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# Mediating of communication skills in handling stress among non-academicians in higher learning institutions

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating of communication in a relationship between work practices, and organizational culture towards managing work stress. The current dynamics and increased competition in the business urge organizations to seek ways to improve performance, remain relevant in the face of technology and go through changes and innovation while keeping their employees healthy and productive. This paper surveyed 176 academicians and non-academicians at local universities in Selangor. The data was analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation (PLS-SEM), and the finding found that communication mediates the relationship between work practices and organizational culture toward stress management. The implication of this study highlights how essential communication skills are for improving organizational learning and improve employee performance. The study offers insightful information for improving staff productivity, well-being, andell as organizational development.

## 1. Introduction

In the current global business environment, the flexibility in learning new tasks and work-related stress coping mechanisms improves not only career advancements but also organizational improves career advancements and organizational performance and well-being across the employee life cycle (YM Kundi, 2020). Entities are constantly changing to innovate and adapt to their environment, incorporate new techniques, and promote a healthy work setting that could guarantee improvement and satisfaction at the workplace. On top of these initiatives, there are complex interrelationships between organizational factors that have a major impact on learning processes, the use of technology, conformance to procedures, and work-related stress in employees. Even in today's complex business world, organizations continue to encounter difficulties when it comes to engaging employees in efficient training that prepares them to perform tasks as soon as possible, integrating technologies into work environments effectively, maintaining consistent compliance with organizational procedures and policies, and managing stress levels in the workplace (Tommy Foy & Mohamad Saleh 2019). It becomes even more challenging across changing work contexts as well as across different cultures, which tends to frustrate organizational initiatives. However, the role of communication skills as a specific mediator of these processes has yet to be studied enough in

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the recent existing scientific literature, despite relative attentiveness to self-regulation, cultural intelligence, and adaptability.

From an organizational learning perspective, the organization determines how members relate to tasks and activities and how to allocate organizational resources sensibly in a given setting to accomplish tasks and common goals. The organization's characteristics include consistency of goals, unified principles, organic combination of resources, collaborative activities, and systematic structure. Workplace practice plays a vital role in personal and professional development. Employees can gain practical work experience, develop professional skills, build networks, and test career interests by engaging in workplace practice. This enables individuals to better adapt to the workplace requirements and achieve their career goals. Therefore, active participation in workplace practices is an opportunity and challenge everyone should pursue. Workplace practice provides individuals with valuable work experience. By participating in various work tasks and projects, individuals can research and become familiar with different workflows and business processes (York, 2020). These experiences are essential for later career development and enable individuals to better adapt to the working environment and understand the job requirements. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the mediating of communication in a relationship between work practices and organizational culture towards stress management.

#### 2. Literature review

## 2.1 Work practice

Workplace practice plays a vital role in personal and professional development. Employees can gain practical work experience, develop professional skills, build networks, and test career interests by engaging in workplace practice. This enables individuals to better adapt to the workplace requirements and achieve their career goals. Therefore, active participation in workplace practices is an opportunity and challenge everyone should pursue. Workplace practice provides individuals with valuable work experience. By participating in various work tasks and projects, individuals can research and become familiar with different workflows and business processes (York, 2020). These experiences are essential for later career development and enable individuals to better adapt to the working environment and understand the job requirements. Through practical work practice, individuals can continuously improve their professional skills (York, 2020). At work, individuals will face various challenges and problems that need to be solved using their professional knowledge and skills. Through these practices, individuals can continue to study, grow, and enhance their competitiveness in the professional field. In addition, workplace practice is an opportunity to cooperate and communicate with others. Individuals can build extensive and valuable networks through interactions with colleagues, leaders, and other partners (Billett, 2021). These relationships impact an individual's career development and career opportunities and can provide various support and assistance. Workplace practices can also help individuals test their career interests and goals (Billett, 2021). By participating in different work projects and positions, individuals can better understand their career preferences and adaptability and further define their career goals. This has an important guiding role in personal career planning and development. Therefore, this study proposes that:

Hypothesis 1: Work Practice has a significant influence on handling stress.

