



Department of Business and Public Administration

MSc HMR Program

How does Informal Communication between employees affect their
performance?

MSc Dissertation

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1. Introduction

At no point in our history have humans, from different corners of the world, been in the position to communicate so effortlessly and in such great lengths (Lui et al., 2010). This advancement in technology has immensely impacted people's lives, especially following the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period, new concepts, such as working from home and hybrid model, were introduced, and embraced in the workplace. Consequently, the need for communication has become increasingly apparent. However, what exactly is communication and how is it perceived in the workplace?

According to Lewicki and Litterer, communication is the "heart" and "central instrumental process" in any social interactions (Lui et al., 2010, p. 469). On a day-to-day basis, individuals are called upon to communicate with each other in various aspects of their lives, from expressing simple pleasantries to presenting a new idea to a room full of people. Communication is a critical skill for an individual to possess and develop, especially for a fresh university graduate who is eager to join this corporate world. In simpler words, according to Scott communication can be explained as the process of "sending, receiving and understanding information and its meaning" (Ergen, 2010, p. 1).

Considering that in every interaction amongst individuals communication takes place, it is clear that this is an extensive subject with numerous aspects worthy of researching and analyzing. In the corporate world, we come across two different types of communication, formal and informal communication. Whilst scholars may not directly address the former, formal communication, in their research on organizational communication, a substantial portion of this research organizational communication indirectly addresses and explains this key concept (Gómez & Dailey, 2017). Meanwhile, a few empirical studies were conducted on the latter, informal communication (Gómez & Dailey, 2017). This indicates a lack of research

on the topic of informal communication, especially on its importance and effect on the workforce.

It is imperative to define what informal communication is to better distinguish its presence in the workplace. Thus, one will be able to better understand and examine how informal communication directly or indirectly affects employees' performance. Research has found that communication between employees plays a vital role in the development of satisfaction within organizations (Kandlousi et al., 2010). Taking into consideration the importance of communication in the workplace and the lack of research on informal communication, the objective of the thesis is to determine how does informal communication between employees affects their performance.

Informal Communication, as described by Holmes and Marra, is the social glue of the workplace (Fay, 2011, p. 212). In essence, communication is the human activity that enables people to connect and create relationships (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 52). Individuals, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, have started to re-evaluate their career prospects and expectations from their workplace. They have begun to resist the concept of being treated to an end by their organization and seek to take control of their working conditions (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 52). Consequently, employees have turned to informal communication channels to achieve both their tasks and social goals (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 4). Researchers have observed that employees prefer to use informal communication channels rather than formal to exchange information. For example, individuals tend to seek answers to questions related to office procedures by asking their colleagues rather than referring to the employee handbook or manual (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 3). This tendency to consult our colleagues on work related questions stems from the need to socialize in the workplace.

Whilst analyzing the role informal communication plays in the overall performance of employees in the workplace, it is imperative to also direct our attention towards the role of

technology in facilitating and preserving informal communication within organizations especially in recent years whereas the trends “Work from home” and “Remote Working” have been embraced by societies. Internet, search engines, electronic mail, instant messaging, audio, and video conferencing are a few of the main technological changes adopted in the workplace that have impacted the communication between employees (Ean, 2011). Information sharing has been enhanced by technology, thus fostering an environment where employees can communicate effectively and timely amongst themselves.

Although technology may have simplified communication in the workplace, it does not necessarily indicate how employees are affected by information sharing through informal communication channels. However, according to Ruth, employees’ performance closely correlates to the organization’s success (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 86). Poor performance, which can be in the form of missing deadlines or not accomplishing specific goals, can be damaging to the organization’s strategic plans and overall success (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 86). Therefore, in this paper we focus on the effect of informal communication on employees’ performance. In other words, it explores whether it positively or negatively impacts employees’ motivation, satisfaction and trust in their colleagues and management, and how these factors can affect one’s performance within the organization.

In regard to the above, considering the close relationship between employees’ performance and organizational success, one may ponder on the connection between informal communication and the organization’s structure and whether or not the structure of the organization allows or prevents the use of informal communication channels. Researchers have found that specific aspects of the organization’s structure influence employees’ productivity and work relationships (Gaspary et al., 2020, p. 134). Throughout their career paths, individuals are introduced to a vast number of people with whom they develop a variety of relationships, ranging from simple acquaintance to friendships. However, when placing the concept

relationship within the working environment one must examine the organizational structure and assess whether it fosters an environment where employees from different departments and positions develop close relationships.

Another factor we must consider when examining the relationship between performance and organizational structure is the leadership style adopted by the management of the organization. Theories, such as general systems theory, are called upon to link leadership styles to organizational structure (Steyn, 2020, p. 99). This theory supports the idea that people can influence their environment, in this case their working environment, thus directly impacting the organizational structure. The general systems theory also implies that not only individuals may influence their environment, but that the environment can influence the individual in the form of leadership. In other words, this theory supports that there is a reciprocal relationship between the two, individuals and environment (Steyn, 2020, p. 99).

To sum up, this paper focuses on secondary research methods to collect information and analyze the above-mentioned topics and concepts while aiming to provide a new perspective on how they are connected and how they may impact employees' performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Informal Communication

It is imperative for organizations to realize that effective and efficient communication is an investment (Ergen, 2010, p. 4). Thus, allowing the flow of information through various communications channels is critical for the overall performance of the organization and not only for the morale of employees (Sinickas, 2001, p.3). According to a survey conducted by the University of Michigan, organizations that support information sharing between employees in various departments had a higher return on investments and sales (Sinickas, 2001, p.3). This indicates that communication should be embraced in all its form in an organization, from upward to downward direction, as well as through formal and informal channels. People are often focused on achieving their individual and teams' goals that contribute to the organization's success. Therefore, communication plays a critical role as information needs to be shared, explained, and discussed with the employees in order to have a clear view of the objectives.

