

Supervisor-Subordinate Communication and Employee Performance: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

Supervisor-subordinate communication is widely recognized as an important factor in employee motivation and performance. However, many previous studies have examined communication mainly as a general organizational variable, with limited attention to the relational processes through which supervisory communication is interpreted and transformed into motivational and performance-related outcomes. This study examines supervisor-subordinate communication as a relational mechanism in a hierarchical workplace context. In this study, relational mechanism refers to recurring communicative processes through which supervisory messages are interpreted by subordinates as sources of clarity, inclusion, guidance, support, and coordination. Using a qualitative case study design at PT Modella, Indonesia, this study draws on semi-structured interviews, observation, and organizational documentation involving one leadership-level key informant and five employee informants from production, packing, administration, and sales divisions. Thematic analysis identified five relational communication processes: task clarification, dialogic participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cross-functional coordination. These processes shaped work motivation by

strengthening role certainty, perceived appreciation, psychological safety, learning orientation, and self-confidence. They also contributed to perceived performance through clearer task execution, fewer work errors, faster problem solving, and smoother inter-divisional coordination. The study contributes to organizational communication scholarship by showing that supervisor-subordinate communication influences motivation and perceived performance not only through information transmission but also through employees' relational interpretation of supervisory interaction. The findings should be understood within the limits of a single qualitative case study and perceived rather than objectively measured performance.

Keywords: *Supervisor-Subordinate Communication; Relational Mechanism; Work Motivation; Perceived Performance; Qualitative Case Study*

1. Introduction

Communication is a fundamental element of organizational life because almost all work activities occur through the exchange of messages, instructions, coordination, evaluation, and feedback. In the workplace, communication functions not only as a medium for transmitting information but also as a social mechanism that shapes work relationships, trust, motivation, and employee performance. Organizational communication literature indicates that open, consistent, and supportive leadership communication can foster engagement, trust, and more positive work-related behaviors (Alsharairi et al., 2025; Qin et al., 2025; Thelen et al., 2022). Therefore, the quality of communication between supervisors and subordinates is a central issue in contemporary organizational management.

This study is important because many workplace performance problems do not originate only from employees' technical ability, but also from unclear instructions, limited feedback, weak listening practices, and insufficient coordination between supervisors and subordinates. In hierarchical workplaces, these communication problems may become more serious because employees may hesitate to ask questions, report difficulties, or challenge unclear instructions. Therefore, examining supervisor-subordinate communication is necessary to understand how daily interaction can support motivation, reduce misunderstanding, and strengthen perceived work performance.

In hierarchical work relationships, supervisor-subordinate communication has a strategic role because supervisors do not

merely provide instructions; they also guide, coach, give feedback, and provide psychological support to employees. This study defines supervisor-subordinate communication as the everyday exchange of task-related and relational messages between employees and those who direct, evaluate, or coordinate their work. When communication is effective, subordinates can more easily understand work expectations, task priorities, and solutions to operational barriers. Conversely, ineffective communication may lead to misunderstanding, role ambiguity, lower motivation, interpersonal conflict, and decreased productivity. Studies on motivating language show that the way supervisors use language can influence psychological safety, meaningfulness, and employee advocacy (Thelen et al., 2022; Yue et al., 2025).

The concept of relational mechanism is central to this study. Relational mechanism refers to a recurring communicative process through which supervisory messages become meaningful to employees as clarity, support, inclusion, guidance, or coordination. This definition is important because communication does not affect employees only through the accuracy of information. Employees also interpret the tone, timing, responsiveness, and openness of supervisory communication as indicators of whether they are trusted, valued, and allowed to participate in work-related problem solving. Psychological safety, in this study, refers to employees' perception that they can ask questions, report problems, and express concerns without excessive fear of blame or interpersonal punishment. Perceived performance refers to employees' and supervisors' subjective assessment of work outcomes, such as task completion, fewer errors, coordination effectiveness, and problem-solving speed. This distinction is important because the present study does not measure objective performance indicators such as productivity records, sales data, or formal appraisal scores.

Work motivation is an important aspect shaped by the quality of supervisor-subordinate communication. Employees who receive clear instructions, appreciation, constructive feedback, and opportunities to be heard by their supervisors tend to develop stronger work motivation. From a relational communication perspective, motivation is not formed only by formal incentives but also by employees' experiences of being valued, trusted, and included in work processes. Recent studies indicate that communication, work environment, leadership, psychological safety, and communicative

behavior can jointly explain employee motivation, engagement, and performance (Ardianto, 2023; Khurohman, 2024; Kim et al., 2020; Sherren & Indra, 2025).

In addition to shaping motivation, supervisor-subordinate communication is closely related to employee performance. Performance is not determined solely by individual technical competence, but also by task clarity, coordination, accuracy of information, and the quality of work relationships. Within the leader-member exchange framework, the quality of leader-subordinate relationships is associated with work engagement, job satisfaction, and performance (Genç, 2024; Jufrizen et al., 2024; Latifoglu et al., 2023; Siswadi et al., 2025; Vernanda, 2022). Other empirical findings also confirm that communication, teamwork, and motivation contribute to employee performance (Sitepu & Husein, 2025).

Three related bodies of literature inform this study. First, leader-member exchange literature emphasizes that the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships is associated with work engagement, job satisfaction, and performance. Second, motivating language theory explains how supervisors' direction-giving, meaning-making, and empathetic communication can shape employee attitudes and supportive behaviors. Third, employee voice literature shows that employees are more likely to speak up when they perceive that communication is safe, valued, and potentially effective. These perspectives suggest that supervisor-subordinate communication should be examined not only as a managerial channel but also as a relational process that shapes how employees experience work.

Although many studies have examined interpersonal communication, work motivation, and employee performance, most still position communication as a general variable measured quantitatively. Such an approach is important for demonstrating statistical relationships, yet it does not sufficiently explain how supervisor-subordinate communication is enacted, interpreted, and negotiated in daily work practices. In other words, there remains a limited understanding of the micro-relational processes through which supervisory communication is transformed into motivational experiences and perceived performance outcomes.

Recent studies on supervisory communication and employee voice indicate that supervisor-subordinate communication should not be understood only as a formal managerial channel. Supervisory

communication can foster trust when employees perceive messages as direction-giving, meaning-making, and empathetic rather than merely instructional (Men et al., 2022). At the same time, employee voice literature shows that employees are more likely to speak up when organizational conditions signal that voice is safe, valued, and potentially effective (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). This is especially relevant in hierarchical workplaces, where power distance may discourage employees from questioning instructions, reporting problems, or offering suggestions unless supervisors actively create a communicative climate that supports voice.

(Mazzei et al., 2025) show that speaking up at work is shaped not only by individual willingness but also by organizational communication conditions that either encourage or suppress participation. Therefore, the present study argues that supervisor-subordinate communication should be examined as a relational mechanism that connects message clarity, psychological safety, employee voice, and perceived performance. This perspective moves beyond asking whether communication affects motivation and performance, and instead asks how everyday communication practices are interpreted, negotiated, and transformed into motivational and work-related outcomes.

