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MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION MIX AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT LEVELS: A PREDICTIVE MODEL

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Abstract: *Employee engagement is widely associated with productivity and organizational effectiveness, yet managers still lack empirically grounded guidance on how to allocate communication efforts to foster employee engagement. This study examines whether a structured mix of managerial communication components, together with hybrid work arrangements, is associated with different observable levels of employee engagement. The research employed a mixed-methods design. In the first stage, qualitative interviews with managers and employees identified communication practices characterizing everyday managerial communication within organizations. These insights, together with the literature, informed a structured questionnaire distributed to employees and managers. The quantitative stage included 168 respondents and examined the relationship between communication practices and employee engagement levels.*

A predictive model was tested using logistic regression analyses. The model incorporated seven communication practices: communication from senior management, communication led by the line manager regarding employees' work and personal matters, routine managerial meetings, employee participation in organizational communication, employees' ability to express opinions in organizational processes, managerial appreciation, line managers' communication, alongside the contextual variable of a hybrid work day.

The findings show that higher engagement levels are associated with the combined presence of these communication practices rather than with a single communication activity, indicating that multiple practices jointly increase the likelihood of observable engagement behaviors.

Keywords: *internal communication management; communication led by line managers; employee engagement.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary organizations, internal communication increasingly functions as a managerial resource rather than merely an operational activity (Men & Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2025). Line managers operate at the interface between the

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organization and employees, translating organizational direction into shared understanding through ongoing formal communication. At the same time, organizations seek to strengthen employee engagement because of its documented association with performance and effectiveness (Chughtai & Buckley, 2011; Engage for Success, 2025).

Research consistently links internal communication with employee engagement and work related behaviors (Men & Bowen, 2017). Engagement has been conceptualized as an active investment of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energies in role performance (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli et al., 2002). However, employees primarily encounter the organization through their line manager, who serves as the most accessible and credible source of organizational information (Pugh & Dietz, 2008). From a dialogic perspective, employees function as an internal audience whose understanding of organizational direction develops through ongoing interaction with their manager (Dhanesh, 2017). Internal communication may therefore be understood not only as a corporate communication system but also as a process embedded within the manager -employee relationship.

This relationship can be interpreted through Social Exchange Theory, which views organizational relationships as reciprocal exchanges of valued resources (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Managerial communication, including information sharing, recognition, and support, may be perceived as organizational investment, to which employees respond through constructive attitudes and engagement behaviors (Men, 2015; Jiang & Men, 2017). Accordingly, communication led by line managers operates as a mechanism linking managerial actions with employees' behavioral responses.

Despite extensive research connecting communication and engagement, most studies examine general communication quality and less specific managerial communication actions (Men & Bowen, 2017). In addition, engagement is typically treated as a general psychological state, while less attention has been given to observable behavioral levels of engagement and their potential association with distinct communication practices.

The present study addresses this gap by developing predictive models identifying formal communication actions led by line managers associated with the probability of distinct employee engagement levels. The study also examines the contextual role of hybrid work arrangements within this relationship. By linking managerial communication practices to observable engagement behaviors, the research advances the understanding of internal communication as a strategically managed organizational resource.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Internal Organizational Communication

Internal communication has been consistently linked to employee engagement (Men & Bowen, 2017; Engage for Success, 2025). Rather than functioning only as an organizational system, communication is enacted through managers who interpret organizational conduct for employees. Accordingly, the present study focuses on communication actions performed by line managers and their relationship to employee engagement levels. From a dialogic perspective, employees constitute an internal audience whose understanding of organizational priorities develops through ongoing interaction with their manager (Dhanesh, 2017).

Although organizational communication includes multiple directions and actors (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), communication led by managers plays a particularly significant role in shaping engagement (Pugh & Dietz, 2008). Contemporary work environments further mediate this relationship: digital communication channels and hybrid work arrangements increasingly shape how employees access organizational information (Neștian, Tita, & Turnea, 2019; Gallup, 2024), while engagement has become a major organizational priority in light of global declines in engagement levels (Gallup, 2025).

