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The Role of Vertical Communication in Fostering Harmonious Workplace Relations: A Literature Review

Titus Indrajaya¹, Dinni Agustin², Azwa Ditya Arfiy³, Erlyana Putri Hermawan⁴, Priska Carliza⁵, Rika Setiawati⁶, Sonya Kemuning⁷

¹Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Respati Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, titus@urindo.ac.id

²Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Respati Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, dinniagustin@urindo.ac.id

³Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Respati Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia, adityaarfiy@gmail.com

⁴Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Respati Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia dinniagustin@urindo.ac.id

⁵Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Respati Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁶Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Respati Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁷Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Respati Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding author: dinniagustin@urindo.ac.id²

Abstract: Communication is a fundamental organizational process that facilitates information sharing, work coordination, and the development of effective workplace relationships. This study examines the role, forms, and functions of vertical communication in fostering harmonious workplace relations, particularly within the changing context of Indonesia's labor market. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through a literature review, data were drawn from relevant scholarly books, journal articles, and academic publications. The findings indicate that effective vertical communication strengthens workplace relations by facilitating coordination, clarifying roles and responsibilities, supporting employee motivation, and enhancing productivity. It also serves important organizational functions, including information sharing, behavioral regulation, feedback, motivation, and emotional expression. However, its effectiveness may be constrained by perceptual differences, lengthy hierarchical communication channels, limited organizational openness, and inadequate communication media. The study concludes that effective management of vertical communication is essential for developing transparent, collaborative, and sustainable workplace relations. Strengthening both downward and upward communication can help reduce workplace tensions, improve mutual understanding between management and employees, and support more harmonious organizational environments.

Keyword: Organizational Communication, Vertical Communication, Workplace Relations, Employee Relations.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human life that cannot be separated from daily activities to convey information, express feelings, or exchange ideas with others. In the context of organizations and the working environment, communication holds a strategic role; it functions not only as a tool for information exchange but also as a mechanism for coordination, decision-making, and establishing effective working relationships (Patricia et al., 2026). Without sound communication, an organization will encounter severe difficulties in achieving its predetermined goals because every work activity basically requires structured and systematic inter-individual relationships.

The critical importance of communication within the workplace becomes increasingly prominent alongside the rapid expansion of the labor force in Indonesia. According to official data published by Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS), the number of employed persons in Indonesia demonstrated a steady year-on-year expansion, surging by 1.90 million individuals to record a total of 146.54 million employed persons (BPS, 2025). This expansion is accompanied by a shifting dynamic towards formal employment, which reached 42.20% of the total workforce, indicating a gradual enhancement in job quality and structural complexity within Indonesian enterprises (BPS, 2025). To provide a comprehensive overview of the employment landscape in Indonesia, the following table presents the multi-year trajectory of the labor supply development:

Table 1. Trend of the Employed Labor Force in Indonesia (2021-2025)

Year	Total Employed Population (Million People)
2021	131.05
2022	135.30
2023	139.85
2024	144.64
2025	146.54

Source: Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), reprocessed by researchers (2026)

This macro-economic condition demonstrates that workplace interactions and internal communications have become increasingly crucial factors in supporting coordination and goal alignment across scaling organizations. Effective communication establishes a shared perception among organizational members, thereby enabling each individual to comprehend their duties and responsibilities accurately and explicitly. Conversely, poorly managed communication systems will inevitably trigger various operational dysfunctions, such as interpersonal workplace conflicts and structural misunderstandings.

In organizational studies, this internal transmission process is recognized as organizational communication, the systematic flow of information occurring between individuals or teams to achieve collective objectives. According to standard frameworks of public and corporate administration, organizational communication encompasses information dissemination between superiors and subordinates, cross-functional units, and peer-to-peer interactions to build operational efficiency (Manggabarani et al., 2025). Consequently, organizational communication stands as a cornerstone for fostering synchronization and amplifying employee participation. The success of this communication heavily depends on the quality of workplace relations. In this regard, communication serves as a vital bridge that connects individuals, thereby cultivating a healthy and mutually supportive working climate.

One specific mode of communication that plays an indispensable role in structuring workplace relations is vertical communication. Vertical communication refers to the process of exchanging information between different hierarchical layers namely, superiors and subordinates, within an enterprise. This process operates as a two-way flow: downward communication (e.g., job directives, corporate policies, or strategic mandates from leaders to subordinates) and upward communication (e.g., progress reports, innovative suggestions, or feedback from employees to executives) (Patricia et al., 2026). High-quality vertical communication is characterized by message clarity, interaction frequency, systemic openness, constructive feedback, and fluid channels. High frequency in vertical interactions signals an active engagement model that refines operational coordination. Furthermore, robust feedback loops significantly elevate performance benchmarks as employees receive transparent and developmental evaluations.

