

# The Moderating Impact of Communication on Employee Performance: A Case Study of Multimedia University of Kenya

Macdonald Ouko Ogambi, MA in Communication Graduate, Multimedia University of Kenya

## Abstract

Communication is central to organizational life; it does not just serve as a medium through which information flows; communication has been a way of creating, maintaining, as well as reworking culture. In the context of institutions of higher learning whereby the academic and administrative personnel work in a complicated cultural setting, communication is especially critical in determining the performance outcomes. This paper discusses the moderating role of communication on the performance of employees at Multimedia University of Kenya (MMU). Based on a convergent mixed methods design, the analysis of the responses of 194 staff members along with eight departmental heads who participated in interviews was presented. The results indicate that the presence of clear, open, and two-way communication channels could play an important role in turning the organizational values, leadership styles, and work processes into employee performance. The relationship between culture and performance was observed to be strengthened through communication as it helps to increase role clarity, trust, collaboration, and motivation. On the other hand, the cultural alignment was compromised by poor communication and disengagement was formed, which in turn stripped performance. The article puts these findings in the broader context of the organizational communication and cultural theories with an important role that institutionalization of the feedback system, teaching leaders communicative skills, and use of digital platforms as a means to achieve transparency and inclusiveness. Management and policymakers in higher education have been recommended to incorporate communication in the strategic culture-building efforts.

**Keywords:** Organizational communication, employee performance, organizational culture, higher education, Multimedia University of Kenya, Theory Z, moderating effect.

## Introduction

The linkage between employee performance and organizational culture has been a research topic of interest among the disciplines of management, communication and education. It is agreed that culture affects organizational values, leadership behaviour and work procedures, which subsequently affect the performance results (Ouchi, 1981; Denison, 1984). However, culture does not exist in a vacuum, it is practiced, strengthened and occasionally challenged by communication (Weick, 1969). Communication is therefore a means of perpetuating culture, as well as an intermediary that determines how cultural characteristics can be transformed into staff conduct and performance.

In institutions of higher learning, communication plays a very critical role. Universities are compound institutions in which the academic and administrative staff work with various faculties, departments, and directorates, each having different norms and expectations. In Multimedia University of Kenya (MMU), which is a publicly-owned institution with a history of institutional change, being a training school which evolved into a fully chartered university in 2013, the dynamics of culture are influenced by heritage practices and modern demands on innovation, professionalism and flexibility (Ogambi, 2024). Communication in such an environment is therefore essential in aligning various staff members, developing cohesion and improving productivity.

The article is dedicated to a single purpose: it aims at establishing the moderating role of communication on employee performance at MMU. Although performance is directly dependent on the variables of organizational culture including values, leadership, and work processes, communication was seen as a moderating variable that conditionalizes the relationships. This attention is noteworthy since although it has been acknowledged that communication is a cultural process (Hall, 1959; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982), scanty empirical research in the Kenyan higher education sector has been conducted.

By reworking and expanding the thesis into a journal article, this paper contributes to organizational

communication scholarship in three ways. First, it provides empirical evidence from an African higher education context, where few studies have systematically explored communication as a moderator. Second, it integrates theoretical perspectives from organizational communication (Deetz, 2001; Weick, 1969) with management literature on culture and performance. Third, it offers practical insights for university administrators and policymakers seeking to enhance performance through communication strategies.

## Literature Review

Organizational culture is usually referred to as common assumptions, values and norms which are used to guide behavior in organizations (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). The Theory Z developed by Ouchi (1981) has stressed the importance of culture in the development of productivity, which is based on trust, intimacy, and shared decision-making. Powerful cultures bring employee behaviours in line with the organizational objectives and weak cultures bring inconsistency and performance resistance (Ahmed, 2012). Cultural traits, like professionalism, teamwork, and scholarly values, are crucial in this context in higher education, to encourage staff and make them aligned to the missions of the institution (MMU, 2017).

Performance is also multidimensional in nature, it includes quality and quantity of work, timeliness, independent working and interpersonal relationships (Sundi, 2013). In higher education, performance measures go further beyond financial performance to that of student satisfaction, research productivity and efficient service delivery (Richard, 2009). Therefore, to determine the effects of culture on performance, we have to consider the mediating and moderating variables that facilitate alignment, communication being the most important.

According to scholars like Hall (1959), Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982), culture and communication cannot be separated: culture is communication and communication is culture. Organizational culture cannot exist unless there are communicative practices, meetings, rituals, memos, conversations. Weick (1969) also developed an idea of organizing as a communicative process where members created common meanings and actions.

