# LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING EMOTIONAL BONDS AMID CHANGE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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## Abstract

*Organizational change often introduces discomfort and resistance among members, necessitating effective leadership communication to navigate these challenges. This paper explores the critical role of leadership communication in managing organizational change, focusing on persuasive techniques and emotional intelligence. It underscores that transparent, empathetic, and consistent communication not only reduces uncertainty but also fosters emotional connections within teams. Leaders who employ persuasive communication, coupled with narratives that resonate emotionally, can effectively manage resistance and align members with the organization's evolving goals. The study also highlights the importance of emotional support, active listening, and openness in dialogue as key factors in building trust and commitment during transitions. In the digital era, the accessibility of communication platforms presents both opportunities and challenges, requiring leaders to adapt their strategies to maintain engagement and cohesion. By integrating traditional and digital communication methods, leaders can enhance their teams' resilience and adaptability, ensuring successful navigation through organizational change.*

K**eywords**: *Leadership Communication, Organizational Change, Persuasive Techniques*

## Abstrak

Perubahan organisasi sering kali menimbulkan ketidaknyamanan dan resistensi di kalangan anggota, sehingga komunikasi kepemimpinan yang efektif menjadi penting untuk mengatasi tantangan ini. Makalah ini mengeksplorasi peran penting komunikasi kepemimpinan dalam mengelola perubahan organisasi, dengan fokus pada teknik persuasi dan kecerdasan emosional. Hal ini menekankan bahwa komunikasi yang transparan, empatik,

dan konsisten tidak hanya mengurangi ketidakpastian, tetapi juga membangun koneksi emosional di dalam tim. Pemimpin yang menggunakan komunikasi persuasif, yang dipadukan dengan narasi yang memiliki resonansi emosional, dapat secara efektif mengelola resistensi dan menyelaraskan anggota dengan tujuan organisasi yang terus berkembang. Studi ini juga menyoroti pentingnya dukungan emosional, mendengarkan secara aktif, dan keterbukaan dalam dialog sebagai faktor kunci dalam membangun kepercayaan dan komitmen selama transisi. Di era digital, aksesibilitas platform komunikasi menghadirkan peluang dan tantangan, yang memerlukan penyesuaian strategi komunikasi oleh para pemimpin untuk menjaga keterlibatan dan kohesi. Dengan mengintegrasikan metode komunikasi tradisional dan digital, pemimpin dapat meningkatkan ketahanan dan adaptabilitas tim mereka, memastikan navigasi yang sukses melalui perubahan organisasi.

**Kata Kunci** : Komunikasi Pimpinan, Perubahan Organisasi, Teknik Persuasi

## A. Introduction

Organizational change often creates uncomfortable conditions for its members. This discomfort can manifest as awkwardness, unease, or even lead to conflict. According to Sopiah (2008, p. 78) in Yudhaningsih (2011, p. 44), organizational change is a process involving changes in specific system variables identified through organizational diagnosis and planning stages. Organizations change because they constantly face various challenges, which arise from the external environment of the organization. The organizational environment, as described by Wursanto (2002), encompasses all factors affecting the organization and its activities, including both internal and external environments.

In the context of rapid change, effective communication within both internal and external environments becomes a fundamental element of leadership. Leaders are tasked not only with guiding the organization's direction but also with ensuring that every member understands, accepts, and supports the ongoing changes. Thus, a leader's ability to communicate persuasively and build

emotional connections with organizational members is critical for navigating the challenges of change. Resistance to change from members, which may manifest as fear, confusion, or outright rejection, is common. Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) found that resistance to change is often caused by uncertainty and threats to personal interests. In this context, effective communication is a primary tool for leaders to reduce fear and increase acceptance of change.

Leaders who communicate transparently and consistently can reduce uncertainty by explaining the reasons for the change, its long-term benefits, and its impacts on individuals within the organization. For instance, a study by Armenakis and Harris (2002) demonstrated that when leaders use persuasive communication emphasizing the urgency and importance of change, organizational members are more likely to support and adapt to the change. Organizational change often involves ambiguity and uncertainty, making

organizations vulnerable to conflict that management must anticipate (Yuwono & Putra, 2005). We argue that communication is essential for addressing the issues arising from organizational change. As Paul Latzalwick said, "We can not communicate." This principle underscores that communication is a crucial component in all aspects, including organizations. Effective communication between organizational members is vital for supporting changes within the organization (Prabawanti, 2008).