Nevertheless, in empirical reality, vertical communication frequently encounters systemic friction. Modern organizations still face significant bottlenecks, including cognitive gaps in information absorption, technological constraints, and high workload pressures that isolate managers from their teams (Manggabarani et al., 2025). Serious misunderstandings are highly prone to surface if information authenticity is not validated before execution. These challenges signify that vertical communication requires strategic oversight to function optimally.

Within workplace relations, vertical communication is not merely a vehicle for operational data transmission; it is a fundamental pillar for building trust and rapport between leadership and workforce. Transparent, two-way communication establishes a psychological safety zone where employees feel valued and empowered to contribute to participatory decision-making. Such an environment directly drives employee motivation and organizational citizenship behavior. Therefore, effective vertical communication is critical to generating harmonious and productive workplace relations.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study addresses the theme of "Vertical Communication in Workplace Relations." The underlying research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How does organizational communication play a role in workplace relations?
2. What are the specific forms and processes of vertical communication between superiors and subordinates?
3. What are the core functions of vertical communication within an organization?
4. What is the explicit relationship between vertical communication and workplace relations?

Accordingly, this study aims to explore and elaborate on: (1) The role of organizational communication in workplace relations; (2) The forms and processes of vertical communication; (3) The strategic functions of vertical communication; and (4) The nexus connecting vertical communication with workplace relations.

METHOD

This study adopts a library research design utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach. The data utilized consist entirely of secondary sources extracted from highly reputable books, academic journals, and peer-reviewed scientific articles, directly focusing on the concepts of vertical communication and workplace relations. The data collection procedure involved an intensive review, deep reading, and systematic categorization of literature sources. The gathered materials were subsequently evaluated through descriptive analysis, which entails deconstructing existing theoretical models and contextualizing them against contemporary corporate challenges. This process ensures a robust and comprehensive understanding of the structural dynamics of vertical communication within modern workplace relations.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational Communication

Within workplace relations, organizational communication is heavily required because it allows individuals to interact, build professional networks, and exchange cognitive ideas. Hence, structural communication between leaders and subordinates forms the baseline for constructing solid workplace cooperation.

Organizational communication is defined as the sending and receiving of messages within an organization across both formal and informal groups (Novianita et al., 2021). It represents an iterative process of information exchange among actors embedded in a shared system. Psychologically, the communication process involves four sequential stages:

- a) Attention: The stage where the receiver focuses on the incoming stimulus.
- b) Comprehension: The cognitive processing and understanding of the message meaning.
- c) Acceptance as true: The evaluation phase where the message is accepted as factual or legitimate.
- d) Retention: The storage of the acquired information for future cognitive retrieval (Irawan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, organizational communication manifests as a continuous show and exchange of messages among interconnected structural units. These units establish the corporate architecture through hierarchical interdependencies (Haryati et al., 2022). Thus, it can be synthesized that organizational communication is the overarching process of message transmission to acquire systemic information within an organized entity.

Objectives of Organizational Communication

According to Haryati et al. (2022), organizational communication fundamentally drives four primary corporate objectives:

- a) Expressing opinions, conceptual views, and analytical thoughts regarding assigned institutional tasks and functional mandates.
- b) Distributing information to align the organization's vision, mission, core objectives, and strategic sub-functions across individuals and teams.
- c) Channeling professional feelings and affective emotions between employees and management to secure clear alignment.
- d) Conducting organizational coordination by dividing operational workflows and structural responsibilities into specific departments or sub-units as a concrete plan of action.

Classifications of Organizational Communication

Organizational communication can be categorized into distinct typologies based on the direction of flow, behavioral form, and operational channels (Raharjo, 2024):

Based on Directional Flow:

- a) Vertical Communication: The flow of messages occurring between individuals or groups occupying different strata within the organizational hierarchy.
- b) Horizontal Communication: The lateral exchange of messages between individuals or groups residing at the same hierarchical level.
- c) Diagonal Communication: The interaction between individuals or groups at different hierarchical levels who do not share a direct structural line of authority.

Based on Behavioral Form:

- a) Verbal Communication: The transmission of ideas utilizing spoken words or written language.
- b) Non-Verbal Communication: The implicit exchange of meaning via body language, facial expressions, vocal inflections, and symbolic indicators absent of words.