#### 2.2 Organizational cultural

Organizational culture is the culmination of the principles, moral standards, corporate culture, and corporate image that are widely recognized and upheld by all workers and developed during an organization's lengthy history of production and operation (Cherian, 2021). It penetrates every aspect of the business, influencing employees' thought processes and behavioral patterns. A gravitational pull is toward a strong corporate culture (Fang, 2023). In addition to having a strong pull on workers, a great company culture also has a strong pull on its partners, who include suppliers, customers, and the general public. A

strong business culture is essential for both stabilizing and luring talent. The impact of corporate culture is restrictive (Fang, 2023): Corporate culture norms include moral and behavioral standards. Corporate culture itself has a normative effect. Once corporate culture reaches a certain level, this standard turns into an imperceptible unifying factor. It informs staff members about acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Through these gentle coercive forces, workers' consciousness, zeal, initiative, and self-control are enhanced, enabling them to understand better the purpose and significance of their work, as well as their feeling of accountability and mission. According to Fang (2023), corporate culture has a cohesive effect. It can bring people closer together to create a powerful centripetal force that propels them to work toward common objectives and stand as one. The enterprise's clearly defined aim serves as the foundation for employee cohesion. Suppose the organization's objective aligns with the interests of most employees and the business. In that case, it is a win-win situation for individuals and the group. Corporate spirit and core values serve an intangible guiding role that gives organizations and employees guidance and practices they can choose to follow voluntarily. This facilitates the development and expansion of businesses by bringing together the objectives and will of individuals and businesses. Ubreziova (2023) asserts that business culture plays a directing role. Employee excitement, initiative, and innovation can be mobilized and stimulated by the corporate culture's cultural milieu and value orientation, which is a spiritual incentive. Additionally, it can awaken people's potential knowledge, facilitating the total growth of workers' skills and boosting the executive authority of the company as a whole (Ubreziova, 2023). Therefore, this study proposes that:

Hypothesis 2: Organizational culture has a significant influence on handling stress.

#### 2.3 Communication skills

The foundation of productive work is effective communication. It is ensured that tasks are understood, procedures are followed correctly, and objectives are accomplished effectively by clear and succinct communication (Ma, 2021). Teamwork is improved by effective workplace communication (Meir Liraz, 2019): Effective and honest communication is essential to teamwork. A sense of understanding and cooperation is promoted when team members listen to one another and communicate their opinions. This free flow of information promotes improved creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making. Conflict problems can be resolved in the workplace through effective communication (Meir Liraz, 2019).

Opinion differences are a given in any job. Good communication means discussing problems honestly, listening to understand others' perspectives, and cooperating to develop solutions that both parties can agree. Effective communication techniques and conflict resolution methods can transform possible arguments into chances for development and education. It takes time and collaboration between management and staff to establish an honest and productive communication culture in the workplace (Cole, 2019). Here are some helpful advice to help you accomplish this. Organize frequent meetings: Regular staff meetings, whether monthly all-staff meetings or weekly team check-ins, are essential. They offer a forum for exchanging views and resolving issues, as well as information to everybody. Promote feedback meetings: Having regular feedback sessions helps you identify what is and is not working. It is important to be receptive to accepting input and providing it. One-on-one conversations, anonymous questionnaires, or a suggestion box in the break room can all be used to do this. Encourage an open flow of information: Open and honest communication fosters trust. It entails exchanging pertinent data regarding decisions, modifications, and updates made by the company. When workers are well-informed about the organization, they are better able to comprehend their place within it. Therefore, this study proposes that:

Hypothesis 3a: Communication mediates the relationship between work practices and handling stress Hypothesis 3b: Communication mediates the relationship between organizational culture and handling stress

