Vietnam, Vietnam National Radio, and Chinese Radio etc. (KLMP3).

ASEAN Secretariat website, and ASEAN country members (KLMP3; KLMP4).

The respondents were asked whether they have journalists/reporters who are trained on the political and economic reports or not. It is found that only reporters of the Lao National TV are trained on specific areas such as political news, economic news, social news etc. However, the two Lao newspaper agencies and the Lao Nation Radio do not have reporters who are trained in specific fields.

We do not have journalists who are trained in specific fields such as politics, economy etc. Our journalists work in all fields (KLMP1).

We have 20 journalists, every one works in all areas. We have a Political-Economic Division and a Socio-Cultural Division. But we do not have journalists who are trained in specific fields (KLMP2).

We have an appointed team to get information or news about ASEAN. We do not have reporters who are trained in specific fields such as political field, economic fields etc. Our reporters work in all fields (KLMP3).

Our reporters are trained to report on specific areas such as political news, economic news, social news etc. They are trained in Laos and in foreign countries such as Japan,

Malaysia, Vietnam and France. We have received grants from the government of Japan. We are a full member of Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, this organisation has budget for reporter training (KLMP4).

When queried about the importance of ASEAN as a new topic for media, the respondents stated that the ASEAN topic is very important for media, especially, Laos as it is going to enter into ASEAN Community. The media is recognised by the Lao government as a central communication medium for disseminating information about ASEAN to the citizens.

We considered that the ASEAN topic is very important, especially, Laos is going to enter into ASEAN Community. It is very important for media persons, so they can improve their English and working skills (KLMP1; KLMP2).

We considered that ASEAN topic is very important, especially, Laos is going to enter into ASEAN Community. Reporters must be very active in reporting about ASEAN. The Lao government has asked the media as the communication medium for disseminating information about ASEAN to the citizen (KLMP3).

ASEAN topic is very important, because Laos is a member of ASEAN. There are more than 100 ASEAN meetings every year, and every meeting is very important. Lao National Television must help to disseminate information and news about ASEAN to the citizen (KLMP4).

The respondents were asked whether their reporters have been invited to attend seminars about the ASEAN's vision (the AEC Blueprint) or not, they replied that their reporters have been invited to attend seminars organised by the involved ministries, and mostly in Laos. Overseas, they have attended seminars about other topics, not the AEC.

Yes, our reporters have been invited to attend seminars about the ASEAN's vision organised by the involved ministries, and mostly in Laos (KLMP1; KLMP2; KLMP3; KLMP4).

Our reporters never attend seminars on this topic overseas. They have attended another topic such as ASEAN journalist meeting, and they have attended study tours in many ASEAN countries (KLMP1; KLMP2).

The respondents were asked whether the related ministries have sent the information about the ASEAN's vision (the AEC Blueprint) or not. The respondents stated that the related ministries have regularly sent information to media to report on the ASEAN's vision (the AEC), particularly the ASEAN Department of MOFA and MOIC.

The ASEAN Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and MOIC have sent the information about the ASEAN's vision (the AEC Blueprint) for us to report regularly (KLMP1; KLMP2).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly send us the information about the ASEAN's vision. Radio is the main media for advertising about ASEAN's vision, and it is very useful (KLMP3).

We have cooperated in every activity, particularly, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and related ministries (KLMP4).

The respondents were asked whether the related ministries have organised press conferences on the ASEAN's vision (the AEC Blueprint) or not. The respondents stated that the three related ministries (MOFA, MOIC, and MICT) have regularly organised press conferences for media.

There was a conference on the ASEAN's vision organised by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism last month (KLMP1; KLMP2; KLMP4).

There was a conference on the ASEAN vision organised by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. The conference was organised at the conference hall of Lao National Radio, I also participated in the conference as a master of ceremony, there were about 100 media people attended the conference (KLMP3).

When queried about the understanding of the respondents (the key Lao media persons) regarding the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint), they stated that they did not understand the plan well, they just understand the plan in general such as its general purpose and goals, and they do not know the details.

I understand about the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) in general such as its general purpose and goals. I do not know much about its details. (KLMP1; KLMP2; KLMP3; KLMP4).

Finally, the respondents were asked about their targeted groups/main audiences, they responded that their targeted groups/main audiences of Lao media are all classes of people and people all over the country.

The targeted groups/main audiences of Vientiane Mai Newspaper are business units, government organisations, and retired employees (KLMP1).

The targeted groups/main audiences of Pasaxon Newspaper are all classes of people such as business people, officials, police, soldiers, students, and general public (KLMP2).

The targeted groups/main audiences of the Lao National Radio are people all over the country (KLMP3).

The targeted groups/main audiences of the Lao National Television are all classes of people and people all over the country (KLMP4).

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the raw data collected through the survey questionnaires (survey questionnaire for Lao officials and survey questionnaire for Lao businesses) and in-depth interviews constructed for this study project. The main part of the analysis of this study includes conducting the survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews, the data was collected from ASEAN related government officials from MOFA, MOIC and Lao businesses in Vientiane. The interview section, questions were designed to explore participants' perspectives and attitudes concerning their communication practices. Both types of questionnaires divided into three parts, part one involves demographics data, while part two is focused on communication practices pertaining to the AEC, and the last part asked open ended questions about the concern of the implementation of the AEC and the participants' feedback. The collected information and data were also presented in descriptions, figures, tables and graphs. The findings presented in this chapter are discussed and investigated in more depth in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5: Analysis Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the research findings, it is also connected to the research question and sub questions, and relevant theories in the literature review in Chapter Two.

This chapter evaluates the ongoing practices and channels used by the Lao government to communicate the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) to its stakeholders, especially, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC) that are responsible for the implementation of the AEC Blueprint and to their audiences or stakeholders; Lao general government officials and the Lao business community.

This chapter also considers the results of the interviews and survey questionnaires in light of the literature on this issue, and analyses the findings in order to answer the research question and sub-questions that are presented in Chapter One. This chapter includes two main sections one of which discusses the questionnaires and the other the interviews.

5.2 Discussion of questionnaires

5.2.1 Communication practices taking place between the Lao government and its stakeholders

A total of 130 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the MOFA and MOIC, however, only 21 copies of the questionnaire were returned from the two ministries. Of the 75 copies of questionnaire that were distributed to Lao businesses in Vientiane, only 13 copies of the questionnaire were returned. A number of questions in the beginning section of the questionnaire survey for Lao officials and Lao businesses asked about individual demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section asked about the communication practices pertaining to the AEC; and the last section asked open ended questions regarding concern about the implementation of the AEC and the feedback on the concerns.