Based on Operational Channels:

- a) Formal Communication: Official interactions adhering to institutional regulations, typically requiring systematic documentation for strategic purposes.
- b) Informal Communication: Spontaneous interactions occurring outside official channels that significantly shape the corporate culture and social fabric.

Vertical Communication

Vertical communication represents the systematic transmission of information, ideas, and directives across different vertical positions within a corporate hierarchy. This structural flow operates through two main vectors (Hermen et al., 2024):

- a) Downward Communication (Top-Down): The dissemination of managerial directives, strategic policies, operational guidelines, and performance expectations from executives to the workforce.
- b) Upward Communication (Bottom-Up): The transmission of administrative reports, strategic suggestions, grassroots aspirations, and constructive feedback from subordinates to the leadership team.

Vertical communication holds a vital responsibility in ensuring the liquidity of corporate information, reinforcing cross-functional coordination, and supporting administrative decision-making frameworks. When a reciprocal, balanced vertical flow exists, organizations experience harmonious workplace relations, elevated task execution rates, and optimized goal realization (Hermen et al., 2024).

Functions of Vertical Communication

Vertical communication does not merely act as an administrative pipeline for internal data; it actively conditions employee motivation. Efficient vertical flows mitigate occupational stress, stimulate active employee participation, and cultivate a highly conducive working climate that accelerates corporate performance (Setiari, 2022). Specifically, Nurul (2021) categorizes four core functions of vertical communication:

- a) Information: Providing the baseline data and operational knowledge required across hierarchical tiers to facilitate informed decision-making.
- b) Control: Regulating and auditing employee behavior through the dissemination of compliance rules, corporate policies, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and explicit boundaries of authority.
- c) Motivation: Stimulating employee engagement and commitment by delivering clear performance expectations, emotional support, and developmental feedback.
- d) Emotional Expression: Serving as a socio-psychological safety valve for employees to communicate their feelings, subjective satisfaction, grievances, and interpersonal responses to their work environment.

Workplace Relations

Workplace relations encompass the systematic interactions occurring between individuals or operational units, both internally within the corporate boundary and externally with relevant institutional stakeholders (Chiandita et al., 2024). Within corporate networks, workplace relations are structured into multiple configurations:

- a) Vertical relations: The structural connection established between management and the subordinate workforce.
- b) Horizontal relations: The collaborative connection between professionals holding parallel institutional ranks.
- c) Diagonal relations: The functional connection linking actors across different departments and different authority levels.

- d) Functional relations: The specialized interaction between units sharing identical technical domains or target outputs.
- e) Informative relations: The mutual exchange of corporate briefs, field observations, and general intelligence among departments.
- f) Consultative relations: The formal advisory interaction between specialists and executives driven by institutional requirements.
- g) Directive relations: The authoritative flow of operational instructions originating from department heads.
- h) Coordinative relations: The integrative alignment designed to harmonize overlapping corporate interests and cross-functional operations.

Ultimately, workplace relations aim to establish operational fluidity and ease the execution of tasks for every individual and business unit. Among these, vertical relations stand as the most critical pillar. Vertical relations are structurally inseparable from vertical communication, which serves as its primary operational vehicle. Through effective vertical communication, the relationship between leadership and the workforce can be dramatically optimized, directly fulfilling the core purpose of workplace relations: achieving organizational efficiency and operational harmony.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structural Forms of Vertical Communication in Workplace Relations

Vertical communication in workplace relations is structurally defined by interactions between corporate actors with asymmetric authority levels. It is characterized by two distinct vectors: downward communication and upward communication, both of which are operationalized through specific communication media and channels (Manggabarani et al., 2025).

1. Downward Communication Channels. Downward communication involves the directional transmission of messages from executives to the workforce, primarily dealing with operational mandates, corporate strategies, institutional regulations, and role definitions (Patricia et al., 2026). In workplace relations, this flow establishes the framework for aligning daily actions with corporate goals. Leaders deploy four distinct channels to execute downward communication (Vebiyani, 2023):

- a) Face-to-Face Communication: Executed through immediate physical interactions such as morning briefings, strategic alignments, and direct coaching. This channel minimizes ambiguity as it allows for instant clarification and the absorption of immediate behavioral responses.
- b) Written Media: Disseminated via formal letters, corporate memos, compliance handbooks, and documented policies. This provides an auditable paper trail and serves as a permanent legal and operational reference.
- c) Electronic and Digital Platforms: Leveraged through corporate emails, enterprise instant messaging applications, and integrated management information systems (MIS). Digital platforms enable high-speed, cost-effective dissemination to massive employee bases simultaneously.
- d) Formal Forums and General Meetings: Structural corporate conferences where leadership presents macro-level policy shifts or annual targets to the entire workforce collectively.

