

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION  
AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION: A UPM CASE STUDY**

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**Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between organizational identification and communication satisfaction. Communication satisfaction was represented by seven dimensions: Organizational Perspective, Personal Feedback, Organizational Integration, Supervisory Communication, Horizontal Communication, Media Quality, and Communication Climate. The present study employed a quantitative approach by utilizing a self-administered survey questionnaire. Data was collected using two established instruments, the Downs and Hazen's Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) and the Mael's Scale for Organizational Identification (MOI). Random stratified sampling was used and a sample size of 299 respondents consisting of UPM's academic staff was obtained. Results from this study show that majority of the respondents display a moderate level of Communication Satisfaction within the organization. It also shows that there are weak positive relationships between

Organizational Identity and all seven Communication Satisfaction Dimensions. This implies that Communication Satisfaction maybe a questionable antecedent for organizational identification.

**Keywords:** communication satisfaction, organizational communication, organizational identification, quantitative survey, UPM

### **Introduction**

Of the many aspects of organizational communication, researchers have acknowledged organizational identification as a means to increase organizational productivity. It is a well-known notion that employee identification with their organizations is a contributing factor to organizational success. Organizational identification refers to the perception of oneness with an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). According to Mael and Ashforth (1992), it is a phenomena that occurs when an “individual defines himself or herself in terms of their membership in a particular organization” (p. 105) and is a form of attachment to an organization.

The study of organizational identification has grown over the last few decades (e.g., Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Scholars have found that organizational identification has been proven to be related to several positive organizational outcomes (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). It has been established that strong organizational identification would lead to a more positive attitude towards the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), contribute to organizational citizenship behavior (Feather & Rauter, 2004; Christ, Wagner, Stellmacher & Van Dick, 2003) and also a lower intention to leave the

organization (Van Dick, Christ, Stellmacher, Wagner, Ahlswede, Grubba, Hauptmeier, Höhfeld & Moltzen, 2004a).

Communication Satisfaction is another important concept in understanding the dynamics of organizational life as well as a means to further boost the effectiveness of organizational activities. Communication satisfaction has been linked to a plethora of desirable organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and overall organizational productivity (Clampitt and Downs, 1993). It is “an individual’s satisfaction with various aspects of the communication occurring in his organization” (Crino & White, 1981, p. 832).

There has been a considerable amount of research that explored organizational commitment and its relationship with several organizational variables such as Communication Satisfaction, Leader-member Exchange and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (Azhar Hj. Ahmad, 2004; Azman Ismail, Hasan Al-Banna Mohamed, Ahmad Zaidi Sulaiman, Mohd Hamran Mohamad & Munirah Hanim Yusuf, 2011; Kamarul Zaman Ahmad & Raida Abu Bakar, 2003). Additionally, there are also numerous studies on the relationship between Communication Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment (Varona, 1996; Azhar Hj. Ahmad, 2004; Alanezi, 2011; Seven, 2012). However, little is known on the relationship between organizational identification and communication satisfaction. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to address this gap in research.

Findings from this study would be highly beneficial to the management of organizations and would enable effective and reliable measurement of communication practices within them. It could also aid in the assessing as well as planning of organizations’ administrative strategies and programs towards increasing overall productivity.

### **Organizational Identification**

As in any field of study, the understanding of a term tends to expand with the increase of research conducted over the years. Earlier studies suggest that organizational identification is explained as the process by which the goals of the organization and that of the organizational member become increasingly integrated and in accordance with one another (Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970). In simpler terms, this definition suggests that organizational identification occurs when an organizational member perceives his or her goals to be similar to his or her organization.

A little over a decade later, Cheney (1982) posits that organizational identification is considered a product when taking into consideration outcomes such as the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of organizational members, while the construct is seen to be a process considering that the organization is responsible to induce organizational identification among organizational members by “communicating values, goals, and information” (p. 280) (Cheney, 1983a). Meanwhile, more recent scholars argue that organizational identification is said to occur when organizational members “define themselves at least partly in terms of what the organization is thought to represent” (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004, p.2).