Communication that is clear, accessible, and transparent contributes to trust and employees' sense of appreciation, thereby supporting engagement (Welch, 2011).

2.2. Communication Structure and Channels

Internal communication is reflected not only in its existence but also in its structure and channels. Organizational communication includes dimensions such as frequency of interactions, communication channels, message content, and direction of communication flows (Johlke & Duhan, 2016). Communication frequency may support knowledge sharing and organizational climate, although excessive multi-channel communication may disrupt employees' attention (Karanges et al., 2014). Communication flows may occur in multiple directions, including managerial top-down communication.

Organizations employ a range of communication channels, from digital media such as email and organizational applications to interpersonal interactions such as meetings led by managers. Despite technological expansion, recent findings indicate relative stability in channel use: email remains the primary internal communication channel, while interpersonal communication led by managers continues to be perceived as significant (Ragan Communications & PoliteMail, 2026). These findings suggest

that even in digitally rich environments, direct and personal communication channels retain a central role in conveying organizational messages and supporting trust.

2.3. Communication Led by a Line Manager

Internal communication management involves several directions and participants within the organization (Men & Bowen, 2017). Communication may be conveyed downward from managers to employees, upward through listening and feedback processes, horizontally among colleagues, or through organizational communication units and opinion leaders (Men & Bowen, 2017). The way communication is conducted has organizational consequences. Unclear messages, inconsistent interpretation, and ambiguous responsibility may impair organizational performance (Grossman, 2011). Communication also serves as the means through which managerial strategy is transmitted to employees responsible for implementation, and unmanaged communication has been associated with project failure in a considerable proportion of cases (Grossman, 2011).

Within these communication processes, the line manager represents a key communication interface. The interaction between a line manager and employees takes place in direct, ongoing contact in daily work settings, without mediating organizational layers. Leadership research indicates that as managers advance hierarchically, their contact with employees becomes more indirect and often occurs through subordinate managerial levels (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Accordingly, communication conducted by the line manager constitutes the most immediate managerial communication experienced by employees and therefore forms a central channel through which organizational messages are conveyed.

2.4. The Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The present study is grounded in Social Exchange Theory, which conceptualizes organizational relationships as reciprocal interactions between parties (Homans, 1958). Within this framework, managerial actions and employee responses are interpreted as part of an ongoing exchange process. Complementary perspectives support this: management theory emphasizes the managerial responsibility for organizational communication processes (Adizes, 2021); engagement theory links managerial actions to employees' behavioral responses (Ruck & Welch, 2012); and internal communication theory positions communication as a central managerial function within organizational management (Baker, 2002). In addition, Self-Determination Theory highlights employees' perceptions of autonomy, influence, and self-expression as shaping their responses to organizational inputs (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In internal communication research, SET provides an explanatory lens for the employee organization relationship. Communication perceived as open, supportive, and fair functions as an organizational resource that encourages reciprocity (Men & Stacks, 2013; Men, 2014). When employees interpret communication as a meaningful organizational contribution, they tend to respond through trust, organizational identification, and stronger engagement (Men, 2015; Jiang & Men, 2017). Accordingly, communication operates as a mechanism linking managerial actions with employees' behavioral responses.

This perspective is particularly relevant to line manager employee interactions, characterized by continuous exchange. Through communication, line managers shape employees' access to information, support, and work related outcomes, while employees respond through attitudes and engagement behaviors, sustaining the reciprocal cycle. The manager employee relationship can therefore be understood as an exchange system in which communication serves as the primary medium through which value is transferred and returned.

2.5. Employee engagement

Employee engagement has become a central organizational concern due to its association with performance and organizational effectiveness. Higher engagement has been linked to improved productivity and performance and to reduced burnout, as engaged employees demonstrate greater energy and involvement in their work (Gallup, 2024; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008).