#### 2.4 Work stress

The term "work stress" describes the social, psychological, and physical demands people face at work. Due to intense competition, significant financial strain, and high labor intensity, work stress has become widespread in modern culture (Fred, 2019). The work stress mainly comes from the work itself and the working environment. The factors of the work include the task's difficulty, the workload's size, and the level of the quality of the work. The factors of the working environment include the length of working hours, the noise of the workplace, and the depression of the atmosphere. In addition, the individual's personality, ability, family environment will also affect the individual's feeling of work pressure. Moderate work pressure can stimulate individual enthusiasm and creativity, but long-term work pressure that is too large will have a negative impact on individual physical and mental health. Common symptoms of work stress include anxiety, depression, insomnia, headache, muscle tension. Severe work stress can also lead to psychological disorders, mental health problems, job burnout (Pradoto, 2022). As a result, it is critical to successfully lower job pressure. To reduce work-related stress, people can change how they work, interact with coworkers, practice relaxation techniques, exercise, and take other measures. By improving the working environment and offering assistance and training, businesses and organizations can also help employees lower their level of stress at work (Soelton, 2020). As shown in Figure 1, a conceptual framework is the mediating of communication in a relationship between work practices, and organizational culture towards stress management.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework The Mediating of Communication In a Relationship Between Work Practices, Organizational Culture Towards Stress Management.

#### 3. Methodology

This research aims to examine the relationship between work practices and organizational culture in mediating communication in relation to handling stress. A quantitative method was employed, and the survey was used as a tool for data collection. The survey was conveniently distributed to 176 non-academicians in local universities in Selangor. The items survey was adapted from the previous literature, and all items were were tested using the Five-Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Data collected was further analyzed for the Structural Equation Model using Smart PLS. The analysis included the measurement model and structural model to test the hypothesis. In the assessment of the reflective measurement modare three assessment criteria neede:: internall consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Meanwhile, in assessing the structural mode, the R Square and the path coefficient were applied to confirm the hypothesis and to test the predictive model (Becker, Cheah, Gholamzade, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2023).

#### 4. Findings

As shown in Table 1, the demographic factor analysis shows that 85 (48.3%) were female, and 89 (50.5%) were male. Female workers dominated the survey. In addition, the working experience factor revealed that the majority, 58 of the employees, have working experience of 1 to 3 years (32.9%), followed by 4 to 5 years of working experience, 44 employees (25%), and 37 of employees had working experience

five years and above (21%) in a position, of 56 employees in the position of executive manager (31.8%) and 55 assistant registrar (32.1%). Next, this study also had 32 accountants (18.1%), 24 from operation (13.6%), and only 9 registrars (5%) involved in the survey.

Table 1. Demographic Factor

Demographic Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	85	0.483
Male	89	0.505
Working Experience		
6 months – 1 year	37	0.210
1-3 years	58	0.329
4 – 5 years	44	0.250
5 years and above	37	0.210
Position		
Registrar	9	0.05
Assistant registrar	55	0.313
Executive Manager	56	0.318
Accountant	32	0.181
Operation	24	0.136

## 4.1 Measurement model

In the measurement model, internal consistency reliability is used to measure the reliability of the survey items. The acceptable values for composite reliability indicate a value greater than 0.70 to 0.90 can be regarded as higher to indicate adequate internal consistency. As shown in Table 2, the composite reliability. The results for work practice (CR=0.971, AVE = 0.828), organizational culture (CR=0.936, AVE = 0.671), communication skill (CR=0.964, AVE = 0.843), and handling stress (CR=0.933, AVE = 737) conclude that all constructs and items were high internal consistency. The assessment applied the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlation (HTMT) for discriminant validity, which refers to the correlation ratio within the constructs to correlations between the constructs. The HTMT value should be be greater than 0.85 or 0.90 when using this assessment (Ringle, Sarstedt, Sinkovics & Sinkovics, 2023). The result in Table 3 shows there are no issues with discriminant as the values meet the threshold values.

Table 2: Convergent validity

Constructs	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)		
Work Practice	0.971	0.828		
Organization Culture	0.936	0.681		
Communication Skill	0.964	0.843		
Handling Stress	0.933	0.737		

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

Construct		1	2	3	4	4
1.	Communication					
2.	Handling Stress	0.788				
3.	Organization Culture	0.668	0.742			
4.	Work Practice	0.695	0.915	0.827		