In the first survey question for Lao officials from MOFA and MOIC, the respondents were asked to identify the frequency that they receive information about the AEC from the ASEAN Department. Notably 23% of the respondents never received the AEC information from the ASEAN Department, and 40% of respondents either never or only very occasionally received the information with only 12% receiving regular information (once a week). The results showed that

the majority of respondents in MOFA and MOIC did not receive the AEC information regularly. This is also useful for evaluating the remaining questions.

The majority of respondents (Lao officials) in MOFA and MOIC did not receive the AEC information regularly, and the following question asked the respondents about the channels that the ASEAN Department used to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to them. The result from this finding shows that 37% of participants received the AEC information from the ASEAN Department by hard copies, while around 40% of participants were being communicated with via other indirect channels. This means the respondents did not receive the AEC information from the ASEAN Department directly, but they accessed the AEC information by themselves via other channels such as TV, radio, internet and newspapers.

As Harrison (2011) points out that communication with stakeholders can make tangible benefits for the organisation because a more positive relationship is created. Research has found that positive stakeholder relations can sustain an organisation's benefits over a long period. A high stakeholder relation ratings indicates that an organisation can move out of a negative position faster during the process of recovery (Choi & Wang, 2009; Godfrey et al., 2009). The Lao government has created a strategic plan and the plan is in accordance with the AEC plan. However, the finding results reveal that the Lao government's stakeholders did not receive the AEC information directly from the involved Lao government agencies. In order to gain tangible benefits from the AEC, there is a need for the Lao government to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to its stakeholders effectively, not just let them to access the AEC information by themselves.

For the Lao businesses, the participants were asked to rank the usefulness of the sources of the AEC information. This question was designed to ask the participants' opinion regarding the sources of the AEC information that were useful for them. These sources include: TV, radio, online sources, hard copies from ministries, and business colleagues. The result shows that the significant majority indicate that the communications to them through the media had been either useful or very useful. Based on Hill and Jones (1992), stakeholders are those who participate in exchange relationships. These views apply a strategic perspective and accentuate the fact that organisations have only limited resources and limited time that they can use to deal with their stakeholders. Therefore, it is in the interest of management to indicate and pay attention to those stakeholders who are relevant in the organisation's economic interests. Lao businesses are those

the Lao government's stakeholders who play an important role in realising the AEC in Laos. Therefore, the Lao government needs apply a useful communication channel to provide the useful AEC information to Lao businesses in order for them to have a good understanding regarding the AEC.

According to the findings results, only Lao officials receive the AEC information directly from the ministries. However, both groups of respondents (Lao officials and Lao businesses) realised that Lao media was a very useful medium through which to access the AEC information. Young (1984) suggests that the media network provides an opportunity to every organisation to communicate information to the public. Thus, well established media relations offer organisations and businesses a higher exposure to the public and community. Zikmund and D'Amico (1995) argue that press releases create a favourable image in the public's mind; which would benefit the long-term strategic vision of an organisation. In order to realise the strategic plan or the AEC Blueprint, the Lao government has recognised the media as a central communication medium to communicate the AEC information to its stakeholders, especially, the general public. The involved ministries regularly organise press release for their stakeholders regarding the AEC, particularly, the Lao media.

The respondents were also asked about their satisfaction regarding channels that the ASEAN Department used to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to them. It was notable that 70% of respondents were either not satisfied, had limited satisfaction or moderate satisfaction, while only 10% of respondents were very satisfied with the channels. Twenty percent of respondents were not satisfied at all. For the Lao businesses, it was also interesting to note that, a high percentage of respondents (83%) were not satisfied with the channels, while only 17% of respondents were satisfied. Based on Belasen (2008), evaluating the organisation performances against stakeholders' perceptions or criteria of effectiveness is very important in collecting feedback about stakeholders' general satisfaction level and whether the organisation tries to meet their expectation. It is very important for the Lao government to know whether or not its stakeholders are satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate the AEC information to them. These findings reveal that the majority of the respondents (Lao officials and Lao businesses) were not satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate the AEC. Thus, the Lao government needs to pay more attention on this issue in order to make its stakeholders have a good understanding regarding the AEC, so that the AEC will be realised effectively.

The participants (Lao officials) from the two ministries were asked whether or not they have been invited to attend the AEC seminars. These findings reveal that approximately 50% of all respondents attended a seminar, yet they are not satisfied with the channels through which the ASEAN Department communicates the AEC information to them, and approximately 40% of participants are hardly ever communicated. The results showed that there is a high level of dissatisfaction with the communication channels used to communicate the AEC information to them. Lao businesses were also asked whether they have been invited to attend the AEC seminars or not. The results of the finding showed that a high percentage of respondents (62%) have never attended the AEC seminars in Laos or overseas. This is fewer than the number of government officials attending the AEC seminars. According to the AEC communication plan, organising seminars for stakeholders or involved parties is one of the communication strategies in order for making the stakeholders have a good understanding regarding the AEC. However, the findings clearly indicate that the Lao government has not worked well on this strategy.

When queried about the understanding of the respondents pertaining to the AEC, it is interesting to note that a high percentage of Lao government officials (93%) do not have much of an understanding of the AEC, while only 7% of respondents had full understanding on the AEC. For the Lao businesses, it is also interesting to note that a high percentage of the Lao businesses (91%) do not have much of an understanding of the AEC, while only 9% of respondents had full understanding of the AEC. The results from this finding revealed that there are big problems in engaging and informing Lao officials and Lao business regarding the AEC. As Greenwood (2007) states that stakeholder engagement is the process of involving individuals and groups that are affected by the activities of the organisation in a positive way; it is a process of consultation, communication, dialogue and exchange. Cumming (2001) points out that stakeholder engagement aims at improving an organisation's social and ethical accountability and performance. The results indicate that the Lao government has not worked well on engaging and informing its stakeholders regarding the AEC. In order to realise the AEC, it is very important for the Lao government's stakeholders to have a good understanding on the issues. It is necessary for the Lao government to have more engagement with its stakeholders. This can be done by following the AEC communication plan strictly, especially, the first pillar of the plan that focuses on dialogue with business community, government agencies, academics, and general public in a seminar/workshop format.

MOFA and MOIC officials were asked to provide an evaluative rating of the importance of the AEC for all ASEAN member states, for the Lao government, for businesses and investors, and for Lao people in general. The respondents from the two ministries revealed that it is in general viewed as positive (the high percentage of rating was between somewhat important and very important). For the Lao businesses, the participants (Lao businesses) were also asked to provide an evaluative rating of the importance of the AEC for their businesses. The respondents from the Lao businesses also revealed that the response is the same as the response from the Lao officials which is also in general viewed as positive (the high percentage of rating was between somewhat important and very important). It is interesting to note that, most respondents from both groups (Lao officials and Lao businesses) have a limited understanding of the AEC. There is a contradiction in that they say the AEC is very important, but they actually do not know very much about the AEC.