The term "Communication" is commonly used to refer to verbal interactions between people. However, it is noteworthy to mention that communication can be verbal and non-verbal (Ergen, 2010). Verbal communication can be represented through speech or writing, whereas non-verbal communication refers to the "communication that transcends the written or spoken word" (Gabbott & Hogg, 2001, p. 6). The non-verbal communication can be divided into four categories. The first category called Vocalics refers to the tone of one's voice as well as their intonation of words whilst having a conversation. This slight change in one's voice can convey their attitude and true emotions on the subject. Kinesics is another category which focuses on someone's body language such as their posture and movement. These cues often serve as clear indicators of their opinion regarding the topic of the conversation. Similarly, the use of distance and attention to personal space can be considered a non-verbal communication. This category

of nonverbal cues is called Proxemics. The fourth category, Oculistics, refers to eye-behavior such as eye-contact during a conversation or gazing around the room. These eye movements during a conversation can convey various intentions or emotions (Gabbott & Hogg, 2001).

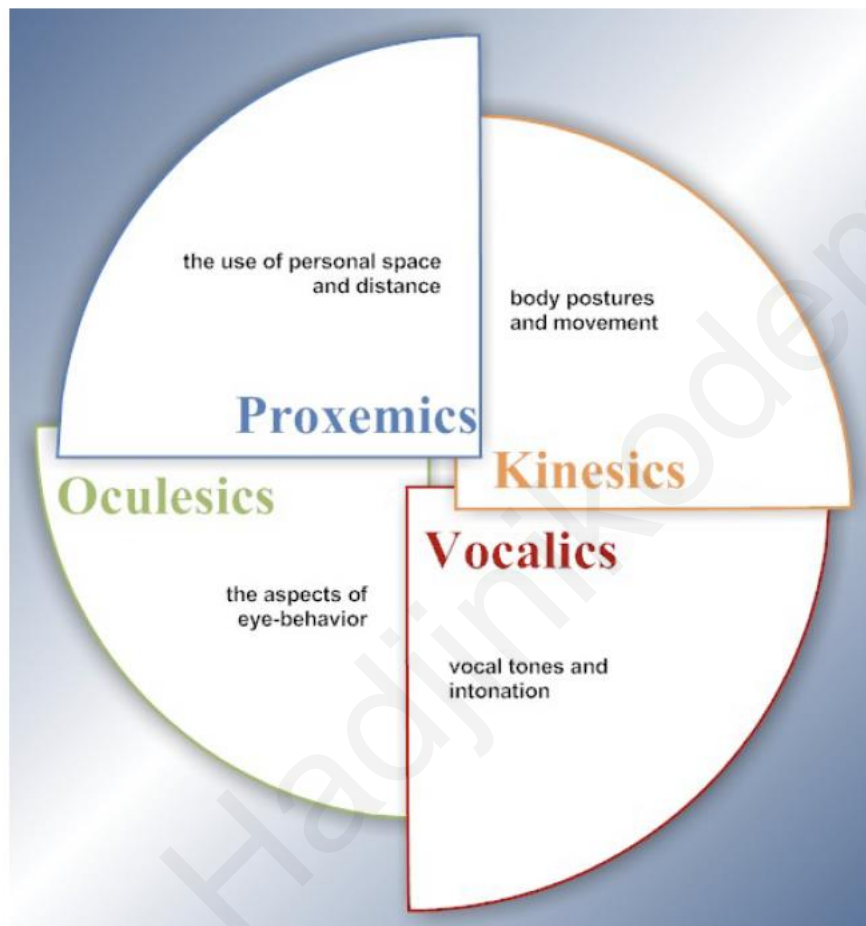


Figure 1: The 4 Categories of non-verbal Communication (Ergen, 2010, p. 3).

Besides verbal and non-verbal communication, in the corporate world, employees are also introduced to two main types of communication: formal and informal. Formal communication often complements the organization's structure. In other words, we can observe that formal communication is focused on the hierarchical structure of the organization, and information is passed through predefined channels (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 52). This formality in the structure and operations describes an organization that follows a more traditional and bureaucratic approach. In such cases, organizations following this traditional

approach tend to focus their attention on differentiating various divisions, departments, and work units, based on their importance in the overall success of the organization. This often results in dividing people into different levels of importance based on their title and department (McPhee, 1985, p. 149). That being said, formal communication channels can also have a positive effect on employees' performance. According to Chio, Hsieh and Yang, formal communication reduces conflict and reinforces trust and overall satisfaction within the organization (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 52).

Researchers have loosely defined the term "Informal Communication" as the exchange of information, ideas, and messages amongst coworkers through unofficial channels (Kapoor, 2020, p. 1). It seems that the concept of informal communication is the last category to be consider when analyzing organizational communication (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 5). According to Kraut, Fish, Root and Chalfonte's research (1990), formal and informal communication can be separated by key characteristics. Formal communication is scheduled in advance, and only arranged participants are involved. Each participant has a predetermined role, and during these scheduled conversations, the participants must present and follow the meeting's agenda. It is a one-way conversation where each participant takes turns to present their findings and add to the conversation. The topic discussed can be described as impoverished as they lack certain key information. Lastly, it is expected that the language used by all participants is formal (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 5). In contrast, informal communication is unplanned, spontaneous, and it is conducted with random people as one seeks to find answers to their questions. During informal communication, various topics may be discussed, including personal life outside of work, such as hobbies and vacations. This form of communication allows all participants to be active and interact with each other in fostering a discussion. Therefore, the participants may use informal language such as slang or shorten words rather than complete sentences (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 5).

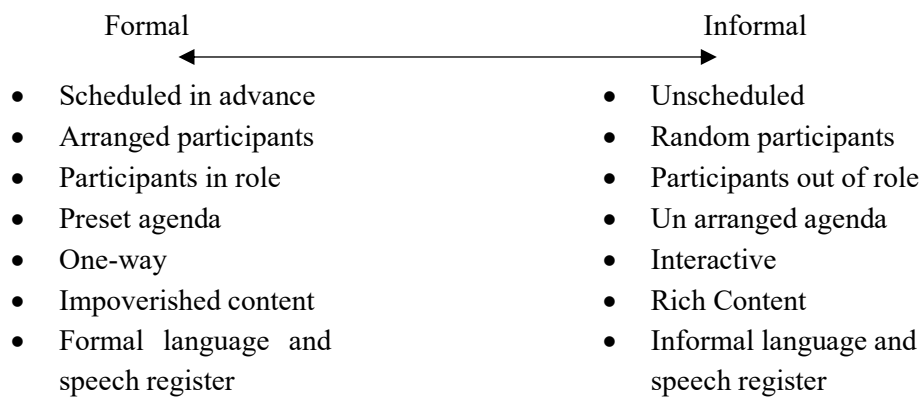


Figure 2: The formality of Communication (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 2)

