

## CHAPTER 5

### OTHER PERSPECTIVES OF THE SYSTEM

#### 5.1 LOGOS AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM

In current capitalistic communities there are inequalities in the distribution of power and goods and these are reflected in the structure of the web of network within each organisation. Within this structure, there are features which sustain domination, and further the interests of those in power. However, in any discourse community it is common knowledge that there is also a need to sustain bonds of solidarity. Therefore ideologies and mission statements and various other community initiated instruments exist to foster and sustain relationships of both power and solidarity.

The existence of instruments of both domination and solidarity in Perdana represent it as having a social order that simultaneously serves the interests of the dominant and the dominated. The components of this relationship between the dominant and dominated are realised in permitted or required behaviours, ways of communication, and so on. For example, in the daily running of the organisation, every producer of a message in the organisation relies on the recipient for it to function as intended. This, therefore, implies that

all members especially the recipients in the organisation have common knowledge and information as to how to receive and perceive the messages.

### 5.1.1 LOGOS AS THE LOGONOMIC SYSTEM

The system Logos, acts as the control mechanism regulating messages as required by the dominant group or those in power. The messages or documents and the way they should be received and responded to have been pre determined by the system and by those in power. In this sense, the system Logos can be termed as the logonomic system of this discourse community. As defined by Hodge & Kress, a logonomic system is:

a set of rules prescribing the condition for production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities (how, when, why ( Hodge & Kress 1988:4).

Thus logonomic systems like Logos, inform and prescribe the behaviour as condoned by those in control at the points of production and reception. One of the functions of Logos is to ensure that rules are taught and followed, and sets of texts or genres that would and should arise as a result of interaction are prescribed, or pre - determined, to ensure the smooth running and maintenance of the organisation. These genres are very transparent and therefore soon regarded as common knowledge and become the taken for granted forms of daily or routine functions within the company. Since these genres are made very transparent, members are fully aware of their purpose, and role.

Members are not ambiguous or obscure about the genres and their own functions and ways to interact and respond to such genres within the community.

Logos has rules that constrain forms of texts, discourse and behaviour. It prescribes specific genres ( in relation to producer, consumer, occasion, goods and medium ). These genres, then control behaviour in the sense that both producer and consumer of the text are fully aware of what to expect in terms of genre, the information in the genres and their own behaviour in relation to these. Thus, the logonomic system Logos would have achieved its purpose of prescribing and enforcing the accepted ways of behaving in particular social occasions in the business community.

Viewed this way, Logos has taken into consideration the meanings and interests of both the dominant and dominated because in this case the dominated know exactly what to do and how to react therefore avoiding complications like miscommunication which arise when roles and positions are undefined and vague. The members in this discourse community, seem to like or at least seem to readily accept their prescribed behaviour. To put it plainly in the jargon of the community investigated, they say that, "the system makes life easy." On the other hand, such acceptance ensures the continued dominance of those in power as the dominated are unaware that they have been manipulated or have been kept in line through the very same communication network which has made life easy.

While technology has flattened hierarchy and promoted greater networking and communication channels, this same technology has

given an inherent sense of power to the owners of the company. Since the holding company is basically managed by the founders or owners of the company, henceforth, I shall refer to the leadership in the holding company, and the owners of holding company, as one and the same. The holding company has managed to maintain and sustain its ideology through Logos. Ideology is understood as in Scollon & Scollon:

a system of thinking, social practice, and communication which is used either to bring a particular group to social power or to legitimate their position of social power (Scollon & Scollon 1995:119).

Logos is the key to the success of the company. In a sense it is the embodiment of the ideological position of the holding company and Logos is maintained solely to perpetuate the objectives and believes of the holding company. Logos does this by making institutionalised accepted norms of discourse very transparent to users or members within the community, especially to those in the middle rung and below in the hierarchy. These people look at the prescribed norms as routine and do not question its existence thus the system has succeeded in reinforcing and ensuring that participants play the game according to the rules dictated. Logos directs the members in all that they have to know or do to participate in this community and everyone in the company soon becomes very dependent on Logos for every move they make in the daily running of their tasks, functions and roles. This dependence on technology and the creation of a technology culture by the community makes it difficult for outsiders to gate crash into the culture. The system assures the maintenance of the norms of discourse approved by the holding company thus ensuring the



continued subtle dominance of the holding company over all its subsidiaries.