Organizational change is an inevitable process. Organizations cannot function or change without a communication process. Communication plays a role in persuading members and managing their emotions during organizational change. Neglecting the emotional aspect during organizational change can lead to lower success rates. However, if emotions during organizational change are well-managed, there is a greater likelihood of success.

One effective communication strategy for persuading organizational members is through the creation of a compelling narrative. Narratives that resonate emotionally and provide meaning to change can motivate members to commit to a shared vision. According to Denning's (2006) Storytelling in Organizations theory, well-crafted narratives can be a powerful tool in changing members' attitudes and behaviors.

Leaders who can convey a clear and convincing vision through relevant and meaningful stories are more likely to garner support. For example, when a technology company undergoes a major strategic change, a CEO who actively shares stories about how the change will lead the company into a new era often succeeds in gaining employee support compared to those who only provide formal statements. In addition to persuasion, the role of leadership communication is also crucial in building emotional connections among organizational members. A sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the organization is an important factor in dealing with change. Leaders who build emotional relationships through empathetic communication, listening to concerns, and showing appreciation for contributions can create a supportive organizational climate.

Goleman's (1998) research on emotional intelligence in leadership shows that leaders with high emotional intelligence are more successful in fostering emotional engagement with organizational members. This engagement is crucial as it can enhance loyalty, commitment, and morale, even in challenging situations. In the face of organizational change, the role of leadership communication cannot be underestimated. Through persuasive and empathetic communication, leaders can not only address resistance but also build strong emotional connections among organizational members. Thus, change can be better managed, and organizational goals can be achieved

more effectively. Leaders who understand and effectively utilize the role of communication will guide their organizations to success even amid challenging changes. Therefore, understanding the role of leadership communication in influencing and strengthening emotional relationships among members to face organizational change is essential.

## Literature Review

Communication is a crucial component in all aspects, including organizations. According to Mulyana (2001, p. 5), communication is essential for building self-concept, self-actualization, survival, happiness, avoiding stress and tension, providing entertainment, and fostering relationships with others. Communication serves functions that can drive, implement, and provide solutions to organizational changes. Effendy (in Arofah, 2009) defines communication as the process of delivering a message from one person to another to inform or change attitudes, opinions, or behaviors, either directly through verbal means or indirectly through media. Lubis (2008, p. 53) describes the communication process as interactive, relational, and transactional activities where a communicator sends a message to a receiver through a specific medium with certain intentions and objectives.

Organizational change is closely linked to the role of communication. Organizational change involves reprocessing organizational components to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Rapid environmental changes necessitate organizational adjustments, ranging from structural changes to cultural shifts. However, not all organizations need to undergo complete changes; some may need to evaluate and correct errors rather than completely overhaul components or culture (Kahar, 2008, p. 21). Communication plays a vital role in transforming knowledge from past mistakes and serves as a learning

medium. Anne Maria (1998, p. 209) in Kahar (2008) argues that organizational change involves reorganizing components to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Given the importance of change in a rapidly moving environment, organizations must not delay change, as delays may lead to organizational decline.

## B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the role of leadership communication in managing organizational change. The research focuses on how persuasive communication and emotional intelligence can be leveraged by leaders to navigate the challenges of change within an organization. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with organizational leaders and team members who have experienced significant change initiatives. These methods allow for a comprehensive

understanding of the communicative strategies employed by leaders and the emotional responses of team members.

To analyze the data, thematic analysis is used, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring the nuanced ways in which communication strategies impact the emotional dynamics within teams. The study also incorporates case studies of organizations that have undergone major changes, examining the communication tactics used by leaders and their effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes.

Additionally, secondary data from existing literature on leadership communication, organizational change, and emotional intelligence is integrated to contextualize the findings and provide a robust theoretical framework. The combination of primary qualitative data and secondary literature allows for a detailed exploration of the interplay

between leadership communication and emotional engagement during organizational change. This methodology aims to provide actionable insights for leaders seeking to improve their communication strategies in the face of organizational challenges.