The research gap addressed in this study lies in the limited qualitative examination of supervisor-subordinate communication as a relational mechanism in hierarchical organizations. Previous studies have often used broad constructs such as communication, leadership style, leader-member exchange, or employee engagement, but they do not always reveal concrete communicative practices such as task clarification, dialogic participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cross-functional coordination. In operational organizations, communication is not only a channel for information delivery but also a means of constructing role certainty, perceived appreciation, psychological safety, and task execution.

The qualitative orientation of this study is also justified by the need to capture meanings that are difficult to observe through survey indicators alone. Quantitative studies can show whether communication is statistically related to motivation or performance, but they often cannot explain how employees experience a supervisor's instruction as helpful, threatening, supportive, or unclear. By examining communication as a relational process, this study attends to the concrete practices through which supervisors

clarify work, invite voice, correct mistakes, provide emotional support, and coordinate interdependent tasks. This focus allows the study to move beyond a general claim that communication matters and toward a more specific explanation of the communicative mechanisms through which motivation and perceived performance are shaped.

The Indonesian organizational context provides a relevant setting for this inquiry. In workplaces where authority relations are clearly structured, employees may be cautious in questioning instructions or reporting problems. Indonesian organizational communication studies have examined the relationship between communication, leadership, leader-member exchange, motivation, and performance, yet more qualitative attention is needed to explain how these relationships are experienced in daily supervisor-subordinate interaction. This cultural and organizational context is relevant because hierarchical communication may shape whether employees interpret supervisory communication as supportive, controlling, or safe enough to invite participation.

Based on this gap, this study focuses on the dynamics of supervisor-subordinate communication at PT Modella as a hierarchical workplace with functional divisions, including production, packing, administration, and sales. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing supervisor-subordinate communication as a relational mechanism rather than merely as message transmission. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how supervisor-subordinate communication is enacted in everyday workplace interaction, what relational communication processes shape work motivation, and how these processes contribute to perceived employee performance.

The research questions derived from this positioning focus on how supervisor-subordinate communication is practiced, experienced, and connected to workplace outcomes at PT Modella. Specifically, this study examines how supervisor-subordinate communication is practiced in routine workplace interaction, what relational communication processes shape employees' work motivation, and how these relational communication processes are connected to perceived employee performance.

This study aims to examine how supervisor-subordinate communication is practiced at PT Modella. It also aims to explain

how relational communication processes shape work motivation and perceived employee performance.

PT Modella provides a relevant case because its work processes require coordination across operational and administrative functions. Production employees depend on clear instructions about task priorities and standards, packing employees depend on timely coordination to avoid delays, administrative employees depend on accurate information flow, and sales employees depend on evaluation and communication related to targets and customer service. These functional differences make supervisor-subordinate communication a practical site for examining how work messages are translated into role certainty, perceived appreciation, and coordinated action. Thus, the value of the case does not lie merely in the uniqueness of one company, but in its ability to illuminate communication processes that may also appear in similar hierarchical and operational workplaces.

The case selection, therefore, follows an instrumental case logic. PT Modella was not selected because it is statistically representative of all organizations, but because it provides a relevant organizational setting for examining how hierarchical communication becomes relationally meaningful in daily work. The case is useful for understanding similar operational workplaces where employees depend on supervisors for direction, evaluation, clarification, and coordination.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings regarding supervisor-subordinate communication in a real organizational context. A case study design was used because the research focused on a single organizational setting, PT Modella, to obtain an in-depth and contextual understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Murdiyanto, 2020; Priya, 2021; Yin, 2018).

The case study was exploratory and interpretive. It did not aim to produce statistical generalization but to develop an analytically transferable explanation of how communication operates as a relational mechanism in a hierarchical workplace. The case was

selected because PT Modella involves several interdependent divisions whose work requires coordination, task clarification, feedback, and supervisory support.

2.2 Research Subjects and Sampling

The research subjects consisted of supervisors and subordinates directly involved in daily workplace communication. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in work communication processes and their understanding of company activities. The informants consisted of one key informant at the leadership level and five informants from the production, packing, administration, and sales divisions. This composition was intended to obtain varied perspectives from both leadership and employees across functional areas.

For confidentiality in the manuscript, informants were identified using codes rather than personal names. The leadership-level informant was coded as KI-1, while employee informants were coded as I-1 to I-5. The informants represented the CEO/leadership level, production, packing, administration, and sales divisions. This coding strategy was used to protect participant identity while still allowing cross-informant comparison across organizational roles.

The purposive sampling criteria were: 1) direct involvement in daily supervisor-subordinate communication, 2) knowledge of work coordination processes, 3) representation of different functional divisions, and 4) willingness to provide information about communication experiences in the workplace. The inclusion of one leadership-level key informant provided insight into supervisory expectations, communication practices, and employee management. The inclusion of five employee informants provided subordinate perspectives from different functional areas.

Although the number of informants was limited, the sample was selected for information relevance rather than statistical representation. The study does not claim full theoretical saturation across all possible organizational experiences. Instead, it claims information sufficiency within the bounded case, based on the convergence of recurring communication themes across interviews, observation, and documentation. The limited number of leadership-level informants is acknowledged as a methodological limitation because the study provides a stronger account of employee interpretation than of variation among supervisors.

Table 1. Research Informants

Code	Profile and Selection Rationale
KI-1	Leader/CEO; selected as the key informant because this position understands communication policy and employee management.
I-1	Production employee; selected because this role is directly involved in operational instruction and coordination.
I-2	Production employee; selected because this role has direct experience communicating with supervisors in daily work.
I-3	Packing employee; selected because this division requires routine coordination and task clarification.
I-4	Administration employee; selected because this role represents administrative communication and data coordination.
I-5	Sales employee; selected because this role represents communication related to targets, evaluation, and customer service.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore informants' experiences regarding communication patterns, clarity of instructions, feedback, emotional support, communication barriers, motivation, and performance. Observation was used to examine the context of daily workplace communication. Documentation was used to complement information regarding organizational structure, work activities, and other relevant supporting data. The literature review was used to build the conceptual foundation and compare the findings with previous studies; it was not treated as an empirical data collection method equivalent to interviews, observation, or documentation.

Interview data were obtained from six informants: one leadership-level informant and five employee informants from production, packing, administration, and sales. The interviews explored leadership communication style, clarity of instruction, feedback, listening practices, workplace climate, verbal and non-verbal communication, openness, work motivation, self-efficacy, and perceived performance. The interview guide was structured around

both supervisor and subordinate perspectives, allowing comparison between managerial intention and employee interpretation.

