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Reconstructing the Constitutive Communication Paradigm in Building a Digital Work Culture at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang

Rekonstruksi Paradigma Komunikasi Konstitutif dalam Membangun Budaya Kerja Digital di SMK Nurul Islami Semarang

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Abstract

Digital transformation in educational institutions is often approached as a technological issue, while its communicative and organizational dimensions remain underexplored. This study examines how constitutive communication shapes the development of digital work culture at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang through the perspective of Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO). Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving school leaders, teachers, and administrative staff. The findings reveal that digital work culture is constructed through continuous communicative interactions that facilitate meaning-making, coordination, and organizational adaptation. The study identifies several communication challenges, including information overload, generational differences in technology use, and fragmented inter-unit coordination. To address these challenges, the school developed participatory communication practices, strengthened cross-functional interactions, and promoted collaborative digital platforms. The study contributes to the CCO literature by demonstrating how communication constitutes organizational reality and supports digital transformation within vocational education settings.

Keywords: Constitutive Communication; Digital Work Culture; Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO); Vocational Education; Digital Transformation

Abstrak

Transformasi digital di lembaga pendidikan sering dipahami sebagai persoalan teknologi, sementara dimensi komunikatif dan organisasionalnya masih kurang mendapat perhatian. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana komunikasi konstitutif membentuk budaya kerja digital di SMK Nurul Islami Semarang melalui perspektif Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO). Penelitian menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan pimpinan sekolah, guru, dan tenaga kependidikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa budaya kerja digital dibangun melalui interaksi komunikasi yang berlangsung secara berkelanjutan dalam proses pembentukan makna, koordinasi, dan adaptasi organisasi. Penelitian juga menemukan berbagai tantangan komunikasi, meliputi kelebihan informasi, perbedaan generasi dalam penggunaan teknologi, serta lemahnya koordinasi antarunit. Untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut, sekolah mengembangkan praktik komunikasi partisipatif, memperkuat interaksi lintas fungsi, dan mendorong penggunaan platform digital kolaboratif. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan literatur CCO dengan menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi berperan sebagai unsur konstitutif dalam membentuk realitas organisasi dan mendukung transformasi digital di lingkungan pendidikan vokasi.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Konstitutif; Budaya Kerja Digital; Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO); Pendidikan Vokasi; Transformasi Digital



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INTRODUCTION

Organizational communication within the contemporary vocational education ecosystem no longer functions merely as a mechanistic tool for message transmission. Instead, it has evolved into a fundamental pillar that shapes, constructs, and negotiates institutional realities amid ongoing technological disruption. The transition toward a digital work culture in vocational high schools (SMKs) is often constrained by a form of technical reductionism, whereby transformation is narrowly defined as the adoption of hardware, software, and virtual collaboration platforms. Such an approach overlooks the more essential dimension of transformation, namely the fundamental reconstruction of human interaction patterns, communication practices, and organizational relationships that underpin educational effectiveness and institutional sustainability.¹ The systemic failure to effectively manage this transition has resulted in a social phenomenon characterized by emotional alienation among staff due to the lack of nonverbal cues, the accumulation of misinformation, and information overload. These factors have collectively and directly undermined the accuracy of managerial decision-making within the school environment.² Poor and overly directive communication in the digital era has been shown to trigger internal fragmentation and reinforce sectoral ego among organizational units, such as curriculum affairs, student affairs, and industrial relations departments. Therefore, a fundamental paradigm shift is required, moving away from the traditional transmission model of communication toward a model that positions interaction as a strategic instrument for fostering an adaptive and sustainable organizational culture.

