

# Indirect Effects of Organizational Communication on Organization Development Interventions: Towards A Theoretical Model.

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## ABSTRACT

*Organizations operating in dynamic environments are increasingly becoming dependent on organization development interventions in a bid to remain competitive. These organization development interventions include technostructural interventions, strategic interventions, human resource management interventions and human process interventions. On the other hand, one of the variables that has been discussed variously in the literature as an intervening variable in organization studies is organizational communication. While most studies report statistically significant indirect effects of communication on organizational outcomes, several methodological weaknesses from some of the studies limit inference to the conclusion that communication can be a true mediator in the relationship between organization development interventions and organizational outcomes. This paper reviews the literature where communication has been investigated and acknowledged as a mediator variable, and based on arguments of the structuration theory and the nudge theory, proposes a theoretical framework that can subsequently be tested in hypothetico-deductive models to help make clear conditions under which communication can best transmit the effects of organization development interventions, thereby leading to enhanced attainment of organizational effectiveness.*

## KEY WORDS

*Organization Communication, Organization Development, Organization Effectiveness, Organization Development Interventions.*

## BACKGROUND

Organizations operating in dynamic and competitive environments regard attainment of organizational effectiveness as one of their most important objectives (Tahsildari & Shahnaei, 2015). While no single definition can be universally agreed to crisply define organizational effectiveness, organizational effectiveness can generally be viewed as the degree to which an organization attains its goals (Kataria, Rastogi & Garg, 2013).

Even so, there still exists scholarly debate on what indeed constitutes an organizational goal because different theoretical traditions have offered different conceptualizations on the construct (Kotlar & De Massis, 2018). Taken together, however, numerous theoretical perspectives and research streams are seen to have a confluence on the argument that organizational goals, irrespective of what they are, are essential in directing organizational behavior (Kotlar & De Massis, 2018).

Kotlar and De Massis' (2018) argument posits a theoretical quandary, as it alludes to a reverse causality in the relationship between organization behavior and organizational goals, given that organization behavior is supposed to be goal-directing (Luthans, 2011). Nevertheless, as a continually developing field of study, organisation behaviour encompasses a complex nexus involving interactions of different situational factors, drawn from multidisciplinary constructs, hence requiring a multidimensional approach in comprehending its effects on organisational outcomes (Kondalkar, 2007).

At the heart of organisation behaviour, as a discipline, is the focus on individuals, groups, teams, and organisation structure (Kondalkar, 2007). Relatedly, organisation development also has its focus on structural issues of the organisation, and how these structural issues impact on organisational effectiveness (Cummings & Worley, 2009). A greater understanding of how organisation behaviour interfaces with organisation development for enhanced effectiveness of organisations has hence been a subject of persistent interest in many organisations (Kondalkar, 2007).

Even so, the literature indicates that organizational development interventions hinge on the effectiveness of organizational communication (Shakiladevi & Basariya, 2019; Saritprava & Dhaval, 2016; Cummings & Worley, 2009). The centrality of organizational communication is informed by the fact that sound organizational communication has a range of considerable positive effects in organizations such as increased engagement and

commitment in employees, greater employee morale, better workplace relationships and more acceptance of change interventions by employees (Hargie,2016).

Unfortunately, given that the mechanisms through which the effects of organization development interventions are transmitted through organizational communication towards attainment of organizational effectiveness is not entirely understood, many organizations have not belabored to invest in further development of their organizational communication (Hargie,2016). It is consequently requisite for organization theorists to continue examining how organizational communication interacts with various organizational interventions to enhance overall organizational effectiveness.

#### ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

Beckhard (1969), one of the founding scholars of organization development, defines organization development as an effort that is undertaken organization-wide, managed from the top, whose aim is to increase organizational effectiveness through planned interventions. Burke and Bradford (2005) opine that organization development by nature is humanistic in values and seeks to apply behavioral sciences to improve organizational effectiveness by enhancing congruence of organization dimensions such as external environment, structure, strategy, leadership, culture, and information.

The emphasis as seen in various definitions of organization development is on planned interventions to enhance organizational effectiveness (Cummings & Worley,2009). Even so, the success of these interventions has a dependency on knowledge standardization in the organization as facilitated by organizational communication (Romme, 2011). The degree of organization, that is, whether an organization is over-organized or under-organized, is, however, a key determining factor of the typology of intervention to be adopted (Cummings & Worley,2009).