It is important to mention that the characteristic of the nature of the communication also influences which style of communication one might adopt. A conversation may be characterized as more or less formal based on structural or functional aspects. When referring to structural characteristic of a communication, one could be referring to the relationship between the people part taking in the conversation as well to their social role in the workspace (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 6). Similarly, the functional characteristics of communication influence which style one might seek to use. For example, if the conversation is conducted via private instant messages, a phone call, or a face-to-face discussion, one might tend to be more informal and interactive rather than when writing an electronic mail (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 6). Thus, formal, and informal communication channels are crucial in the workplace as both styles provide employees with the opportunity to foster a discussion, and choose which style is best suited for the conversation.

According to Daft and Lengel, people choose to opt for informal communication when faced with uncertainty as it allows them to coordinate more quickly and efficiently in challenging situations (Kraut et al., 1990, p. 6). In essence, informal communication plays a critical role in the coordination of tasks in the workplace as it depends in on four primary human needs: (a) the physical proximity, how close are the individuals part taking in the conversation; (b) the instinctive need of humans to communicate; (c) the sense of belonging in a group; and

last but not least, (d) the hierarchy (Ergen, 2011). Additionally, Subramanian has claimed that informal communication does not only appear between people in close proximity, but it also appears due to the people's perception of one another. In other words, if the people taking part in the conversation can provide reliable information and additional knowledge on the subject of the discussion. Another important aspect that leads people into seeking an informal communication with someone is their relationship, if they are friends, and lastly trust (Ergen, 2011). Trust is a substantial concept that warrants separate analysis.

According to Kapur, informal communication is based on personal and informal communication among people. Thus, when this type of communication is transferred in the context of a workplace it disregards the organizations' structure, rules, and formalities (Kapur, 2020, p. 1). Informal communication in the workplace can take the form of a grapevine, rumors, and gossip (Michelson & Mouly, 2002). The above-mentioned forms of informal communication can also be called informal communication networks. Researchers have concluded that informal communication channels are more effective in the transfer of information rather than formal (Davis & O'Connor, 1977). The grapevine was found to be the fastest means of sharing information. It is preferred over formal communication channels as it requires a face-to-face interaction to spread the information, thus making it faster than any other formal method such as an email (Davis & O'Connor, 1977, p. 61). It is also free from any organizational restriction as it operates through word-of-mouth rather than formally written memos distributed among the employees of the organization (Davis & O'Connor, 1977, p. 62).

Academics have noted that informal communication channels are frequently fueled by the lack of information shared within an organization. Employees use informal channels such as grapevine to "fill the gaps that formal communication fails to address" (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 52). The grapevine network allows for information to circulate through the different departments of an organization amongst all levels. It is reasonable to assume that employees

tend to share information first with their peers, preferably those in the same department as them, and then with their friends (Burke & Wise, 2003, p. 71). One might question the validity of the information shared through informal communication channels. However, according to Davis's study at least 75 percent of information passed through the grapevine is true (Burke & Wise, 2003, p. 72).

People are inclined to obtain information through informal communication channels such as the grapevine for various reasons. Four main factors were examined. Research found that these four factors are clearly associated with the grapevine network and how it operates. These factors are: (1) the importance of communication to employees, (2) the level of ambiguity and lack of clarity in communication, (3) the organization environment, if it is perceived as threatening or uncertain, and (4) the organizational climate, which may not foster trust between employees and formal communication channels (Ergen, 2011, p. 62). The primary reason for the existence of these informal communication channels is that people are social creatures by nature and formal channels do not allow them to fulfill their social batteries (Burke & Wise, 2003, p. 72).

The grapevine network could be considered as the means by which gossip, and rumors are spread within an organization. It is important to recognize that the words gossip, and rumors have a negative connotation. There are occasions where the transmission of inaccurate information, starting from a rumor or people gossiping, might harm the organization or other employees (Michelson & Mouly, 2002, p. 58-59). However, one should be open to considering the positive aspects as well. According to Rosnow and Fine, rumors and gossip are bound by time limits; once the information has occurred and is now irrelevant, there is no point in spreading that information any longer (Michelson & Mouly, 2002, p. 60). The frequency of rumors and gossip tends to be influenced by the environmental settings of the organization. As stated above, individuals tend to spread rumors when feeling anxious due to uncertain

situations. Gossip is the means for individuals to relieve this tension and anxiety created by the situation (Michelson & Mouly, 2002, p. 59).

Research on the nature and function of rumors and gossip has revealed that individuals who partake in the action of spreading information via gossiping often experience feelings of guilt or ambivalence (Michelson & Mouly, 2002, p. 60). In essence, people could be conflicted when exposed to rumors or gossiping. Gossiping is generally viewed negatively as it is considered as an act of spreading false information; however, within the context of the organization, it is possible that the information circulating through the grapevine could reach individuals who were kept out of the loop. According to Michelson and Mouly (2002, p. 61), it is not clear if rumors and gossip can function independently or if they require one another for the flow of information through the grapevine. If rumors and gossip are found to be mutually dependent, it does not automatically erase their differences.

Rumors could be perceived as hypotheses someone made, as the information shared is not confirmed (Ergen, 2011, p. 63). Taking into consideration the previous statement, it is logical that people are conflicted about whether or not to believe the rumors circulating in the workplace. In contrast, gossip is considered as casual and meaningless conversation, involving information that could be based on facts and reality (Ergen, 2011, p. 63). Michelson and Mouly have also provided us with another perspective on how to differentiate the two concepts; gossip is considered intimate and personal as it often involves sharing personal details about someone you know, while rumors have a tendency to spread in a social setting with a larger crowd (Ergen, 2011, p. 63). In essence, rumors are information shared between people with the purpose of explaining and justifying the emotional investment of individuals in the matter, while gossip is the exchange of information related to “entertainment, gaining influence, and social control” over a group of people with the similar interests (Ergen, 2011, p. 63). To sum

up, rumors and gossiping are the means by which information travels through informal communication networks such as the grapevine within an organization.