### 5.1.2 LOGOS AS A PANOPTICON

Logos of Perdana is similar in concept to Bentham's "Panopticon". Bentham was extremely concerned with efficiency and he developed this concept called Panopticon. The concept is well explained by Bentham and the original definition is reproduced here:

This was a structure in which one person could survey and control the work or activities of many individuals. In his ideal Panopticon the observer would be located in the centre surrounded by a ring of cells in which each individual could be seen by the observer in the centre ( Bentham in Scollon & Scollon 1995:112).

In Perdana, Logos is conceptually placed at the centre and it controls all the companies (subsidiaries) involved with Perdana. ( Refer chapter four )The people concerned with the maintenance of the holding company can at once view what all the subsidiary companies are up to: their profits, losses, the way they run their business, the people involved, the relevant communications engaged in their day to day activities, etc. In fact, almost all and everything one needs to know, or wants to know about these subsidiary companies can be retrieved through the system. This information is of course available to only a select few. At the same time, the subsidiary companies can make use of the Panopticon's ( my use of it as a noun) expertise in every aspect of their working environment. These mechanisms include using its expertise in writing out an invoice to helping to write the annual end-of-year audit report. The possibilities within this system are now are

endless, and promises more possibilities in the future. The relationship between Logos, the employees, and the employer is symbiotic, but the bottom line is that it is biased towards the parent company. It gives the holding company the power to streamline all the subsidiary business involvements and the profits they make. With Logos, communication becomes focussed and directed with one or few people controlling the activities of many.

Most communication and interaction with the parent company is hierarchical, yet the parent company carries out and responds to the communication with compassion and consideration as is usually done in a family unit where the parent can take a child to task because of the vested interest of the parent to ensure the success of the child. In this case the Panopticon - Logos, ensures success by making provisions to ensure that the child, in this case the subsidiary company, is well schooled in the culture and ideology by providing everything necessary to ensure success in this enculturation process. Some of the ways logos does this is by providing online help functions and also hands on in-house training. Corporate systems like this are purposive in the sense that they are set up with the purpose of achieving certain goals of which making profit for the owners is the main objective - the *raison d'être* for the existence of the company.

## **5.2 LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION OF LOGOS**

Linguistically, Logos is a paradigmatic system from which syntagmatic structures for most forms of communication within this discourse community can be called upon by members. The system is

complete with its own register, set of genres and also lexico-grammatical features that allow one to tap the system for preferred communication and at the same time ( within limits ) allows individualised creative use of syntagmatic structures. For example, members can tap the system when they need to fill in a purchase order, or a sales order or to write a brief report for a particular purpose related to the social process within the company. The paradigmatic system within Logos can be viewed as the discourse system of the Perdana business community.

### **5.2..1. LOGOS -THE DISCOURSE SYSTEM**

Linguistically, any discourse system is an activity system in which all kinds of social interactions take place. The human is a social animal and his/her linguistic ability is the social tool necessary to engage socially in the community she/he is in. Logos can be described as having a discourse system in the linguistic sense based on the four characteristics described by ( Scollon & Scollon, 1995:165). The four characteristics are tabulated below:

- (i) Members hold a common ideological position and recognise a set of extra - discourse features which define them as a group.
- (ii) Socialisation is accomplished primarily through these preferred forms of discourse.
- (iii) A set of preferred forms of discourse serves as banners or symbols of membership and identity.
- (iv) Face relationships are prescribed for discourse among members or between members and outsiders.

According to Scollon & Scollon, if the four characteristics are present, one can confirm that Logos has a discourse system as the term is understood linguistically. The characteristics and related issues in relation to Logos are discussed below.

## **5.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS**

### **5.2.2.1. CHARACTERISTIC ONE: MEMBERS HOLD A COMMON IDEOLOGICAL POSITION AND RECOGNISE A SET OF EXTRA - DISCOURSE FEATURES WHICH DEFINE THEM AS A GROUP**

Logos, set up by the holding company, can be referred to as a voluntary system in that it is goal directed and has been set up for a specific purpose, in this case, bringing a greater profit to the holding company. It is a self-conscious ideology because it has been created specifically to accomplish a set of tasks that have been identified as necessary for effectiveness and survival by the holding company. In other words, within Logos is a set of values that overtly or covertly guide and mediate the operations and processes that are necessary for making effective decisions in the daily running of the organisation. The operations available in Logos are processes that are controlled, purposive and value laden. Logos is manipulated carry out the wishes and aspirations of the holding company.