These significant findings are illuminated with the literature by many researchers. As Preble (2005) affirms that effective stakeholder relationship management can be achieved by engaging in dialogue and building relationships with many different groups. Swift (2001) states that engagement is the act of managing the relationship between the organisation and different stakeholders in order to enhance the effectiveness of the decisions, strategies and behaviour. An organisation's success depends on creating real dialogue with its diverse stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Therefore, Hughes and Demetrious (2006) maintain that dialogue is at the core of stakeholder engagement given that the process allows managers to find ways to evaluate, address and balance stakeholder demands. In order for the Lao government to realise the AEC. There is a need for the Lao government to engage with its stakeholders effectively, particularly, the Lao businesses. As these findings reveal that the Lao business respondents had a limited understanding regarding the AEC and were not satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate the AEC information to them. Dialogue is a useful and important communication channel that can be used to engage with Lao businesses, so that they can exchange and share ideas regarding the AEC.

5.2.2 Summary of responses from respondents (both Lao officials and Lao businesses) on whether or not effective communication took place

A total of 71 respondents (Lao officials) in MOFA and MOIC and 34 respondents (Lao businesses) in Vientiane wrote their comments on two open-ended questions to express their perspectives and suggestions on effective communication taking place between the Lao

government and its stakeholders. Some comments and suggestions overlap between answers to the two questions as they are written in Chapter Four. They can be summarised below:

- ◆ The respondents expect to have more advertisements concerning the AEC throughout the country for villages, districts and provinces in order to inform stakeholders about the AEC more effectively. The advertisements in the media can be supported by organising seminars for stakeholders and targeted audiences and publicising these to stakeholder groups. New information about the AEC is regularly updated and provided to stakeholders. The related sectors send the updated information about the AEC and the progress of the implementation of the AEC to officials, businesses and general public, especially people in rural areas.
- ◆ Respondents would like to see MOFA and involved ministries organise and support the AEC TV program, ASEAN column on newspapers, publish details of the AEC in business sectors in order to make Lao businesses, and general public understand well about the AEC. The involved parties report and disseminate the AEC information to the people and businesses in detail, particularly import and export businesses. Public relations is a priority work of the government.
- ◆ Respondents would like to see the Lao government implement a strategic plan to improve its economy as well as to improve its SMEs and capacity of workers in order to cope with the upcoming challenges.
- ◆ Respondents would like to see the level of awareness of possible impacts from the AEC to be raised within the Lao business community and general public, by providing more budget for AEC public awareness projects. For instance, AEC magazines, promote the AEC via media such TV, radio, etc. These will help Lao people, government officials and businesses people know and understand more about the AEC.
- ◆ Respondents would like to see the dissemination or communication of the AEC to schools and universities throughout the country (from primary schools to tertiary schools) in order to make students aware of the importance of the AEC.
- ◆ Respondents expect Lao entrepreneurs to learn foreign languages (ASEAN's official language is English) in order to be able to communicate effectively in business dialogues. The government provides free English classes. Lao businesses learn more about the AEC in order to approach the AEC effectively. Lao businesses have solidarity and to work well together. So there is a strong call for more effective communication to be taking place.

The results suggest that most participants do not get much information about the AEC and they also do not know much about the AEC, which appears to be a significant shortcoming in the ASEAN Department communication strategy. Communications is a central theme in stakeholder management, as a tool to engage with the stakeholders and encourage collaboration where there might be conflict of interest, but also to stimulate co-creation. Insights from the public relation literature, especially the communications model introduced by Grunig and Hunt (1984), illustrates different communications strategies depending on the purpose, from pure one-way propaganda to a two-way symmetric communications strategy aimed at creating mutual understanding. Gregory (2007) suggests that while stakeholders should actively participate in the communications process, it does not mean all stakeholders. She rather suggests, based on the power/interest matrix developed by Johnson and Scholes (2002) that the communications strategy will be more effective if tailored for different stakeholder groups.

5.3 Discussion of interviews

5.3.1 The communication channels used by ASEAN Secretariat and Lao stakeholders

The Lao government officials were asked to express their opinion regarding the communication channels used between the participants and the ASEAN Secretariat. These findings revealed that no participants had problems in contacting or coordinating with ASEAN Secretariat. The respondents were satisfied with the way ASEAN Secretariat communicates information to them, especially, communicating via email as it was very effective, convenient and timely. The participants regularly meet ASEAN Secretariat personnel at conferences, they can also update information by visiting the website of the ASEAN Secretariat. However, these qualitative findings contradict the quantitative findings. In the quantitative findings, the results collected from the survey revealed that the majority of the respondents (both Lao officials and Lao businesses) were not satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to them. This means only key Lao government officials who work or are involved with the ASEAN matters were satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate with the ASEAN secretariat. However, the general Lao government officials and Lao businesses still need proper communication channels used to communicate and access the AEC information.

According to Eesley & Lenox (2006) and Freeman (1984), stakeholders are divided into internal and external stakeholders. While Clarkson (1995) divides stakeholders into primary and

secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are in a direct association with the organisation, while secondary stakeholders are not directly associated with the organisation because they lack a formal contractual bond with the organisation or direct legal authority over the organisation (Eesley & Lenox, 2006). The Lao government is a primary and internal stakeholder of ASEAN. Therefore, the communication between ASEAN and the Lao government must be taking place effectively. However, these findings revealed that the communication channels used by the ASEAN Secretariat and the Lao government need more improvement. As Shockley - Zalabak (2009) states that internal communication is the function that is responsible for the effective communication within an organisation, including states. The function of internal communication often deals with the subject matter of daily interactions, the function is planned and formalized communication; prepared and disseminated information by communication professionals to and for internal organisation members.

As Stead & Stead (2000) suggest that through dialogue organisations can create patterns that allow underlying assumptions to be openly brought to the surface and questioned. They add that using dialogue forms the basis for the way an organisation interacts with its internal and external stakeholders. An organisation can implement the process of dialogue to establish communication channels with stakeholders in order to maintain the relationship between the organisation and shareholders (Stead & Stead, 2000). Dialogue is a way of enhancing stakeholder involvement in the decision-making processes and a collaborative means of resolving conflict by exploring diverse viewpoints (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003). Therefore, a dialogue could be used between the ASEAN Secretariat and the Lao government in order to form a way to interact with the issues regarding the AEC.