Semi-structured interviews were selected because this technique allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while still maintaining consistency across informants. This format was appropriate for the study because supervisor-subordinate communication involves subjective meanings, relational interpretations, and contextual work experiences that may not be fully captured through structured questionnaires. The semi-structured format also allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions when informants described specific examples of task clarification, feedback, communication barriers, motivation, or perceived performance.

The interviews were designed to elicit concrete examples rather than general evaluations. Informants were asked to describe how instructions were usually delivered, how they responded when instructions were unclear, how feedback was communicated, and how communication influenced their willingness to complete tasks or report problems. Observation was used to complement interview accounts by paying attention to communication situations such as clarification of tasks, informal conversations, coordination across divisions, and supervisory responses to employee questions. Documentation was treated as contextual evidence rather than as the primary source of findings, helping the researcher understand organizational structure and the distribution of work responsibilities.

Observation was conducted during field visits to PT Modella to understand the context of daily supervisor-subordinate communication. It focused on communication situations related to task clarification, informal supervisory interaction, cross-divisional coordination, employee questions, and supervisory responses to work-related problems. Field notes were used to record communication settings, actors involved, interaction patterns, and relevant contextual details. Observation data were compared with interview accounts to identify whether participants' descriptions of communication were consistent with workplace interaction patterns observed by the researcher. Because observation was used mainly to complement interview data, it functioned as contextual evidence rather than as the primary source of findings.

To avoid imposing a single interpretation on the data, the researcher treated each data source as complementary. Interview

data provided participants' accounts of communication experiences, observation provided contextual cues about interaction patterns, and documentation helped situate those experiences within organizational roles and work processes. The integration of these sources was intended to strengthen the credibility of the findings and to reduce the risk of relying only on self-reported statements.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically through data reduction, coding, category grouping, theme presentation, and conclusion drawing. Thematic analysis is appropriate for systematically identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The initial themes were developed through a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Deductively, coding was guided by the research focus on supervisor-subordinate communication, motivation, and performance. Inductively, additional themes emerged from informants' narratives, particularly regarding psychological safety, rapid clarification, non-rigid work atmosphere, and verbal-nonverbal inconsistency.

To make the analytical procedure more transparent, the thematic analysis followed six phases. First, the researcher familiarized himself with the data by reading interview notes, observation notes, and documentation repeatedly. Second, initial codes were generated from meaningful units related to communication practices, motivation, and perceived performance. Third, codes were grouped into potential themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed by comparing them with the data set and research questions. Fifth, the themes were defined and named. Sixth, the findings were written by connecting empirical evidence with the conceptual framework.

The coding process followed several iterative steps. First, interview and observation notes were read repeatedly to identify meaningful units related to communication practices, motivation, and perceived performance. Second, similar units were grouped into preliminary codes such as task clarity, opportunity to speak, corrective feedback, appreciation, emotional support, coordination, and communication barriers. Third, these codes were compared across informants and data sources to identify broader thematic categories. Finally, the categories were refined into five core themes that explain how communication operates as a relational mechanism. This process helped maintain analytical transparency

and ensured that the themes were grounded in recurring patterns rather than isolated statements.

The coding process combined deductive and inductive strategies. Examples of deductive codes included task clarity, feedback, motivation, coordination, and performance perception. Examples of inductive codes included rapid clarification, feeling safe to ask, non-rigid atmosphere, verbal-nonverbal inconsistency, and supervisor responsiveness. The final thematic structure consisted of five main relational communication processes: task clarification, dialogic participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cross-functional coordination. A sixth subsection on communication barriers was retained as a negative case and boundary finding to show that communication effectiveness was not always smooth and depended on clarification practices.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Ethics

Data trustworthiness was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from leaders and employees across divisions, while technique triangulation was conducted by comparing interview, observation, and documentation data. Formal member checking was not conducted; therefore, this study relied on source triangulation, technique triangulation, and careful comparison across data sources to strengthen credibility.

For example, the theme of task clarification was supported by leadership-level explanations about delivering clear and simple instructions and by employee accounts from production, administration, and sales that described how clear instructions reduced confusion and work errors. Similarly, the communication barriers theme was identified by comparing employee accounts of sudden instruction changes, verbal-nonverbal inconsistency, and changed evaluation messages across production, packing, and sales divisions. When accounts differed in emphasis, the analysis treated these differences as contextual variation rather than forcing uniform interpretation across all informants.

Research ethics were maintained through participant consent, the use of informant codes, confidentiality of identity, and the clarification that participation was voluntary. Because the study was conducted in a hierarchical workplace, ethical considerations also included attention to potential power dynamics between leaders and employees. Employees might feel uncomfortable discussing

communication with supervisors if they believe that their responses could affect their work situation. To reduce this risk, informants were informed that participation was voluntary, their identities would not be disclosed, and their responses would be presented anonymously through informant codes. The study also avoided reporting identifiable statements that could create workplace consequences for participants.

The researcher also considered the possibility of researcher bias during data interpretation. Because qualitative analysis depends on interpretation, the researcher repeatedly compared emerging themes with interview excerpts and observation notes to avoid selecting only data that supported the initial assumptions. Reflexive attention was given to the possibility that participants might present supervisor-subordinate communication in a positive way because of organizational hierarchy. For this reason, the analysis also included communication barriers and moments of confusion as negative-case evidence.

Although the study used a small number of informants, the selection was based on information relevance rather than statistical representation. The informants represented different work functions and communication positions within the organization, allowing the study to compare supervisory perspectives with employee experiences across operational and administrative roles. The purpose of the study was not to generalize statistically to all organizations, but to develop an analytically transferable explanation of how communication processes may operate in hierarchical workplaces with similar coordination demands.

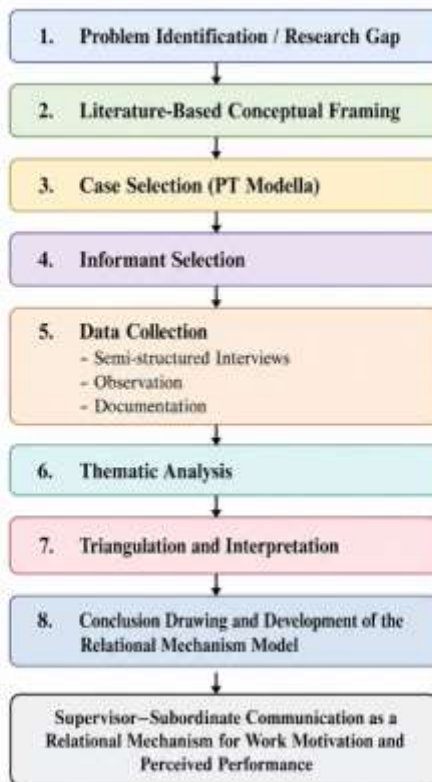


Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram

Figure 1 presents the research process from problem identification, literature-based conceptual framing, case selection, informant selection, data collection, thematic analysis, triangulation, and conclusion drawing. The figure shows how the study moved from the identification of a research gap to the development of a relational mechanism model of supervisor-subordinate communication.