Organizational practices and working conditions contribute to engagement. Employees' satisfaction, organizational support, and perceptions of organizational values have been associated with their willingness to invest effort in their work (Ndlovu Quaye, & Saini, 2021; Tsai, 2011). Communication research further indicates that connecting employees to organizational goals, enabling dialogue, and facilitating understanding contribute to engagement (Welch, 2011; Verčič & Vokić, 2017).

Conceptually, engagement has been described as a positive work related psychological state characterized by energy, dedication, and involvement (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021), while earlier perspectives emphasized behaviors extending beyond formal job requirements (Katz & Kahn, 1966). In the present study, engagement is treated as a graded construct expressed through engagement levels rather than a binary state, consistent with frameworks distinguishing degrees of involvement among employees (AON, 2018). Accordingly, this research operationalizes engagement through three observable behavioral levels derived from the development of the concept in the literature, engagement means:

- Carrying out the task with determination even when facing challenges (Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008, Dai & Qin, 2016).
- Doing above and beyond formal requirements (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Zeidan & Itani, 2020)
- Passion towards an organization and its goals (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021).

2.6. Hybrid work

Hybrid work has become a significant employment arrangement influencing employee engagement and organizational communication. Global findings indicate that employees in hybrid arrangements often report higher engagement than those without flexibility (Gallup, 2024), although hybrid work may also involve negative experiences such as loneliness and disconnection (Gallup, 2025), reflecting the complex relationship between hybridity and engagement.

Accordingly, the present study incorporated hybrid work as a demographic variable, distinguishing between no hybridity, one day flexibility, and full flexibility, in order to examine whether employment arrangements are associated with variations in the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. This approach supports a communication management perspective led by the line manager while considering hybridity as a related factor affecting both employees and organizations.

Effective communication has been shown to reduce uncertainty and promote transparency and inclusion, particularly in hybrid environments where physical distance may increase feelings of exclusion (Men, O'Neil, & Ewing, 2020). In such contexts, communication functions not only as information transmission but also as a process of shared meaning and social interaction between managers and employees (Lee & Yue, 2020).

3. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article represents the third stage of a doctoral-level research project, that aims to explore the connection between internal communication and the level of employees' engagement. The framework of the quantitative research is grounded in three dimensions of internal communication management that relate to this research: corporate communication, senior management communication, and communication led by a line manager, reflecting the multi-layered structure of organizational communication (Men & Bowen, 2017). Regarding that, and based on the first and the second stage of this research (qualitative stages based on in-depth interviews), the

independent research variables were formulated: corporate communication, senior management communication, communication led by a line manager, internal communication routine, communication channels: face-to-face, digital, internal communication actions: listening, sharing, participation, appreciation, meetings.

3.1. Research Paradigm

This study was conducted according to the mixed methods paradigm, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The present article reports the quantitative phase and presents a finding: a predictive model examining specific internal communication components and their capacity to predict levels of employee engagement.

The quantitative stage of the study established the statistical foundation for analyzing the relationship between internal communication practices and the level of employee engagement within companies.

3.2. Mixed Methods Approach

Both qualitative and quantitative methods contributed complementary perspectives to the investigation of the research problem. Combining the two approaches enabled comparison and integration of the findings, thereby supporting a more comprehensive interpretation of the relationships examined (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative stage offered contextual understanding of participants' responses, whereas the quantitative analysis identified measurable patterns and associations among the variables.

3.3. The Research Aims

Primary Research Aim: To examine how internal communication implemented through line managers is associated with employee engagement within organizations.

3.4. The Research Questions

Main Research Question

How can internal communication led by line managers promote employee engagement within organizations?

To address the main research question, a set of operational research questions was formulated to guide the qualitative and quantitative stages of the research. In this third stage of the research the two main operational questions are:

1. What is the relationship between internal communication and the level of employee engagement?
2. What is the relationship between communication led by line managers and the level of employee engagement?