#### 4.2 Structural model

Table 4 indicates the result of the hypothesis testing. First, the R Square value was 0.456, which indicates that 45.6 percent of the handling stress is explained by work practice, organizational culture, and communication skills. The results of work practice ( $\beta = 0.741$ , t-value = 14.167, p-value < 0.05) and organizational culture ( $\beta = 0.807$ , t-value = 17.836, p-value < 0.05) indicate that there were significant influences on handling stress. Thus, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were supported. The findings similar to those of Jentsch, Hoferichter, Blomeke, Konig, and Kaiser (2023) supported the idea that effective work practice is able to handle stress effectively. In addition, Ubreziova (2023) asserts that business culture plays a directing role in minimizing stress for employees due to the support and facilities provided by the organization. Furthermore, the mediating analysis revealed the result that communication skills mediate the relationship between work practice ( $\beta = 0.393$ , t-value = 2.69, p-value < 0.05) and organizational culture  $(\beta = 0.270, \text{ t-value} = 2.717, \text{ p-value} < 0.05)$ . The result revealed that communication skills significantly mediate the relationship between work practice and organizational culture toward handling stress. The finding is similar to Shahriari, Tajmir Riahi, Azizan, and Rasti-Barzoki (2023), who found that effective strategies for managing stress are significantly influenced by work practice and supportive organizational culture. In addition, the finding found that work culture and practice influence the opportunity of workers to learn new knowledge within work-related tasks, technologies, or processes and the staff's ability to cope with stress in work-related activities. Therefore, hypothesis 3a and hypothesis 3b were supported by this study.

Table 4: Structural model assessment

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Statement	Beta	SE	T-Value	P-Value	Result
H1	Work Practice has a significant i nfluence on handling stress.	0.741	0.051	14.467	0.000	H1: Supported
H2	Organizational culture has a significant influence on handling stress.	0.807	0.045	17.836	0.000	H2: Supported
Н3а	Communication mediates the relationship between work practices and handling stress.	0.393	0.146	2.696	0.007	H3a: Supported
H3b	Communication mediates the relationship between organizational culture and handling.	0.270	0.157	2.717	0.006	H3b: Supported

## 5. Conclusion

It was found in this study that communication enhanced the exchange of knowledge and enhanced the learning processes regarding the employees' work responsibilities and their ability to manage emergent stressors in the working environment. Effective communication management promotes the free sharing of information between the people and the institutions through the normal process of the organization to enhance the realization of learning and stress management, where organizational factors act as a communication pathway. Furthermore, the research focused on the coexistence of these variables in organizational environments. A positive work environment entails embracing; there is continuing training and positive workplace communication, which results in the embrace of knowledge capacity in executing new activities/technologies, and also, the employees are provided with a positive way of handling stress. However, some organizational practices may not assign value or, on the contrary, underestimate the significance of the aspects above; as a result, suppression of staff employees' development and enhanced stress levels may occur. Finally, this study supports the stance that practice and culture in organizations should enhance the times when enhancing communication skills in order to operate within an environment suitable for working. Thus, organizations can improve the effectiveness of learning processes, the ways to manage tasks, and the impact of work stress on employees' health. From the findings, this study recommends that organizations should boost communication to establish a culture for task learning since communication mediates culture and learning tasks. If there is frequent proper communication, improved communication channels, and a display of specific cultural differences, the learning/teaching process will foster improved general performance and enhanced task. This study shows that communication does not affect the practical relationship between work practices and stress management, so increased organizational stress management, personal support, and work practice improvement are recommended. Thus, the suggested approach will improve work stress management and employee well-being. Furthermore, the implication of this study could enrich knowledge by pointing out the role of communication skills as the variable through which organizational factors (culture, work practices) impact one's experiences (learning work tasks, coping with stress). In principle, it makes it possible for organizations to improve the interaction processes in the workplace. Attention to creating a culture that supports learning, focusing on such aspects as communication training and work practices that help ease stress, contributes to creating positive environments for employees. Managers and human resource personnel can apply these findings in forming policies that enhance staff's health and productivity in organizations, especially those experiencing dynamic transformation. In conclusion, there are positive implications for incorporating these ideas, as they can enhance employee satisfaction, decrease the turnover rate, and increase the organization's ability to respond to emerging issues.

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## **Conflict of interest statement**

The authors agree that this research was conducted without any self-benefits or commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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