## C. Result and Discussion

## Communication for Persuading Organizational Members During Change

Communication can be used by organizational leaders to persuade members during organizational change. Persuasive communication, as defined by Suparno (2009), involves delivering messages using a personal approach, making requests rather than demands, so that the receiver consciously understands and adjusts attitudes as expected by the communicator. Persuasive communication, according to Pfau and Perot (2001, p. 2) in Suparno (2009), involves shaping, changing, or reinforcing receivers' responses, including attitudes,

emotions, intentions, and behaviors. Therefore, persuasive communication aims to form, change, or compel attitudes, emotions, attention, and behaviors of organizational members.

Leaders who effectively employ persuasive communication can motivate organizational members to support organizational change. Research by Suparno (2009) indicates a positive relationship between persuasive communication, achievement motivation, managerial knowledge, and transformational leadership. In this case, if organizational leaders fail to apply persuasive communication, organizational failure may occur. For example, school principals in SMP Negeri Banten struggled with increasing educational quality and adapting to the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) due to insufficient persuasive communication skills. Problems included low student achievement, poor discipline, inadequate teaching techniques, and slow administrative support. Thus,

organizational leaders must continually improve their communication skills, especially persuasive communication, to guide and motivate members.

Effective persuasive tactics include "softer tactics," such as ingratiation, personal appeals, inspirational appeals, rational persuasion, and consultation, which are less likely to impact emotions and interpersonal relationships negatively. Hard power tactics may cause discomfort and pressure within the organization. According to Marianti (2011), softer tactics rely on personal power and include rational persuasion (using logical reasons and evidence), inspirational appeals (invoking enthusiasm by explaining values and aspirations), consultation (involving targets in planning), and personal appeals (requesting favors based on personal relationships). Bryant (2006, p. 255) explains that individual responses in negotiations are crucial for organizational success. Feedback from members helps develop future organizational change strategies, tailored to meet the unique needs of management and staff.

## Communication for Managing Emotions During Organizational Change

Organizational change often creates discomfort, which can manifest as awkwardness, unease, or conflict. Santrock (2007, p. 200) defines emotions as behaviors reflecting an individual's feelings about experiences. Managing emotions through interpersonal communication is crucial for maintaining organizational commitment during change. In unstable situations, fostering a sense of belonging through interpersonal communication strengthens organizational commitment. Trust built through quality communication between leaders and subordinates is essential for successful motivation (Nurrohim & Anata, 2009).

Emotions are integral to how individuals perceive and react to organizational change. They can reveal verbal and non-verbal indications of acceptance or rejection of change. Research by Adey & Bahari (2010, p. 62) shows a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational commitment. Organizational commitment fosters a sense of belonging among workers (Yudhaningsih, 2011).

Creating a sense of belonging is crucial for achieving organizational goals. Frijda (in Yuwono & Putra, 2005, p. 261) notes that emotions can positively contribute to organizational change if managed properly, as they serve adaptive functions. Neglecting emotional factors during change can lead to lower success rates. However, effective management of emotions during change can significantly improve success rates.

**Tabel 1. Key Factors of Leadership Communication Affecting Emotional Aspects of Team Members**

| Factor | Description | Impact on Emotional Relationships | Application in Organizational Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Empathy | The ability of leaders to understand and share the feelings of their team members. | Builds trust and emotional connection, making members feel valued and understood. | Helps in addressing fears and anxieties during organizational change by showing genuine concern for members' feelings. |
| Transparency | Open and honest communication about the changes and the reasons behind them. | Fosters a sense of security and openness, reducing uncertainty and speculation. | Ensures that all members are on the same page, reducing resistance and confusion during change implementation. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Active Listening | Leaders' practice of attentively listening to members' concerns, feedback, and ideas. | Strengthens the emotional bond by showing that members' voices matter and are heard. | Encourages a collaborative approach to change, making members feel involved and respected. |
| Support and Encouragement | Providing guidance, motivation, and reassurance during times of uncertainty. | Enhances members' confidence and emotional resilience, promoting a supportive team environment. | Helps members adapt to change more effectively by maintaining morale and a positive outlook. |
| Consistency in Communication | Maintaining regular and predictable communication patterns. | Builds reliability and trust, as members know what to expect from their leaders. | Reduces ambiguity and keeps everyone informed and aligned during the transition period. |
| Motivates members to embrace change by highlighting their role in the success of the transition. | Acknowledging and valuing members' contributions and efforts. | Strengthens emotional ties by making members feel recognized and appreciated. | |
| Emotional Intelligence (EI) | The ability to manage one's emotions and understand the emotions of others. | Creates a harmonious and empathetic work environment, enhancing emotional connections among team members. | Facilitates smoother transitions by managing stress and conflicts effectively during organizational change. |