Commonly adopted typologies of organization development interventions are technostructural interventions, strategic interventions, human resource management interventions and human process interventions (Idris, Adekalu & Kabiru, 2014; Cummings & Worley, 2009). Technostructural interventions are a class of organization development interventions that are targeted towards both structural and technological issues in the organization and include work and ergonomic redesigns (Siruri, Namusonge & Kilika, 2019). Strategic interventions on the other hand are those that are undertaken to align the organization to its environment to position the organization to be more adaptive and responsive to rapidly changing external conditions (Saritprava & Dhaval, 2016).

Human resource management interventions as a typology of organization development interventions are those geared towards gaining organizational competitive advantage through measures aimed at competence building, motivation, and enhancing job satisfaction of employees (Idowu, 2020). Last, but not least, human process interventions are those that focus on working

towards attaining organizational effectiveness through enhancing team effectiveness, group processes and intergroup interactions mainly by enhancing the organization's problem-solving capability through leadership development and improvement of organizational communication (Shakiladevi & Basariya, 2019).

#### ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The history of studies on organizational communication and its effects on organizations dates several decades, but recent thrusts have been on topics such as the strategic nature of communications in the attainment of organizational effectiveness (Putnam & Banghart, 2017). Arguably, this is because organizations are increasingly being appreciated to be goal oriented complex entities consisting of systems of interrelated parts, whose influence relies on patterns of communication within them (Cacciattolo,2015).

Given that organizational communication has its roots from multiple disciplines, it has been useful in the advancement of the understanding of individual and social behavior in organizations (De Benedicto, Sugahara, & Sousa, 2017) especially in areas such as workplace bullying, work life balance, workplace relationships, organizational change, among many others (Keyton,2017). Its greatest impact on organizational behavior, however, has been through the application of the extant different organizational channels of communication (Turkalj & Foscic,2017).

Channels of organizational communication commonly used include face to face, telephone, text messaging and e-mail (Saninaa, Aleksey, Mariia & Satinsky,2017). Whereas these have different efficiencies in relaying desired messages, their respective efficacy can be judged using three gauges: reliability, speed, and effectiveness (Saninaa *et al.*,2017). Reliability refers to the measure of certainty that the channel will function (Shrivastava,2017). Speed relates to how fast it is to obtain a result from the communication. Effectiveness of a communication channel on the other hand refers to the usefulness of the channel in attaining the desired outcomes of the messaging (Westmyer, DiCioccio & Rubin,2006).

#### STRUCTURATION THEORY

Structuration is a component of organization development interventions (Romme,2011). It is equally an important subject in communication studies ((Ahrens & Chapman, 2007; Englund, Gerdin, & Burns, 2011; Haslett, 2012). In the quest to understand how organizational communication facilitates organizational development interventions, the structuration theory hence becomes handy.

The theory is associated with Anthony Giddens, with its basic tenets centering on agency and structure (1984). Although its initial arguments were on social structuration, Whittington (2011) argues that it continues to offer appeal in practice research on various subjects. Structuration theory has consequently been used to analyze organizational development practices for a long time (Floyd, Cornelissen, Wright & Delios 2011; Langley 2009).

The theory's applicability on organizational studies is on its concept of duality of structure that appears different at the interaction and institutional levels of analysis, with the dimensions

of interest being communication, power, and sanctions (Whittington, 2011). Of these three, communication is the most important for driving success, when executing organization development interventions, as people generally resist change when they are uncertain of its consequences, which may then necessitate management to exercise the use of power and sanctions, but which may lead to counter intuitive outcomes (Cummings & Worley, 2009).

### NUDGE THEORY

The theory was first introduced by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) as a complementary intervention approach aimed at changing individuals' behavior by addressing the choice architecture in which people make decisions, while preserving their freedom of choice. The emphasis of the theory is that effort should be towards actions that aim to shift behavior by changing people's beliefs and attitudes to address organizational challenges (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018).

Whereas the theory is largely in the formative stages hence spawning a considerable amount of debate in the research community, it has already found application in some organizational practice where organizations attempt to change behavior by altering the profiles of different choices through provision of information on need to embrace change by employees (Lin, Osman, Ashcroft, 2017).

In building up on the work of Thaler and Sunstein (2008), Lin, Osman and Ashcroft (2017) differentiate between two types of nudges: Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 nudges are those that target decision-making contexts involving simple interventions that minimally disrupt the choice context to prompt some adjustments in behavior. Type 2 nudges, on the other hand, are those that promote a sustained reassessment of the evidence base on which people make their choices, and the choices themselves, by disrupting the coherence between the two, thereby highlighting the benefits of an intended change.

