



## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF LEADERS WITHOUT A PUBLIC RELATIONS FUNCTION AT THE DOLOK ILIR TENERA MACHINE FACTORY

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the internal communication strategies of leaders at the Tenera Machine Factory (PMT) in Dolok Ilir, a manufacturing organization operating without a formal Public Relations (PR) department. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with case studies, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results indicate that unit leaders perform PR substitution functions through a hybrid communication strategy. This strategy integrates the use of WhatsApp Groups as a digital channel for rapid and transparent information dissemination, combined with interpersonal communication through morning gatherings (appel) to provide clarification and build emotional closeness. Although the absence of a PR unit poses challenges in the form of the risk of message distortion and a centralized information burden on leaders, the use of informal communication channels and a relay system has proven effective in minimizing these obstacles. This study concludes that leaders' interpersonal communication competencies and the optimization of instant media are key to the effectiveness of information flow in a minimalist organizational structure.*

**Keywords:** Communication Strategy, Internal Communication, Leadership, No PR, WhatsApp..

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Internal communication is a strategic element in maintaining the stability, coordination, and effectiveness of organizational work, particularly in the manufacturing sector, which is characterized by technical, hierarchical operations and a focus on precise instructions. In a factory environment, communication functions not only as a process for conveying information but also as a mechanism for coordinating work, controlling production activities, and ensuring compliance with organizational procedures. A clear flow of information enables leaders and employees to have a shared understanding of targets, task allocation, work standards, and problem-solving in the field. Advances in communication technology also encourage organizations to integrate direct communication with digital media to ensure information delivery is faster, more

transparent, and more adaptable to daily work needs. In this context, internal communication is a crucial instrument for maintaining work harmony, reducing misunderstandings, and strengthening relationships between leaders and employees (Bella Marita, 2022).

In formal organizational structures, the internal communication function is generally supported by the presence of Public Relations (PR), which acts as a liaison between management and the organization's internal public. Public Relations not only disseminates information but also manages relationships, builds mutual understanding, and helps the organization maintain its image and internal trust. However, not all organizations have a dedicated PR department. In organizations with a minimalist structure, the communication function is often assigned to the leadership or specific administrative divisions. This situation places leaders in a crucial position as primary communicators, responsible not only for operational decision-making but also for clarity of messages, work discipline, and resolving communication barriers. Therefore, the absence of a Public Relations unit requires leaders to possess strong interpersonal communication competencies, the ability to manage the flow of information, and a keen understanding of employee communication needs (Supriani, 2022).

This phenomenon is evident at the Tenera Machine Factory (PMT) in Dolok Ilir, a manufacturing organization operating without the support of a formal Public Relations department. In this situation, unit leaders fulfill a dual role as operational managers and controllers of the organization's internal communications. This role becomes increasingly crucial because the machine factory environment demands precise instructions, cross-departmental coordination, and high work discipline. Misunderstanding work messages can result in production delays, technical errors, and even occupational safety risks. This situation aligns with the view that leadership in industrial organizations is closely linked to communication effectiveness, occupational safety, and organizational performance (Praditya et al., 2025). Therefore, leadership communication at PMT Dolok Ilir cannot be understood only as an activity of conveying messages, but as a strategic process to ensure that every instruction is understood, implemented, and clarified appropriately by employees.

The internal communication strategy implemented at PMT Dolok Ilir demonstrates a hybrid communication pattern, a combination of face-to-face and digital communication. Face-to-face communication occurs through morning gatherings (called "gatherings"), or roll calls, as a forum for conveying work instructions, brief evaluations, and clarifying information. Meanwhile, digital communication occurs through WhatsApp groups, used to convey quick information, additional instructions, and coordinate when employees are not in a single, direct communication space. This pattern demonstrates that organizations with simple structures can still build adaptive communication systems through a combination of formal, informal, direct, and digital channels. In the context of modern organizations, the use of hybrid communication is crucial because it can address the need for speedy information flow while maintaining interpersonal closeness between leaders and employees (Sangapan et al., 2025). Thus, internal communication at PMT Dolok Ilir represents a flexible, contextual, and field-based organizational communication practice.

