

## **Interpersonal Communication Strategies Between Supervisors and Subordinates to Improve Operational Performance**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the implementation of interpersonal communication strategies between superiors and subordinates in the operational context of PT Bukit Makmur Mandiri Utama (BUMA) Jobsite IPR. The main focus is directed at how communication interactions shape work relationships and influence the process of achieving production targets. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and case study method, this study explores the experiences, perceptions, and communication practices that occur in the field. The findings indicate that open, empathetic, and trust-based communication is an important foundation in building work synergy. However, there are a number of communication barriers that arise, such as differences in perception, incongruent communication styles, and limited time and space for interaction, technical disruptions caused by disrupted radio or internet signals, which ultimately pose real challenges in accelerating work, errors in execution, and ultimately disrupt work productivity. This study recommends the need to strengthen interpersonal communication capacity through training and continuous evaluation of internal communication systems.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Communication, Superior-Subordinate, Communication Barriers, Operational Performance, Qualitative Study

## **INTRODUCTION**

Interpersonal communication is the primary foundation for building healthy and productive working relationships within an organization. In the context of modern organizations, particularly those operating in heavy industrial sectors such as mining, communication serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a tool for building trust, fostering coordination, and strengthening collaboration between individuals and work units. PT Bukit Makmur Mandiri Utama (*BUMA*) Jobsite *IPR*, one of the largest mining services companies in Indonesia, faces complex operational challenges, ranging from high production targets and demanding working conditions to the dynamics of relationships among a diverse workforce. In such situations, interpersonal communication between superiors and subordinates becomes crucial. This not only ensures that work instructions are conveyed effectively but also builds morale, reduces conflict, and improves operational efficiency.

However, in practice, interpersonal communication in the workplace does not always run smoothly. Barriers such as differing perceptions, incongruent communication styles, time pressures, and differing cultural and educational backgrounds often hinder meaningful communication. This can lead to decreased work motivation, errors in task execution, and even conflicts that hinder the achievement of company goals.

This study aims to explore how interpersonal communication strategies are implemented by superiors towards subordinates at PT *BUMA* Jobsite *IPR*, and how these communications contribute to improved operational performance. Using a qualitative approach and case study method, this study seeks to delve deeply into the experiences, perceptions, and communication practices that occur in the field. The primary focus is directed at identifying communication patterns, emerging barriers, and strategies used to overcome communication challenges in a dynamic work context.

Interpersonal communication has long been a focus of study in communication science, particularly in the context of organizations and workplace relationships. Previous research has

shown that the quality of interpersonal communication between superiors and subordinates significantly contributes to various organizational aspects such as productivity, work motivation, job satisfaction, and workplace safety. (Afriyadi, 2015), in his research at PT Borneo Enterprisindo Samarinda, found that not optimal interpersonal communication—particularly due to a lack of empathy and openness from superiors—can reduce motivation and work productivity. Poor communication also contributes to high turnover rates and workplace accidents. (Siregar, 2019) emphasized that interpersonal communication between employees is key to building strong working relationships. He stated that compared to other forms of communication, interpersonal communication is more effective in creating closeness between individuals, not only as coworkers but also as partners in achieving organizational goals.

(Muhtadi, Suparba, & Wahyu, 2023) underline the importance of healthy relationships between leaders and staff in building mutual trust and commitment. When leaders demonstrate empathy, actively listen, and provide constructive feedback, employees feel valued and encouraged to contribute their best. Conversely, relationships that are too formal or too personal outside of a professional context can create tension and decrease work motivation. (Laia, Sitorus, & Bangun, 2024), in a study at PT Mandiri Abadi Permai, concluded that good interpersonal communication between superiors and subordinates creates a harmonious and productive work environment and supports the achievement of operational targets. The study also emphasized the importance of open and empathetic two-way communication in building a healthy work culture. (Hajijah & Putra, 2023) shows that interpersonal communication has a greater influence than motivation on employee work performance. This study provides a new perspective that the quality of interactions between individuals within an organization can be a dominant factor in achieving performance.

In general, all previous research indicates that interpersonal communication between superiors and subordinates has a significant relationship with various aspects of performance. This relationship can be direct, such as increased productivity and work effectiveness, or indirect, such as increased motivation, loyalty, and job satisfaction. However, most research has been conducted in the service, education, and manufacturing sectors. This study makes a novel contribution by focusing on the mining sector, which has unique work characteristics, such as remote work locations, high work rhythms, and intense levels of interaction between workers. This makes interpersonal communication a very important element in maintaining smooth operations and work safety.

### **Theoretical Review**

The theoretical study in this research examines the basic concepts of interpersonal communication and their relevance in an organizational context, particularly in the mining sector. Interpersonal communication is defined as the process of exchanging messages between two or more individuals that occurs directly and allows for feedback. This theory emphasizes that communication is dynamic, transactional, and influenced by social, psychological, and cultural contexts.