Evidence in the literature point to the fact that Type 2 nudges are more effective and cost effective in changing long term behavior compared to Type 1 nudges (Arad & Rubinstein, 2015; Hedlin & Sunstein, 2016; Jung & Mellers, 2016). Consequently, organizations should endeavor to use Type 2 nudges over Type 1 nudges, if long term benefits of desired behavior change are to be attained, thereby leading to enhanced organizational effectiveness (Chetty et al., 2014; Benartzi et al., 2017).

### A BRIEF ON MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Mediating variables, just like many other intervening variables such as confounders, moderators, and covariates, are prominent in organizational theory and research. Conceptually, a mediating variable is one that transmits the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable (MacKinnon, Fairchild & Fritz, 2007). Understanding mediating effects in research is key as estimation of causal effects without considering the effect of intermediate variables that lie in the causal pathway between the independent variable and the dependent variable can lead to misleading outcomes (Imai, Keele & Tingley, 2010).

The general approach to mediation analysis in research has been the use of linear structural equation modelling (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981; MacKinnon, 2008). However, the use of such models has also been fraught with controversy given that linear structural equation modelling techniques are not generalizable to nonlinear models for discrete mediators, as well as for non- or semiparametric models (Imai, Keele & Tingley, 2010).

Owing to the different methodological preferences, tests for mediation greatly differ in both statistical power and reported Type I error rates (MacKinnon, Lockwood & Williams, 2004). Accordingly, researchers have proposed the use of effect size in mediation analysis and adoption of bootstrapping methods as these have been seen to have a higher accuracy (MacKinnon, Fairchild & Fritz, 2007). There are also proposals in the statistical literature that research should consider adoption of counterfactual frameworks to enable analysis of complex situations such as panel data, multilevel models, and multiple mediators (Imai, Keele & Tingley, 2010).

### INDIRECT EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Multiple studies have been undertaken to determine the direct and indirect effects of organizational communication on several organizational outcomes (Chan, Hu & Mak, 2020). The literature is however quite scanty on indirect effects of organizational communication on organizational development interventions, making the subject an important research agenda in view of the importance of organization development interventions in today's organizations.

Suh and Battaglio (2022) explored the mediating effects of organizational communication on the relationship between strategic human resource management and organizational performance among Korean workers. A comparative study was undertaken on public, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations. Results established significant sector differences with only for-profit firms being seen to tap into the benefits of organizational communication to improve alignment between strategic human resource management and organizational performance. Their study also established that organizational communication has a partial mediating effect on perceived organizational performance.

Aras and Yazgan (2022) sought to investigate the mediating effect of communication in the relationship between organizational culture and information sharing in higher education institutions in Turkey. Structural equation modeling was used to explore the relationship. The results established that communication is a partial mediator in the relationship between organizational culture and information sharing in the higher education sector in Turkey.

Mahdani, Saputra, Adam, Yunus (2022) investigated the mediating role of communication in the relationship between organizational culture, employee motivation, and workload on employee performance in employees of Batam Port, Indonesia. The data was analyzed using structural equation modelling. The results indicated that organizational culture and communication

have a positive and significant effect on employee performance. Communication was also established to mediate the relationship between employee workload and employee performance.

Kateb and Ramanathan (2019) examined the mediating effect of communication competence on the relationship between the transformational leadership and employees' job satisfaction in Syrian private universities. The results, from path analysis and bootstrapping re-sampling methods, established that communication competence partially mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction in employees of Syrian private universities.

Gochhayat, Giri, & Suar (2017) explored the mediating role of organizational communication in the relationship between organization culture and organization effectiveness in the Indian technical education space. Correlations did not reveal antecedent-consequent relationships hence a hybrid path analysis was undertaken. Results showed that organizational culture positively predicted organizational effectiveness, but this relationship was partially mediated by organizational communication.

Estrera and Gempes (2016) assessed the mediating effect of communication drivers on the relationship between task performance and attitude towards change of public elementary school heads of Davao Region, Philippines. Regression techniques and Sobel z-test were the statistics used. Results indicated that communication drivers have a significant partial mediation in the relationship between performance and attitude towards change of public elementary school heads.

Michael (2014) investigated the relationship between supportive supervisor communication as a mediator of the leader-member exchange and subordinate performance. The hypothesis was that leader-member exchange would directly influence supportive supervisor communication, and supportive supervisor communication would directly influence two facets of contextual performance: interpersonal facilitation and job dedication and that job dedication would directly influence task performance, thus mediating the relationship between supportive supervisor communication and task performance. Structural equation modeling results based on supervisor-subordinate dyads from the banking industry were analyzed and it was established that supportive supervisor communication mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange and employees task performance.