Communication, according to this point of view, is a moderator in the sense that it affects the quality and the orientation of the relationship between culture and performance. As an example, organizational values like teamwork are consistently excellent in improving performance, which can only happen when it is effectively communicated. The styles of leadership that work well are where leaders are open and participatory in their communication. When instructions and feedback are transparently conveyed, work processes become efficient.

This moderating role is confirmed by empirical studies. Akbar and Jahanzaib (2012) discovered that failure to communicate effectively creates confusion, dissatisfaction and poor performance. Balyan (2012) found out that when there is poor communication, it decreases the impact of job and motivation to work in employees. Cheney et al. (2011), on the contrary, noted that good communication creates trust, motivates action and leads to collective prosperity. Paisey (1992) suggested, in the educational set-ups, that communication enabled consultation, teamwork, and participation as the pillars of successful institutions.

Universities are confronted with peculiar challenges of complexity, diversity and accountability. Employees have to juggle between teaching, research and administration, and address evolving needs of society. Such communication is vertical (under management to staff) and horizontal (peer-to-peer), formal (official circulars) and informal (corridor conversations). Effective communication will result in internalization of organizational values like professionalism and integrity, leadership practices like transformational styles reinforced and the work processes carried out in an efficient manner.

In Kenya, state universities such as MMU have been facing a lot of transitions such as restructuring, expansion, and resource limitation. These changes bring about cultural gaps which, unless addressed with proper communication, can destroy the morale and performance of employees (Ogambi, 2024). Therefore, the study of the moderating role of communication is not only opportune but also practically important.

## Methodology

The adopted methods including design used, study site and population, sampling, data collection, analysis,

presentation, ethical considerations, pilot study, and validity of the research instrument are explained in this section. Convergent parallel mixed design with a descriptive approach was used for the study. Kothari (2004) recommends this design because of its characteristics of allowing recording, analysis, reporting, as well as portrayal of conditions which exist. Nachmias and Nachmias (2007) postulates that a descriptive research design is used to obtain information on the position of phenomena to describe what exists with respect to variables in a situation, by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes, behavior, values or opinions. This research design helped the researcher understand opinions and perceptions of the respondents on how the organization culture affects employee performance at MMU.

The study was conducted at the Multimedia University of Kenya which is one of the 35 chartered Public Universities according to the Commission for University Education website 2024. According to figures from the Multimedia University of Kenya Human Resource department, the university has 378 employees, who are the target population, 264 are administrative staff while the remaining 114 are academic staff. A sampling frame is a complete list of all the cases in the population from which a sample size is drawn (Saunders et al., 2009). Sampling frame included staff obtained from the Human Resource department at the Multimedia University of Kenya. The study employed stratified random sampling as a probability sampling method. The researcher settled on this because of its high accuracy level as well as avoidance of bias as compared to simple random sampling technique (Chatterjee & Diaconis, 2018). The respondents were divided into 39 stratus of administrative and academic staff at Multimedia University of Kenya. This was after the population which is 378 is defined, deciding on the relevant sample size for each stratum and randomly sampling from each stratum by calculating the mean, median, and mode of each stratum and comparing them to identify patterns or differences between groups. The researcher employed a non-probability sampling method, which is purposive sampling. The eight heads of department were selected so as to include only subjects that would provide useful data.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a sample size of 30% of the population is representative of the population. To ensure accuracy of estimate, a confidence of 95 percent was used in sampling. This means that the accuracy of results is estimated in terms of confidence level where it indicates a degree of certainty and falls within a given range of values (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). 194 respondents were sampled from a population of 378 MMU members of staff. The study employed the Slovin (1960) formula to determine the sample size.

Survey method was adopted to collect qualitative data. Semi-structured questions were used in this study because they offered an increased response rate and are easily coded and analyzed, while open ended questions are useful in providing more information because they enable respondents to express their thoughts freely and spontaneously (Saunders et al., 2005). Besides the questionnaires, interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data from key informants. These interviews were conducted face to face. Telephone and online meetings were held because of the researcher's physical disability. The interviews were scheduled in advance with time adhered to. All the interview sessions each lasting 20 minutes were recorded on tape with permission from the interviewees. Primary data was collected through the use of questionnaires and interviews. Closed ended questions, used the five-point Likert-type scale, ranking from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree). Interviews were also conducted with the selected heads of department in the university. The interview guide was used to collect data on research question i to iv. Interviews were conducted with the heads of sections from the various departments.