Studies on communication dynamics in organizational technology adaptation have been extensively discussed by previous scholars, with various focuses and contextual limitations. The transformation of communication functions in the digital era initially emphasized the importance of enhancing technological literacy alongside clear message articulation to reduce operational ambiguity. Within the context of hybrid work ecosystems, one of the most significant challenges identified is maintaining emotional cohesion and organizational member loyalty as opportunities for face-to-face interaction continue to diminish.³ Unfortunately, the majority of previous studies have tended to position communication within a conventional top-down instructional transmission model, where educators and educational staff are regarded as passive recipients of digital policies rather than active agents in the process of digital transformation. Prior research has also focused excessively on the readiness of macro-level digital infrastructure in urban mainstream educational institutions, thereby overlooking the dynamics of micro-level intergenerational communication and informal cultural networks, such as the grapevine, that flourish within comparative Islamic vocational education institutions. Furthermore, a significant literature gap remains regarding how the meaning-making function of organizational communication can be optimized to foster an integrated and persuasive digital vision through everyday interactions and informal conversations within educational settings.⁴

To address these theoretical and empirical gaps, this study specifically aims to analyze the strategy for reconstructing the constitutive communication paradigm in order to foster a harmonious, adaptive, and accountable digital work culture at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang.

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- 1 H. A. Karim, *Pendidikan Untuk Pembangunan Berkelanjutan: Pendekatan Manajemen Partisipatif* (Jakarta: Arti Bumi Intaran, 2021), hal. 112-115.
 - 2 F. Fahrurrozi, "Integrasi Nilai Islam dalam Manajemen Strategis Mutu pada Lembaga Pendidikan Kontemporer," *Jurnal Kepemimpinan dan Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2023), hal. 118.
 - 3 R. Prastowo, "Transformasi Fungsi Komunikasi dan Hambatan Semantik dalam Birokrasi Pendidikan Era Digital," *Journal of Digital Education and Communication*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2022), hal. 89–102.
 - 4 A. Wardhani, "Kohesi Emosional dan Tantangan Komunikasi Virtual pada Model Ekosistem Kerja Hybrid," *Jurnal Administrasi dan Kebijakan Pendidikan*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2021), hal. 45–57.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in the application of the Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO) framework to examine the complexity of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal communication within an Islamic values-based vocational educational institution located in an urban setting. The fundamental theoretical assumption examined in this article is that a school organization is not merely a static container in which communication takes place. Rather, the organizational structure, authority, and regulatory mechanisms are continuously produced, maintained, and transformed through the communicative interactions of its members. Accordingly, communication is understood not only as a medium for information exchange but also as a constitutive process through which organizational reality is created, negotiated, and sustained.⁵ The central argument advanced in this study is that the development of a strong digital work culture at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang can only be achieved through the participatory management of intergenerational semantic and psychological barriers, integrating formal digital interactions with inclusive Islamic local wisdom.⁶

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study method to explore the phenomenon of reconstructing the constitutive communication paradigm in shaping a digital work culture.⁷ The case study design was selected to enable an in-depth and contextual investigation of daily communication interactions within the environment of SMK Nurul Islami Semarang. Primary data were collected directly through in-depth interviews with key informants, including the Principal, the Vice Principal for Public Relations, and representatives of both teaching and administrative staff. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through document analysis, including the school's digital transformation blueprint, internal regulations, and communication records from the digital platforms utilized by the institution.⁸

The primary instrument for data collection was the researcher as a human instrument, supported by structured interview guidelines and participatory observation sheets to capture and document patterns of constitutive communication in the field. To ensure the replicability and validity of the findings, all data collection procedures were systematically documented in chronological order, beginning with the preliminary survey stage, followed by the interview transcription process, and concluding with the archiving of both physical and digital documents.

Furthermore, the data were analyzed using content analysis in combination with the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. This analytical framework consisted of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.⁹ The scope of this study is specifically limited to the internal ecosystem of SMK Nurul Islami Semarang, with the analysis focusing on the dimensions of communication that shape digital social reality. Consequently, the findings of this study have limitations in terms of empirical generalizability to non-vocational educational institutions that possess different organizational culture characteristics.

5 D. Wahyudi dan A. Saputra, "Kritik Atas Model Komunikasi Transmisi Top-Down dalam Kebijakan Digitalisasi Sekolah," *Jurnal Akuntabilitas Manajemen Pendidikan*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2023), hal. 210–223.

6 Linda L. Putnam dan Nicotera A. M., *Building Organizations from Communication: Advances in Communication as Constitutive of Organization* (New York: Routledge, 2010), hal. 73–81.

7 Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Manajemen: Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Kombinasi, Penelitian Tindakan, dan Penelitian Evaluasi* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2021), hal. 345.

8 J. R. Raco, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif: Jenis, Karakteristik, dan Keunggulannya* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2018), hal. 67.