### **Communication Satisfaction**

The other important concept in this study, the Communication Satisfaction construct, is of great interest to researchers and managers alike due to it being linked to a plethora of desirable organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and overall organizational productivity (Clampitt and Downs, 1993). Conversely, this

construct has also been shown to be negatively correlated to undesirable organizational outcomes such as turnover intention, where the more satisfied an employee is with his or her organization, the less likely he or she is to leave the organization (Hargie, Tourish & Wilson, 2002).

Downs and Hazen (1977) in their study have hypothesized eight dimensions that have been proven to make up Communication Satisfaction through factor analysis. The dimensions are: 1) Organizational Perspective, 2) Personal Feedback, 3) Organizational Integration, 4) Supervisory Communication, 5) Horizontal Communication, 6) Media Quality, 7) Subordinate Communication, and 8) Communication Climate.

### **Dimensions of Communication Satisfaction**

The first dimension is Organizational Perspective. Clampitt and Downs (1987) describes Organizational Perspective as information pertaining to the organization as a whole, which includes information about changes within the organization, the financial standing of the organization, and information about the policies, missions, visions, and goals of the organization in general.

The second dimension, Personal Feedback, encompasses organizational members' perception pertaining to the extent to which their efforts are being recognized, whether they are being judged fairly by superiors, and whether their superiors understand their problems (Nakra, 2006). Clampitt and Downs (1987) explained that it involves "the workers need to know how they are being judged and how their performance is being appraised" (p. 4).

The third dimension is Organizational Integration. This dimension is concerned with information pertaining to immediate tasks and other information related to the immediate working environment (Nakra, 2006). In

terms of satisfaction, this dimension essentially encompasses the extent to which members of an organization or employees perceive that the information they receive that enables them to complete their tasks as well as participate in work-related groups and units is sufficient and of acceptable quality.

The fourth dimension, Supervisory Communication, involves communications with superiors, be it upward or downward communication, and includes the extent to which a supervisor is open to ideas. It refers to the ability of supervisors to listen and pay attention to subordinates, as well as the extent to which adequate guidance and instruction is given in relation to solving work-related tasks (Clampitt and Downs, 1987).

The fifth dimension is Horizontal Communication. It relates to how members of an organization perceive the quality of informal communication among peers, and the extent to which it is free flowing (Nakra, 2006; Clampitt and Downs, 1987; Varona, 1996). Horizontal Communication, which includes *grapevine* communication has been acknowledged as an important part of organizational communication and deals primarily with the social needs of employees or organizational members as individuals who require social interaction and communicate at an informal level.

The sixth dimension, Media Quality, “deals with the extent to which meetings are well organized and written directives are short and clear, and the degree to which the amount of communication is about right” (Varona, 1996, p. 113). Nakra (2006) describes Media Quality as a dimension that “measures the helpfulness, clarity, and quantity of information associated with channels such as publications, memos, and meetings” (p. 42).

The seventh dimension is Subordinate Communication, which gauges satisfaction of managerial-level staff in communicating with their subordinates. This dimension is omitted from this study because its measurement involves

responses solely from those with supervisory responsibilities (Nakra, 2006) while this present study does not discriminate between supervisors and supervisees.

Finally, the eighth dimension is Communication Climate. Clampitt and Downs (1987) explained that communication climate involves communication on the organizational level as well as the personal level. “It includes item[s] such as the extent to which communication in the organization motivates and stimulates workers to meet organizational goals and the extent to which it makes them identify with the organization” (p. 4). It also includes whether or not organizational members view the communication within an organization to be healthy or not.

For an overview of the level of communication satisfaction among UPM’s academic staff, the following research question is posed:

*RQ:* What are is the level of communication satisfaction among UPM’s academic staff?

### **Organizational Identity and Communication Satisfaction**

The link between Organizational Identity and Communication is one that has much room for investigation. Huff, Sproull, and Kiesler (1989) who opined that frequent and effective communication among employees contributed to employees feeling that they were active participants in the organization, thus enhancing commitment. This opinion linking Communication Satisfaction and organizational identification is also in accordance with Cheney’s (1983) who argued that organizational identification is both a product and a process of organizational life. Interestingly, Nakra (2006) found Communication Satisfaction as a composite to be significantly

and moderately correlated with organizational identification. Based on this, the following is predicted for the present study:

*H:* There is a positive relationship between Organizational Identity and Communication Satisfaction.