3.5. Research Design – The quantitative stage (stage 3)

Table 1 Research design, quantitative stage

Stage	Research aims	Research tools	Research population
Quantitative	1. To investigate the relationship between corporate internal communication and the level of employee engagement 2. To investigate the relationship between communication led by a line manager and the level of employee	closed-ended questionnaire	168 participants: • 67 Managers & • 101 Employees

3.6. Hypotheses Development

Drawing on the qualitative stage and the literature, a set of internal communication variables was identified as potential components of a predictive model examining the relationship between internal communication practices and employee engagement levels. Eight hypotheses were formulated, seven of which are addressed in the present article and tested in the statistical analysis.

The hypotheses examine whether routine managerial communication, communication led by the line manager (compared with senior management and corporate communication), interpersonal communication, employee participation and voice, managerial recognition, hybrid work arrangements, and the sharing of organizational information are positively associated with employee engagement.

3.7. The research population

The study population included employees and line managers (excluding senior executives) from organizations with more than 150 employees across three sectors: financial, high-tech, and industrial-technological, representing complex, knowledge-intensive work environments.

3.8. Sampling method for the quantitative research

The quantitative sample was obtained through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Friedman, 2020), in which accessible employees and managers were invited to participate and subsequently distributed the questionnaire within their organizations. Distribution was conducted across multiple organizations, roles, and sectors, and the questionnaire was administered primarily in digital form, with printed versions used in some organizations due to information security restrictions.

3.9. The respondents

The questionnaire was completed by 168 respondents (85 women and 83 men), mostly aged 26–55 and predominantly holding academic degrees. The sample included both employees and line managers across varying levels of seniority, with 40% supervising others, and 58% reporting hybrid work arrangements. The respondent distribution is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' distribution: parameters

Variable	Values	Count	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Education	Matriculation	13	7.7	7.7	7.7
	Professional degree	27	16.1	16.1	23.8
	Academic degree	128	76.2	76.2	100.0
	Total	168	100.0	100.0	
Role	Employee	76	45.2	45.2	45.2
	Manager without employees	25	14.9	14.9	60.1
	Managers with employees	67	39.9	39.9	100.0
	Total	168	100.0	100.0	
Group of roles	Employees + managers without employees	101	60.1	60.1	60.1
	Managers with employees	67	39.9	39.9	100.0
	Total	168	100.0	100.0	
Group of seniority	Up to 5	64	38.1	38.1	38.1
	6-10	47	28.0	28.0	66.1
	21-30	15	8.9	8.9	96.4
	31+	6	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	168	100.0	100.0	

3.10. Building the questionnaire

The quantitative questionnaire was designed to test the study's hypotheses and was developed based on qualitative findings, the literature review, and previously validated engagement instruments (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Saks, 2006; Goyal, 2024). It included items measuring internal communication and employee engagement using a six-point Likert scale and was pilot-tested with 21 participants, after which wording, scale structure, and hybrid-work measures were refined before full data collection.

3.11. Reliability Analysis

Prior to hypothesis testing, reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire were examined using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951). All main scales demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.713$), with an overall alpha of 0.943, and composite indices were subsequently constructed for the internal communication and engagement variables used in the regression analyses.

3.12. Data analysis method

The quantitative analysis included Pearson and Spearman correlation tests to examine associations between the study variables, and one-way ANOVA to assess differences in engagement levels across demographic and organizational categories. For the predictive model presented in this article, **logistic regression** analyses were conducted to evaluate the extent to which communication components and background variables predict the probability of high engagement at each of the three engagement levels. Model fit and predictive contribution were assessed using chi-square statistics.

3.13. Ethical aspects

Participation in the quantitative study was voluntary. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants received an explanation regarding the purpose of the research and were informed that they could discontinue their participation at any stage without consequence. All responses were collected anonymously, and no identifying personal information was requested or recorded. The data were transferred for statistical analysis in an aggregated form, ensuring that individual participants could not be identified.