Before beginning the data collection process, approvals to conduct the research were sought from the MMU as well as the National NACOSTI. The respondents were notified of the purpose of the study and a request to participate in the research made to them. As a result of mobility challenges because of the researcher's physical disability, research assistants helped with physical questionnaires distribution while most of the questionnaires were distributed through the internet. Soft copy questionnaires developed using Google forms and shared through WhatsApp and email. To ensure the researcher achieved an appropriate response rate, follow-ups were done through Short Message Service (SMS), emails and phone calls. Voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality were observed. Similarly, the respondent could withdraw at will and were allowed to conceal information that they considered to be private and sensitive. The researcher used codes instead of the respondents' names to ensure confidentiality. The information provided by one respondent was not exposed or shared with another participant whatsoever and was strictly used for the research. The study was guided by acceptable research standards taking into consideration the respondents rights including recording all interview sessions on

tape with permissions from the interviewees.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a pilot study with a sample of 10% of the total sample with similar characteristics is appropriate. Pilot testing helps in determining the adequacy of a research instrument to recommend corrective actions before actual research. Cohen et al. (2007) record that a pilot study is in fact an imitation and tryout of the main study. Pilot study was conducted at the Multimedia University of Kenya Julious (2005) noted that a sample size of 12 respondents for a pilot study is ideal. This study, therefore, was pre-tested among 12 respondents who were excluded from the main study. Out of the 12 respondents, 3 interviews were conducted while the remaining 9 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. Reliability measures a research instrument's adequacy in providing a similar outcome when applied on a different population. It is the degree to which a research instrument produces consistent results or data after repeated trials (Orodho, 2012). Reliability was ascertained using the test-retest procedure which administered the questionnaire to the same target respondents and comparing the similarity in the findings. The questionnaire was reliable because it achieved the same result while conducting the pilot test on samples in the same study area while observer error will be taken care of by this research through the use of a highly structured interview schedule. Validity concerns with the internal consistency underlying study variables such that relevant outcomes are obtained per objective. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), validity is the accuracy and meaningfulness of explanations, which are based on the research results. Both content and face validities were adopted to measure research instrument's validity. Content validity examined the closeness in responses of the study variables to result in relevant outcomes. The validity of this study was also ensured through the selection of the study area, sampling of the respondents, and piloting of the research instrument.

The study assessed the impact of organizational culture on employee performance in MMU. The three aspects that guided this study were organization value, leadership styles and work processes with the aim of understanding how these elements impact employee performance in MMU and eventually make recommendations on how best the three values can be used to influence employee performance positively.

The data gathered was edited and cleaned to eliminate errors, inconsistencies, and outliers for descriptive and inferential statistics. Through coding, the qualitative data was transformed into quantitative information to enable successful analysis using the SPSS Version 26 software. SPSS helped to measure central tendencies; relationship between variables and to what extent independent variables affected the dependent variable. Inferential analysis tools made corollaries about the population from which the sample was selected (Leavy, 2017). Correlation analysis to determine variable relationships constituted the inferential in this study. And results presented in figures and tables. According to Amin (2005) descriptive statistics provides the techniques of numerically and graphically presenting information that gives an overall picture of the data collected. The final constituent in the interview design process was the interpretation of data gathered during the interview process. During this phase, the researcher must make "sense" out of what was just uncovered and compile the data into sections or groups of information, also known as themes or codes (Creswell, 2003, 2007). These themes or codes are consistent phrases, expressions, or ideas that were common among research participants (Kvale, 2007). According to Kvale (1996), a structured interview, which may yield numerical data, can be reported succinctly in tables and graphs, whilst an open-ended interview which would yield word-based accounts, may be presented in the form of narratives.

