

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF MODELS, BARRIERS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has become a major driving force that is fundamentally reshaping the business and organizational landscape. Successful implementation depends not only on technology adoption but also on an organization's ability to manage change, particularly through effective communication. This systematic literature review aims to deeply analyze the link between digital transformation and organizational communication, focusing on three key aspects: existing models, barriers encountered, and emerging opportunities. Using a systematic literature review (SLR) of 37 relevant journals published between 2018 and 2025, this study identified that organizational communication is a crucial element in various digital transformation models, serving as a mechanism for aligning visions, managing change, and building a digital culture. Key barriers identified include resistance to change, interdepartmental silos, and a lack of a clear communication strategy. On the other hand, digital transformation opens up opportunities to create more agile, transparent, and data-driven communication processes, which can ultimately improve collaboration and organizational performance. The review concludes that strategic integration of organizational communication is a critical success factor for digital transformation and provides recommendations for future research focused on developing adaptive communication frameworks in a digital context.

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Organizational Communication, Barriers to Transformation, Digital Opportunities, Organizational Culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, organizations across various sectors face pressure to adapt to rapid technological change. Digital transformation—defined as the process of leveraging digital technologies to create or modify existing business processes, culture, and customer experiences—has become a necessity for survival and growth ((Verhoef et al., 2021 ; Omol, 2024). However, implementing digital transformation is a complex and multidimensional challenge. Many studies show that failure in digital transformation is often not caused by the technology itself, but by organizational factors, such as culture, leadership, and especially, communication ((Gagan Deep, 2023; Fahmi, 2024).

Organizational communication plays a central role in any change initiative. In the context of digital transformation, effective communication serves as the glue that unites various organizational elements, from conveying strategic vision by leaders to managing resistance at the employee level (Porfirio et al., 2021). Poor communication can lead to

misunderstandings, increased resistance, and failure to align goals, ultimately hindering the success of the transformation (Trushkina et al., 2020)

While the importance of communication is widely recognized, there remains a gap in understanding how communication specifically interacts with the digital transformation process. Much of the literature addresses digital transformation from a technology or strategy perspective, but in-depth analysis of the role of communication in digital transformation models, barriers, and opportunities is limited. Therefore, this systematic literature review (SLR) aims to answer the following research questions:

How is the role of organizational communication depicted in existing digital transformation models?. What are the most common communication barriers that arise during the digital transformation process?, And what opportunities does digital transformation create to improve organizational communications?

By answering these questions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature and offer practical insights for leaders and managers in designing effective communication strategies to support their digital transformation initiatives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Transformation as Organizational Change

Digital transformation is more than just the implementation of technology; it is a fundamental change in how an organization operates and delivers value to its customers (Verhoef et al., 2021). This process impacts every level of the organization and requires changes to strategy, structure, and culture (Hanelt et al., 2021). The success of this transformation depends heavily on the organization's ability to manage change effectively. Fahmi, (2024) highlighted that in Indonesia, the main impact of digital transformation is increased collaboration between departments and flexibility of organizational structures. However, this is also accompanied by challenges in the form of employee resistance to change.

The Central Role of Communication in Digital Transformation

Effective communication is the backbone of any change management process. In the context of digital transformation, leadership must be able to articulate a clear and compelling digital vision to gain support from across the organization (McCarthy et al., 2024). Communication serves to reduce uncertainty and anxiety among employees, build trust, and encourage active engagement in the change process (Deep, 2023). Cosa,(2024) emphasizes that strategic adaptation and communication are two key pillars of business digital transformation, where effective communication enables organizations to navigate the complexities and dynamics of an ever-changing market.