Table 1 outlines the key factors in leadership communication that play a crucial role in influencing and strengthening emotional bonds among

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team members, especially in the context of organizational change. Each factor is described based on its nature, its impact on the emotional relationship between leaders and team members, and its role in facilitating the team's adaptation to change.

Leadership communication plays a significant role in shaping the emotional dynamics within a team, especially during periods of organizational change. Four major factors have a strong impact in this context: communication clarity, empathy, openness in dialogue, and emotional support.

Communication Clarity

Clarity in communication is vital for leaders because it ensures that team members fully understand the goals, expectations, and reasons behind changes. When communication is clear, it reduces uncertainty, thereby building trust and emotional stability within the team. This trust is crucial in reducing resistance to change and creating a

supportive environment to ease the transition process.

Empathy

Empathy in communication involves the leader's ability to understand and acknowledge the emotions and perspectives of team members. Empathetic leaders actively listen and respond in ways that recognize the feelings of their members. This approach not only strengthens personal relationships but also reduces anxiety, making team members more receptive to change. When members feel understood and valued, they are more likely to embrace organizational changes with less resistance.

Openness in Dialogue

Openness in dialogue refers to the leader's readiness to engage in two-way, transparent communication with team members. By creating a safe space for dialogue, leaders allow members to voice their concerns, opinions, and ideas. This

openness builds trust and emotional engagement, making team members feel more involved in decision-making processes. This involvement is crucial during organizational changes as it reduces resistance and encourages collaboration in overcoming challenges.

Emotional Support

Emotional support from leaders is essential during times of change. Leaders who provide encouragement, reinforcement, and understanding help build a strong sense of unity and solidarity within the team. This support not only enhances the emotional well-being of team members but also boosts their resilience and commitment to facing challenges.

These factors are supported by research in leadership communication and organizational behavior. Studies show that communication clarity reduces ambiguity and increases job satisfaction (Men & Stacks, 2013). Empathy is related to increased employee engagement and

emotional well-being (Gentry et al., 2016). Openness in dialogue fosters a participatory culture, crucial for successful change management (Detert & Burris, 2007), while emotional support has been shown to reduce stress and improve adaptability during change (Keller, 2006). Overall, these factors create a leadership approach that not only strengthens emotional bonds within the team but also prepares them to face and adapt to organizational changes effectively.

**The Impact of Leadership Communication in the Digital Era**

In the digital era, leadership communication has undergone significant transformations that affect organizational dynamics and effectiveness. The emergence of digital technologies and platforms has changed how leaders interact with their teams, impacting organizational culture and change management. This discussion explores the implications of these changes and highlights key areas where

digital advancements impact leadership communication.

1. Increased Accessibility and Transparency

Digital tools such as email, instant messaging, and video conferencing have made communication more accessible and immediate. Leaders can now engage with their teams in real time, regardless of geographic location. This increased accessibility promotes transparency, as leaders can share information quickly and openly, reinforcing a culture of trust. Research indicates that transparency in leadership communication enhances employee satisfaction and organizational commitment (Men & Stacks, 2013). However, the challenge is to ensure that digital communication does not become overwhelming or lead to information overload, which can diminish interaction quality and decision-making (Gentry et al., 2016).