The blockage or filtering of information during its transmission can be caused by various barriers. These barriers are also known as communication barriers in literature. Researchers have classified the types of barriers into two categories: environmental and personal (Ergen, 2011, p. 58). Environmental communication barriers refer to obstacles one might face during communication related to the environmental setting of an organization, while personal communication barriers refer to any obstacles that arise from individual's personal life and their interactions (Ergen, 2011, p. 58). According to Smith, effective communication in the workplace depends on the organization's infrastructure and whether or not its systems enable employees to communicate with each other (Ergen, 2011, p. 58). Inadequate communication systems may result in miscommunication or misinterpretation of the shared information, thus leading to further problems for both the organization and its employees (Ergen, 2011, p. 58). When the organization's infrastructure does not support effective communication, it is better for employees to communicate face-to-face in order to ensure their points are correctly interpreted and understood.

Factoring in the above information, one can assume that communication in the workplace is unavoidable. Hence, researchers stated that communication is an investment for an organization and not merely a cost item, as evidence supports the idea that a greater level of communication in an organization leads to better success (Ergen, 2011, p. 59). According to Yammarino and Naughton's research, there is a positive correlation between the time one spends communicating and work outcomes such as job satisfaction and employee effort (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 53). Thus, researchers were eager to find the connection between organizational communication and communication satisfaction. The latter, communication satisfaction, refers to the level of a person's satisfaction with the flow of information in the

organization and relationship variables within it (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 53). Some relationship variables within an organization may include the form of communication, communication channels, the relationship status between employees, leadership style and organizational structure. In this paper, we analyze the connection between these variables and employees' performance in the organization.

Workplace communication can be a complex topic as it can be influenced by the above-mentioned variables (Ergen, 2010, p. 10). However, it is important to note that an organization's goal is to achieve success, thus requiring its employees to be engaged, motivated, and satisfied with their work in order to be productive and support the goals of the organization. The finding of the research analyzed by Kandlousi et al. (2010, p. 56) highlights that employees' satisfaction with the organization's communication relates to their satisfaction in their position. In essence, if employees are satisfied with the communication level and communication channels of their organization, it will be reflected in their work ethics. They will be more engaged in their work and motivated to accomplish their responsibilities, thus contributing to the overall success of the organization.

2.2 The role of Technology

New communication technologies have been developed, introduced, and adopted by organizations over the years. According to Ean (2011, p.1), the new communication technologies introduced in the 21st century have significantly changed the communication process of organizations. It is now evident that effective communication motivates employees to contribute to the overall goals of their organization (Ean, 2011, p.1). The advancement in technology has resulted in the introduction of new tasks performed by administrative professionals, which are dependent on technology (Scott & Timmerman, 2005, p. 684). With the introduction of systems such as Microsoft Office, professionals are now able to prepare intricate presentations based on data collected and analyzed. As a result, the vast majority of tasks of employees in an organization require some degree of active collaboration and communication among coworkers in different departments (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 53).

“An organization cannot exist without communication” (Ean, 2011, p. 1). Communication ensures that employees are well-informed about the organization’s strategic goals, vision, and mission, thus promoting the spirit of collaboration among them (Ean, 2011, p. 1). This is where technology comes into play, equipping us with the necessary tools to facilitate effective communication among employees while also laying the groundwork for the introduction of remote working. These major technological changes have influenced the way organizations approach communication, with many embracing new trends such as remote working and working from home. Thanks to technology, employees can now communicate seamlessly via various channels such as chats and email, transcending geographical barriers (Ean, 2011, p. 3). The introduction and use of these technological advances in the work environment are crucial as it can provide the organization with a competitive advantage over others (Smith, 2019, p.19-20). Organizations should pay close attention to new technological

trends as they may offer new advantages that, when mastered by employees, could become that competitive advantage the organization seeks to succeed (Smith, 2019, p. 20).

Interactions among employees have changed over the years, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Government restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of the virus facilitated the transition to virtual teams (Tromer, 2021, p. 2). During this period, groupware systems like Microsoft Teams and Zoom were embraced by virtual teams in order to stay connected and informed about work-related issues (Tromer, 2021, p. 2). Employees were able to reach out to each other, ask questions, and interact even though they were not in the same physical location. Employees are now able to collaborate with teams as well as have access to work-related information from anywhere and at any time without any technological restrictions (Smith, 2019, p. 20). This trend has persisted even after the pandemic, with companies continuing to communicate via instant messages rather than visiting each other's offices. The use of these groupware systems has also provided organizations with the opportunity to expand their businesses to other countries as well. With this transition to virtual teams, the concept of informal communication has expanded. People are no longer meeting in the kitchen to make coffee or drink water; instead, they are now making spontaneous and unplanned calls over Teams and Zoom, introducing a new type of informal interaction in this technological era (Tromer, 2021, p. 4).

As organizations expand their businesses across the globe, new teams are formed in various countries, facilitating the organizations' introduction into these new markets. With physical proximity no longer an option between teams, it becomes crucial for individuals to be aware of their team members and more broadly, of the organization (Tromer, 2021, p. 5-6). Employees ought to be informed about new additions to the company, as they may interact and collaborate with them. To ensure aware of any changes in the organization's structure, the organization could introduce the concept of an organizational chart, where employees are

arranged by department, division, and position (Tromer, 2021, p. 6). Including photographs of employees would enable individuals to put a face behind the name which could enhance communication and collaboration among employees. Additionally, another approach to introducing new additions to the organization is through an email sent to all employees, presenting the new hires along with their photograph, title, and department, work email address, in case they are interested in communicating with them. According to Gutwin, organizations should embrace platform who allow for instant messaging between individuals as it encourages quick informal expressions among employees thus offering “an effortless transition between awareness and communication” (Tromer, 2021. p. 7).