5.3.2 Communication or dissemination of the AEC information taking place between the Lao government and its stakeholders or involved parties.

The Lao government officials were asked about how they communicate or disseminate the AEC information to Lao stakeholders or involved parties. The results of these findings revealed that the information about the AEC was communicated or disseminated to the involved parties or stakeholders by organising seminars and conferences for targeted audiences such as the related government officials and Lao businesses throughout the country. Lao government has followed the communication plan indicated in the AEC Blueprint, to engage stakeholders and debate the AEC with them. This strategy focuses on dialogue with the business community, government

agencies, academics, and general public in a seminar/workshop format (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b).

According to Shockley – Zalabak (2009), internal communications involve in a wide range of activities through surveys, interviews, and meetings. An organisation’s mission, objectives, strategies, and programs can be communicated through training activities or the preparation and dissemination of newsletters, manuals, and pamphlets. Organisational communicators establish formalised structures to improve the quality and flow of organisational communication, they manage all communication designed to help the organisation achieve its strategic objectives.

Podnar & Jancic (2006) state that stakeholder theory draws attention to dialogue and communication with different stakeholders, and argues that communication is the only way to accomplish understanding and balance between the organisation and stakeholder interests. Cumming (2001) describes dialogue as a two way process of consultation, listening and sharing views between the organisation and everyone that has a legitimate stake in the organisation. According to Kaptein and Van Tulder (2003), using stakeholder dialogue can advance the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders “from one of confrontation and competition to one of consultation and co-operation” (p. 209).

Findings also revealed that Lao media was also a key driver in communicating the AEC information to the involved parties, especially, for the general public. In addition, stakeholders also get the information by another means such as reports from the ministries, websites of the ministries, and other activities. This strategy of the Lao government is consistent with the AEC communication plan which focuses on educating businesses and the general public. The communications of the AEC information are implemented via the media program – in prints such as one-page print advertisements and banner advertisements, on radio spots, PSAs (public service advertisements) on TV, and online (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b).

These qualitative findings are not supported by the results of the quantitative findings. The survey questionnaires (Lao officials and Lao businesses) revealed that the Lao government had problems in engaging and informing Lao officials and Lao business regarding the AEC. The key Lao officials stated that communication or dissemination of the AEC to its stakeholders or the involved parties was their priority work. The Lao government has followed the communication plan indicated in the AEC Blueprint. Nonetheless, they are not being very successful in meeting the information needs of their stakeholders.

These findings are supported by Gibson (2012) and Podar & Jancic (2006) who state that stakeholder awareness is very crucial; therefore, an organization has to recognize the local community and various stakeholder groups in order for mutual benefits to take place. As Casidy (2003) points out an organization will be observed by the society where it is located through various interactions with its stakeholders. They embrace the view that an organization is observed as an entity through a group or a chain of implicit and/or explicit interactions between itself and individuals and other organisations. He adds that organisations are involved in the social system and are forced to enter or exchange interactions with different social subjects. Therefore, the organisation's management must balance different stakeholders' interests and align them with the organisation's strategic goals (Casidy, 2003). In order for the Lao government's strategic goals to be achieved successfully, especially, realising of the AEC, there is a need for the Lao government to raise its stakeholders' awareness and provide them a useful information regarding the AEC. The Lao businesses have played an important role in realising the AEC, so that they need to have a good understanding of the issues.

Both (key Lao government officials and key Lao media persons) were asked to express their understanding regarding the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). The results of these findings revealed that only key Lao government officials who work or are involved with ASEAN matters have a good understanding of the ASEAN's strategic plan, especially, the AEC Blueprint. They stated that they possess a good understanding of the ASEAN mechanism, they understood how to work internationally, particularly, in the ASEAN frameworks, and they have gained knowledge and experiences by attending conferences in various frameworks and contributing to negotiations in both small and big arenas. However, there does appear to be a contradiction that while the key government officials know a lot, they are not communicated with regularly or very well. This also contradicts the quantitative results as the quantitative results of these findings from both groups (Lao officials and Lao businesses) showed that a high percentage of the Lao government officials and Lao businesses only possess a limited understanding of the AEC.

According to Quintanilla and Mallard (2008), there is overwhelming evidence that indicates good communication skills are necessary to being productive and successful in an organisation. Management communication aims at facilitating the orderly operations of the organization. Also, it aims at promoting understanding of an organization's mission, vision, and goals; and to

supply information needed in day-to-day operations, including customer and vendor transactions and customer and staff training (Hallahan et al., 2007).

5.3.3 Barriers and main reasons to effective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) and the feedbacks from the respondents.

The key Lao government officials were asked to comment on barriers and main reasons to effective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). They commented that there are barriers to effective communication. Those barriers include the capability of human resources who do not have experiences and skills in specific fields to explain to audiences well, and the limitation of budget. They added that in order to accomplish the AEC communication plan there is a need for funding from the Lao government and external parties to support the implementation of the AEC communication plan. The limitation of budget is a barrier but it is not the main issue, the main issue is the level of skills and knowledge possessed by the personnel responsible for delivery of the AEC strategy. The respondents would like the Lao government and concerned parties to provide training to communicators, officials and media people in all fields and all levels to ensure effective communication of AEC issues to stakeholders groups. The sectors that are responsible for the communication or dissemination of the plan should gain more support from international sources in order to facilitate the communication practices. Based on ASEAN Secretariat (2008b), a significant element of the funding will need to go toward human resources. Additional communications resources at the ASEAN Member States level, within select Ministries, should be a top priority as soon as the Plan is endorsed and approved. However, there is no evidence to support the respondents' comment. Thus, it is interesting to have more exploration whether or not the limitation of budget and the incapability of human resources are barriers to effective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan.

5.3.4 Lao media practices in communication report of ASEAN information or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)

The key Lao media persons were asked about the frequency and the emphasis of news reports on ASEAN matters or the ASEAN Strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). They stated that the ASEAN or the AEC news are regularly reported every week and on very event by Lao National TV, Lao National Radio, and Lao newspapers. Important activities about ASEAN matters are regularly reported by Lao media such as ASEAN conferences organised in Laos and overseas, the progress

of the implementation of ASEAN community in all three pillars. The reports are focused on important topics of ASEAN conferences, useful laws and policies of ASEAN, interesting topic from papers provided by the Ministries, and the progress of the implementation of the ASEAN community.