3. Results

This section presents the qualitative findings according to the research questions and the thematic structure that emerged from interviews, observation, and documentation. In line with qualitative reporting principles, the findings are organized from broader patterns to more specific participant experiences. The analysis identified five

interrelated themes: task clarification, dialogic participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cross-functional coordination. These themes show how supervisor-subordinate communication operates not only as a channel for work instructions but also as a relational process that shapes motivation and perceived performance.

To maintain a clearer distinction between results and interpretation, this section focuses on empirical patterns, participant accounts, and observed communication situations. A broader theoretical interpretation is developed in the Discussion section. The analysis also includes communication barriers as a negative-case finding to show that communication effectiveness was not automatic and depended on clarification practices.

All interview quotations presented in this section have been translated from Indonesian into English by the authors. Informant codes are used to maintain confidentiality.

The themes should not be read as isolated categories. In the data, they appeared as interconnected communication processes. Task clarification often created the condition for dialogic participation because employees were more willing to ask questions when initial instructions were understandable but still open to confirmation. Dialogic participation supported constructive feedback because employees could explain the reasons behind mistakes or delays. Emotional support strengthened employees' willingness to participate and accept feedback, while cross-functional coordination connected these interpersonal processes to broader workflow across divisions. Communication barriers, such as sudden instruction changes or verbal-nonverbal inconsistency, showed how the relational mechanism could be disrupted and then repaired through clarification.

Following the qualitative reporting structure, each theme is presented by defining the theme, describing its empirical pattern, supporting it with participant quotations, and summarizing its motivational and performance-related meaning. This structure was used to maintain a clear distinction between descriptive findings in the Result section and broader theoretical interpretation in the Discussion section.

Table 2 summarizes the themes, their operational meaning, supporting evidence, and perceived consequences for motivation and performance. The table is used as an analytical map, while the

following subsections provide descriptive evidence and participant-based explanations.

Table 2. Thematic Summary of Supervisor-Subordinate Communication Processes

Theme	Definition in This Study	Evidence Pattern	Motivational Meaning	Perceived Performance Outcome
Task clarification	Communication that explains tasks, priorities, standards, and work expectations	Reported by production, packing, administration, and sales informants	Role certainty and reduced anxiety	Fewer work errors and clearer task execution
Dialogic participation	Opportunities for subordinates to ask questions, raise problems, and provide input	Most visible in employees' accounts of problem reporting	Perceived appreciation and psychological safety	Faster problem identification and solution seeking
Constructive feedback	Corrective communication delivered with explanation, guidance, and a respectful tone	Appeared in accounts of evaluation and correction	Learning orientation and self-improvement motivation	Better work quality and fewer repeated mistakes
Emotional support	Supervisory attention, appreciation, empathy, and trust	Reported through verbal appreciation and	Self-confidence and perceived support	Stronger commitment and work

Theme	Definition in This Study	Evidence Pattern	Motivational Meaning	Perceived Performance Outcome
Cross-functional coordination	Communication that connects production, packing, administration, and sales activities	supportive treatment Observed in task flow and inter-division communication	Shared understanding and reduced pressure	consistency Smoother coordination and operational productivity

Table 3. Cross-Informant Evidence Matrix

Theme	KI-1	I-1	I-2	I-3	I-4	I-5
Task clarification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dialogic participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constructive feedback	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Emotional support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cross-functional coordination	✓	✓	Partly	✓	✓	✓
Communication barriers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 3 demonstrates that the identified themes were not based on isolated statements but appeared across multiple informants and divisions. This cross-informant comparison strengthens the credibility of the thematic structure and shows how supervisor-subordinate communication was experienced across different organizational roles.

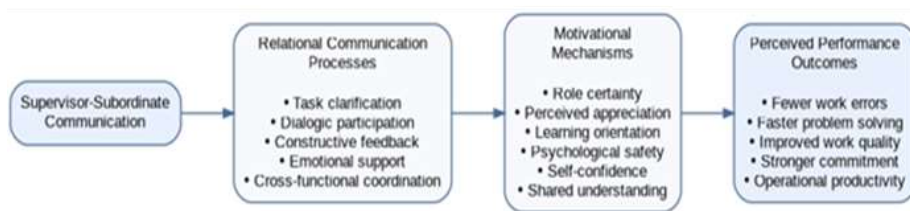


Figure 2. Relational Mechanism Model of Supervisor-Subordinate Communication

Figure 2 visualizes the process relationship among the themes. It shows that supervisor-subordinate communication begins with task-related and relational messages, develops through five communication processes, and contributes to motivation and perceived performance through employees' interpretation of clarity, safety, learning, support, and coordination. Communication barriers may disrupt these processes, but clarification practices can repair misunderstandings and restore shared meaning.

3.1 Task Clarification: Building Role Certainty in Daily Work

Task clarification refers to the way supervisors explain assignments, priorities, expected outcomes, and work standards to employees. This theme appeared consistently across informants because employees in production, packing, administration, and sales depend on clear instructions to coordinate work. Participants reported that direct and unambiguous messages helped them understand what should be done, which task should be prioritized, and how work quality would be assessed.

The data indicate that task clarification was not a single act of giving instructions, but a repeated communicative process. Employees needed clarification at the beginning of tasks, during changes in operational priorities, and when evaluating whether completed work met expected standards. This pattern was particularly visible in divisions whose work depended on sequential task flow, where one unclear instruction could affect subsequent activities. Participants reported that they felt more secure when supervisors explained not only what had to be done but also why a task had to be prioritized. Such an explanation reduced uncertainty and helped employees connect individual tasks with broader operational needs.

One production informant explained that clear instructions helped reduce work errors: "The instructions are usually direct to the main task and not complicated. This helps me work more focused and reduces mistakes in the production process" (I-1). Another production informant similarly stated, "The instructions given by the supervisor are generally clear and easy to understand. If there is a change in the work, the supervisor communicates it directly so that mistakes do not occur" (I-2).

Employees described task clarity as especially important when instructions changed during operational activities. One production informant explained that sudden changes in instructions could initially create confusion, but rapid clarification helped employees adjust their work and maintain trust in the supervisor. This account suggests that ambiguity does not necessarily damage work relations when supervisors provide timely clarification and explain the reasons behind changes.

Task clarification was also visible in observation data, where work activities required supervisors to translate general targets into operational steps. In this context, communication functioned as a bridge between managerial expectations and employee action. The main insight from this theme is that clear supervisory communication generates role certainty, reduces hesitation, and enables employees to perform tasks with greater confidence.

From the administrative perspective, task clarification was also important because administrative work required accurate and structured information. One informant stated, “Clear and structured instructions help me avoid administrative mistakes and work more effectively” (I-4). This evidence shows that task clarification was not limited to production work but also appeared in administrative and sales-related tasks.