Instant messaging is considered an informal action, as it is not focused on grammatical and spelling errors, but rather on sharing information between individuals (Tromer, 2021, p. 7). It can be compared to an informal face-to-face conversation among people. One significant difference between the two concepts of informal interaction, messaging, and face-to-face conversation, is that when messaging, one can control when to respond or reach out to someone. This control, offered by instant messaging, could affect an employee's performance as it allows them to focus on their tasks and respond once they are ready. In contrast, in face-to-face conversation, an individual may be interrupted while working, affecting their concentration on their task and, consequently, take a toll on their performance. Additionally, instant messaging offers individual privacy, as their team members can reach out to them via messaging without the need to visit them in their office space. This instant sharing of information guarantees that individuals can be easily informed about changes in the organization, staying aware and informed about new hires, new projects and the success or failure of the organization. Instant messaging could also be helpful in solving problems or facing issues arising on a daily basis.

In contemporary working environments, the need for new technologies increases as the need for competitive advantage becomes more apparent and desired. Thus, enhancing the need

for employees with information technology literacy. It is important for individuals to be aware of the technological changes, especially in their organization, that might aid or affect their work. Employees should be open to adapting to and embracing these changes whereas the organization ought to offer training to its employees. However, these technological changes should not only be used for the collaboration of employees in the completion of tasks. As mentioned previously, people are social by nature thus requiring a sense of social interaction in the workplace. With the introduction of technology-mediated communication employees located anywhere in the world can create and manage their social networks (Siitonen & Aira, 2020, p. 10).

To sum up, technology plays a vital role in the success of organizations by enabling employees to complete their tasks more efficiently and effectively, while also fostering an informal environment that encourages employees to socialize and bond with their colleagues.

2.3 Employees' Performance

The performance of an organization is closely linked to the performance of its employees. This relationship raises the question of what factors influence employee performance. It is crucial for an organization to examine these factors and take appropriate measures to ensure its success. However, as the main focus of this paper is informal communication in the workplace, we will focus on how this concept relates to employee performance. Communication is a vital part of any organization as it allows the sharing of information. According to Banihashemi, communication is the means by which organizations reach and accomplish goals, while creating and maintaining a social environment that shapes individuals' relationships in the workplace (Mabondo, 2022, p. 12).

In this social environment, informal communication lies at its center. Informal communication is the means by which employees receive information and share thoughts, ideas, and experiences not only related to work (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 6). In essence, informal communication is regarded as more useful considering the relevance and importance of information shared through informal channels (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 6). Researchers have found that informal communication is indispensable, faster, and allows for more information to be shared in less time. It may also increase individuals' sense of job satisfaction while serving as a means to express and release emotions (Mabondo, 2022, p. 11). Its relation to job satisfaction makes informal communication a crucial part of an organization's performance (Mabondo, 2022, p. 11). It is important to consider the organization's performance when studying the factors influencing the employees' performance. According to Venkatraman and Ramanujam, organizational performance can be perceived as a sign of an organization's capacity to efficiently achieve its goals (Muda et al., 2014, p. 74).

Performance, by definition, is "the act of carrying out actions and activities to achieve the desired results" (Mabondo, 2022, p. 12). But how is this related to employees' performance

in the organization? Individuals have the desire to belong and feel important in the organization. This desire might be met when employees have positive interactions and communication with leaders, their managers etc (Mabondo, 2022, p. 12). Once they feel important and appreciated, their sense of responsibility for the organization increases, resulting in higher performance as the completion of tasks affects their organizations' success. Matthews and Crow's research reveals that almost 80% of employees' time is spent communicating with each other either through formal or informal communication channels (Mabondo, 2022, p. 13). Following a more formal structure can lead to a loss of morale, as it makes people feel monotonous. In contrast, building relationships with colleagues and engaging in informal conversations can boost people's motivation to complete their tasks (Mabondo, 2022, p. 13).

Recognition of employees' efforts is one of the main factors that can influence their performance (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 87). Employees are motivated to accomplish their tasks, and even more so when their efforts are recognized by the management. It is logical to assume that this motivation can also increase when employees are rewarded for their efforts and actions that contribute to the overall performance of the organization (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 87). Another factor besides the need for recognition and reward that could influence employees' performance is the attitude of people surrounding them (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 87). When colleagues have a positive attitude towards individuals, they are open to collaboration and motivated to accomplish tasks, which positively affects those around them. Tina suggested that the attitudes are contagious, and that positive attitude brings positive results in the overall success and performance of the organization (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 87). One can assume that the opposite is also true. If individuals are surrounded by negativity and rude behaviors, their performance will decrease as they are affected by this bad attitude.

Taking into consideration the above, informal communication can be employed in cases where employees experience bad attitudes, allowing them to vent and express their emotions

to close colleagues (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 5). Consequently, it becomes a means for employees to express their emotional frustrations. In some instances, other may be able to relate to their experiences and emotions, thus strengthening their bond and increasing their overall satisfaction (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 5). It is also believed that an increase in satisfaction is related to employees' performance, as the more satisfied one is with their job, the more productive and engaged they are in their tasks and with the organization. This bond among employees not only forges social connections, but also deepens respect and increases the mutual support (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 6). This bond between coworkers binds them to the organization and is referred to organizational commitment. It binds employees to the organization as that is the connecting link between them (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 6). The organization is the reason they were able to connect and communicate in the first place.

One can assume that informal communication is interconnected with employees' performance as it is the means by which employees are satisfied and motivated to accomplish their tasks. Through effective communication channels, employees have the opportunity to interact and share information. In order for these informal channels to continue providing a smooth flow of information throughout the organization, thus increase the performance of employees, management should be willing to allow their existence and offer the technology to expand the informal environment for employees working remotely (Mabondo, 2022, p. 14). If management supports this flow of information, employees will also be inclined to share work-related topics and information. One might suggest that this new method of informing employees about work-related issues through their peers may be the new concept of organizational communication (Mabondo, 2022, p. 17). The goal of the organization should be to consider the above-mentioned factors that influence employees' performance to ensure that the organization's performance exceeds standards (Mabondo, 2022, p. 18).

It is suggested that both satisfaction and happiness with and within the workplace can positive influence one's performance. Specifically, satisfaction with communication among employees has been found to increase employees' overall job satisfaction (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 53). To sum up, the findings of Koch and Denner (2022, p. 11) support the theory that the amount of informal communication significantly affects employees' productivity. This research has also shown that informal communication helps employees feel motivated to accomplish their individual tasks more effectively, resulting in the increased organizational performance (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 11).