When questioned about the main sources of the ASEAN information that they have used for reports, the media stakeholders responded that they collected information from the host of conferences organised in Laos and overseas. They receive hard copies from related ministries and sectors, gather information from the ASEAN Secretariat website, from their foreign news agency partnerships, and foreign media. The related ministries regularly send information to media to report on the ASEAN's vision (the AEC), particularly the ASEAN Department of MOFA and MOIC. The three related ministries (MOFA, MOIC, and MICT) have organised the press conference for media regularly.

The respondents were asked whether they have journalists/reporters who are trained on the political and economic reports or not. It is found that only reporters of Lao National TV are trained on specific areas such as political news, economic news, and social news. However, the two Lao newspaper agencies and the Lao National Radio do not have reporters who are trained in specific fields. The result reveals that Lao media personnel need to develop their professional skills.

When queried about the importance of ASEAN as a new topic for media, the results of these findings revealed that the subject of ASEAN is very important for media, especially as Laos is going to enter into the ASEAN community. The media is recognised by the Lao government as a central communication medium for disseminating information about ASEAN to the citizen.

The respondents were asked whether their reporters have been invited to attend seminars about the ASEAN's vision (the AEC Blueprint) or not. The results of these findings revealed that their reporters have been invited to attend seminars organised by the involved ministries, and mostly in Laos. Overseas, they have attended seminars about other topics, not relating to the AEC. According to ASEAN Secretariat (2008b), one of the aims of the AEC communication plan is to reach out to media across the region on an ongoing basis by organising seminars and press releases for media people from all ASEAN member states in order to educate them on the AEC implementation status and benefits of the AEC.

It is crucial to organisations to remember that they operate within communities, in which they have substantial audiences. Media is one of key audiences of an organisation (Wells and Spinks, 1998). Thus co-operation with the media is essential and the key to succeeding in establishing as well as maintaining relationships with the media. This is all down to communication skills and attitude of individuals. Khodarahmi (2009) states that communication is an art and a science. It is an art because a human being creates and delivers its purpose. It is a science, because we learn and experiment stuff; where we can give solutions to complexities. This is about innovation and creativity as basic principles of gathering the attention of the media for what organisations may have to say to their public. Wells and Spinks (1999) discuss that organisations employ various communication channels to reach their target audience by following “effective communication systems” principles. Bland, Theaker and Wragg (2001) argue that good media relations would contribute to strategic objectives of organisations; in which various channels need to be utilised by organisations for fulfilling their strategic purposes.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter discusses findings from collected data and analysed data results from Chapter Four. The research focused on survey questionnaires from both groups of respondents (Lao officials and Lao businesses), and interviews with key Lao government officials and key Lao media persons. The results from both survey questionnaires and interviews were discussed. It was explicit that there is a contradiction between quantitative and qualitative data. The results of this qualitative findings are not backed up by the results of the quantitative findings. The results of quantitative findings revealed that the majority of the respondents (both Lao officials and Lao businesses) were not satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to them, while only key Lao government officials who work or are involved with the ASEAN matters were satisfied. However, the general Lao government officials and Lao businesses still need appropriate communication channels to be used to communicate and access the AEC information. The responses from survey questionnaires of both Lao officials and Lao businesses also revealed that the Lao government had problems in engaging and informing Lao officials and Lao businesses regarding the AEC. Although, the Lao government has followed the communication plan indicated in the AEC Blueprint, but they are not being very successful in meeting the information needs of their stakeholders.

The research also discusses the role of Lao media in communication for reporting of ASEAN information or the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). According to the results, Lao media has played an important role in communication or dissemination of the AEC to Lao stakeholders. However, human resources within Lao media still need more development.

The following chapter will present the conclusion that includes findings, limitations, future research opportunities, and a closing statement.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

6.1 Research conclusions

This research has focused on the implementation of ASEAN's Vision 2020 strategic plan, particularly, the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint (AEC Blueprint) which is established in order to achieve higher levels of economic dynamism, sustained prosperity, inclusive growth and integrated development of ASEAN. The AEC strategic plan or the AEC Blueprint is created and adopted by the heads of state/government of ten ASEAN member countries. The research examined the stakeholder communication that has taken place between ASEAN Secretariat and the Lao government, and the Lao government and the wider society in order to examine the effectiveness of the communication strategies undertaken as part of the AEC Blueprint strategy.

This research implemented a mixed methodology approach by surveying and interviewing key research participants. The research executed interviews with six key Lao officials who are involved with ASEAN works from the Lao ministries; and four key Lao media persons from Lao newspaper agencies, Lao national TV and Lao National Radio. This research also conducted survey questionnaires with two groups of respondents (Lao officials and Lao businesses). Data collected from key Lao stakeholders was used as evidence to evaluate the communication of implementation of the AEC Blueprint that has taken place with Lao stakeholders. This study is able to provide the following answers to the research questions:

6.1.1 Main research question

How effectively has the ASEAN's strategic plan (AEC Blueprint) been communicated to Lao stakeholders through communication strategies identified in the AEC Blueprint?

The findings clearly indicate that the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) has not been effectively communicated to Lao stakeholders. The Lao government has followed the communication strategies indicated in the AEC Blueprint. However, the Lao government still has problems in engaging and informing Lao officials and Lao business regarding the AEC. Both businesses and the general public feel that communication channels being utilised by the Lao government at present are not effective enough to reach an extensive number of people within

the target audiences. As Freeman (1984) states that an organisation's success depends on creating real dialogue with its diverse stakeholders. Hughes and Demetrious (2006) maintain that dialogue is at the core of stakeholder engagement in order to find ways to evaluate, address and balance stakeholder demands. According to Greenwood (2007), stakeholder engagement is the process of involving individuals and groups that are affected by the activities of the organisation in a positive way; it is a process of consultation, communication, dialogue and exchange. Cumming (2001) points out that stakeholder engagement aims at improving an organisation's social and ethical accountability and performance.

6.1.2 Research question one

How have the Lao government and the ASEAN Secretariat been communicating regarding the AEC matters?

According to the qualitative results, the interview results of six key Lao government officials from the Lao ministries (MOFA, MOIC, and MICT) revealed that the all participants used email to communicate with ASEAN Secretariat regarding the AEC matters. The respondents commented that they are satisfied with the channel (email) used to communicate or coordinate with the ASEAN Secretariat, they stressed that communicating via email was very effective, convenient and timely. The research also revealed that the participants regularly meet ASEAN Secretariat at conferences, they can also update information by visiting the website of the ASEAN Secretariat. However, there is a contradiction between the qualitative findings and the quantitative findings. In the quantitative findings, the results collected from the survey revealed that the majority of the respondents (both Lao officials and Lao businesses) were not satisfied with the communication channels used to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to them.