Models, Barriers, and Opportunities

Various conceptual models have been developed to guide digital transformation. These models often implicitly or explicitly place communication as a key element. For example, the model proposed by Novianto (2023) for the public sector identifies “coordination, collaboration, and promotion” as crucial organizational elements. Barriers to digital transformation are often organizational and cultural, not technical. Gkintoni et al. (2023) classified barriers in higher education institutions into several categories, with the lack of a clear vision and resistance to change—both heavily influenced by communication—being the main barriers. On the other hand , digital transformation also creates new opportunities. Digital technology enables faster, more interactive, and more personalized forms of communication, both internally and externally, which can strengthen a collaborative and innovative culture (Omol, 2024).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from relevant studies. The SLR process follows several stages:

Source Identification: The data sources for this study were 37 provided scientific journals, all of which covered various aspects of digital transformation. These journals were published between 2015 and 2025, ensuring relevance to current developments in the field.

Selection Process: All provided journals were deemed relevant and included in the analysis. No exclusion process was applied because the data sources were predetermined.

Data Extraction and Analysis: Data were extracted from each article based on a predetermined framework, which included: (a) the digital transformation model discussed, (b) the role of communication within the model, (c) identified barriers (particularly those related to communication), and (d) opportunities arising from digital transformation. Analysis was conducted by identifying recurring themes and synthesizing these findings to answer the research questions.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results of the systematic literature review are presented in the following matrix. This matrix summarizes key findings from the analyzed journals, focusing on the role of communication in digital transformation models, barriers, and opportunities.

Table 1. Literature Review and Findings Matrix

| Category | Key Findings from the Literature | Source (Author & Year) |
|---|--|---|
| Communication Models in Organizations | Communication as a Strategic Leadership Tool (Top-Down) | Porfirio et al. (2021); McCarthy et al. (2023); Chandra (2024); Al-Nuaimi et al. (2022) |
| | Communication as an Integration Mechanism (Horizontal & Vertical) | Hanelt et al. (2021); Smith & Beretta (2021); Cunningham & Keyes (2017); Fahmi (2024) |
| | Communication as a Form of Culture (Culturalizing Communication) | Deep (2023); Ghafoori et al. (2024); Trushkina et al. (2020); Lezo et al. (2022) |
| | Communication as an Organizational Capability | Schiuma et al. (2023); Konopik et al. (2022); Egodawela et al. (2022) |
| | Communication as a Facilitator of Two-Way Dialogue & Participation | Tayazime & Moutaouakkil (2022); Novianto (2023); Kaganer et al. (2023) |
| Communication Barriers in Organizations | Lack of Clear Vision and Communication Strategy | Gkintoni et al. (2023); Trushkina et al. (2020); Cosa (2023); McCarthy et al. (2023) |
| | Ineffective Communication Triggers Resistance | Fahmi (2024); Tayazime & Moutaouakkil (2022); Deep |

| Category | Key Findings from the Literature | Source (Author & Year) |
|--|--|--|
| Communication Opportunities in Organizations | | (2023); Adama & Okeke (2024) |
| | Organizational Silos and Fragmented Communication | Smith & Beretta (2021); Gkintoni et al. (2023); Hanelt et al. (2021) |
| | Unsupportive Leadership Communication Style | Porfirio et al. (2021); Chandra (2024) |
| | Lack of Information Culture and Communication Skills | González-Varona et al. (2021); Li et al. (2021) |
| | Increasing Transparency and Access to Information | Omol (2024); He et al. (2022) |
| | Enhanced Cross-Functional Collaboration | Deep (2023); Fahmi (2024); Egodawela et al. (2022) |
| | Building a Culture of Dialogue and Feedback | Kaganer et al. (2023); Hasti et al. (2025) |
| | More Personal and Segmented Communication | Verhoef et al. (2021) |
| | Data-Driven Decision Making in Communication | Li et al. (2021) |

A thorough analysis of the literature matrix above reveals three main interrelated narratives regarding the role of communication in digital transformation.