The questionnaire was distributed within organizations without disclosure of the identity of the person who forwarded the survey, in accordance with the snowball distribution procedure. Consequently, respondents were not exposed to the source of the invitation, reducing potential pressure to participate. These procedures were intended to protect participants' confidentiality and to ensure that responses reflected their perceptions freely and without organizational influence.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Preliminary Analyses

Prior to presenting the main findings, the questionnaire items were grouped into conceptually related sets corresponding to employees' and managers' responses. Items

addressing the same construct were combined into statistical categories in order to create composite variables for analysis.

To validate these scales, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each group of items as well as across the questionnaire sections. These analyses examined the internal consistency of the items and supported the construction of the communication and engagement categories presented below.

Table 3 Cronbach's alpha analyses across for the questionnaire sections

The parts in the statistical analysis	Cronbach's Alpha Scores for questions within the same part	Cronbach's Alpha Scores for index content within the same part
A. Communication from an organization's management	0.832	0.832
B. Communication led by a line manager	0.864	0.857
C. Corporate communication	0.885	0.713
D. The engagement aspects	0.935	0.895

Table 3 presents the internal consistency ($\alpha>0.7$) within the questions in each section and also in the scale in each section except for the section where the five questions were addressed only to managers, $\alpha=0.504$ and therefore the five questions were examined separately.

4.2. Preliminary findings

Findings from the qualitative and quantitative phases identified a range of internal communication practices operating across three arenas: corporate communication, senior management communication, and communication led by line managers. The relationship between these components and employee engagement levels was examined using Pearson and Spearman correlations. Statistically significant associations ($p \leq 0.05$) were ranked according to their strength.

As presented in Table 4, seven communication components demonstrated relatively strong associations with the higher engagement levels. These components therefore constituted the communication domains selected for inclusion in the predictive model.

In addition, hybrid work was associated with engagement levels. A one day per a week hybrid arrangement showed a significant difference in engagement at the first engagement level ($F = 4.42$, $p < 0.05$), while at the highest engagement level its associate was comparable to that of flexible hybrid arrangements ($F = 3.84$, $p < 0.05$). Conversely, the absence of hybrid flexibility was associated with lower engagement levels.

Table 4 *Seven communication components with high associate with employee engagement levels*

Communication component and practice that received higher score as relate to employee engagement	**Engagement level 1: Carrying out the task with determination**	**Engagement level 2: Doing above and beyond formal requirements**	**Engagement level 3: Passion towards an organization and its goals**
A.2. Communication from top management – regarding organizational matters	.282**	.473**	.462**
B.3. Communication from line manager – regarding the employee's personal and professional matters	.175*	.397**	.531**
B.5. Communication method – routine of group meetings	.170*	.456**	.511**
C.5. Employee involvement in organizational communication – inviting employees to participate	.399**	.598**	.625**
D.4. Communication from a line manager as influencing engagement	.211**	.511**	.455**
D.5. Appreciation received as influencing engagement	.378**	.651**	.633**
D.8. Ability to express opinions and participate in organizational processes as influencing engagement	.399**	.598**	.625**

(*p < .05; ** p < .01.)

Based on these preliminary relationships, the selected communication components together with the one day of hybrid work variable were entered into a logistic regression model to examine their joint predictive contribution to employee engagement levels. The results of this model are presented below.

4.3. Examining predictive ability

The seven communication components identified represent practices that are feasible and actionable within organizational communication, and the one-day hybrid arrangement remains a common work pattern in many organizations, in part managed by a line-manager. Accordingly, these components, together with the hybrid work

variable, were entered into a predictive model to examine whether managing such a communication pattern under the leadership of the line manager, can predict the associated with high levels of employee engagement.

Logistic regression analyses indicated that the combined set of eight variables demonstrated significant predictive capacity across all three engagement levels, especially the second level: doing above and beyond.