3.2 Dialogic Participation: Feeling Safe to Speak and Be Heard

Dialogic participation refers to two-way communication in which subordinates are allowed to ask questions, report obstacles, and provide input. This theme illustrates that effective supervisor-subordinate communication is not limited to downward instruction. It also includes upward communication, where employees communicate field-level constraints and seek clarification without fear of being blamed. In the context of this study, dialogic participation appeared when employees were given opportunities to explain work difficulties, clarify unclear instructions, and provide practical suggestions based on their direct experience.

This theme is analytically distinct from emotional support. Dialogic participation focuses on employees’ opportunity to speak, ask, report, and provide input, whereas emotional support concerns employees’ experience of being appreciated, encouraged, and trusted. This distinction is important because an employee may be

emotionally supported but not always given space to participate in decision-making or problem clarification.

The evidence shows that dialogic participation was closely tied to employees' perception of respect. Employees did not interpret the opportunity to speak merely as a communication channel; they interpreted it as recognition that their field-level knowledge mattered. This is important because employees often encounter practical problems that may not be fully visible to supervisors. When supervisors allow questions and input, employees can communicate constraints before they develop into more serious operational problems. This pattern is consistent with employee voice research, which emphasizes that employees are more willing to speak up when they perceive psychological safety and believe that their voice will be taken seriously. (Ge, 2020; Kwon & Farndale, 2020).

One informant stated, "The supervisor listens sufficiently to our input; I feel more comfortable raising problems without being afraid of being blamed" (I-1). This quotation shows that listening practices create a sense of safety in communication. The statement was not presented as an isolated experience; similar patterns appeared in other accounts in which employees associated open listening with comfort, trust, and willingness to communicate work problems. Another production informant emphasized that openness from the supervisor made it easier to communicate technical problems: "The supervisor listens to our input, especially when it concerns technical obstacles. I personally feel more comfortable raising problems without being afraid of being blamed" (I-2). Prior studies on employee voice similarly show that supervisor support and developmental feedback can encourage employees to express ideas, concerns, and improvement suggestions (Gazzoli et al., 2023; Sibunruang & Kawai, 2024).

The same pattern appeared in other divisions. A packing informant stated, "I feel quite free to express opinions or problems to the supervisor. This makes the working relationship better and increases my motivation" (I-3). An administrative informant also noted, "The supervisor is quite open to questions and input. This makes me feel appreciated and motivated to work better" (I-4). These accounts show that dialogic participation was experienced across divisions, not only in production.

Dialogic participation also helped supervisors obtain more accurate information about operational realities. Employees from

different divisions reported that problems could be resolved more quickly when they were able to explain constraints directly. Thus, the central finding of this theme is that two-way communication builds perceived appreciation and psychological safety, which in turn encourages employees to communicate problems earlier and more openly. In this study, dialogic participation functioned as a relational bridge between managerial direction and employees' situated work experience.

3.3 Constructive Feedback: Turning Correction Into Learning

Constructive feedback refers to evaluative communication that identifies errors, explains expectations, and provides guidance for improvement without humiliating employees. Participants reported that feedback was easier to accept when it was delivered clearly, respectfully, and with sufficient explanation. In contrast, feedback that was perceived as unclear or inconsistent could create confusion, especially when it differed from earlier instructions. This indicates that feedback effectiveness depends not only on what supervisors say but also on how they frame correction and whether they connect evaluation with practical guidance.

Constructive feedback appeared most clearly when correction was accompanied by explanation. Participants distinguished between being blamed and being guided. Correction was accepted more positively when supervisors explained the expected standard, identified the source of the mistake, and provided direction for improvement. However, when feedback was delivered without sufficient explanation, employees reported the possibility of confusion, particularly if the feedback seemed inconsistent with previous instructions. This finding is consistent with research showing that supervisor feedback can generate relational energy and encourage employees to voice ideas when the feedback is perceived as favorable, developmental, and supported by high-quality leader-member exchange (Zhu et al., 2023).

The leadership-level informant explained that feedback was intentionally delivered as guidance rather than blame: "I try to make the feedback constructive, not only highlighting mistakes but also providing solutions or directions for future improvement" (KI-1). This statement was consistent with employee accounts. A production informant stated, "Although feedback is sometimes delivered directly, it is constructive because it is accompanied by direction for improvement" (I-1).

Interview data indicate that employees did not reject the correction itself. Rather, they valued correction when it helped them understand what needed to be improved. One recurring pattern was that employees could maintain trust in supervisors when evaluative communication was followed by clarification. Supervisor developmental feedback is also known to facilitate proactive employee voice because employees may become more willing to contribute suggestions when they perceive feedback as a resource for growth rather than as a threat (Sibunruang & Kawai, 2024).

A sales informant also described feedback as useful for evaluating target achievement: “Feedback from the supervisor is very helpful, especially in evaluating sales results. When targets are achieved, the supervisor gives appreciation, and when they are not achieved, feedback is delivered as motivation to improve the sales strategy” (I-5).

Constructive feedback, therefore, operated as a learning-oriented communication process. It encouraged employees to correct mistakes and improve work quality without feeling personally attacked. The key insight from this theme is that respectful feedback transforms evaluation from a controlling practice into a developmental process that supports motivation and perceived performance improvement.

3.4 Emotional Support: Recognition, Empathy, and Work Motivation

Emotional support refers to supervisory communication that conveys attention, appreciation, empathy, and trust. This theme shows that employees interpret communication not only through task-related messages but also through relational signals. Participants associated supportive communication with feeling valued as individuals rather than merely as workers responsible for completing tasks. In this study, emotional support emerged through everyday practices such as greeting employees, acknowledging completed work, listening to difficulties, giving encouragement during busy periods, and expressing trust in employees’ ability to handle responsibility.

This theme is distinct from dialogic participation because emotional support concerns the affective meaning of supervisor communication. Employees interpreted appreciation, encouragement, and empathy as signs that they were valued, while dialogic participation concerned whether they could speak, ask questions, and report problems safely.

The key informant explained, “Appreciation does not always have to be material. It can also take the form of verbal appreciation, recognition of work results, and trust to handle greater responsibility” (KI-1). This view was reflected in employee accounts, suggesting that recognition and respectful treatment increased their willingness to work more seriously and maintain performance consistency. This finding is aligned with research on motivating language, which shows that leadership communication can strengthen employee engagement when it conveys meaning, empathy, and direction (Rabiul et al., 2025).

Employee accounts supported this view. A production informant stated, “Direct appreciation makes me feel that my work effort is noticed. It encourages me to work better and improve my work results” (I-1). A packing informant similarly stated, “Appreciation from the supervisor motivates me, especially when my work is recognized. It encourages me to work more carefully and improve work quality” (I-3).

Emotional support also contributed to employees’ self-confidence. When supervisors listened to difficulties and responded with encouragement, employees were more willing to ask questions and acknowledge work-related problems. This pattern is theoretically consistent with psychological safety research, which suggests that employees are more likely to express voice when they feel safe from interpersonal risk (Ge, 2020). Recent studies also show that psychological safety can encourage voice participation and support performance-related practices in operational contexts (Hu et al., 2024).