ASEAN is an Intergovernmental Organisation. It engages with its stakeholders and those individuals and communities that are affected by its policies and projects through forums, committees, conferences and consultations (Neligan et al., 2003). According to the report of Wilang and Teo (2012), the ASEAN Communication Model captivates the dynamic written and/or spoken communication happening between and among member states. Core in the model are the rods that connect all ten-member states within the bloc including the members-in-waiting nations. The numerous rods represent the bilateral and multilateral interaction between and

among ASEAN member nations. Bilateral communication occurs when two countries come together to negotiate on a certain treaty and/or agreement. Meanwhile, multilateral interaction usually happens annually during the ASEAN Summit when all the government heads of member states assemble for a retreat. Outside this web are instances where bilateral and/or multilateral communications occur.

6.1.3 Research question two

How has the Lao government been communicating or disseminating information about the AEC to its stakeholders (ASEAN related government officials and Lao business community, and general public)?

The results of these findings revealed that the Lao government has been communicating or disseminating the information about the AEC to the involved parties or stakeholders by organising seminars and conferences for targeted audiences. The Lao government has followed the communication plan indicated in the AEC Blueprint, to engage stakeholders and debate the AEC with them. This strategy focuses on dialogue with the business community, government agencies, academics, and general public in a seminar/workshop format (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b). As Stead & Stead (2000) suggest that through dialogue organisations can create patterns that allow underlying assumptions to be openly brought to the surface and questioned. They add that using dialogue as the basis for the way an organisation interacts with its internal and external stakeholders. An organisation can implement the process of dialogue to establish communication channels with stakeholders in order to maintain the relationship between the organisation and shareholders (ibid).

The findings also revealed that the Lao government has been using media as a key driver in communicating the AEC information to the involved parties, especially, for the general public. Example of Lao media tools used in communicating the AEC information include Lao National TV, Lao National Radio, Lao newspapers, and Lao magazines. This strategy of the Lao government is consistent with the AEC communication plan which focuses on educating businesses and the general public. The communications of the AEC information are implemented via the media program – in prints such as one-page print advertisements and banner advertisements, on radio spots, PSAs (public service advertisements) on TV, and online

(ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b). In addition, stakeholders also get the information by another means such as reports from the ministries, websites of the ministries, and other activities.

6.1.4 Research question three

What challenges has the Lao government faced in communicating with or connecting to its stakeholders?

According to the interviews with six key Lao government officials regarding the barriers and main reasons to effective communication of the Lao government in communication or dissemination the AEC information to its stakeholders, the respondents commented that the Lao government has faced challenges in communicating the AEC information to its stakeholders. The challenges include the inefficiency of capability of human resources who have experiences and skills in specific fields to explain to audiences well, and the limitation of budget. They added that the limitation of budget is a barrier but it is not the main issue, the main issue is the inefficiency of capability of human resources who have ability to get the right message to the right target groups. According to (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008b), a significant element of the funding will need to go toward human resources. Additional communications resources at the ASEAN Member States level, and within selected Ministries, should be a top priority as soon as the Plan is endorsed and approved. However, there is no evidence to support the respondents' comment. Therefore, it is interesting to explore whether or not the limitation of budget and the incapability of human resources are barriers to effective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan.

6.1.5 Research question four

Has the communication strategy of the Lao government been effective in meeting information needs of its stakeholders?

The findings revealed that the Lao government has applied the communication strategies indicated in the AEC communication plan. For example, the Lao government organised the AEC seminars or workshop for targeted audiences such as business community, officials, academics, and general public. The Lao government also used media to communicate or disseminate the AEC information to the involved parties and Lao citizen. Even though, the Lao government has followed the communication plan indicated in the AEC Blueprint, they are not being very successful in meeting information needs of its stakeholders. The research has also found that the

results of the qualitative findings are not backed up by the results of the quantitative findings. The responses from survey questionnaires (Lao officials and Lao businesses) showed that the Lao government had problems in engaging and informing Lao officials, Lao business, and the general public regarding the AEC.

The findings has also found that only key Lao government officials who are involved with ASEAN works understand well about the ASEAN's strategic plan, especially, the AEC Blueprint. However, the research revealed that there is a high percentage of Lao government officials and Lao businesses that do not have much of an understanding of the AEC or have a limited understanding of the AEC. Based on Quintanilla and Mallard (2008), there is overwhelming evidence that indicates good communication skills are necessary to being productive and successful in an organisation. Management communication aims at facilitating the orderly operations of the organization, it also aims to promote understanding of an organization's mission, vision, and goals. According the findings, there is a need for the Lao government, particularly, the involved ministries to reconsider and improve their communication strategies in order to communicate or disseminate their vision (the AEC) to their stakeholders more effectively.

6.1.6 Research question five

What has been the experience of Lao media in communication report of the AEC?

Lao media has played an important role in communicating the report of the AEC. The findings revealed that the ASEAN or the AEC news is regularly reported every week and in events by Lao National TV, Lao National Radio, and Lao newspapers. Important activities about ASEAN matters are regularly reported by Lao media such as ASEAN conferences organised in Laos and overseas, the progress of the implementation of ASEAN community in all three pillars.

The information about ASEAN was collected from the host of conferences organised in Laos and overseas, hard copies from related ministries and sectors, from the ASEAN Secretariat website, from their foreign news agency partnerships, and foreign media. The related ministries have regularly sent information to media to report on the ASEAN's vision (the AEC), particularly the ASEAN Department of MOFA and MOIC. The three related ministries (MOFA, MOIC, and MICT) have organised the press conference for media regularly. ASEAN topic is very important

for media, especially, Laos is going to enter into ASEAN Community. The media is recognised by the Lao government as a central communication medium for disseminating information about ASEAN to the citizen.

Lao reporters have been invited to attend seminars organised by the involved ministries, and mostly in Laos. Overseas, they have attended seminars about other topics, but not the AEC. According to ASEAN Secretariat (2008b), one of the aims of the AEC communication plan is to reach out to media across the region on an ongoing basis by organising seminars and press releases for media people from all ASEAN member states in order to educate them on the AEC implementation status and benefits of the AEC. Bland, Theaker and Wragg (2001) argue that good media relations would contribute to strategic objectives of organisations. Various channels need to be utilised by organisations for fulfilling their strategic purposes. As Young (1984) suggests, the media network is an opportunity to every organisation to communicate information to the public. Thus, well established media relations offer organisations and businesses a higher exposure to the public and community. Zikmund and D'Amico (1995) argue that press releases create a favourable image in the public minds that would benefit the long-term strategic vision of an organisation.