Securing high levels of message clarity across these channels is vital to ensure that information is decoded accurately by the workforce, thereby avoiding costly operational mistakes (Manggabarani et al., 2025).

To further analyze the socioeconomic pressures fueling workplace tension, Table 4.1 outlines the internal realities of wage dynamics and structural disparities across the Indonesian labor segments:

Table 2. Structural Wage Profile and Gender Disparities in the Indonesian Workforce (2025)

Labor Indicator Category	Matrix Value Detail	Impact on Organizational Climate
National Average Monthly Wage	IDR 3.09 Million	Increases economic vulnerability, potentially heightening collective worker distress.
Average Male Employee Income	IDR 3.37 Million	Establishes the structural baseline for formal sector budgeting and compensation schemes.
Average Female Employee Income	IDR 2.61 Million	Creates a critical gender pay gap, frequently driving underlying organizational friction.

Source: Compiled from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and Tempo English Reports (2025)

2. Upward Communication Channels. Upward communication constitutes the bottom-up flow of data from employees to the executive suite, serving as the vehicle for progress reports, project updates, innovative solutions, grassroots ideas, and employee evaluations of corporate mandates (Patricia et al., 2026). This provides executives with an unfiltered view of field operations through four key channels:

- Performance and Progress Reports:** The primary structural vehicle, compiled systematically (daily, weekly, or monthly) to document field data, milestones achieved, and operational hurdles.
- Face-to-Face Consultations:** Conducted via one-on-one evaluations or performance review sessions, allowing employees to thoroughly articulate intricate operational nuances directly to managers.
- Formal Written Inclusions:** Realized through physical suggestion boxes, standardized feedback sheets, or detailed written project proposals.
- Digital Enterprise Pipelines:** Executed through automated online reporting portals and internal digital communication platforms, accelerating feedback loops and granting structural flexibility.

Employee feedback acts as an essential diagnostic tool for executives to understand empirical realities. The ultimate health of this vertical system depends on systemic transparency and the liquidity of information flowing from the bottom up (Manggabarani et al., 2025). Recent evidence further shows that employee voice and management receptiveness are important predictors of employee engagement, reinforcing the value of open upward communication in hierarchical organizations (Cardon et al., 2021).

The Strategic Role of Vertical Communication

Vertical communication plays an indispensable role in bridging corporate hierarchies, driving macro-level performance metrics, and elevating employee motivation via balanced directive flows and upward feedback loops (Manggabarani et al., 2025). The two directional vectors generate a highly symbiotic corporate dynamic (Cardon et al., 2021; Pfrombeck et al., 2022):

- 1) Upward flows foster institutional loyalty and employee commitment by validating the workforce's right to voice questions, offer strategic innovations, and voice grievances. It also grants executives the ability to detect latent organizational risks or rumors early, thereby increasing employee engagement. From a hierarchy perspective, employee voice is shaped by power and status differences, while managerial responses influence whether employees continue to communicate ideas, concerns, and suggestions upward (Pfrombeck et al., 2022; Snoep-Delleman et al., 2024).

- 2) Downward flows serve as the ideal mechanism for embedding corporate values, aligning cultural attitudes, mitigating anxiety born from structural disinformational leaks, and preparing human capital to navigate corporate transitions fluidly.

Furthermore, vertical communication acts as a vital tool for organizational control, allowing executives to make timely, data-backed decisions (Vebiyani, 2023). A balanced, two-way vertical flow eliminates operational friction, accelerates conflict resolution, and builds sustainable institutional trust, culminating in highly harmonious workplace relations.

Structural Barriers in Vertical Systems

1. Barriers in Upward Communication

According to Fitriyanti & Yantika (2022), the transmission of data from the workforce to executives is frequently restricted by three distinct categories of barriers:

- a) **Technical Barriers:** Inefficiencies rooted in poor physical communication infrastructure, faulty digital channels, or rigid reporting software.
- b) **Semantic Barriers:** Cognitive distortions resulting from varying interpretations of technical language or jargon, causing managers to misunderstand the employee's original intent.
- c) **Behavioral Barriers:** Psychological resistance stemming from employee fear of managerial retaliation, corporate intimidation, or an unapproachable leadership style that silences the workforce.