Although various previous studies have addressed internal communication and leadership communication strategies, there remains a significant underexplored area of study. Ramadhani's (2025) research emphasizes the importance of two-way internal

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communication in improving employee performance and work-life balance, but the context of the study is an information technology company, not a manufacturing organization with a technical and hierarchical work structure. Setyana and Aruman (2021) explain the role of internal communication in achieving a company's vision and instilling values, but do not specifically examine how the communication function is implemented when an organization does not have a Public Relations department. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah and Simamora (2025) and Nengsih (2025) emphasize leadership communication strategies in improving performance and work discipline, but do not in-depth discuss leadership as a substitute for the Internal Public Relations function in organizations without a formal Public Relations structure. Based on this gap, this study offers a novelty through the concept of "self-communicative leadership," a leadership practice that positions leaders as the primary actors in managing internal communication, building interpersonal closeness, controlling the flow of information, and partially replacing Public Relations functions in a minimalist organizational structure.

Theoretically, this research is based on Max Weber's organizational communication theory, which emphasizes the importance of hierarchical structure, position authority, and vertical communication in maintaining organizational effectiveness. In Weber's perspective, organizational communication occurs through structural positions that allow for instructions, coordination, and work control to be carried out regularly according to the functions of each member of the organization (Weber in Mahmudah, 2015). This theory is relevant to reading communication practices at PMT Dolok Ilir, because leaders are the center of information flow as well as the main link between organizational policies and employee work implementation. Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the internal communication strategies of leaders at the Tenera Machine Factory (PMT) Dolok Ilir in carrying out organizational communication functions without the support of a formal Public Relations department. Specifically, this study identifies the communication strategies used by leaders, analyzes the communication channels implemented, and explains the obstacles and solutions to internal communication in a minimalist structured manufacturing organization.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to deeply understand the internal communication strategies of leaders in a manufacturing organization that lacks a formal Public Relations (PR) department. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on the meanings, experiences, communication practices, and relational dynamics that occur within the organization's natural context. The case study was used to specifically examine internal communication practices at the Tenera Machine Factory (PMT) in Dolok Ilir, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra, as the primary unit of analysis. Through this design, the research not only describes the forms of communication used but also interprets how leaders directly carry out organizational communication functions, including conveying instructions, building coordination, managing communication barriers, and replacing some PR functions within a minimalist organizational structure. This approach aligns with the characteristics of qualitative

research, which emphasizes in-depth data, social context, and understanding phenomena from the perspective of the research subjects (Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024).

Research informants were determined using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants based on specific considerations relevant to the research focus. The primary informants in this study were unit leaders who have a direct role in managing internal communications and conveying direction to employees. Furthermore, the research involved administrative/HR staff and field employees as supporting informants to obtain a more balanced picture of the communication process from both the information managers and message recipients. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore the communication experiences, strategies, obstacles, and solutions implemented by leaders. Non-participatory observation was conducted to observe daily communication practices, particularly the "morning gathering" activity, which serves as a direct communication forum between leaders and employees. Documentation was used to supplement field data, including organizational records, evidence of communication activities, and the use of digital media such as WhatsApp groups as internal coordination channels. Purposive selection of informants was crucial to ensure that the data obtained truly came from those with direct understanding of the research phenomenon (Wijaya et al., 2025).

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers sorted and simplified data from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research focus, such as leadership communication strategies, internal communication channels, two-way communication patterns, communication barriers, and solutions implemented by the organization. In the data presentation stage, findings were arranged narratively and thematically so that the relationship between field data and organizational communication concepts could be systematically seen. Next, conclusions were drawn inductively by interpreting the patterns of findings that emerged from the field. To maintain data credibility, this study applied source triangulation, technical triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from leaders, administrative/HR staff, and field employees. Technical triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, while time triangulation was carried out to ensure consistency of information at different data collection times. This step is important so that the research results have strong qualitative validity and can be scientifically accounted for (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024; Rahayu & Rindrayani, 2025).