6.2 Limitations

All research has limitations associated with the processes involved and this study also has limitations. During the research process the study revealed several limitations although both quantitative and qualitative approaches were chosen for this study. For the quantitative approach, the research conducted only survey questionnaires with government officials in ministerial level (MOFA and MOIC), and Lao businesses in Vientiane Capital, because of the limited time frame. It would have been useful if the researcher could have conducted some survey questionnaires with Lao government officials and Lao businesses in provinces, as such results would have brought different perspectives about the AEC communication practices.

According to Collis and Hussey (2009) a quantitative approach may make it difficult to identify whether a question has been misinterpreted or ambiguous because the researcher is separate from 100 of the subjects being researched. As a result, this researcher may have collected some inaccurate data. In conducting the survey questionnaires from officials in MOFA and MOIC and Lao businesses in Vientiane, some questions had not been answered, for example, open-ended

questions were left out by respondents in these banks. This missing information affects the analysis outcomes.

6.3 Future research opportunities

The researcher would like to recommend that future research study should conduct and collect data with a larger base of Lao stakeholders at provincial level (Lao officials and Lao businesses). This would either support or challenge the findings of this study and contribute to different perspectives from Lao provincial stakeholders.

In essence, the Lao government could apply the findings to improve its communication strategies in order to communicate or disseminate the information about the AEC to its involved parties or stakeholders more effectively.

Finally, the researcher would like to stress that further study should address that missing perspective, such as gathering data with a larger base from provincial stakeholders. This would give contrasts and comparisons to the findings of this study thus providing a wider range of perspectives. In addition, the future research should find out whether or not the limitation of budget and the incapability of human resources are barriers to effective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint).

6.4 Closing statement

The overall level of understanding regarding the AEC for both Lao officials, Lao businesses and general public is still low because of a general lack of interest existing alongside an ineffective use of the available communication channels. However, it is useful to note that the overall perception and attitude of Lao stakeholders towards the AEC is positive. Most Lao stakeholders believe that the integration will bring a brighter future both economically and mentally.

Key challenges for the Lao government for future effective communication include more frequent intervals of communication for promotional activities, selecting the right message to the right target group, and ensuring that the appropriate channels are used for each communication message. Businesses feel that currently there are not enough promotional activities available to stimulate interest and awareness through the media. Part of this is probably due to messages not

being specifically created for that specific group. Business people prefer to have clear specific messages about ASEAN economic issues delivered to them. They feel that they are more familiar with these matters in which the impacts are more directly related to their everyday life. In addition, both businesses and the general public feel that communication channels being utilised by the Lao government at present are not effective enough to reach an extensive number of people within the target audience. This results in the low awareness about the AEC amongst Lao stakeholders.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The semi-structured interview questions



SEMI-STRUCTURE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE RESEARCH

All participants' comments will not be personally identified or reported back to organisations. Additionally, all information that I collect from participants will also be treated confidentially. Participants have the right to either withdraw from interviews without consequence and/or to review transcripts as well as access to the final report.

Questions for interviewing key Lao stakeholders (Lao Ministries)

1. How long have you been working regarding to ASEAN matters?
2. How frequently do you communicate with the ASEAN Secretariat?
3. How do you communicate with the ASEAN Secretariat?
4. What kind of training have you received about ASEAN?
5. How well do you understand the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)?
6. Do you think that the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) will be beneficial or not?
7. What has been your experience so far of working for ASEAN?
8. What is the current state of the implementation of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)?
9. What is your opinion about the way ASEAN Secretariat communicates information to you?
10. How do you communicate or disseminate the information about the AEC the involved parties?
11. What is the role of ministries to communicate the ASEAN's vision to the citizen?
12. Are the ministries responsible for disseminating information to the citizen?
13. Do you think there are any barriers to effective communication?
14. What are the main reasons for ineffective communication of the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)? Why? How to address these issues?

Questions for interviewing key Lao stakeholders (Lao media)

1. How often do you report on ASEAN matters?
2. What do you report on ASEAN matters?
3. Where is the emphasis?
4. Where do you get the information from?
5. What are your main sources of information?
6. Do you have journalists/reporters who are trained on the political and economic reports?
7. How important do you think ASEAN is a new topic for media?
8. Have you reported on the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)?
9. Have your journalists/reporters been invited by the Lao ministries or ASEAN to attend seminars about the ASEAN vision (the AEC)?
10. Do the ministries send you the information to report on the ASEAN vision?
11. Do the ministries organise press conference on the ASEAN vision?
12. How well do you understand about the ASEAN's strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint)?
13. Who are you targeted groups/main audiences?

Appendix 2: The research questionnaire (Lao officials)



Survey Questionnaire for Lao officials

Topic: “Strategic stakeholder communication within international organization: The case of ASEAN and the implementation of the ASEAN’s strategic plan”

Instruction: please tick (✓) in the most suitable answer for you

GENERAL QUESTION

1. Please indicate your gender

- Male
- Female

2. Please indicate your working experience with the Lao government

- Less than 1 year
- 2 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11- 15 years
- More than 16 years

3. What is your highest level of education?

- Diploma
- Bachelor degree
- Master degree
- Doctoral degree
- Others (please specify).....

COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

4. How often do you receive information about the AEC from the ASEAN Department?

- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Every two weeks
- Once a month
- Others (please specify).....

5. How do you receive information about the AEC from the ASEAN Department?

- Hard copies
- E-mail
- Fax
- Others (please specify).....

6. To what extent are you satisfied with channels that the ASEAN Department communicates or disseminates the information about the AEC to you?

- Not at all
- To a limited extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a considerable extent
- To a great extent

7. Have you ever been invited to attend seminars about the AEC?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please tick the place where you have attended

- () In Laos
- () In overseas

() Others (please specify).....

Who organized the seminars?

() Ministry of Foreign Affairs

() Ministry of Industry and Commerce

() ASEAN Secretariat

() Others (please specify).....

8. Please rate your understanding on the AEC?

Full understanding

Somewhat understand

Neutral understand

Poor understanding

Not at all understand

9. From your perspective, please rate the importance of the AEC to the following.

(1 = least important, 2 = somewhat least important, 3 = neutral important, 4 somewhat important, 5 very important)

	1	2	3	4	5
For All ASEAN member states	O	O	O	O	O
For the Lao government	O	O	O	O	O
For businesses and investors	O	O	O	O	O
For Lao people in general	O	O	O	O	O

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

10. From your experiences, what is your greatest concern about the implementation of the AEC?

.....
.....
.....
.....

11. Do you have any recommendations?

.....
.....
.....
.....