All the subsidiary companies within this holding company are aware of the parent company and its power over them. They are aware as to how to behave in this community through the enculturation process created by Logos. The Perdana discourse community has access to the special discourse, genres, which have been specially defined and individualised for them by Logos. They are aware of the

ethos of the community becomes it is subtly indoctrinated during socialisation through the system. Thus, we can say that all the members in this community have a common ideology and in addition, Logos has made available to the community, special or extra discourse features for specific uses. Each subsidiary may have a further set of discourse features specifically fine tuned for their personalised individual needs and these can be perceived as within group variations or dialects.

#### 5.2.2.2. CHARACTERISTIC TWO: SOCIALISATION IS ACCOMPLISHED PRIMARILY THROUGH THESE PREFERRED FORMS OF DISCOURSE.

To ensure socialisation and enculturation, the holding company had representatives from the various subsidiary companies sit together as a team and be part of the process of setting up Logos. The various representatives were trained or socialised into the system, initially through tutorials and workshops. This is the first line of socialisation through the system was for the various key personnel throughout the community. Having trained the various key personnel of the subsidiaries, these people are sent back to their respective companies and they, in turn, train staff under them hands on the system itself. It is a self-reinforcing system in that one learns how to be an effective member by learning through the system the ways to use the prescribed forms of discourse generated by the system. The system prompts the member each step of the way in the early days of enculturation and as time goes by, the help function is weaned off and the social processes become automatic and routine.

One becomes socialised or enculturation takes place when one can competently use the forms of discourse and genres generated by

the system. In other words, one learns the ropes while on the job through the system. Various training programs at various levels in the hierarchy as well as at various departments are carried on regularly to socialise the members. One is then left to work directly on the system and progress through a period of apprenticeship or hands on practice is continued until dependence is weaned off. Thus, one can say that socialisation is achieved through preferred forms of discourse generated by the system, and the preferred training style through Logos.

5.2.2.3. CHARACTERISTIC THREE: A SET OF PREFERRED FORMS OF DISCOURSE SERVES AS BANNERS OR SYMBOLS OF MEMBERSHIP AND IDENTITY.

Logos has been programmed to churn out or produce a preferred way of writing in terms of genres and discourse for the community. For example, there are standardised genres for various processes carried out by all the subsidiaries. There is commonality in the genres with the community but Logos does allow for some individualised variations by each subsidiary within the general framework. In other words, an element of intertextuality runs horizontally as well as vertically across all writing done by this discourse community. This intertextuality glues the activity hub to the various roles the changing genres play in the unfolding of the social processes of this community.

For example, a letter of credit will have all the content available within Logos. All subsidiaries writing a letter of credit will use the same content churned out by the system, yet the moves may be

switched around in various permutations or sequence according to the personal needs of each subsidiary company. At the same time, elements or aspects of this letter of credit will also be found in other genres or texts, for example in the invoice and in the delivery order. Members will readily recognise the aspects of the letter of credit that are also found in the invoice. Thus, all members utilising Logos will recognise not only the variations to the letter of credit but also the relevant or transparent aspects of the letter that are repeated in the invoice. That is how the principle of intertextuality works horizontally and vertically.

To quote another example, all e-mail within the company have been pre-formatted not only in terms of classification of genre but also in terms of priority within the discourse community. (All e-mail is ranked on a five point scale ranging from urgent to bulk in descending order of priority). Thus, every member when using the system will have a uniform perception and conception of the genre and the priority sequence when using their e-mail for internal communication. However, this does not mean rigidity because there is the possibility for individualised idiosyncratic writing. Official communication becomes very transparent within the organisation. Finally Logos generates all the genres necessary for the smooth running of the organisation and one need not really move out of the system for information, facts, history etc. when writing any document related to the daily running of the organisation. (Refer Appendix 1 for examples of intertextuality in genres). These preferred genres and forms of discourse serve as banners of identity and membership within the community. The organisation, its members and the system are in a symbiotic relationship. Each one needs the other for effective

functioning of the day to day activities and each one is just as crucial to the survival of the company.

5.2.2.4. CHARACTERISTIC FOUR: FACE RELATIONSHIPS ARE PRESCRIBED FOR DISCOURSE AMONG MEMBERS OR BETWEEN MEMBERS AND OUTSIDERS.

Logos has pre-determined ways of how the subsidiary companies communicate with the holding company. All subsidiary companies have lease lines to access corporate data but not everyone can have unlimited access all the data. Some information is denied to some members of a company. There are protocols and gate keeping measures to ensure that the correct and approved forms of discourse are followed when communicating not only with the holding company, but also between companies as well. This is to ensure continuity, regularity and control. There are also measures to ensure that some information is denied between departments within a company as well. Outsiders cannot gain access into Logos because they do not have the password. It would be possible to gain access into Logos, by hacking, but this is not considered in this study as legitimate because the activity is illegal and considered a crime.