For the first engagement level, the model showed a significant predictive association ($\chi^2 = 30.10$, df = 8, $p < .001$). For the second engagement level, the predictive association was particularly strong ($\chi^2 = 59.01$, df = 8, $p < .001$), with 94% classification accuracy. For the third engagement level, the model also showed a significant predictive association ($\chi^2 = 36.14$, df = 8, $p < .001$) and 92.3% classification accuracy. Detailed results are presented in the following tables.

Table 5 Predictive Model for the first level of engagement: Doing task with determination

Engagement - Carrying out the task with determination	**B**	**S.E.**	**Wald**	**df**	**Sig.**
A.2. Communication from top management – regarding organizational matters	41.263	511.119	0.007	1	0.936
B.3. Communication from line manager – regarding the employee's personal and professional matters	48.468	1082.107	0.002	1	0.964
B.5. Communication method – routine of group meetings	-216.552	2538.277	0.007	1	0.932
C.5. Employee involvement in organizational communication – inviting employees to participate	-168.716	1976.807	0.007	1	0.932
D.4. Communication from a line manager as influencing engagement	46.002	980.742	0.002	1	0.963
D.5. Appreciation received as influencing engagement	233.159	2643.400	0.008	1	0.930
D.8. Ability to express opinions and participate in organizational processes as influencing engagement	57.719	1167.511	0.002	1	0.961
Hybrid work	435.312	5261.884	0.007	1	0.934
Constant	-433.219	6642.105	0.004	1	0.948
Model: Chi-square	30.10				
Model: df	8				
Model: Sig.	0.000				

The model correctly classified all cases, achieving 100% overall prediction accuracy.

Table 6 Predictive Model for the second level of engagement: Doing above and beyond

Engagement - Doing above and beyond	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.
A.2. Communication from top management – regarding organizational matters	1.078	0.603	3.190	1	0.074
B.3. Communication from line manager – regarding the employee's personal and professional matters	-2.685	1.178	5.196	1	0.023
B.5. Communication method – routine of group meetings	2.181	0.933	5.468	1	0.019
C.5. Employee involvement in organizational communication – inviting employees to participate	-0.982	0.742	1.749	1	0.186
D.4. Communication from a line manager as influencing engagement	-0.305	0.514	0.352	1	0.553
D.5. Appreciation received as influencing engagement	2.215	0.737	9.019	1	0.003
D.8. Ability to express opinions and participate in organizational processes as influencing engagement	1.312	0.546	5.787	1	0.016
Hybrid work	0.432	0.569	0.576	1	0.448
Constant	-5.046	1.959	6.632	1	0.010
Model: Chi-square	59.01				
Model: df	8				
Model: Sig.	0.000				

The model achieved 94% overall classification accuracy, correctly predicting the engagement level for 148 respondents.

Table 7 Predictive Model for the third level of engagement: Passion towards the organization and its goals

Engagement - Passion towards the organization and its goals	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.
A.2. Communication from top management – regarding organizational matters	0.269	0.532	0.256	1	0.613

Engagement - Passion towards the organization and its goals	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.
B.3. Communication from line manager – regarding the employee's personal and professional matters	-0.110	0.770	0.021	1	0.886
B.5. Communication method – routine of group meetings	0.639	0.652	0.961	1	0.327
C.5. Employee involvement in organizational communication – inviting employees to participate	0.179	0.548	0.106	1	0.744
D.4. Communication from a line manager as influencing engagement	0.057	0.458	0.015	1	0.901
D.5. Appreciation received as influencing engagement	0.997	0.505	3.892	1	0.049
D.8. Ability to express opinions and participate in organizational processes as influencing engagement	0.421	0.370	1.295	1	0.255
Hybrid work	-0.116	0.481	0.058	1	0.810
Constant	-3.962	1.670	5.632	1	0.018
Model: Chi-square	36.14				
Model: df	8				
Model: Sig.	0.000				

The model achieved 92.3% overall classification accuracy, correctly predicting the engagement level for 152 respondents.