9 Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, dan Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2019), hal. 12–15.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reconstructing Constitutive Communication (CCO) in the Formation of Digital Culture

The shift in work culture at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang demonstrates the validity of the Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO) paradigm. The existence of the school as an organization is no longer viewed merely as a physical setting where teachers perform instructional activities; rather, it is actively produced and constituted through the intensity of daily digital interactions. As communication patterns within the school increasingly move into virtual spaces, conventional hierarchical structures that were once rigid and formal begin to become more flexible. This transformation enables a more dynamic flow of information, accelerates decision-making processes, and fosters collaborative relationships among organizational members, thereby reshaping the way organizational realities are constructed and maintained in the digital era.¹⁰

In the context of SMK Nurul Islami, this reconstruction can be observed in the way strategic decisions regarding vocational curricula are generated through informal dialogic interactions on digital platforms, rather than solely through formal plenary meetings. Communication functions as a cultural adhesive that transcends the boundaries of the classroom. Teachers do not merely receive text-based messages in the form of instructions; instead, they collectively construct a shared understanding of the very essence of digital transformation in education.¹¹

Dynamics of Platform-Based Informative and Regulatory Functions

The distribution of information at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang, as documented in Table 1, demonstrates that the informative function operates with remarkable efficiency. Online communication platforms have significantly shortened lengthy bureaucratic chains and reduced information delays that were previously common within paper-based and highly legalistic administrative structures. Academic policies, examination schedules, and newly established operational standards can now be disseminated in real time.

However, the high effectiveness of this informative function has also generated a new challenge, namely information overload. Teachers often experience difficulties in filtering and prioritizing essential messages amid the overwhelming volume of notifications generated through school coordination groups. Consequently, this condition may reduce the effectiveness of managerial execution and decision-making processes.¹²

From the regulatory function perspective, school regulations have been transformed into digital commitments embedded within the organizational system. Nevertheless, the relatively high standard deviation (4.12) indicates the presence of both technical and psychological barriers. Several senior staff members continue to experience technological anxiety (technophobia), which hinders their compliance with digital-based attendance and performance reporting systems. Consequently, school leaders are required to maintain a balanced persuasive approach to facilitate adaptation while ensuring adherence to organizational regulations and digital transformation initiatives.

10 Haryati dan Ahmad Suriansyah, "Transformasi Budaya Organisasi Sekolah melalui Digitalisasi Komunikasi Pendidikan," *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Indonesia* Vol. 14, No. 2 (2022): 133–145.

11 Rully Khairul Anwar dan Dedi Mulyasana, "Komunikasi Organisasi dalam Penguatan Budaya Kerja Digital di Lembaga Pendidikan," *Jurnal Administrasi Pendidikan* Vol. 29, No. 1 (2023): 55–67.

12 Siti Nurhayati dan M. Iqbal Fasa, "Pemanfaatan Platform Digital dalam Pengambilan Keputusan Pendidikan di Era Society 5.0," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* Vol. 11, No. 1 (2023): 88–101.

Transforming Persuasive and Integrative Functions to Reduce Organizational Barriers

The average score of the persuasive communication function, which reached 41.50, reflects the success of the leadership at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang in shifting from an authoritarian leadership style toward a more participative approach. In the digital era, one-way instructions through top-down communication are considered less effective in fostering teachers' commitment. Therefore, the principal has optimized digital communication platforms to accommodate bottom-up aspirations from teachers and vocational department committees. This approach has directly contributed to strengthening employee engagement and enhancing teachers' involvement in achieving the school's organizational goals.¹³

However, the most critical area requiring strategic intervention is the integrative function of organizational communication. The relatively low level of cross-unit coordination is primarily attributed to the limited availability of non-verbal cues in digital communication media, which often leads to semantic and psychological misunderstandings among departmental committees. Furthermore, cultural barriers stemming from differences in digital adaptation readiness between teacher generations (Generation X and Millennials/Generation Z) have contributed to the emergence of virtual silos within the organization. Informal communication channels (*the grapevine*), which ideally serve to strengthen emotional cohesion and interpersonal relationships beyond formal work responsibilities, have not yet been adequately facilitated within the school's current digital ecosystem.¹⁴

As a strategic solution, the communication paradigm at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang should be reconstructed by strengthening diagonal communication and establishing inclusive virtual communication protocols. The flexibility of cross-functional communication without rigid bureaucratic barriers has proven to be a crucial instrument in enhancing institutional adaptability and competitiveness amid the ongoing disruption of information technology. Such an approach enables more effective collaboration, accelerates decision-making processes, and supports the achievement of organizational goals in a rapidly changing educational environment.