Logos ensures that only information which has been pre determined is made available through a process of gate keeping. Thus, non members or peripheral members do not have access to privileged information. These measures ensure that face relationships or pre determined forms of communication are followed because they have been programmed into the system. The enculturation activities



involving all new comers ensures that face relationships are maintained, practiced and followed. All members within this society have internalised the face relationships because it is crucial for survival and acceptance within the society. They know their roles, positions and expected behaviour thus, ensuring that face relationships are maintained and perpetuated when carrying out the social processes of the community.

All these four characteristics, defined by Scollon & Scollon are present in Logos and these confirm that Logos can be regarded as the discourse system of the Perdana business community.

### **5.3 OTHER SEMIOTIC SYSTEMS**

The other semiotic systems mentioned in this chapter are based on a detailed study of one of the subsidiary companies of Perdana. However, visits to the other subsidiaries, as well as the headquarters, confirmed that the observations made in this subsidiary were also present to lesser or greater degrees throughout the Perdana discourse community.

#### **5.3.1 SPACE OUTSIDE THE OFFICE BUILDING**

Technology has flattened hierarchy in this community and inherent in that assumption is the notion that hierarchy does not play a very important role in the organisation. Yet hierarchy though silent is obvious when anyone comes within the vicinity of the company. The first thing that strikes a visitor is the car park and the cars in it. It is

common practice within this discourse community to reward members in high positions with company cars. The make or brand of the company car given to the various positions in the company reflect the importance of that person in the hierarchy. The top positions get a Mercedes, next in line get Honda Accords and the ones below that get Protons. The car allocated is an indication of their positions and power within the company. The higher the position the more expensive the car. The fleet of cars that greet the visitor to the company is the real reflection of the hierarchy and power play in the company whatever else the organisational chart of the company may indicate.

In addition to the type of car a person drives, there are also other indications of power in the car park. For example, people with the most power have reserved carpark bays closest to the office and, generally, directly in front of the main building. People with lesser power have reserved carpark bays as well but not as close to the building as those with more power. People further down the hierarchy may be given carpark bays, but these are not reserved but are general parking bays for all employees. To ensure that no one else parks in the spaces of the powerful, sometimes the car registration number is written down in the bay and sometimes there are other indications like boards that instruct that the space is specifically reserved for a particular position. Guards on duty ensure that the space is sacrosanct by not allowing anyone to park in these lots even if the lots be vacant because the legitimate owner is away, out of the country. The carpark power play ensure the silent acknowledgment of the powerful and their continued dominance. In addition to carpark bays, drivers or chauffeurs are provided for the more powerful higher up the hierarchy. So, even if one is ignorant of the organisational chart of the company, if a member

has an expensive company car and a driver too, one can safely assume that the person concerned is indeed powerful in the organisation. Thus, the apparent flattened hierarchy brought about by technology cannot hide the obvious power, politics, and status visible in the carpark.

### **5.3.2 SPACE INSIDE THE OFFICE BUILDING**

The distribution and allocation of space inside the company is another indication of the power hierarchy. It appears on the surface that the company has applied the Japanese open concept in terms of office design and it gives the impression that the company is not bureaucratic. All employees of a division are housed on the same floor with low partitions to separate various work groups. However, all managers have rooms completely to themselves. Their office space is walled with glass and their territory is clearly demarcated and is very visible. The fact that these managers have a room to themselves indicates that they have more power than the rest seated outside in the open space of the office. The open space is not only occupied by the clerical pool but also by assistant managers and other officers. Members are grouped according to job functions. The secretaries of the managers are stationed outside each door to act as screens filtering visitors and all in coming communication.

However, in this community, members are free to enter the room and speak to the managers without making appointments as the managers are willing and ready to speak to anyone if there is a problem, be it personal or professional. In this sense, the managers do practice an open door policy and are very approachable. Their power and status is certainly displayed by the allocation of office space. In addition, after office hours the doors of all the managers' offices are

locked and no one is allowed to enter the office. All other members do not have enclosed spaces. This dichotomy is extremely interesting because the open door policy practised still does not blur the actual power of those high up the hierarchy. Besides that, personnel in the open space share telephones but managers not only have their own telephones inside their offices but their secretaries outside their office also manage a telephone on their behalf to sieve out and manage communication. Members within the group are aware of these subtleties.