## Findings

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
MMU communication channels impact positively	16.7	34.7	22.7	19.3	6.7	2.647	1.17

on employee performance							
MMU has clearly identified channels of communication	17.3	40.7	19.3	14.0	8.7	2.560	1.19
MMU uses open channels of communication	12.0	32.7	22.0	16.7	16.7	2.933	1.28
Communication at MMU provides employees with information about their jobs, organization and fellow employees	10.7	30.7	28.7	17.3	12.7	2.893	1.18
Communication at MMU helps to motivate, build trust, create shared identity and spur engagement among employees	6.7	24.0	31.3	24.0	14.0	3.147	1.14
Communication at MMU makes sense of the organization; what it is and what it means	10.0	28.7	26.0	24.0	11.3	2.980	1.18
Communication channels used at MMU are generally effective	9.3	29.3	26.0	20.7	14.7	3.020	1.21

*Table 1: Communication: Source: Researcher (2024)*

The findings presented in Table 1 show effective communication's impact on employee performance and collaboration. The study provided valuable insights into various aspects of communication, including channels, openness, and the role of communication in fostering motivation, trust, and engagement among employees. There was a relatively high percentage of respondents who either strongly agree or agree that communication channels within MMU positively impact employee performance. 16.7% strongly agreed while 34.7% of the respondents agreed that channels within MMU positively impacted employee performance. 17.3% strongly agreed while 40.7% agreed that MMU had clearly identified channels of communication. This suggests a generally positive perception of the communication channels and their potential influence on employee productivity.

However, the data also revealed some areas of concern. A significant portion of respondents, 16.7% disagreed and another 16.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed that MMU uses open channels of communication. On



the other hand, 20.7% disagreed while 14.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed that communication channels used at MMU are generally effective. This may indicate potential areas for improvement in terms of fostering more transparent and efficient communication practices. The findings suggested a divided perception regarding the role of communication in informing employees concerning their jobs, the organization, and their colleagues, 10.7 strongly agreed, 30.7% of respondents agreed that communication served this purpose, 17.3% disagreed and 12.7% strongly disagreed while a notable 28.7% remained neutral. This highlights the importance of ensuring that communication channels effectively disseminate relevant and timely information to employees.

The data also revealed varying perspectives on the impact of communication in fostering motivation, trust, shared identity, and engagement among employees. 6.7% strongly agreed while 24% of respondents agreed that communication plays this role, 24% disagreed, 14% strongly disagreed, and a substantial 31.3% remained neutral. This underscored the potential need to enhance communication strategies to better address these critical aspects of employee engagement and organizational culture. Furthermore, the findings suggested that there is a lack of improvement opportunity in terms of using communication to help employees better understand the organization's identity and purpose. 10% of respondents strongly agreed or strongly agreed that communication at MMU fulfills this function. 24% disagreed, 11.3%. The mean of 2.88 indicated that employee views on communication at MMU tended to be neutral or slightly leaning toward dissatisfaction. On a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "Strongly Agree" and 5 indicating "Strongly Disagree," a mean close to 3 suggests that while communication is not viewed overwhelmingly negatively, it is not seen as particularly effective or impactful either. This aligns with several specific aspects of communication, such as the perception of open channels, motivational potential, and the general effectiveness of communication channels, where responses hover around neutrality.

For instance, the mean of 2.647 for "MMU communication channels impact positively on employee performance" indicated that while some employees see the benefit, a significant portion remained neutral or skeptical about the positive effect of communication on their work. Similarly, the statement "MMU has clearly identified channels of communication" had a mean of 2.560, showing a slight positive tendency but still reflecting a level of uncertainty or disagreement among employees regarding the clarity of communication channels. Other statements reflect even higher mean scores, such as 3.147 for "Communication at MMU helps to motivate, build trust, create shared identity and spur engagement among employees," which suggested that employees generally disagreed with the notion that communication fostered a positive organizational culture.

The mean for "Communication channels used at MMU are generally effective" is 3.020, further highlighting dissatisfaction with the overall effectiveness of communication. The standard deviation of 0.97261 suggested that there is moderate variability in employee opinions about communication at MMU. This spread is consistent with the standard deviations seen in specific survey items. For example, the standard deviation of 1.17 for "MMU communication channels impact positively on employee performance" indicated a wide range of opinions on this statement, with some employees strongly agreeing and others disagreeing. This variability is evident in other areas as well, such as the openness of communication channels (1.28), where employee experiences and perceptions differ significantly. The higher standard deviations suggested that while the mean indicated a general tendency toward neutral or slightly negative opinions, there are significant subgroups within the organization who view communication either positively or negatively. This variation could reflect differences across departments, hierarchical levels, or individual communication needs and expectations. For example, some employees might experience clear, effective communication from their direct supervisors, while others might find the organizational-level communication lacking in transparency or timeliness.