Additionally, it was noticed that proximity influences the number of informal interactions between employees, with such interactions being relatively low among remote employees (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 12). Lastly, Balyan points out that employees' performance and organizational performance form a cycle: as employees' productivity rises, their job satisfaction increases, their emotionally loyal to the organization, and they receive better remunerations because of these improvements in quality and quantity. Consequently, the organization experiences growth in sales and overall business growth (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 87). Conversely, if employees' performance is low, the organizations' performance will be negatively affected (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 88).

2.4 Organizational Structure & Culture

An organization consists of a group of people organized and managed in a manner designed to accomplish specific goals (Nene & Pillay, 2019, p. 11). The structure of the organization is a core aspect that can significantly affect its performance (Nene & Pillay, 2019, p. 10). As examined previously, organizational performance is closely related to employees' performance. But how does organizational structure influence employees' performance, and how are these concepts related to informal communication? It has been proven that employees' loyalty to a company depends on various factors, including their awareness of changes within the company and their knowledge of the company's functions (Awadh & Saad, 2013, p. 168). This is where informal communication comes into play. As previously discussed, informal communication channels are one of the preferred methods of sharing information among employees.

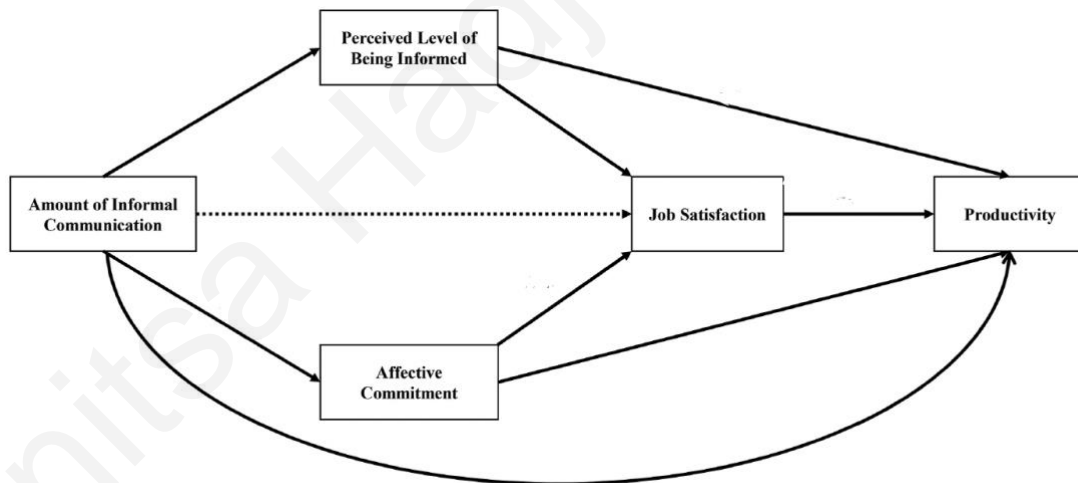


Figure 3: Conceptual model of the relationship between informal communication and productivity (Koch & Denner, 2022, p. 7).

It has been observed that each organizational has its own structure, which can be influenced by the organization's culture as well as by constant changes in the business world (Gasparly et al., 2020, p. 133). Organizations should be aware of changes in the business environment that may affect their success and adapt to these changes either by adopting new

methods or by reorganizing and restructuring their functions (Gaspary et al., 2020, p. 133). According to Pleshko, the majority of organizations are characterized by a mixed structure form (2007, p. 53). The four main structural dimensions are: (1) formalization, (2) integration, (3) centralization, and (4) complexity (Pleshko, 2007, p. 54).

In essence, formalization can be defined as the degree to which an organization implements rules and procedures to prescribe behavior, including but not limited to the allocation of tasks to specific individuals (Pleshko, 2007, p. 55). The term complexity, in relation to organizational structure, refers to the various interconnected functions of an organization (Pleshko, 2007, p. 55). This connection between the functions creates a complex organizational structure as tasks have to pass through different hands before they are completed. Additionally, researchers describe structural integration as the coordination of activities among individuals, teams, and departments within the organization (Pleshko, 2007, p. 55). Lastly, the term centralization is used to describe “the degree of concentration of the decision-making process,” usually by upper management, as well as the degree of employees’ autonomy in organizing their working day and completing their tasks (Gaspary et al., 2020, p. 134).

These four main structural dimensions are believed to describe a more traditional approach, which focuses on hierarchical control, control of the decision-making process and formal communication channels (Gaspary et al., 2020, p. 134). Each dimension describes a different aspect of the organizational structure, allowing the introduction of more than one dimension within an organization. Organizations that follow a more traditional approach on the structural nature of their operations have a hard time adapting to changes, especially in sectors that are characterized by a fast-paced environment and uncertainty (Gaspary et al., 2020, p. 134).

It is imperative for the success of contemporary organizations operating in a very highly competitive market to be open to change and to continuously adjust their functions in order to respond to the changes in their business environment (Gasparly et al., 2020, p. 133). According to researchers, there is no single best approach in organizational structure. The most efficient and productive method to structure and manage an organization is to adapt the organization's structural design to specific contextual demands (Gasparly et al., 2020, p. 134). This includes forming new departments and positions, shifting the hierarchical structure of departments, and creating new teams to allow for a better flow of information shared among employees (Gasparly et al., 2020, p. 134).

The introduction of new organizational structures based on the needs and goals of organizations represents a change from the pre-established traditional dimensions. At the same time, the new organizational structure facilitates an environment where flexibility and collaboration between employees is encouraged, thus promoting productivity, innovation, and work relationships within the organization (Gasparly et al., 2020, p. 135). The process of changing an organization's structure can take a long time, as its functions are fixed and cannot be adapted to every change in the business environment. Consequently, organizations should ensure that their structure is flexible and adaptable to at least the most anticipated circumstances, thus ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of their structure (Nene & Pillay, 2019, p. 11).