Garnett, Marlowe, and Pandey (2008) explored the indirect effect of communication in the relationship between organizational culture and organizational performance. The analysis supported the hypothesis that communication is a meta-mechanism, both as a moderator variable and a mediator variable, for influencing performance. Feedback and upward communication indicated positive effects on perceived organizational performance in mission-oriented organizations: but they had negative effects on organizational performance in rule-oriented cultures.

From the reviewed literature, it is apparent that organizational communication is a mediator variable in various causal

relationships. A conceptual framework depicting it along causal pathways in the relationship between organization development interventions and organizational effectiveness can accordingly be abstracted in a theoretical framework.

### PROPOSED THEORETICAL MODEL

A theoretical framework is a guide for research and serves as the foundation upon which research is undertaken (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Ravitch and Carl (2016) opine that a theoretical framework is useful as it assists researchers in situating and contextualizing formal theories in their research undertakings. Theoretical frameworks are also useful as they help the researcher critique, develop, and expand a theory that served as a guide for their study vis-à-vis the findings of their study, thereby making theoretical frameworks indispensable in hypothetico-deductive models (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Our proposed theoretical framework for investigating the indirect effects of organizational communication in the relationship between organization development interventions and organizational effectiveness, based on the structuration theory and nudge theory, is accordingly as presented here-below:

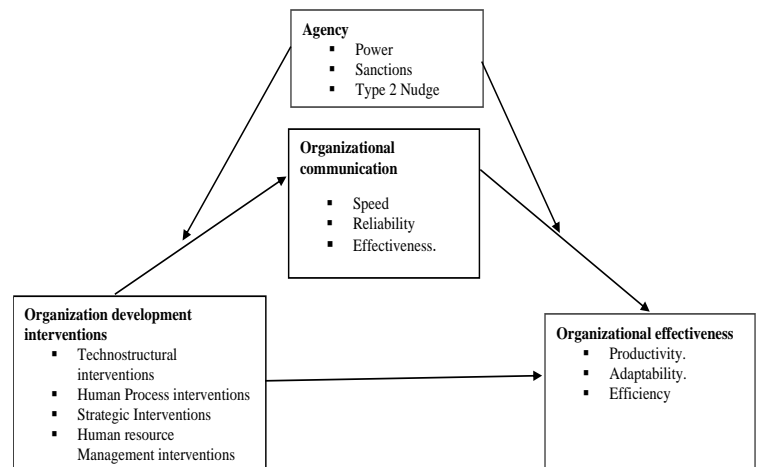


Figure 1: Theoretical model integrating organizational development interventions, organizational communication, and organization effectiveness.

Source: Authors (2022).

### DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed theoretical framework under Figure 1 above suggests scenarios where organizational communication mediates the relationship between organizational development interventions and organizational effectiveness. Equally, in the proposed theoretical framework, agency, as construed in the structuration theory, is suggested to have conditional effects on the relationship at different levels, assumably through power, sanctions, and type 2 nudges.

Under unmediated relationships, individual typologies of organization development interventions have been posited to be a



predictor of organizational effectiveness. Even so, given that these organization development interventions may also be undertaken jointly in organizations, a composite index of these may equally be used to evaluate the model. The proxy indicators for organizational effectiveness in the proposed theoretical framework are recommended to be productivity, adaptability and efficiency as suggested by Mott (1972) and indeed also being indicators that have been used by several researchers to measure the construct of organisational effectiveness.

Work investigating mediation processes in multilevel designs is still an active area of research, hence analysis of the interaction effects will, as a necessity, lay emphasis on effect size and statistical power, with an additional assumption that the mediator is neither distal nor proximal. Moreover, given that structural equation modelling is a large-sample technique, it is expected that in evaluating the model, a minimum sample size of one hundred is to be used if generalizable results are to be obtained (Hoyle & Kenny, 1999).

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Empirical studies show that organizational communication is a mediator in relationships between predictor and outcome variables for both individual and organizational outcomes. However, the literature is quite scanty on the indirect effects of organizational communication in the relationship between organizational development interventions and organizational outcomes. This paper consequently seeks to propose a generic theoretical model for studying the indirect effects of organizational communication in the relationship between organization development interventions and organizational effectiveness.

Methodological weaknesses in research designs can lead to misleading inferences. Consequently, in testing the model and its propositions there-of, rigor to attest the proposed mediating causal paths must always be a priority, preference being use of bootstrapping methods as several large-scale simulation studies on mediation analysis have shown that bootstrapping has higher accuracy in analysis of indirect effects. Most variables have time precedence, hence in evaluating the model, use of longitudinal studies over cross-sectional studies is also highly recommended.

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