2. Barriers in Downward Communication

Managerial directives frequently lose operational efficacy due to systematic breakdowns in downward flows. Key impediments include (Agustik & Hidayati, 2023):

- a) **Deficient Feedback Tracking:** Executives frequently fail to monitor whether their strategic directives have been properly decoded and absorbed by lower-level employees.
- b) **Passive Information Absorption:** A lack of proactivity among certain segments of the workforce to actively seek clarity on formal regulations, causing execution errors.
- c) **Information Irrelevance:** Disseminating generic or non-applicable mandates to highly specialized teams, creating administrative confusion.
- d) **Information Overload:** Bombarding employees with massive volumes of unorganized operational data simultaneously, which diminishes focus and halts execution.

The Macro Dynamics of the Indonesian Labor Force and Its Structural Implications on Corporate Communication

The vital function of vertical communication systems cannot be isolated from the macroeconomic reality of the rapidly expanding Indonesian labor market. According to the latest structural surveys by Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS), the number of employed individuals in the country escalated to 146.54 million, showing a modest yet consistent progression in formal sector placement which capped at 42.20% of the active workforce (BPS, 2025). Concurrently, academic evaluations by economists at Universitas Gadjah Mada underscore a highly critical anomaly: despite the growth of the labor supply, over 57.8% to 59.4% of working citizens remain trapped within informal clusters, part-time setups, or low-wage manufacturing networks that trigger widespread occupational vulnerability and structural underemployment (Nugroho, 2025; UGM, 2026). This baseline distortion produces two significant communication bottlenecks that directly affect workplace relations within Indonesian enterprises.

First, the rising formalization of 42.20% of the massive workforce implies that millions of workers are stepping out of informal family businesses into modern, highly bureaucratized corporate systems (BPS, 2025). In these environments, operational success relies entirely on

complex formal hierarchies rather than casual, spontaneous daily interactions. When companies transition into large-scale operations without training their management team in clear downward communication (SOPs, transparent policies, and corporate mandates), severe structural misunderstandings easily arise between corporate executives and the lower-tier labor force.

Second, the structural realities of low average wages (recording an average of IDR 3.09 million monthly) coupled with a stark gender pay gap, where male workers average IDR 3.37 million and female professionals earn only IDR 2.61 million, generate latent institutional friction, workplace stress, and emotional dissatisfaction (BPS, 2025; Tempo, 2025). Within this tense economic environment, upward communication acts as a vital structural safety valve (Nurul, 2021). If organizational leaders fail to establish transparent, psychologically safe bottom-up pipelines, employees will feel completely silenced, leading to a drop in performance, high turnover rates, and systemic labor conflicts. Therefore, managing vertical communication is no longer just a theoretical choice; it is a vital strategy for stabilizing workplace relations amid the shifting landscape of the Indonesian workforce. Empirical research also indicates that high-quality managerial vertical communication can reduce role ambiguity and perceived job insecurity when supported by strong organizational support (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Organizational communication serves as a vital pillar of workplace relations, acting as the primary channel for information transmission to drive efficiency and corporate productivity. The process involves sequential cognitive stages: attention, comprehension, acceptance, and retention. Within corporate networks, the strategic management of interactions between leadership and the workforce forms the bedrock of long-term operational viability.

As a core sub-set of organizational behavior, vertical communication is key to establishing effective workplace relations. It provides clear roles, enhances job satisfaction, and helps execute the management's vision. This structural dynamic is sustained through balanced downward channels (directives and policies) and upward pipelines (reporting and feedback). Functionally, vertical communication serves as an instrument for information sharing, behavioral control, motivation, and emotional expression.

Crucially, this study concludes that the urgency of vertical communication systems within contemporary enterprises is heavily amplified by the macroeconomic dynamics of the Indonesian labor force. The structural transition toward formal employment alongside systemic challenges, such as underemployment, wage disparities, and occupational vulnerabilities, inevitably intensifies workplace stress and organizational friction. In this context, transparent downward directives reduce operational ambiguity during corporate scaling, while robust upward feedback mechanisms function as a psychological safety valve for employee grievances.

Ultimately, the health of workplace relations depends directly on the quality of vertical communication. Healthy, transparent, two-way vertical channels reduce miscommunication, build trust, and foster long-term harmony. Conversely, failures in vertical communication trigger internal conflicts, create information siloes, and degrade performance. Therefore, optimizing vertical communication systems is essential to maintain conducive, resilient, and sustainable workplace relations amid the evolving national employment landscape.

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