Communication as a Common Thread in the Digital Transformation Model

Of the various models and frameworks analyzed, communication consistently emerged not as a stand-alone element, but as a common thread that ties together the various components of digital transformation. Whether in models focused on leadership (Porfirio et al., 2021; McCarthy et al., 2023), culture (Deep, 2023; Fahmi, 2024), or organizational capabilities (Hanelt et al., 2021), communication is always a prerequisite. Its role can be mapped into three strategic functions:

Visioning Function: Communication is the primary vehicle for leaders to instill a vision for digital transformation. Without clear, consistent, and inspiring communication, the vision will remain a strategic document devoid of impact. McCarthy et al. (2023) explicitly mention "communicating the vision" as a crucial task for a digital leader.

Integrating Function: Digital transformation often leads to fragmentation as different business units move at different speeds. Communication, as highlighted by Hanelt et al. (2021), serves as an integration mechanism that aligns efforts, breaks down silos (Smith & Beretta, 2021), and ensures that all parts of the organization are moving in the same direction.

Culturalizing Function: Culture cannot be changed through mandates, but through consistent communication and action. Communication helps translate desired digital values (e.g., agility, openness, customer-centricity) into everyday behavior. Deep (2023) emphasizes how communication shapes a customer-centric and collaborative culture.

Barriers to Transformation as Communication Failures.

The analyzed literature clearly demonstrates that many critical barriers to digital transformation are fundamentally communication failures. Resistance to change, cited by

nearly all studies as a key challenge (Fahmi, 2024; Trushkina et al., 2020), is often not a rejection of the new technology itself, but rather a reaction to uncertainty, fear of job loss, and a lack of understanding of the purpose of the change—all of which can be mitigated with proactive and empathetic communication.

In addition, organizational silos that hinder collaboration (Smith & Beretta, 2021) are a manifestation of rigid and inadequate communication structures. When information doesn't flow freely across departmental boundaries, organizations can't leverage the full potential of their digital initiatives. The failure to create a structured and deliberate communications strategy (Cosa, 2023) is at the root of many of these problems, indicating that many organizations still view communications as a tactical function rather than a strategic imperative.

Dualism of Opportunities: Process Efficiency and Humanization of Interaction

Digital transformation creates a dual and exciting opportunity for organizational communication. On the one hand, it offers process efficiencies. Technologies such as collaboration platforms, data analytics, and automation enable faster, more scalable, and more efficient internal communication (Omol, 2024). Information can be disseminated instantly, feedback can be collected systematically, and the effectiveness of internal communication campaigns can be measured.

On the other hand, and more importantly, digital transformation opens up opportunities for humanizing interactions. By automating routine communication tasks, organizations can focus resources on more meaningful dialogue. Digital technology enables leaders to communicate more directly and personally with employees at all levels. This creates an opportunity to build a culture based on trust, transparency, and two-way dialogue—elements that are critical to navigating constant change. The opportunity to create seamless omnichannel interactions with customers (Verhoef et al., 2021) also applies to internal communications, where employees can interact with the organization through multiple integrated channels.

Overall, this discussion shows that organizations that succeed in digital transformation are those that understand that technology is an enabler, but communication is the key that unlocks its potential. They consciously place communications at the center of their change strategy, using it not only to inform, but also to inspire, engage, and empower all members of the organization.

5. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review confirms that organizational communication is not simply a support function, but rather a strategic element that determines the success or failure of digital transformation initiatives. An analysis of 37 relevant journals shows that effective communication is embedded in digital transformation models as a key mechanism for aligning vision, managing change, and fostering collaboration. The main barriers identified, such as resistance to change and organizational silos, are often rooted in communication failures. On the contrary, digital transformation opens up huge opportunities to create more agile, transparent, and collaborative communication systems.

Practically, these findings suggest that organizational leaders must proactively design and implement a comprehensive communications strategy as a core part of their digital transformation roadmap. This includes building a strong change narrative, utilizing multiple digital communication channels, fostering two-way dialogue, and equipping managers with the communication skills necessary to lead their teams through change.

For future research , it is recommended to conduct more in-depth case studies on how successful organizations specifically design and adapt their communication strategies during different phases of digital transformation. Furthermore, quantitative research measuring the impact of various communication interventions on transformation success metrics (e.g., technology adoption rates, employee engagement, innovation performance) would provide valuable insights.

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