This theme indicates that motivation is not produced solely by formal incentives or work targets; it is also shaped by everyday interpersonal communication that creates perceived support and psychological security. Emotional support, therefore, functions as a relational condition that enables employees to participate, report problems, and sustain their work effort with greater confidence. For the sales division, emotional support was particularly relevant because work targets created pressure. One informant stated, “Communication and motivation from the supervisor really help increase my confidence and work enthusiasm” (I-5).

3.5 Cross-Functional Coordination: Connecting Divisions Through Communication

Cross-functional coordination refers to communication that connects work processes across production, packing, administration, and sales divisions. This theme was important because PT Modella's work activities require different divisions to exchange information in a timely and accurate manner. Participants reported that coordination problems could delay work, create repeated errors, or increase pressure during busy operational periods.

Coordination was especially important because the divisions in the case organization were interdependent. Production activities affected packing, packing affected administrative recording and delivery preparation, and sales activities depended on accurate information about product availability and work progress. Participants indicated that delays or incomplete information could create pressure across divisions. Supervisory communication helped reduce this pressure by aligning priorities and clarifying which tasks required immediate attention. Thus, coordination was not only a technical process of transferring information, but also a relational process of maintaining shared understanding across roles.

The need for coordination appeared clearly in employee accounts. A packing informant stated that communication helped manage orders and work time: "The supervisor listens when we communicate obstacles, for example, related to the number of orders or working time. This really helps improve communication and teamwork" (I-3).

One informant from the packing division noted that a less rigid work atmosphere made employees communicate more easily. This statement indicates that coordination is shaped not only by formal channels but also by the interpersonal climate in which employees feel able to communicate across roles. Observation data also suggest that supervisors function as information connectors who help align priorities among divisions.

The administrative informant also emphasized the importance of coordination across work units: "The work environment supports communication, especially because administrative communication is closely related to coordination between divisions" (I-4). In the sales division, coordination was linked to target achievement. One informant stated, "Clear direction from the supervisor reduces confusion and improves my work effectiveness in achieving sales targets" (I-5).

The data show that communication supports productivity when employees understand task priorities, receive information on time, and are able to clarify problems quickly. The key insight from this theme is that cross-functional communication strengthens perceived performance by improving information flow, reducing coordination barriers, and supporting operational continuity.

3.6 Communication Barriers and Clarification Practices

Although the overall pattern of communication was described positively, the data also revealed several barriers. The most frequently identified barriers were sudden changes in instructions, work pressure during busy operational periods, and occasional inconsistency between verbal messages and non-verbal expressions. These barriers sometimes produced confusion or hesitation among employees. A production informant described how sudden changes in instruction could create temporary confusion: “There was a situation where the supervisor’s instruction felt confusing because of a sudden change. It affected performance for a while because we had to readjust the work. However, after clarification, my trust in the supervisor remained” (I-1).

This subsection is treated as a negative-case finding. It shows that communication effectiveness at PT Modella did not depend on the absence of problems. Rather, it depended on how supervisors and employees repaired ambiguity through clarification. This negative-case interpretation is important because it prevents the findings from presenting an overly idealized picture of workplace communication. Another production informant described a mismatch between verbal and non-verbal communication during busy work periods: “Sometimes there is a difference between what is said and the attitude shown by the supervisor, especially when work is busy. It made me confused for a while, but it did not strongly affect my trust because it was usually explained immediately” (I-2).

The presence of communication barriers is analytically important because it prevents the findings from presenting an overly idealized picture of workplace communication. Employees did not describe communication as perfect; rather, they emphasized that communication became effective when supervisors were willing to clarify ambiguity and respond to concerns. This suggests that effective communication in hierarchical workplaces should be understood as a capacity to repair misunderstanding, not merely as the absence of misunderstanding. The ability to recover from

ambiguity through clarification emerged as a critical relational practice.

However, the findings also show that communication barriers did not automatically weaken supervisor-subordinate relationships. Their impact depended on whether supervisors provided rapid clarification. When supervisors explained the reasons for changed instructions or clarified unclear messages, employees were able to adjust their work and maintain trust. This negative-case pattern is important because it shows that communication effectiveness is not defined by the absence of problems, but by the organization's ability to manage ambiguity through clarification.

Similar barriers appeared in other divisions. A packing informant noted, "Sometimes instructions seem to change, which makes me a little confused. However, after being communicated again, the problem can be solved" (I-3). A sales informant also stated, "There was a situation where the message felt different between the initial direction and the evaluation. I was confused for a while, but after an explanation, my trust in the supervisor remained" (I-5). These accounts show that communication barriers were not absent, but their effects were reduced through clarification.

These barriers show that relational mechanisms are not automatically stable. Task clarification could be weakened when instructions changed suddenly, dialogic participation could be reduced when employees felt uncertain about the supervisor's tone or expression, and constructive feedback could become confusing when evaluation messages differed from earlier directions. However, when supervisors clarified the message and explained the reason for the change, the relational mechanism was repaired. This indicates that clarification worked not only as an informational practice but also as a relational repair process.

Overall, the Results section shows that supervisor-subordinate communication at PT Modella works through five relational processes supported by clarification practices. These processes shape motivation through role certainty, perceived appreciation, psychological safety, self-confidence, and shared understanding, while contributing to perceived performance through fewer errors, faster problem solving, improved coordination, and stronger task execution.

Taken together, the six result subsections indicate that communication effectiveness emerged from the interaction between

message clarity and relational responsiveness. Clear instructions were important, but they were not sufficient when employees needed to report constraints or interpret changing priorities. Likewise, supportive relationships were valuable, but they required task-oriented clarity to prevent ambiguity. The data, therefore, suggest that supervisor-subordinate communication becomes meaningful when informational and relational elements are combined in daily work practices.

4. Discussion

The findings show that supervisor-subordinate communication plays a strategic role in building employee motivation and performance. Communication should not be understood merely as the transmission of messages, but as a relational process that shapes how employees understand work, evaluate supervisor support, and build commitment to the organization. These findings strengthen the perspective that interpersonal communication in organizations has informational, motivational, coordinative, and emotional functions.

The Discussion is organized to move from the interpretation of the main findings, comparison with previous studies, explanation of the relational mechanism model, practical implications, limitations, and future research directions. This structure follows qualitative reporting principles by moving from empirical findings to theoretical meaning and practical contribution.

This study defines relational mechanisms as patterned communicative processes through which supervisory messages are interpreted by employees as clarity, inclusion, guidance, emotional support, and coordination. This concept differs from simple message transmission because it emphasizes employees' interpretation of communication, not only the delivery of information. It also differs from leader-member exchange because it focuses more specifically on the communicative practices through which relationship quality is produced in daily work. It differs from communication competence models because it not only assesses individual communication skills but also explains how communication practices generate relational meanings that shape motivation and perceived performance.