### **Methodology**

The present study employed a quantitative approach by utilizing a self-administered survey questionnaire.

### **Sampling and Procedure**

The population that was examined in the present study consist of Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) academic staff. This university was chosen because it is one of the five 'Research Universities' that have recently been granted autonomy. UPM brings with it a long list of credentials which portrays itself as a center of excellence for tertiary education and research. This, therefore, makes it a suitable choice for fulfilling the main aim of this study.

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained written permission from the relevant authorities of UPM to ensure smoothness during the data collection process in terms of authorization as well as to increase the probability of cooperation. Since the study uses a stratified sampling method, the distribution of the questionnaires was done structurally university-wide across all faculties, institutes, centers, schools, academies, and administrative offices to ensure that all staffs of the selected university have a chance of being selected as a respondent for the study.

The survey method employed in the present study was the mail survey method, where the researcher delivered the questionnaires attached with the relevant cover letter in a self-addressed envelope to the offices of the academic

staff as per the list formulated. Respondents were asked to stick or pin the envelope on their notice boards to facilitate the collection of responses. Respondents also had the option of mailing the questionnaire back to the researcher with the self-addressed envelope provided.

Data collection was conducted in between the months of January and March 2013. The whole data collection process took place over the course of three months and yielded an effective response rate of 42.5% (N= 299). The distribution of respondents according to gender was rather balanced with 147 (49%) male and 152 (51%) female respondents. From the total respondents, 42 (14%) were Professors, 71 (24%) Associate Professors, 108 (36%) Senior Lecturers, 63 (21%) Lecturers, and 15 (5%) Language Instructors. For the tenure of the respondents, 102 (34%) had served between 1 and 5 years, 101 (34%) between 6-10 years, 37 (12%) between 11-15 years, 29 (10%) between 16-20 years, and 30 (10%) served over 20 years.

### **Questionnaire Format**

The questionnaire consisted of four sections (A to D). Section A and B consisted of thirty five statements to measure respondents' satisfaction on the quality and amount of communication in the organization. These statements focus on the seven dimensions of Communication Satisfaction, as stipulated by Downs and Hazen (1977). Section C consisted of items from the Mael Scale for Organizational Identification, which included six items used to measure the organizational identification of the respondents. Section D was used to gather the demographic data of the respondents (e.g., gender and organizational position).

### **Pre-test**

A pre-test was conducted one month prior to the actual data collection and involved the collection of data utilizing the questionnaire from 30

respondents. The reliability was measured using the Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . By convention, an  $\alpha$  value above .70 is considered as acceptable in social science research. Results from the pre-test indicate that the instruments used in the questionnaire is of acceptable level of internal consistency and reliability (see Table 2).

**Table 1.** Results of Reliability Testing (Pre and Actual)

Section	Pre-Test Cronbach's $\alpha$	Actual Cronbach's $\alpha$
A (14 items)	.86	.80
B (21 items)	.91	.84
C (6 items)	.78	.83

### Dependent Variable

**Organizational Identification.** The instrument used to measure organizational identification of UPM academic staffs was adapted from the Mael Scale for Organizational Identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). It consists of six items: 1) It feels like a personal insult to me when someone criticizes UPM, 2) I am very interested in what others think about the UPM, 3) When I talk about UPM, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they', 4) UPM's successes are my successes, 5) It feels like a personal compliment when someone praises UPM and 6) I would feel embarrassed if a story in the media criticized UPM. Responses on each item was made on a 5-point Likert scale with higher scores indicating higher level of organizational identification and vice versa ( $M= 3.94$   $SD = .79$ )

### **Key Independent Variable**

**Communication Satisfaction.** This variable was measured based on seven dimensions namely. These dimensions were measured using Downs and Hazen's (1977) Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ). A total of thirty five items were used to measure the level of Communication Satisfaction with regards to the quality and amount of communication practices in the selected university. Each of the dimensions was measured by five items (see Appendix). Respondents provided their responses using a 7-point Likert scale, higher means indicating a higher level of satisfaction and vice versa. The means and standard deviations for each dimension is shown in Table 2.