### **Interpersonal Communication Models and Processes**

The research refers to a transactional communication model involving components such as sender, receiver, message, channel, encoding-decoding, feedback, noise, and context. The communication process occurs circularly and simultaneously, with each party taking turns as speaker and listener.

### **Positive Attitude in Interpersonal Communication**

Referring to the theory (DeVito, 2013), there are five positive attitudes that are indicators of successful interpersonal communication:

1. *Openness* – honesty and transparency in conveying information.
2. *Empathy* – the ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others.

3. Supportive Attitude – communication that is descriptive, non-judgmental, and encourages participation.
4. *Equality* – recognition that all parties have equal value and rights in communication.
5. Positive Attitude – appreciation of others' contributions and use of constructive language.

### **Function Interpersonal Communication**

Interpersonal communication serves to build relationships, reduce conflict, improve coordination and collaboration, provide psychological support, and support participatory decision-making.

### **Interference in Interpersonal Communication**

According to (DeVito, 2013), in every interpersonal communication event, there is the potential for interference. This interference can hinder the success of the communication process and cause the message to be received incorrectly. DeVito identified several types of communication disorders that can occur in the interpersonal communication process:

- a) Physical/Technical Interference: originates from the external environment, such as noise, distance, or interruptions.
- b) example, hearing or vision impairment in one party, or an illness that makes it difficult for someone to concentrate.
- c) Psychological Interference: arises from differences in values, emotions, or attitudes between the communicator and recipient.
- d) Semantic Interference: occurs when words or symbols used have multiple meanings or are not understood by the recipient.

These interferences can cause the message sent to differ from the message received, thus reducing the success of the communication process.

### **Operational Performance**

In an organizational context, performance refers to the achievements made by individuals or groups in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Performance is not only seen in terms of the final result, but also encompasses the implementation process, work behavior, and contribution to overall organizational goals. According to (Bernardin & Russell, 1998), performance is the documentation of the results of carrying out a job function over a specific period of time. Meanwhile, (Armstrong, 2006) emphasizes that performance encompasses the execution of tasks and the results obtained, with a focus not only on output but also on the quality and work processes performed.

Employee performance assessment is usually carried out using the following indicators:

1. Quantity of work: how much output is produced;
2. Quality of work: the level of accuracy, precision, and conformity of work results to standards;
3. Timeliness: the ability to complete tasks according to deadlines;
4. Work efficiency: the extent to which resources are optimally utilized;
5. Personal initiative: the ability to act independently without waiting for instructions;
6. Collaboration skills: team contributions and interactions that support collective work.

According to (Lagou, et al., 2024), there are several theories that explain aspects related to performance, including:

#### **a) *Expectancy Theory* – Victor Vroom**

This theory states that work motivation arises when individuals have a clear perception of the relationship between effort, performance, and rewards. Interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in shaping this perception through three main components:

1. *Expectancy*: the expectation that effort will result in good performance, reinforced through clear communication from superiors;
2. *Instrumentality*: the belief that performance will be rewarded, reinforced through interpersonal feedback;

3. *Valence*: the understanding of the value of the rewards received, shaped through optimal communication.
- b) *Goal-Setting Theory* – Locke & Latham This theory emphasizes the importance of specific and challenging goals in improving performance. Clear goals provide direction, motivate effort, and encourage persistence. Open and dialogic communication in goal setting can increase understanding, commitment, and accountability for achieving work results.
- c) *Motivation Theory* – Herzberg  
Herzberg divided factors influencing performance into two categories:
  - a) Motivator factors: such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and self-development, which can increase satisfaction and performance;
  - b) Hygiene factors: such as salary, working conditions, interpersonal relationships, and organizational policies, which serve to prevent dissatisfaction. Interpersonal communication is a crucial element in supporting both of these factors, both in providing recognition and creating a healthy work environment.
- d) *Equity Theory* – Adams  
This theory states that individuals assess fairness based on a comparison of inputs (effort, time, skills) and outputs (rewards, recognition) with others. When perceived unfairness occurs, employees tend to adjust their work behavior accordingly. Open and transparent interpersonal communication can help create a sense of fairness, which is associated with improved performance.  
Based on these theories, it can be concluded that individual performance can be linked to several key aspects, such as:
  1. Competence and skills: the extent to which an individual possesses the necessary abilities;
  2. Work motivation: internal and external drives to perform optimally;
  3. Work environment: the physical and social conditions that support task performance;
  4. Leadership style: how superiors guide and direct subordinates;
  5. Interpersonal communication: the quality of interactions between individuals within an organization.

This theoretical study serves as a foundation for analyzing how interpersonal communication strategies are implemented at *BUMA IPR* and how these elements contribute to operational performance.

## METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm, which views *social* reality as being shaped through individual interactions and interpretations. This paradigm allows the researcher to explore the meaning of interpersonal communication experiences between superiors and subordinates in the operational work context at PT *BUMA Jobsite IPR*. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the communication process, rather than quantitative measurements. This research does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to explore communication phenomena contextually and interpretively. The method used is a case study, which allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of interpersonal communication practices within one specific organization, PT *BUMA Jobsite IPR*. This case study is intrinsically motivated because its focus is on understanding communication phenomena within the complex and high-risk context of mining operations.

The main focus of this research is the interpersonal communication strategies applied by superiors to subordinates at *BUMA Jobsite IPR*, the communication process that occurs in operations, and the communication barriers that arise in work interactions. This focus is developed based on Joseph A. DeVito's interpersonal communication theory, which

emphasizes the two-way communication process and five positive attitudes as aspects that are used as references for successful communication.

The research subjects consisted of various levels of positions at PT *BUMA* Jobsite *IPR*, namely, Mr. Agung Riyanto (Project Manager *BUMA* Jobsite *IPR*) as a key informant, Mrs. Sri Devi Octavia Surbakti (Business Excellence & Communication Superintendent) as the main informant, and several Superintendents, Operational Supervisors, Operators, and Mechanics as additional informants. The selection of informants was done purposively, taking into account their direct involvement in the operational communication process.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted thematically, with triangulation of sources and methods to ensure data validity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Good interpersonal communication between superiors and subordinates, consistently implemented, will positively impact a company's success. Increased work productivity, decreased workplace accident rates, and the achievement of company targets are all positive outcomes. Therefore, a good and optimal interpersonal communication strategy must be a major concern for a company. This data analysis will be further deepened by linking the interpersonal communication strategy implemented at *BUMA IPR* with the interpersonal communication strategy theory developed by Joseph De Vito to gain an overview of the current communication strategy, the communication process, and the obstacles encountered in its implementation.

This study examines the interpersonal communication strategies between superiors and subordinates at PT Bukit Makmur Mandiri Utama Jobsite *IPR* (*BUMA IPR*) and how the communication process is implemented to support operational performance. The results indicate that interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in creating a productive, safe, and collaborative work environment.

### Interpersonal Communication Strategies

The communication strategy implemented at *BUMA IPR* is divided into two main forms: formal and informal. Formal communication includes email, meetings, job briefings (P5M), safety talks, and monthly managerial messages. Meanwhile, informal communication is carried out through activities such as PM Visits, onboarding (PMAN), Ngobras forums, and Super Leader (SULE) meetings. This strategy aims to build harmonious working relationships, increase motivation, and strengthen understanding of work targets. The communication strategy implemented by *BUMA IPR* also reflects DeVito's five main functions:

- a) Relationship-building, implemented through face-to-face communication strategies such as GENBA, Ngobras (Casual Chat), PMAN, Super Leaders (SULE), direct communication (coffee meetups), DESA, Project Manager Visits, and WhatsApp Groups.
- b) Conflict reduction, implemented through communication strategies implemented in workshops such as Ngobras (Casual Chat), Super Leaders (SULE), direct communication (coffee meetups), and DESA.
- c) Coordination and collaboration, implemented through communication strategies such as email, WhatsApp Groups, radio communications, job briefings, Safety Talks, and both face-to-face and online meetings.
- d) Motivation and psychological support, implemented through face-to-face communication strategies implemented in workshops such as Project Manager Visits, Ngobras (Casual Chat), Super Leaders (SULE), direct communication (coffee meetups), and DESA.
- e) The decision-making function is carried out through formal communication strategies in online and offline meeting agendas, such as cross-section and internal section meetings,

Project Manager Visits and Super Leaders (SULE), as well as direct communication (land coffee).

### **Positive Attitudes in Communication**

This study identified five positive attitudes as indicators of successful interpersonal communication: openness, empathy, support, equality, and positivity. Openness encourages two-way dialogue and builds trust. Empathy is reflected in attention to employees' emotional and personal well-being. Supportive attitudes are demonstrated through technical assistance and motivation from superiors. Equality creates a fair and inclusive communication space. A positive attitude strengthens work morale through appreciation and constructive communication.

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### **Communication Process**

The interpersonal communication process at BUMA IPR is dynamic and two-way. Based on transactional communication theory, communication involves not only sending messages but also constructing shared meaning between the sender and receiver. In practice, supervisors and operators exchange information through various communication stages, from idea initiation, message coding, media selection, message delivery, decoding by the receiver, and providing feedback.

Communication occurs in various forms, both verbal and nonverbal, and is influenced by work contexts such as operational pressures, shift differences, and cultural backgrounds. This process also involves ongoing evaluation through direct feedback, both in formal forums such as briefings and in informal interactions such as field discussions.