This interpretation extends the discussion beyond a simple relationship between communication and performance. The findings suggest that employees do not respond only to the informational content of supervisory messages. They also respond to relational

qualities embedded in those messages, such as whether the supervisor is accessible, whether correction is delivered respectfully, and whether employees are allowed to explain problems. These relational qualities influence whether employees experience communication as supportive or controlling. Therefore, the same managerial message may have different motivational effects depending on how it is communicated and how employees interpret it.

First, open and clear communication helps reduce work uncertainty. In organizations, unclear instructions often cause employees to hesitate in decision-making or perform tasks inconsistently with expectations. This finding aligns with (Sherren & Indra, 2025), who positions communication as an important component in models of employee motivation and performance improvement. In the context of PT Modella, task clarity not only directs work activities but also builds role certainty.

Second, two-way communication functions as a participatory mechanism. Employees who are given space to ask questions and express opinions feel more appreciated. This finding is consistent with (Putri & Fathiyah, 2025), who emphasize that leader-member exchange quality and interpersonal communication are related to job satisfaction. In hierarchical organizations, two-way communication reduces psychological distance and strengthens subordinates' willingness to communicate work-related constraints.

Third, constructive feedback becomes a bridge between motivation and performance improvement. Employees need evaluation to understand the quality of their work, but the way evaluation is delivered determines its impact. Supportive feedback can enhance learning and work improvement. This finding supports (Thelen et al., 2022), who show that motivating leadership language is associated with psychological safety, job meaningfulness, and psychological availability.

Fourth, emotional support from supervisors demonstrates that work motivation is not shaped solely by material incentives. Employees also need recognition, attention, empathy, and healthy interpersonal relationships. (Qin et al., 2025) show that supervisors' motivating language can predict employee trust and engagement. In this study, emotional support appeared through verbal appreciation, willingness to listen, and the assignment of greater responsibility to employees.

Fifth, supervisor-subordinate communication affects performance through work coordination. In organizations with several functional divisions, communication links work activities. Performance depends not only on individual competence but also on information flow, shared understanding, and problem-solving speed. This finding is consistent with (Sitepu & Husein, 2025), who found that communication, teamwork, and motivation positively influence employee performance.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing supervisor-subordinate communication as a relational mechanism rather than merely as message transmission. Existing studies have shown that managerial motivating language is associated with employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, reduced turnover intention, and job performance (Nguyen et al., 2021). Other studies further indicate that supervisory communication can foster employee trust by satisfying employees' psychological needs for competence and relatedness (Men et al., 2022). Building on these findings, the present study explains how such effects may emerge through concrete relational communication processes in daily work interaction.

Specifically, this study identifies five interconnected processes: task clarification, dialogic participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cross-functional coordination. These processes show that communication becomes motivational not only because supervisors deliver information, but because employees interpret supervisory messages as signals of clarity, respect, support, and inclusion. This finding also extends the employee voice literature, which emphasizes that speaking up depends on whether employees perceive organizational communication conditions as safe and effective (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). In the present study, voice was not treated as an isolated employee behavior; rather, it appeared as part of a broader relational communication mechanism shaped by listening, clarification, feedback, and psychological safety.

Compared with previous studies that mainly explain supervisor communication through quantitative associations with motivation, engagement, or performance, this study provides a process-based qualitative explanation. The findings are consistent with studies on motivating language, leader-member exchange, and employee voice, but they differ in analytical focus. Previous studies tend to measure the strength of relationships between variables, while this study explains how communication is experienced by employees through

concrete practices such as clarification, listening, feedback, support, and coordination. This difference is mainly due to the qualitative case study design, the small number of information-rich participants, and the hierarchical operational context of PT Modella.

The proposed model, therefore, refines the discussion of supervisor-subordinate communication in two ways. First, it explains how task-related messages become motivational experiences through role certainty, perceived appreciation, learning orientation, psychological safety, self-confidence, and shared understanding. Second, it clarifies why perceived performance should be understood as an outcome of both informational and relational communication. Employees not only responded to instructions; they responded to how instructions were clarified, how feedback was delivered, how support was expressed, and how coordination was maintained across divisions. This theoretical positioning contributes to organizational communication scholarship by showing that communication quality is not only a matter of frequency or message delivery, but also of relational interpretation.

Figure 2 explains the relational mechanism identified in this study. Supervisory communication begins with task-related and relational messages. These messages are processed through five communication practices: task clarification, dialogic participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cross-functional coordination. Employees then interpret these practices as role certainty, psychological safety, learning opportunity, self-confidence, and shared understanding. These interpretations shape work motivation and contribute to perceived performance outcomes such as fewer errors, faster problem solving, smoother coordination, and more consistent task execution. The model should not be read as a causal model in the statistical sense, but as an interpretive model that explains how communication processes connect supervisory interaction with motivation and perceived performance in a hierarchical workplace.

The interview evidence supports the relational mechanism model because the same communication processes appeared across different organizational roles. The leadership-level informant emphasized open leadership, constructive feedback, listening, appreciation, and clarification. Employee informants from production, packing, administration, and sales also described similar experiences, although each division emphasized different

communication needs. Production employees emphasized clear instructions and rapid adjustment to changes. The packing informant emphasized coordination, accuracy, and a non-rigid atmosphere. The administrative informant emphasized structured information and coordination across divisions. The sales informant emphasized motivation, target communication, and confidence. This cross-informant pattern strengthens the analytical claim that supervisor-subordinate communication operated as a relational mechanism in the case organization.

The findings also need to be interpreted in light of the Indonesian organizational context. In hierarchical workplaces, employees may be cautious in questioning supervisors, especially when authority relations are strong. Therefore, supervisory openness, listening, and clarification are not merely interpersonal preferences; they become important conditions that allow employees to speak up and coordinate work effectively. This context may affect the transferability of the findings to other organizations with different cultures, leadership norms, or work structures.

A key limitation is that performance was examined as perceived performance. The study did not use objective performance indicators such as productivity data, formal appraisal scores, sales records, or error rates. Statements about improved performance therefore refer to perceived outcomes, such as reduced mistakes, clearer work direction, smoother coordination, stronger confidence, and better focus. The study did not independently verify these claims using objective performance records. Therefore, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that supervisor-subordinate communication directly improves measured performance. Instead, they show how employees and supervisors perceive communication as contributing to work effectiveness. This reliance on perception may introduce social desirability bias, especially because the research was conducted in a hierarchical organization.

Alternative explanations should also be considered. Employees' perceived motivation and performance may not be shaped by supervisor-subordinate communication alone. Other factors, such as workload, salary, job security, production targets, peer support, individual work experience, and organizational culture, may also influence how employees evaluate motivation and performance. In this case, communication appears to operate as one important relational condition rather than as the only determinant of work

outcomes. This interpretation prevents the study from overstating the causal role of communication and keeps the relational mechanism model within the limits of qualitative case study evidence.