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

#### **The Role of Internal Communication in Organizational Operations**

Internal communication at the Tenera Machine Factory (PMT) in Dolok Ilir plays a strategic role as an operational coordination mechanism that ensures all organizational units understand work direction, production targets, and daily task priorities. In the context of a manufacturing organization, communication serves not only as a medium for conveying information but also as a work control instrument to ensure production processes run according to standards. Field findings indicate that leaders use internal

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communication to convey technical instructions, organize workforce readiness, map raw material requirements, and coordinate work between field and administrative departments. One leader informant stated, "If instructions aren't given from the start, work can run its own course. So every morning we first convey what needs to be done, what needs to be prioritized, and what obstacles need to be addressed." This quote demonstrates that internal communication is the foundation of work coordination because every leadership instruction serves as a guideline for employees in determining operational steps. This aligns with the organizational communication perspective, which positions communication as a process of aligning the actions of organizational members to achieve common goals (Mahmudah, 2015).

The role of internal communication is also evident in the way leaders establish clear messages in work situations that demand technical precision. PMT Dolok Ilir, as a machine factory, has a work environment that requires discipline, precision, and adherence to instructions. In situations like this, misunderstanding messages can lead to work delays, production errors, and even potential safety issues. A field employee explained, "We in the field are very dependent on our leaders' directions. If the instructions are clear, the work becomes easier. But if there's unclear information, we usually ask again immediately to avoid errors." This statement demonstrates that internal communication is not solely one-way but also allows for clarification so employees can confirm the meaning of the messages received. Interpretatively, this confirms that the effectiveness of internal communication in manufacturing organizations is highly dependent on clear instructions, openness to feedback, and the leadership's ability to explain messages to employees' levels of understanding. In organizations with high technical risks, leadership and communication are closely linked to performance effectiveness and operational safety (Praditya et al., 2025).

In addition to serving as a means of instruction, internal communication at PMT Dolok Ilir also serves as an integration mechanism between leaders, administrative/HR staff, and field employees. The administration/HR department acts as an information liaison, helping ensure that policies, directives, and operational needs are communicated to relevant parties. This is crucial because PMT Dolok Ilir does not have a formal Public Relations department, so the communication function rests with the leadership and the administrative department. One informant from the administration department stated, "Usually, we help forward information from the leadership to employees, especially regarding schedules, work requirements, or information that needs to be known immediately. So, we also help ensure that information is received." This quote demonstrates that internal communication is not only carried out personally by the leadership, but also through the support of a simple organizational structure. From a Weberian perspective on organizational communication, structural positions determine the channels through which messages are delivered, making position communication crucial for maintaining order, discipline, and organizational efficiency (Weber in Mahmudah, 2015).

Research findings also demonstrate that internal communication plays a role in building relational closeness between leaders and employees. The "morning gathering" activity is not only used as a forum for conveying instructions but also as a space for social interaction that strengthens interpersonal relationships. Through this forum, leaders can

understand employee conditions, hear about challenges in the field, and provide direct motivation. One employee stated, "At the morning gathering, we don't just listen to work instructions, but we can also communicate any challenges. Sometimes the leader immediately provides solutions." This statement demonstrates that internal communication has an important social function in fostering a sense of employee engagement. Analytical, this activity demonstrates a two-way communication pattern that strengthens internal trust and reduces the hierarchical distance between leaders and subordinates. Participatory internal communication can increase employee engagement because they feel they have a space to express their views, challenges, and work needs (Ramadhani, 2025).