The relatively neutral mean combined with the moderate to high standard deviations across the board indicate that MMU's communication practices are inconsistent. Some employees may experience effective communication that supports their performance and engagement, while others may feel disconnected or uninformed. For instance, while 40.7% of employees agree that "MMU has clearly identified channels of communication," a sizable proportion (14% disagree, and 19.3% are neutral), indicating gaps in how communication channels are understood and utilized. These findings suggested that MMU needed to focus on making its communication more consistent, transparent, and engaging. Efforts to streamline communication channels, clarify information dissemination processes, and ensure that communication fosters trust and

motivation could improve overall employee satisfaction. Given that communication at MMU is seen as not fully motivating or effective in creating shared identity, leadership should emphasize improving both the content and the method of communication, making sure that messages resonate with and engage employees across the organization.

In qualitative analysis, communication channels employed at MMU encompassed social media, email, phone calls, and texts, with informant 6 noting the effectiveness of one-on-one physical meetings for gathering feedback. The impact of communication channels on employee performance was portrayed positively by informant 3, with clarity, timeliness, engagement, and crisis management highlighted as key contributors. Communication channels employed at MMU, including social media, email, and calls, were seen as positively impacting employee performance by enhancing clarity, timeliness, engagement, and crisis management as viewed by informant 2. Informant 6 was in support by saying that:

*“Clear communication channels help ensure that information reaches employees accurately and comprehensively and at the same time facilitate timely updates on organizational changes, policies, and important announcements contribute to a work environment where employees can adapt quickly, reducing uncertainty and potential disruptions”*

However, the lack of information on employee performance areas in one response raises questions about the comprehensiveness of the communication strategy. There's a consensus that direct, one-on-one physical meetings are particularly effective for gathering feedback, emphasizing the importance of personalized and interactive communication methods. The study underscored the need for adequate communication in fostering a positive organizational culture. Clear, open, and impactful communication channels contribute significantly to employees' understanding of organizational values and expectations. This finding aligns with the well-established role of communication in organizational success. According to Balyan (2012) for instance, when an organization experiences poor employees' performance as a result of poor and ineffective organizational communication, it begins to observe the following problems: employees' performance decreases, employees become dissatisfied, emotional challenges of employees increases; reduction in employees' jobs involvement; absence of willingness to work hard and submission among employees. Thus, this therefore implies that communication at MMU is effective to a large extent; there is still room for improvement for it to be fully effective.

The findings have practical implications for management in public universities to design leadership development programs, communication strategies, and efforts to optimize work processes are recommended to enhance organizational culture and, consequently, employee performance. Recognition and rewards for employees' contributions also play a crucial role in shaping a positive culture. The below summarized descriptive statistics that offer valuable insights into the impact of the variable under analysis have on the overall productivity of employees. This study focused on five variables related to the employee's performance (Sapta et al., 2021). The data consistently highlights the importance of proper incorporation of these factors in determining the overall employees' performance.

## Discussion

The findings affirm the theoretical proposition that communication moderates the relationship between culture and performance. In line with Weick's (1969) notion of organizing as communication, the results show that organizational culture at MMU is not an abstract construct but enacted through communicative practices. Communication amplifies positive cultural attributes and mitigates the risks of misalignment.

The study resonates with Balyan's (2012) assertion that poor communication undermines performance and with Cheney et al.'s (2011) argument that effective communication builds trust and engagement. In the Kenyan context, the findings extend Onyango's (2014) study, which found employee involvement enhanced performance, by demonstrating that communication is the mechanism through which involvement is achieved.

For universities, communication is more than an administrative function; it is strategic. It ensures that academic staff understand institutional goals, that administrative staff align with procedures, and that both groups

collaborate effectively. In contexts of resource constraints and rapid change, communication becomes critical for maintaining morale and sustaining performance.

## Conclusion

The positive correlation observed emphasizes that well-defined and efficiently communicated work processes positively influence how employees carry out their responsibilities. When employees have a clear understanding of standard procedures, feel that their work requirements are adequately satisfied, their performance tends to be higher. The research findings highlight a positive correlation between communication practices and employee performance at MMU. Effective and transparent communication channels positively influence how organizational values are understood, contribute to trust-building, and foster a shared sense of identity among employees. This aligns with established literature emphasizing the pivotal role of communication in impacting performance.

## Recommendation

The positive correlation between communication and organizational culture underscores the need for refined communication strategies. The university should prioritize clear and open communication channels, ensuring that information about organizational values, expectations, and achievements is effectively disseminated. Lastly, future researchers can investigate how the integration of technology, such as digital communication tools or artificial intelligence, influences organizational culture and employee performance.

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