2. Enhanced Engagement Through Interactive Platforms

Social media and collaborative platforms have revolutionized how leaders interact with their teams. Tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, and various social media channels enable leaders to create a more interactive and participatory environment. These tools facilitate ongoing dialogue, feedback, and collaboration, which can enhance team cohesion and collective problem-solving. Empirical studies show that interactive communication platforms improve employee engagement and collective innovation (Detert & Burris, 2007). Leaders must use these platforms strategically to balance engagement with productivity and ensure that virtual interactions complement, rather than replace, face-to-face communication.

3. Challenges of Remote and Asynchronous Communication

While digital tools offer many advantages, they also present challenges, particularly in remote and asynchronous communication. Remote work can lead to feelings of isolation and reduced

emotional connection among team members. Leadership communication must adapt to address these challenges by incorporating regular check-ins, virtual team-building activities, and personalized communication approaches. Research shows that effective remote leadership involves not only task management but also emotional support and connection (Keller, 2006). Leaders need to adeptly use digital tools to maintain engagement and morale in a virtual work environment.

4. Data-Driven Insights and Decision-Making

Digital technology provides leaders with data-driven insights that can enhance decision-making and strategic planning. Analytical tools can track communication patterns, employee engagement levels, and overall organizational performance. Leaders who effectively leverage these insights can make more informed decisions and adjust their communication strategies to address specific needs and challenges.

However, there is a risk of over-reliance on data, which may overlook qualitative aspects of leadership communication, such as empathy and personal connection (Suparno, 2009).

5. Navigating the Complexity of Digital Communication

The digital era has introduced a variety of communication channels and platforms, each with different norms and expectations. Leaders must navigate this complexity by developing digital communication skills and understanding the nuances of various platforms. Effective leadership communication now requires proficiency in managing multiple digital tools and adapting messages to different media. The ability to integrate digital communication with traditional methods is crucial for maintaining effectiveness and ensuring that messages are clear, engaging, and appropriate for the audience. Considering the discussion provided, here are the potential limitations of the study :

One key limitation of this study is the complexity of the topics it addresses, including leadership communication, emotional intelligence, and the impact of digital tools on organizational change. While the study attempts to cover these areas comprehensively, the breadth of these topics may limit the depth of analysis. This could lead to an oversimplification of the nuanced interactions between these elements, which are often context-dependent and influenced by various external factors.

The generalizability of the study's findings is another significant limitation. The research is grounded in specific organizational settings and leadership styles, which may not be universally applicable across different industries, cultures, or organizational structures. As a result, the strategies and outcomes discussed may not fully resonate with or be effective in other contexts, limiting the broader applicability of the conclusions drawn.

Additionally, the study focuses heavily on the leadership perspective, potentially overlooking the viewpoints of other organizational members. This focus might result in a one-sided analysis that does not fully capture the diverse experiences and responses to organizational change within the organization. The subjective nature of emotional responses, which can vary widely among individuals, further complicates the study's ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the emotional dynamics at play.

Lastly, the study's reliance on qualitative data, including interviews, focus groups, and case studies, introduces limitations in terms of empirical evidence. While these methods provide valuable insights, they are also subjective and context-specific, which may affect the reliability and robustness of the findings. Additionally, given the rapid evolution of digital communication tools, the study's conclusions regarding their impact may

quickly become outdated, limiting the long-term relevance of the research.

## D. Conclusion

Bbased on the discussion above, there are two key communication strategies that leaders should employ when managing organizational change: persuasion and emotional bonding. Communication can serve as a means to persuade team members to achieve organizational goals. Persuasive communication plays a critical role in organizational change. When leaders aim to implement new policies, using softer tactics for persuasion is the most effective approach compared to hard tactics. Communication also plays an equally important role in managing team members' emotions, particularly through interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication from leaders can reveal team members' emotions regarding the acceptance or rejection of organizational changes.

Leadership communication in the digital era presents both opportunities and challenges. While digital tools enhance accessibility, transparency, and engagement, they also require leaders to adjust their communication strategies to address issues of isolation, information overload, and platform complexity. Successful leaders in the digital era are those who can effectively integrate digital communication tools with traditional approaches, maintain emotional connections with their teams, and leverage data-driven insights to guide their decision-making processes. As digital technology continues to evolve, ongoing research and adaptation will be essential to understanding and optimizing the impact of leadership communication in this dynamic environment.

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