Organizational structure as mentioned above can be influenced by the organization's culture. By definition organizational structure is a "system of assumptions, values, and beliefs, which governs how people behave in an organization" (Nene & Pillay, 2019, p. 11). These values have a strong influence over employees' behavior in an organization. It can influence individuals from the way they dress to the level of their performance in their role (Nene & Pillay, 2019, p. 11). Every organization is characterized by a unique culture, which is developed

and maintained by the set of values and beliefs, as well as by the boundaries and guidelines developed to be followed by employees (Nene & Pillay, 2019, p. 11). Consequently, the organizational culture establishes a degree of formality in the working environment of the organization, therefore the behavior of employees. It is said that to understand an organization's culture and how it is shaped, firstly one should pay close attention to the reactions, interpretations, and actions of employees and how these are influenced by the collectivity (Nene & Pillay, 2019, p. 11).

It is crucial that the norms, values, and beliefs establishing the culture of the organization are shared with employees. Employees should be aware of these so they can behave accordingly. Studies conducted on the concept of organizational culture have revealed that organizational culture can positively affect the organization's performance. A "good atmosphere" leads to a better working environment for employees, thus promoting productivity and satisfaction, which can enhance overall the performance of the organization (Karunia, 2020, p. 166-167). Management plays a critical role in shaping the organization's culture, as their values and beliefs about leading employees to achieve the organizational goals influence the overall culture of the organization and employees' behavior (Bwalya, 2023, p. 181).

2.5 Leadership

Similarly to organizational structure, the leadership style varies from organization to organization as well as from person to person. Leadership can be characterized as a personal relationship between people. One person directs, coordinates, and supervised the others while accomplishing the tasks (Khan et al., 2015, p. 87). However, leadership is not a simple act. While one may comprehend that leadership refers to the act of directing people to accomplish a task and supervising their performance, it is much more. “Leadership is the ability to inspire, motivate, and empower individuals or groups to work collaboratively and effectively” (Bwalya, 2023, p. 181). Over the years, many theories were developed and modified as new information come to light, but none of them can be perceived as completely irrelevant as all have something to add to previously existing literature (Nawaz et al., 2016, p. 1).

The general systems theory supports the concept that individuals may influence their working environment, thereby affecting organizational structure, and that the working environment may influence individuals, thus shaping the leadership styles (Steyn, 2020, p. 99). There is a continuous loop where any change in individuals’ behavior or in their working environment may affect the other. Similar to general systems theory, situational theory suggests that leaders adjust their leadership style to fit with the working environment and employees (Steyn, 2020, p. 99). In contrast, trait theory proposes that the leadership style and behavior of an individual are dictated by their personality traits (Steyn, 2020, p. 99). It is believed that the reasons for this diversity in the definition of the term ‘leadership’ derives from evidence on a variety of topics including the leader’s traits, behaviors, interactions; the role of the leader; the leader’s influence on their team; leader’s impact on objectives and the completion of tasks; as well as their ability to directly or indirectly affect the organizational culture and structure (Steyn, 2020, p. 100).

The leadership style is the expression of the individual's leadership approach (Bwalya, 2023, p. 181). There is a variety of leadership styles, each with its unique characteristics, which can influence an organization's dynamics, culture, or their employees' productivity in several ways (Bwalya, 2023, p. 181). This paper focuses on four specific theoretical behavioral styles of leadership: empowering, directive, transformational and transactional (Steyn, 2020, p. 101). The empowering leadership style has a positive connotation as it involves encouraging employees to share their ideas and express their opinions on work-related topics, thus increasing their level of autonomy and responsibility (Steyn, 2020, p. 101). Additionally, the empowering leadership style promotes teamwork, sharing information among colleagues, and a collaborate decision-making process (Steyn, 2020, p. 101). This behavioral leadership style focuses on fostering an environment where employees are motivated to make decisions and express their opinions.

The next behavioral leadership style is the directive style. In the directive leadership style, the leaders take on the role of explaining work-related information to employees and directing them in the delivery of their role's duties and responsibilities (Steyn, 2020, p. 101). This leadership style provides employees with clarity about their position and the goals of the organization, which directly affects their performance (Steyn, 2020, p. 101). Employees are now more engaged in accomplishing their tasks and contributing to the overall success of the organization. The two leadership styles, empowering and directive, are very similar in motivating employees to accomplish their tasks. However, the former provides employees with the autonomy to take control of their working schedule to accomplish their tasks, while the latter provides clear direction for employees to follow in order to accomplish their tasks.

The third leadership style is transformational leadership. With this style, employees are encouraged to align their goals and efforts with those of their leader in ensuring the overall success of the organization (Nawaz et al., 2016, p. 3). This leadership style requires trust

between employees and leaders and shared values and beliefs on which they will focus to contribute to the organization's success (Steyn, 2020, p. 101). The transformational style focuses on encouraging employees to focus their attention on collective interests from which everyone will benefit (Nawaz et al., 2016, p. 3). Once the benefits of the group are established, then the leader assists employees in taking charge and transforming into a leader themselves (Steyn, 2020, p. 101). In essence, transformational leaders can identify the need for change, thus creating the vision to promote and accomplish this change (Nawaz et al., 2016, p. 3). This leaders focus is the future and how they can transform the existing norms to bring better results not only for their organization but for their employees as well.

The final leadership style mentioned in this paper is the transactional leadership style. This style refers to a different relationship between leaders and employees. It refers to a more transactional approach where employees put the effort to accomplish their tasks and duties only to receive the reward promised to them by the leader (Steyn, 2020, p. 102). These transactional leaders believe that the primary reasons for an employee to accomplish their tasks and their duties in their position are the contractual agreement signed between the two parties and the extrinsic rewards offered when achieving a set of goals (Nawaz et al., 2016, p. 3-4). Taking into consideration the characteristics of these four behavioral leadership styles, one may ponder whether or not the organizational structure affects the leadership style adopted by a leader.

To sum up, it is logical to assume that leaders may choose to work in an organization where the structure and culture align with their preferred leadership style (Steyn, 2020, p. 100). As mentioned above, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to leading people and organizations (Bwalya, 2023, p. 193). Different situations and characteristics of organizations require specific types of leadership style (Bwalya, 2023, p. 193). It is imperative to consider not only the positives but the drawbacks of a leadership style when contemplating which method and style is better suited for the current organization (Bwalya, 2023, p. 193).