The predictive model incorporated seven communication practices, selected according to their correlations with higher engagement levels and their prominence in the qualitative findings of the first two research stages, alongside hybrid work as a contextual variable. The findings indicate predictive capability for higher engagement levels and suggest that a clearly defined, empirically grounded communication configuration is associated with a greater likelihood of high level of employee engagement.

5. DISCUSSION

The study examined how a strategic communication mix composed of several internal communication actions, together with hybrid work arrangements, is associated with employee engagement levels. The predictive relationships identified across all engagement levels suggest that engagement is related not to isolated communication

actions but to a structured and consistent communication environment created through multiple managerial practices.

This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the central role of internal communication in shaping employee engagement (Men & Bowen, 2017; Welch, 2011). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of transparent information sharing, dialogue, and ongoing interaction in strengthening employees' connection to organizational goals. The present findings extend this perspective by suggesting that engagement is associated with a defined combination of communication practices.

The communication mix identified in the predictive model includes organizational communication from senior management, communication led by line managers, routine meetings, employee involvement in communication processes, the opportunity to express opinions, and managerial appreciation, alongside a hybrid work day that may function as a contextual signal of trust and autonomy. These elements appear to form a coherent communicative environment through which employees interpret organizational intentions.

From a relational perspective, these results are consistent with Social Exchange Theory, which conceptualizes organizational relationships as ongoing exchanges of resources between managers and employees (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Communication practices such as information sharing, recognition, and participation may function as organizational investments that employees interpret as signals of support and inclusion. In response, employees may reciprocate through engagement behaviors.

The stronger association observed at the second engagement level, employees' willingness to act beyond formal role requirements, further supports this interpretation. Engagement behaviors exceeding formal expectations appear to emerge not from isolated communication events but from employees' ongoing experience of managerial communication practices. This interpretation is consistent with studies suggesting that employees' responses are shaped by their cumulative experience of managerial communication rather than by individual communication episodes (Men, 2015; Jiang & Men, 2017).

Accordingly, internal communication can be understood not only as a mechanism for transmitting organizational information but also as an interpretive managerial activity through which employees understand the organization's intentions toward them. Within this communicative environment, employees' engagement behaviors, particularly those exceeding formal role expectations, appear to reflect their response to the communication mix led by their managers.

6. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The theoretical contribution of the findings relates to Social Exchange Theory (SET) within the organizational context. While prior research has mainly used SET to explain why employees express organizational support, the present study indicates that employee responses may emerge in distinct observable engagement levels. Managerial communication, when perceived as an organizational investment, is associated not only with the presence of engagement but with differentiated levels of engagement behavior. The results further suggest that engagement can be understood as a graded behavioral response to ongoing communicative exchange. The communication mix created and maintained by managers represents the investment side of the exchange, whereas employees' engagement represents an observable response.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The study offers a managerial contribution by identifying a focused communication mix associated with employee engagement. Internal communication may therefore be understood as a structured managerial practice supporting observable engagement, expressed in three levels of behavior.

The communication mix includes organizational communication from senior management on organizational matters, communication led by the line manager connecting issues relevant to employees, routine communication practices, employee participation and expression of opinion, managerial appreciation, and the inclusion of one hybrid work day. Managing communication in this focused manner directs managerial attention and resources toward a defined engagement outcome.

The findings indicate that this communication mix is associated not merely with general engagement but with engagement expressed through initiative and effort. Accordingly, the study provides guidance for prioritizing communication actions when seeking to support employee behavior.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies may examine whether similar relationships appear in other organizational sectors and cultural environments. Longitudinal research could explore whether sustained communication patterns maintain engagement over time.

9. LIMITATIONS

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The study is based on data collected at a single point in time, therefore identifies predictive associations rather than causal relationships. In addition, the variables are based on employees' perceptions of communication practices, which may reflect interpretation of ongoing organizational experience rather than direct observation of managerial actions. Finally, the study was conducted within a specific organizational context.

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