### **Results**

#### **Level of Communication Satisfaction among UPM's Staff**

The research question posed in this study read: what are is the level of communication satisfaction among UPM's academic staff? In a 7-point Likert , the mid point would be 3.5. Results from a descriptive analysis shows that the mean for each of the dimension is above the midpoint ( $>3.5$ ) (see Table 2). This implies that the responses lean more towards the positive rather than the negative.

To determine the level of Communication Satisfaction, the summative scores for the instrument were used and divided into three groups: High scores are those between 176 and 245, moderate scores are those between 106 and 175, and low scores are those between 35 and 105. Descriptive analysis show that majority of the respondents showed a moderate level of Communication Satisfaction (68%), while the other 32% of the showed a high level of Communication Satisfaction. None of the respondents showed a low level of Communication Satisfaction.

**Table 2:** Means and standard deviations for each dimension of the Communication Satisfaction Construct ( $N=299$ )

Communication Satisfaction Dimensions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Organizational Perspective	4.74	1.17
Personal Feedback	4.66	1.13
Organizational Integration	5.05	1.10
Supervisory Communication	4.97	1.04
Horizontal Communication	5.03	.97
Media Quality	4.85	1.01
Communication Climate	4.58	1.07

*Note:* The Likert scale used was 1 to 7 with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 9 being “strongly agree”.

### **Relationship between Individual Dimensions of Communication Satisfaction and Organizational Identification**

It was previously hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between Organizational Identity and Communication Satisfaction. Results from a Pearson’s Bivariate Correlation analysis show that there are positive relationships between Organizational Identity and all seven Communication Satisfaction Dimensions (see Table 2): However, based on Dancey and Reidy’s (2004) categorization for the Pearson’s Correlation rule of thumb, these positive

relationships are weak (with  $r < .30$ ).<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there are still positive relationships which means that the hypothesis for this study is supported.

**Table 3:** Pearson's Bivariate Correlations between Dimensions of Communication Satisfaction and Organizational Identification

Independent Variable (Dimensions of Communication Satisfaction)	Dependent Variable (Organizational Identification)
	<i>r</i>
Organizational Perspective	.16**
Personal Feedback	.26***
Organizational Integration	.16**
Supervisory Communication	.10*
Horizontal Communication	.14**
Media Quality	.23***
Communication Climate	.10*

\* Significant at .05 level (one-tailed)

\*\* Significant at .01 level (one-tailed)

\*\*\*Significant at .001 level (one-tailed)

## Discussion

The main aim of this study was to examine the relationship between organizational identification and communication satisfaction. In light of this aim, it was discovered that first, the level of organizational Identification among UPM's academic staff were rather positive.

Second, all seven of the dimensions included in the present study were positively correlated to organizational identification. However, they all had a very minimal effect on organizational identification. Nakra (2006) also reported only low to moderate correlations between Communication Satisfaction and its dimensions with organizational identification, with only five of eight dimensions significantly correlated with organizational identification. The investigation of which dimensions of Communication Satisfaction acted as significant predictors of organizational identification also yielded only two dimensions as significant predictors, namely the Personal Feedback dimensions and Media Quality dimension. Although significant, they are seen to be very weak predictors to say the least. This suggests a possibility that Communication Satisfaction is not a dominant antecedent for organizational identification.

Finally, it was discovered that majority of respondents had a moderate level of Communication Satisfaction. This could mean that the communication practices within the organization (UPM) were considered as acceptable by most of the respondents at the time of the present research. Interestingly, there has been research that suggests Communication Satisfaction increases with tenure and seniority due to the experienced involved in the organization (Murad Mohammed Al-Nashmi and Hj. Syd Abdul Rahman Hj. Syd Zin, 2011). The moderate level of communication satisfaction can be further substantiated with the fact that less than half of the respondents had 10 years or more working experience with the organization.

Like all empirical studies, this too has some caveats. First, the present study only examines the construct of Communication Satisfaction due to the intention of the researcher to examine organizational identification purely from an organizational communication perspective. As such, this study omits various

other variables such as perceived external prestige, perceived organizational distinctiveness, organizational reputation, and strength of organizational image.