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a secondary research approach to examining the relationship between informal communication and employees' performance by conducting extensive research on existing literature on the topic. Through the analysis of existing theories and literature developed over the years, this paper aims to identify connecting points between the main themes of informal communication and employees' performance in the organization, while also seeking to provide new insights.

Informal communication within the organizational environment has a crucial and primary role. Thus, it is important to consider how and what factors can influence informal communication. Technology is one of the primary factors as it is part of our daily lives. Nowadays, organizations functions are solely dependent on technology. In this paper we analyze the role of technology in adopting and promoting the use of informal communication channels among employees. Concepts such as employees' performance, organizational performance, organizational structure, and culture are mentioned throughout the paper. It is also noteworthy to mention that leadership styles can also influence employees' performance as well as the level of formality of interactions amongst them. As the paper focuses on secondary research approach by analyzing existing literature, theories, and concepts, it was imperative to cite the proper individuals who developed those theories over the years. It is crucial to give credit where credit is due.

While this study aims to provide valuable insights in the connection between informal communication and employees' performance, it is important to recognize some limitations. The literature review examined throughout the paper proves the existence of a connection between informal communication and employees' performance. Unfortunately, the pressure of the deadline did not allow for the consideration of the opposite aspect: there might not be a connection between informal communication and employees' performance. Another limitation

to consider is the collection of data for the analysis of theories and concepts related to the main question. This paper is focused on a secondary research approach, where perhaps a primary research approach of collecting data through questionnaire or interviews could have provided us with better insights on the actual relationship between the two main concepts.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, this paper contributes to existing literature by connecting theories and concepts developed over the years in order to demonstrate that informal communication between employees can affect their performance.

4. Discussion

The aim of this paper was to analyze and examine literature on informal communication in order to understand whether or not this method of communication among employees can affect their performance. Research on the topic suggests that communication plays a significant role in the development of satisfaction within organizations (Kandlousi et al., 2010). As previously mentioned, communication is the action that enables people to connect and create relationships (Kandlousi et al., 2010, p. 52). Unfortunately, communicating via informal communication channels in the workplace was especially difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic as people were instructed to avoid physical contact. This did not last long as the advancements in technology were able to provide employees and organizations with the tools to stay connected and keep interacting with each other.

It was observed that employees prefer to use informal communication channels to communicate and share information among themselves, as it allows for a more personal relationship between them. With the help of technology, employees were able to communicate effectively and in a timely manner. Another theme examined in this paper was the connection of organizational structure and culture with employees' performance. It was observed that poor performance in the form of missing deadlines or not accomplishing goals can be damaging to the organization's strategic plans and overall success (Nwata et al., 2016, p. 86). The opposite might also be true, that excellent performance of employees can have a positive effect on the overall organizational performance.

Researchers have also found that leadership styles just like organizational structure vary from place-to-place. Leaders are called to choose their own leadership style based on their preferences. The four main dimensions of leadership style analyzed in this paper are: empowering, directive, transformational and transactional leadership style. One can assume that leaders may also choose the organization based on its culture and if those characteristics

complement their own style of leadership. The leadership style of managers in an organization also affects the level of communication among employees. In situations where the leadership style does not foster a collaborative environment people will tend to communicate less. People tend to seek this social aspect of communication. If individuals are not allowed to communicate and fill their social batteries in their working environment, then their satisfaction and motivation will start to decrease. Consequently, once employees' performance decreases thus the organization's performance will decrease as well.

The analysis of these concepts and ideas contributes to the existing literature on informal communication by providing a theoretical understanding of the connection between informal communication and employees' performance. This analysis provides a multi-faceted perspective as it examines the factors that can impact the relationship between informal communication and employees' performance. It was observed that researchers tend to focus more on formal communication when examining its effect on the working environment and looking into informal communication last. In this paper, we turn our attention to informal communication and its importance in achieving the organization's strategic goals and success. However, the lack of empirical evidence is apparent. Researchers should examine in greater depth how informal communication actually affect employees' performance and whether or not the factors presented in this paper may influence, positively or negatively, the level of informal communication among employees and their work performance.

It is imperative to also consider the practical implication of this paper as well. An organization may start to encourage the use of informal communication channels by employees. Hence, promoting a collaborative environment among employees in different parts of the world. Contemporary organizations are described as diverse as they are now open to recruiting and attaining talent from all over the world. In situations where organizations have

diverse human resources, technology plays a vital role in connecting employees with each other anywhere and anytime to collaborate on tasks aiming for the success of the organization.

HR professionals should also focus on cultivating an open culture where employees feel free to express their ideas and thoughts without being scared. Informal communication channels can become the preferred means which employees use to share their ideas with their manager and colleagues. Leadership styles that foster informal communication among employees should also be encouraged. The HR Department could organize training courses or seminars where leaders are informed on new theories on leadership styles whilst encouraged to develop new styles and methods of leading people. Learning how to lead a team of individuals is a vital skill for one to possess. These training courses are the perfect opportunity for leaders to examine and experience their leadership style methods in order to better understand its impact on their employees.

As this paper focuses on the theoretical approach on the relationship between informal communication and employees' performance, it is crucial that in the future, research should be conducted in order to empirically prove the connection between the informal communication and employees' performance as well as any other connection between the theoretical concepts mentioned. By conducting primary research, scholars will be able to examine if these theories are factually correct. The sampling in these cases should also be diverse to ensure that the cultural characteristics are also included while analyzing the connection between informal communication and employees' performance.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, informal communication is a vital part of an organization as it can influence employees' performance which can lead to either the success or the downfall of an organization. Existing literature on the topic analyzes the different factors affecting informal communication thus employees' performance. In this paper we examined the main three factors, which are the role of technology, organizational structure, and culture, and lastly leadership styles.

The objective of the study was to contribute to the existing literature on informal communication and its effects on employees' performance. By comparing various insights from researchers over the years, this paper aims to indicate the importance of informal communication as well as the role of the human aspect in the overall success of the organization. HR professionals should pay close attention to the use informal communication channels by employees as negative information and feelings spread through these channels will negatively affect the organization, which is not the ideal scenario. Informal communication could be one of the most common methods of communication in organizations. Hence, HR professionals should keep an eye on any major changes that could turn the positive effects of informal communication channels into something negative and harmful to the organization's structure and culture.

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