#### 5.4. SYSTEM ACCESS

While Logos manages the activities and logistics to run the discourse community, inbuilt in the system are certain features of control that are not always obvious to all members. For example, each employee is given a code or password to tap into the system to carry out her/his functions in the organisation. With the code is also mapped the areas within the system that she/he may have access to. Different people within the organisation have different access to the system depending on their job functions and power. There is only limited access into the system. This is one level of denial or maintenance of power by the holding company. Besides that, because one can only access the system with a code, if a person enters into areas in the system that she/he is denied entry, her/his tracks or footsteps would be noticed and identified when the operations manager checks the system. The system would have a record of the entry and the user and unauthorised entries can be detected. Therefore, technically, one

cannot steal access into areas that one is denied access to as one will be found out and an explanation demanded.

For example, in the finance department, the accounts manager would have greater access to many of the facilities and information needed by the finance department and this is provided by the system. It is part of the job of an accountant to counter check various finance aspects for sensitive accounting. If accounts do not tally, she/he can enter different paths to counter check information or rectify a problem or “massage data” to protect the interests of the company she/he is working for. People below her/him are denied this unsupervised access but she/he can check the various areas on their behalf and provide them with the information needed to continue with their work. Therefore, depending on your position in the company, access into the system is within limits only. The authorisation table prepared by the holding company in conjunction with the subsidiaries indicates access paths of the various positions in the company. However, it is sometimes necessary to access certain areas that are generally denied to a user. If such a situation arises, then a person in higher authority can override the denial and enable entry.

Hierarchy determines access limits. The General Manager and the Operations Manager of this particular subsidiary have unlimited access to all the aspects of their company through the system. The Operations Manager of the subsidiary company has access even to private e-mail as she/he has the task of house -keeping in the sense of creating storage space in the company hard disk, putting in new facilities for staff use, etc. She/He also has to make the decision regarding which data to store and for how long and which data to

delete. These housekeeping tasks are basically done on the advice of members as well as predetermined decisions, for example, as to how long data to be kept online before it is deleted or thrashed. These house-keeping procedures are necessary to ensure memory space and avoid information overload. Individuals who do not like their data destroyed would have to save what they want on their own disk and release the main system storage disk of space. However, it must be stated that while the General Manager and Operations Manager have unlimited access to data about their own company they may be denied access to information in terms of corporate data of other subsidiary companies or even confidential information regarding the parent company.

Of course the owners of the company have no limitations to accessing the system at any time of day or even place. The owner is able to access information that the owner needs even if she/he is in the United States and not in Malaysia. This facility is known as remote access.

## 5.5           AUTHORISATION LIMITS FOR CASH

Another indication of power that is not very obvious is the amount of spending power a company gives to those in the hierarchy within the community. Each person in the hierarchy is given the mandate to pass expenditure of up to a certain amount without needing to get permission from the parent company. Here the power is represented by the amount allocated for use in various ways to better run the company. The purpose of the authorisation limit for cash is to cut down on red tape but it also ensures that the power to spend is in the hands of a selected few. The table, 5K, below gives an indication of

the power and the authority limits in terms of expenditure in one subsidiary company. Again it is obvious from the table 5 (K) below, that the higher the position the greater the mandate to spend, determine staff salary of new recruits, commitment to advertising expenditures, signing of sales contracts etc. This is another form of power that may not be obvious to the outsider.

Figure 5 (K)

**AUTHORITY LIMITS IN MALAYSIAN RINGGIT  
OF ONE SUBSIDIARY COMPANY**

Designation	Capital Expen	Travel Mileage	Inventory	Freight Custom	Advertising	Donation	Credit Approval	General Expenses	Hiring Staff level	Sales contract
Gen. Mngr.	15k	5k	100k	20k	20k	1k	20k	5k	Middle Mgmt	2 mill.
Sales Mngr.	-	1k	-	-	-	0.5k	-	1k	Mid. Exe & below	500k
Market Mngr.	-	1k	-	-	15k	0.5k	-	1k	-do-	100k
Off. Mngr	-	1k	-	-	-	0.5k	-	1k	-do-	-
Ops Mngr.	-	1k	-	-	-	0.5k	-	1k	-do-	100k
Accnt	-	0.5k	-	-	-	-	-	0.5k	-do-	-
Bus. Mngr	-	0.5k	-	-	-	-	-	0.5k	-do-	100k
Market Serv. Mngr.	-	0.5k	-	-	5k	-	-	0.5k	-do-	-
Channel Service Mngr.	-	0.5k	-	-	5k	-	-	0.5k	-do-	100k

Source: Adapted from Perdana Confidential Information Services