(Thank you very much for the time devoted to answering the questionnaire. Your contribution to this survey is greatly appreciated.)



Survey Questionnaire for Lao businesses

Topic: “Strategic stakeholder communication within international organization: The case of ASEAN and the implementation of the ASEAN’s strategic plan”

Instruction: please tick (✓) in the most suitable answer for you

GENERAL QUESTION

1. Please indicate your gender

- Male
- Female

2. Please indicate your business working experience

- Less than 1 year
- 2 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11- 15 years
- More than 16 years

3. What is sector is your business located in?

- Agriculture
- Services
- Finance
- Retail
- Others (please specify).....

COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

4. Which source of information about the AEC is the most useful for you?

Please rate (1 = least useful, 2 = somewhat least useful, 3 = neutral useful, 4 = somewhat useful, 5= very useful)

	1	2	3	4	5
TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online sources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hard copy from ministries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. How do you get information about the AEC?

- TV
- Radio
- Newspapers
- Websites
- Business colleagues
- Others (please specify).....

6. To what extent are you satisfied with channels that the AEC is communicated to you?

- Not at all
- To a limited extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a considerable extent
- To a great extent

7. Have you ever been invited to attend seminars about the AEC?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please tick the place where you have attended

() In Laos

() In overseas

() Others (please specify).....

Who organized the seminars?

() Ministry of Foreign Affairs

() Ministry of Industry and Commerce

() ASEAN Secretariat

() Others (please specify).....

8. Please rate your understanding of the purpose of the AEC?

Full understanding

Somewhat understand

Neutral understand

Poor understanding

Not at all understand

9. Please rate the importance of the AEC to you and your business. (1 = least important, 2 = somewhat least important, 3 = neutral important, 4 somewhat important, 5 very important)

	1	2	3	4	5
For business	O	O	O	O	O

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

10. From your experiences, what is your greatest concern about the implementation of the AEC?

.....
.....
.....
.....

11. Do you have any recommendations to help the AEC communicate effectively with businesses?

.....
.....
.....
.....

(Thank you very much for the time devoted to answering the questionnaire. Your contribution to this survey is greatly appreciated.)

Appendix 4: Participant consent form



Participant consent form: interview

“Strategic stakeholder communication within international organisation: The case of ASEAN, Laos and the implementation of the ASEAN’s strategic plan”

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understood the information sheet given to me. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand that I do not need to be a part of this research if I do not wish to. Participating in this research is voluntary and there are no obligations attached.

I understand that every word I say is confidential and all information I provide will not identify my name or be reported back to my organisation as individual feedback. The only persons who know what I have said will be the researcher and his supervisors.

I understand that my discussions with the researcher will be recorded and transcribed into written content by the researcher.

I understand that I can ask the researcher to give me a copy of the transcript of my interview to check.

I understand that I can ask the researcher to send me a soft copy of the finished research document.

I have had time to consider this research in detail and I give my consent to be a part of this research

Participant Name:

Participant Signature: Date:

Researcher Name: Mr. Ongkane Sombounkhanh

Researcher Signature: Date:

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (insert number here)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 5: Information for potential participants for the semi-structured interviews



INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

“Strategic stakeholder communication within international organisation: The case of ASEAN, Laos and the implementation of the ASEAN’s strategic plan”

My name is Ongkane Sombounkhanh. I am currently enrolled in Master of International Communication programme in the School of Communication Studies at Unitec New Zealand.

The aim of my project is to evaluate the ongoing practices at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry and Commerce regarding the implementation and communication of the ASEAN’s strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) to their stakeholders. This project will also evaluate the Lao media which have been the bridge between the Lao government and the Lao people pertaining to the AEC awareness.

I would like to interview you and ask some questions related to the implementation of the ASEAN’s strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint). I really appreciate your kind support to allow me to meet you for about 30 minutes to one hour to discuss about questions on the interview schedule. I will visit your organisation at a reasonable time as prearranged between us.

All your comments will not be personally identified or reported back to your organisation. Additionally, all information that I collect from you will also be treated confidentially. Thank you very much for participating to complete this interview that will not take longer than one hour.

If you agree to participate in this study, please kindly complete the consent and return it to a sealed box that the researcher will leave in the staff room and the researcher will collect it later. This does not stop you from changing your decision if you wish to withdraw from the project. You can withdraw all information from the study up to one week after you have had the transcript.

If you have further queries about the research, please feel free to contact my primary supervisor at Unitec, New Zealand, Ms Deborah Rolland, Tel +64 9 815 4321 ext 8361, Fax +64 9 815 4330 or email drolland@unitec.ac.nz. My secondary supervisor Dr Giles Dodson, Tel +64 9 815 4321 ext 8798, or email gdodson@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2013 - 1064

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 05/09/2013 to 30/06/2014. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 6: Information for potential participants for the survey questionnaires



INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS: SURVEY

“Strategic stakeholder communication within international organisation: The case of ASEAN, Laos and the implementation of the ASEAN’s strategic plan”

My name is Ongkane Sombounkhanh. I am currently enrolled in Master of International Communication programme in the School of Communication Studies at Unitec New Zealand.

The aim of my project is to evaluate the ongoing practices at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Industry and Commerce regarding the implementation and communication of the ASEAN’s strategic plan (the AEC Blueprint) to their stakeholders. This project will also evaluate the Lao media which have been the bridge between the Lao government and the Lao people pertaining to the AEC awareness.

I would like to seek your help in completing this survey regarding the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community (the AEC). I really appreciate your kind support to fill this survey questionnaire; this will approximately take 10 minutes to finish. Thank you.

Appendix 7: Permission letters for conducting survey from the Ministries (MOFA and MOIC)



Lao People's Democratic Republic

Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Permanent Secretary

ORGANISATIONAL CONSENT

I, Mr Sayakane Sisouvong, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR give consent for Mr Ongkane Sombounkanh to undertake research in this organisation as discussed with the researcher.

The consent is subject to approval of research ethics application no **2013-1064** by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee and a copy of the approval letter being forwarded to the organisation as soon as possible.

Signature:



Date: 20/8/13

Sayakane SISOUVONG



Lao People's Democratic Republic
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

Ministry of Industry and Commerce

Cabinet

ORGANISATIONAL CONSENT

I, Mr Boumy MANIVONG, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Lao PDR give consent for Mr Ongkane Sombounkanh to undertake research in this organisation as discussed with the researcher.

The consent is subject to approval of research ethics application no **2013-1064** by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee and a copy of the approval letter being forwarded to the organisation as soon as possible.

Signature: 
Date: **Boumy MANIVONG**

27 AUG 2013