Thus, the role of internal communication in the operations of PMT Dolok Ilir can be understood as an organizational driving system encompassing instructive, coordinative, integrative, and relational functions. Internal communication enables leaders to perform substitute PR functions, particularly in conveying information, maintaining relationships with employees, managing message barriers, and ensuring smooth work activities. In the context of organizations without a formal PR department, communication effectiveness is not entirely determined by the existence of a dedicated communication structure, but rather by the leadership's ability to manage messages clearly, quickly, and contextually. This finding reinforces the notion that internal communication in minimalist organizations can be effective if supported by self-directed communication leadership, adaptive communication channels, and interaction patterns that allow for clarification. Therefore, internal communication at PMT Dolok Ilir is not simply a technical activity of conveying information, but rather a strategic practice that supports work stability, operational discipline, and sustainable coordination within the manufacturing organization (Setyana & Aruman, 2021; Supriani, 2022).

### **Leadership's Internal Communication Strategy**

The internal communication strategy at PMT Dolok Ilir relies on a combination of two channels: direct communication (ngupi) and digital communication (WhatsApp groups). Direct communication is carried out through routine "morning gatherings," which serve as the primary forum for conveying work directions and coordinating daily operations. This forum allows for direct interaction, allowing for clearer message delivery.

This study reflects that catcalling at the University of North Sumatra is not simply a spontaneous act or verbal joke, but rather a patterned, repetitive communication practice that reflects the inequality of relationships in campus social interactions. The research findings show that verbal messages in the form of name-calling, comments, and teasing remarks are always associated with nonverbal cues such as stares, whistles, smiles, and body gestures that reinforce psychological pressure on the victim. From a S-O-R perspective, catcalling works as a stimulus that influences the victim's internal processes, creating feelings of discomfort, fear, shame, alertness, and threat, which then elicit responses such as silence, avoidance, ignoring the perpetrator, or leaving the location. An important reflection of this study is that campus spaces, which should be safe and equal academic environments, can still become spaces for the emergence of communication practices that are detrimental to women if communication ethics, gender awareness, and protection of student comfort are not firmly established. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of viewing catcalling as an interpersonal communication issue with social

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and psychological impacts, as well as providing a basis for universities to develop ethical communication education, prevent verbal and nonverbal harassment, and create academic spaces that are safer, more inclusive, and respect the dignity of every individual.



Figure 1. Daily Morning Gathering (Ngumpul) Activities at the PMT Company Field

As a complement, digital communication is utilized through the use of WhatsApp groups divided by employee category. This division aims to convey information more specifically according to the needs of each group. Information that is urgent or cannot be conveyed in person will be channeled through this medium.

The use of these two communication channels demonstrates an adaptive strategy for reaching all employees. On the one hand, direct communication provides clarity of messages, while on the other, digital communication allows for speed in information delivery.

### **Communication Patterns in the Organization**

The communication patterns at the Tenera Machine Factory (PMT) in Dolok Ilir demonstrate a two-way communication pattern that not only relies on vertical instructions from management to employees but also allows for feedback, clarification, and the communication of work challenges from employees to management. In the context of a manufacturing organization with a hierarchical work structure, vertical communication remains the primary pattern because management has the authority to set directions, work priorities, and operational decisions. However, field findings indicate that this vertical communication is not rigid but is complemented by dialogical mechanisms to ensure messages are accurately understood by employees. One manager informant stated, "Usually, we convey directions from the leadership to the employees, but after that, we still open up the opportunity for anything unclear. If employees don't understand, they can ask directly to avoid mistakes in their work." This statement demonstrates that the organizational communication pattern at PMT Dolok Ilir combines structural authority with participation. From a Weberian perspective on organizational communication, a hierarchical structure is important for maintaining orderly instructions, but its effectiveness depends heavily on the clarity of messages and organizational members' adherence to formal communication channels (Weber in Mahmudah, 2015).