Second, only three demographic factors are observed in this present study, namely: gender, organizational tenure, and organizational position (Professor, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer, and Language Instructor). Other factors such as work experience, age, ethnicity, level of education, and income group were not included.

Third, respondents of the present study are only limited to the university's academic staff. This is mainly because of the fact that most university rankings base their ranking methodology and assessment heavily on research grants, publications and teaching, which are specific to only academic staff. Coincidentally, in the Malaysian public university system, university key performance indicators (KPIs) are mostly related to research and publications as well as teaching activities, also specific to only academic staff.

In the future, the relationship between Communication Satisfaction and organizational identification could be investigated in the context of a privately-owned profit-based organization, instead of a public institution of tertiary education. This is in light of the fact that obvious differences in management styles and the nature of work between government sectors and private sectors exist. Such a variable could possibly affect the Communication Satisfaction and organizational identification, as well as shed more light on the relationship between these two variables. Considering the differences in management styles of public and private universities, it would be interesting to investigate the differences between the organizational identification of academic staff in public universities with that of academic staff in private universities.

Future research should also attempt to investigate the relationship between demographic variables such as gender, organizational tenure, and

organizational position, age, income, ethnicity, and education level on organizational identification.

Notwithstanding the present limitations, on a larger scale, this study has contributed to the field of organizational communication by validating the use of the Mael Scale for Organizational Identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) in a Malaysian setting. This scale has been found to be a reliable measure of the organizational identification construct in the context of a country like Malaysia.

This study can be taken as a form of communication audit for the organization in question, which is Universiti Putra Malaysia. Based on the findings, UPM has healthy levels of Communication Satisfaction and encouraging levels of organizational identification among its academic staff. However, Specific areas of improvement can be identified based on the responses towards the items in the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire. The findings provide university management with valuable information and insight with regards to the many facets of Communication Satisfaction and how academic staffs perceive communications within UPM.

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> If  $r$  is 1, then it is a very strong positive relationship. If  $r$  is between 0.7 and 0.9, then it is a strong positive relationship. If  $r$  is between 0.4 and 0.6, then it is a moderate relationship. If  $r$  is between 0.1 and 0.3, then it is a weak relationship.

## Appendix

### Communication Climate

1. Extent to which UPM's communication practices makes me identify with the university or feel like a vital part of it.
2. Extent to which I receive in time the information needed to do my job.
3. Extent to which conflicts are handled appropriately through proper communication channels.
4. Extent to which the staff of UPM have great ability as communicators.

5. Extent to which UPM's communication motivates an enthusiasm for meeting its goals.

### **Personal Feedback**

1. Recognition of my efforts.
2. Information about how my job compares to others.
3. Information about how I am being evaluated.
4. Reports on how problems in my job are being handled.
5. Extent to which my supervisors understand the problems faced by subordinates.

### **Supervisory Communication**

1. Extent to which my supervisor trusts me.
2. Extent to which my supervisor is open to new ideas.
3. Extent to which the amount of supervision given to me is about right.
4. Extent to which my supervisor listens and pays attention to me.
5. Extent to which my supervisor offers guidance for solving job related problems.

### **Media Quality**

1. Extent to which our meetings are well organized.
2. Extent to which written directives and reports are clear and concise.

3. Extent to which the amount of communication in UPM is about right.
4. Extent to which the attitudes toward communication at UPM are basically healthy.
5. Extent to which UPM's communications are interesting and helpful.

### **Organizational Perspective**

1. Information about the policies and goals of the university.
2. Information about the accomplishments and/or failures of UPM.
3. Information about government directives/action that affect UPM.
4. Information about changes in UPM.
5. Information about UPM's financial standing.

### **Organizational Integration**

1. Information about my job progress.
2. Information about departmental policies and goals.
3. Information about the requirements of my job here at UPM.
4. Information about benefits and pay.
5. Information about personnel news and policies.

### **Horizontal Communication**

1. Extent to which my work group is compatible.
2. Extent to which the horizontal communication with other staffs is accurate and free flowing.
3. Extent to which communication practices are adaptable to emergencies.
4. Extent to which informal communication is active and accurate.

5. Extent to which the 'grapevine' is active in UPM.