Practically, the findings suggest that organizations should develop a communication culture that is open, supportive, dialogic, and feedback-oriented. However, communication improvement should not be limited to general communication training. Organizations need practical routines that directly address daily work problems, such as confirming task priorities, encouraging employees to ask questions, giving feedback with explanation, and creating short coordination points across divisions. These practices are especially relevant for hierarchical workplaces where employees may depend on supervisors for clarification and may hesitate to speak up without relational support.

Organizations may also institutionalize practical communication mechanisms such as brief clarification meetings, routine feedback sessions, and cross-functional communication checkpoints. These mechanisms can help reduce ambiguity, prevent misinterpretation, and provide employees with opportunities to confirm instructions before operational problems escalate. In hierarchical workplaces, such practices may also prevent communication from becoming overly top-down by encouraging employees to report difficulties, ask questions, and participate in problem-solving.

For PT Modella and similar operational workplaces, practical mechanisms may include short daily clarification meetings, structured feedback sessions, cross-division coordination checkpoints, and agreed procedures for confirming changed instructions. These mechanisms are especially important in work settings where task interdependence and hierarchical authority can make misunderstandings costly.

These recommendations should be implemented with attention to feasibility. In operational workplaces, communication interventions should be brief, routine, and integrated into existing work processes rather than adding excessive administrative burden. For example, a five- to ten-minute clarification meeting before busy production periods may be more feasible than a formal weekly meeting. Similarly, feedback sessions can be conducted informally after task completion, while cross-division checkpoints can be limited

to moments when production, packing, administration, and sales activities directly affect one another.

The findings further indicate that communication problems do not always arise from the absence of communication. In several cases, communication had already occurred, yet employees still required clarification because instructions changed, work pressure affected message delivery, or nonverbal signals created uncertainty. Therefore, organizations should not only assess whether supervisors communicate frequently, but also whether employees have sufficient opportunities to confirm, question, and reinterpret supervisory messages.

This distinction shifts managerial attention from communication frequency to communication quality. In this study, communication quality refers to the clarity, responsiveness, consistency, and relational usefulness of supervisory interaction as perceived by employees. Such quality is central to understanding how supervisor-subordinate communication becomes a relational mechanism for motivation and perceived performance.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the dynamics of supervisor-subordinate communication at PT Modella play an important role in building work motivation and strengthening perceived employee performance. Open, two-way, clear, supportive communication supported by constructive feedback helps employees understand tasks, feel appreciated, receive emotional support, and develop self-confidence at work. Work motivation is shaped not only by material factors but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships between supervisors and subordinates.

The study identified five relational communication processes: task clarification, dialogic participation, constructive feedback, emotional support, and cross-functional coordination. These processes help explain how supervisory communication becomes meaningful to employees in terms of clarity, inclusion, guidance, support, and shared understanding. The main contribution of this study is the proposition that communication affects motivation and perceived performance not only through information delivery but also through employees' relational interpretation of supervisory interaction.

The findings should therefore be read as an explanation of perceived organizational processes rather than as a statistical test of causal effects. Within the limits of a qualitative case study, the evidence shows how employees interpret communication practices as meaningful signals of clarity, inclusion, support, and coordination. This interpretive dimension is important because communication practices can influence employees even when formal organizational policies remain unchanged.

Supervisor-subordinate communication also contributes to performance through improved coordination, fewer work errors, faster problem solving, and greater operational productivity. Supporting factors for communication effectiveness include open leadership, message clarity, listening ability, constructive feedback, a conducive work climate, and alignment between verbal and nonverbal communication. Barriers mainly appear in the form of sudden instruction changes, work pressure, and verbal-nonverbal inconsistency, yet their effects can be reduced through rapid and open clarification.

The study also shows that communication barriers do not automatically weaken supervisor-subordinate relationships. Their impact depends on whether supervisors and employees can repair ambiguity through clarification. This finding suggests that effective communication in hierarchical workplaces should be understood not as the absence of misunderstanding but as the ability to clarify and restore shared meaning.

The contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing supervisor-subordinate communication as a relational mechanism that transforms workplace message exchanges into motivational experiences and perceived performance outcomes. The limitation of this study is its reliance on a single case study and a limited number of informants; therefore, generalization should be made cautiously. Future studies are encouraged to use mixed-method or multi-case designs to test the relational mechanism model of supervisor-subordinate communication in broader organizational contexts.

These limitations mean that the relational mechanism model should be treated as an analytical starting point rather than a generalizable causal model. Because only one leadership-level informant was included, the study provides a stronger account of employee interpretation than of variation among supervisors. In addition, the Indonesian hierarchical workplace context may shape

how employees interpret openness, feedback, and voice opportunities.

Another limitation concerns possible researcher bias and participant response bias. Because the study relied on qualitative interpretation and interview-based accounts, the findings may be influenced by how participants chose to present their experiences and how the researcher interpreted those accounts. Although triangulation and comparison across informants were used to reduce this risk, future studies should include more diverse data sources, such as supervisor observation, formal performance records, or repeated interviews over time.

Future research may also examine whether the five relational processes identified in this study appear in organizations with different structures, such as remote teams, service organizations, educational institutions, or public-sector agencies. A comparative design would help determine which elements of the model are context-specific and which may be analytically transferable across organizational settings. Quantitative follow-up studies may further translate the five processes into measurable indicators and test their relationships with motivation, psychological safety, engagement, and objective performance indicators.

Future comparative research could examine whether the relational mechanism identified in this study differs across organizations with different levels of hierarchy, organizational size, industry type, or communication culture. For example, future studies may compare production-based firms with service organizations, or compare Indonesian hierarchical workplaces with organizations that use more participatory leadership structures. Such comparisons would clarify which elements of the relational mechanism are context-specific and which may be transferable across organizational settings.

Future studies may test propositions derived from this study, such as: 1) task clarification increases role certainty and perceived task effectiveness; 2) dialogic participation increases psychological safety and employee voice; 3) constructive feedback strengthens learning orientation and perceived work quality; 4) emotional support increases self-confidence and work motivation; and 5) cross-functional coordination improves perceived operational performance. Future research should also compare perceived performance with objective performance indicators to examine

whether employees' communication experiences correspond with measurable organizational outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a useful analytical starting point for understanding everyday communication as a mechanism of organizational motivation. It shows that motivation and performance-related outcomes are not produced only by formal policy, reward systems, or individual ability, but also by routine communicative practices through which supervisors and employees negotiate meaning, support, and coordination.

More specifically, this study provides a conceptual tool for analyzing how supervisor-subordinate communication transforms ordinary workplace interaction into role certainty, psychological safety, learning orientation, self-confidence, and shared understanding. These relational meanings are central to explaining why communication matters for work motivation and perceived performance in hierarchical organizational settings.

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