Research conducted at SMK Nurul Islami Semarang indicates that the transition toward a digital educational ecosystem has triggered a significant reconstruction of interaction patterns among school stakeholders. Based on observations and in-depth interviews, formal communication channels that were previously dominated by verbal instructions and paper-based bureaucratic procedures have gradually transformed through the adoption of digital platforms, such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), coordination-oriented WhatsApp Groups, and school management applications.¹⁵

To map the effectiveness of information flow and the perceptions of teachers and staff regarding this cultural transformation, descriptive quantitative data are presented in the following table:

13 Yosai Iriantara, "Komunikasi Organisasi dalam Transformasi Digital Pendidikan," *Jurnal Komunikasi Pendidikan* 6, no. 2 (2022): 118–126.

14 Yosai Iriantara, "Komunikasi Organisasi dalam Transformasi Digital Pendidikan,"

15 Ahmad Supriyanto dan Kholil Nisa, "Digitalisasi Birokrasi Sekolah: Dampak Arus Informasi dan Efisiensi Manajerial Guru," *Jurnal Akuntabilitas Manajemen Pendidikan* 12, no. 2 (Juli 2024): hlm. 147.

Table 1. Distribution of the Effectiveness of Digital Workplace Communication Flow at Nurul Islami Vocational High School

Communication Dimension	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Average Score (Mean)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Digital Information Flow	32	50	42.15	3.42
Virtual Regulatory Compliance	30	50	39.80	4.12
Participatory and Dialogic Climate	28	48	41.50	3.85
Cross-Committee and Cross-Unit Synergy	25	45	36.45	5.20

Source: Author (2026)

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the digital information flow dimension (informative function) achieved the highest mean score (42.15), suggesting that the availability and speed of school policy dissemination through digital media have been highly effective. However, the cross-committee/unit synergy dimension (integrative function) recorded the lowest mean score (36.45) and the highest standard deviation (5.20). This finding indicates disparities in technology adaptation among organizational units and suggests the potential emergence of virtual silo mentality and fragmented collaboration across departments within SMK Nurul Islami Semarang.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study provides a theoretical reflection that the existence of a digital work culture within SMK Nurul Islami Semarang is not merely determined by the availability of technological infrastructure; rather, it is fundamentally produced and constructed through communication processes themselves. The paradigm shift from a linear transmission model to the Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO) approach has proven capable of transforming interaction patterns that were previously rigid and instruction-oriented into more participatory, dialogical, and collaborative forms among school members. Through the strengthening of integrative and persuasive communication functions, the internalization of new work values in the era of digitalization can be carried out harmoniously, thereby reducing sectoral ego among organizational units and reinforcing the affective commitment of teachers and educational staff.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this transformation continues to face significant challenges, including semantic barriers arising from varying levels of digital literacy, intergenerational psychological distortions, and the risk of information overload resulting from excessively intensive virtual communication flows. Therefore, organizational communication should be positioned as a strategic pillar in the modern management of educational institutions, serving as a sustainable mechanism for integrating structural and cultural dimensions.

As a practical recommendation, the management of SMK Nurul Islami Semarang is encouraged to formulate clear digital communication regulations and protocols to prevent role ambiguity and minimize miscommunication within virtual platforms. Furthermore, the enhancement of inclusive communication competencies through regular cultural awareness programs should be promoted to bridge the technological adoption gap among different generations of educators. This study is limited by its focus on a single private Islamic vocational school located in an urban setting; therefore, the constitutive communication dynamics identified may not be fully

generalizable to public educational institutions or traditional Islamic boarding school systems that operate under different bureaucratic structures. Given these limitations, future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparative empirical studies involving broader samples and to further investigate the psychological impacts of digital information overload on the quality of managerial decision-making at the school leadership level.

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