### **Communication Channel and Challenge**

The communication channels used at BUMA IPR include:

- 1) Face-to-face: used for daily briefings, field discussions, and informal sessions such as Ngobras (Ngobras). This channel is considered the most effective because it allows for nonverbal expression and minimizes technical interference.
- 2) WhatsApp: is the most active communication channel, used for technical coordination, work documentation, and the delivery of operational information. However, limited signal strength and overlapping messages pose challenges.
- 3) HT radio: used for direct communication in the field, especially during operational activities. Signal interference and crowded channels are major obstacles.
- 4) Email: used for the delivery of formal information and internal documentation.

Key challenges in using communication channels include limited signal strength in mining areas, information overload in WhatsApp groups, technical issues with HT radios, and differences in communication preferences among individuals. New employees also tend to be reluctant to actively use communication channels, which impacts the effectiveness of message delivery.

### **Communication Interference**

During the communication process, interference can occur, which can negatively impact the delivery and interpretation of messages. Interference is anything that hinders the delivery or understanding of a message. Research has shown that several types of interference frequently occur in BUMA IPR's operations:

- a) Physical/technical interference (such as weak radio signals),
- b) Physiological interference, which is related to the physical condition of the communicator or recipient, which can affect the communication process. For example, hearing or vision

impairment in one party, or illness that makes it difficult for someone to concentrate. This research did not find any occurrence of these interferences at BUMA IPR.

- c) Psychological interference (feelings of embarrassment or work pressure), and
- d) Semantic interference (the use of regional languages not understood by all parties).

Disruptions in the communication process at BUMA IPR pose a real challenge to operational communication. These disruptions subsequently lead to several operational failures, such as work delays, execution errors, and decreased productivity and safety. This reinforces the relevance of DeVito's theory that disruptions in the communication process must be recognized and minimized to ensure successful communication.

Overall, interpersonal communication at BUMA IPR has made a positive contribution to operational performance. However, strengthening the consistency of strategy implementation, interpersonal communication training, and a more structured communication evaluation system is needed. Communication built on trust, empathy, and equality is a strategic foundation for creating a healthy and sustainable work culture.

## CONCLUSION

The interpersonal communication strategy implemented by superiors and subordinates at *BUMA IPR* currently demonstrates a systematic structure and pattern, both in formal and informal communication. Formal communication is conducted through media such as email, coordination meetings, job briefings (*P5M*), safety talks, and *PM Messages*. Meanwhile, informal communication is carried out through activities such as *PM Visits*, *PMAN* (onboarding program), *Ngobras* (casual forum), and *SULE* (Super Leader). This strategy is designed to reach all levels of the organization and build closer and more open working relationships.

From the perspective of Joseph A. DeVito's interpersonal communication theory, this strategy reflects the five main functions of interpersonal communication: building relationships, reducing conflict, supporting coordination and collaboration, providing motivation and psychological support, and supporting decision-making.

In application, this strategy aligns with Victor Vroom's performance theory by increasing expectations and perceptions of work results (instrumentality), Herzberg's two-factor theory by creating motivating and hygiene factors, Locke & Latham's goal-setting theory by setting clear and participatory goals, and Adams' equity theory by creating perceptions of justice in organizational communication.

The communication process at *BUMA IPR* is two-way, dynamic, and contextual, yet still faces challenges in the effectiveness of communication channels and understanding across job levels. Communication between supervisors and operators takes place through various channels, such as face-to-face, radio, WhatsApp, and email. This process involves the exchange of messages covering technical instructions, appreciation, empathy, and work coordination. Feedback is provided directly as well as through evaluation forums, coaching, and informal discussions.

DeVito's transactional communication model is highly relevant in describing this process, where senders and receivers interact simultaneously in complex and stressful work contexts. Communication contexts such as shift differences, operational pressures, and work culture also influence communication effectiveness. With regard to performance theory, this communication process supports the development of competencies and skills (Herzberg), increases work motivation through empathy and support (Vroom), strengthens commitment to work goals (Locke & Latham), and creates a fair and supportive work environment (Adams).

Interpersonal communication disruptions between superiors and subordinates at *BUMA IPR* remain a significant obstacle that directly impacts operational performance. Technical disruptions such as weak radio signals and crowded channels, semantic disruptions resulting

from the use of regional languages not understood by all parties, psychological disruptions such as reluctance from new employees, and differences in worker perception and support across shifts and *sections* have led to miscommunication, execution errors, and decreased productivity.

DeVito's theory emphasizes the importance of recognizing and minimizing communication breakdowns to achieve effectiveness. Meanwhile, Adams' equity theory suggests that unfair or non-transparent communication can decrease motivation and lead to job dissatisfaction.

Therefore, communication system improvements are needed, including infrastructure upgrades, interpersonal communication training, and strengthening structured feedback systems. These efforts are expected to reduce communication disruptions and support sustainable operational performance.

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