This two-way communication pattern is crucial because PMT Dolok Ilir employees have varying backgrounds, work experiences, and levels of understanding of organizational messages. These differences mean that leaders cannot rely solely on

concise message delivery, especially when information relates to technical work, production schedules, task allocations, or internal policy changes. A field employee explained, "Sometimes we don't immediately understand information conveyed through the group. If we're still unsure, we ask again when we meet in person or through friends who are more knowledgeable." This quote demonstrates that understanding messages in an organization doesn't always occur automatically after information is conveyed. Interpretatively, organizational communication at PMT Dolok Ilir occurs through a process of negotiating meaning, where employees interpret messages, seek clarification, and adapt their understanding to the working conditions on the ground. This aligns with the view that effective internal communication must be participatory, as employee involvement in the communication process can reduce misunderstandings and strengthen organizational performance (Ramadhani, 2025).

In addition to vertical communication between leaders and employees, communication patterns at PMT Dolok Ilir also involve the mediating role of the administration/HR department. This department serves as a liaison between leadership policies and technical implementation in the field, particularly when information needs to be relayed to specific employee groups or when messages require administrative clarification. One administrative informant stated, "We usually help relay information from leadership, especially regarding schedules, employee data, or information that needs to be forwarded to specific departments." This statement demonstrates that organizational communication patterns move not only directly from leaders to employees but also through intermediaries who help maintain the orderly flow of information. Analytically, the presence of the administration/HR department demonstrates a substitution function for internal communication typically performed by Public Relations, even though the organization lacks a formal Public Relations department. In this case, the communication function is not lost but is embedded within the existing structure and implemented flexibly according to the organization's needs (Supriani, 2022).

Organizational communication patterns at PMT Dolok Ilir also exhibit a combination of formal, informal, direct, and digital communication. The "morning gathering" forum serves as a direct communication space that allows leaders to convey directions and immediately read employee responses, while WhatsApp groups are used as digital communication channels to expedite information dissemination. An employee informant stated, "In the morning, directions are usually given in person, but if there are changes or sudden information, it usually comes through the WhatsApp group. So we still stay informed even when we're not together." This quote demonstrates that communication patterns at PMT Dolok Ilir are hybrid and adaptable to operational needs. Interpretatively, the combination of face-to-face and digital communication reflects the organization's efforts to balance message clarity, interpersonal closeness, and speed of information. This finding reinforces the argument that organizational communication in the modern work era no longer relies solely on a single channel but instead requires integration between face-to-face communication and digital media for effective, responsive, and contextual work coordination (Sangapan et al., 2025; Setyana & Aruman, 2021).

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### **Barriers and Solutions in Internal Communication**

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Despite the established communication system, several barriers remain that impact the effectiveness of information delivery. One major obstacle is the difference in ability to understand messages, particularly written messages delivered through digital media. Not all employees have the same habits or access to communication devices, so information is not always received equally.

Furthermore, limited verbal communication is a challenge, especially for employees who work outside the main location and cannot participate in morning gatherings. This situation can potentially cause delays in receiving information.

To address this, management has implemented various solutions, such as repeated information delivery, the use of a relay system between employees, and the use of informal channels such as passing information to close contacts (family, friends, or neighbors). This demonstrates that PMT Dolok Ilir relies not only on formal communication but also utilizes informal networks to ensure effective information delivery.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the absence of a formal Public Relations department at the Tenera Machine Factory (PMT) in Dolok Ilir does not necessarily weaken the organization's internal communication function, because the leadership is able to take a strategic role as the main communicator who manages the flow of information, provides work direction, builds interpersonal closeness, and maintains operational coordination. The communication strategy implemented through a combination of "morning gathering" activities and WhatsApp groups shows that the effectiveness of communication in a minimalist-structured manufacturing organization is highly dependent on the leadership's ability to convey messages clearly, quickly, and contextually. This finding reflects that internal communication is not merely the activity of conveying instructions, but rather a leadership practice that determines work stability, discipline, employee trust, and smooth production. Thus, the Public Relations function in an organization does not always have to be present in the form of a special structural unit, but can be carried out adaptively through independent communication leadership that is responsive to the needs of the organization and the characteristics of employees in the field.

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