



INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEE EFFICIENCY - THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

Internal communications are one of the most important variables impacting employee performance. Various firms are dealing with internal communication issues that are having a negative impact on employee performance. Employees have grown less effective in their tasks, hurting their overall performance in the organization, in most organizations with weak and extensive internal communication chains induced by the highly structured character of such organizations. Internal communication underlies organizational effectiveness because it fosters positive internal connections by allowing senior management and staff to communicate. Hence, employees of organizations in Cameroon needed to be engaged in internal discussions for effectiveness of work and performance. The study examines the relationship between internal communication and employees' efficiency, and the mediating role of employee efficiency of telecommunications in Cameroon. A cross-sectional survey with a size of 501 was conducted. Data was analysed using Structural Equation model. The results indicate that all the three variables of internal communication (upward, downward and peer to peer) have direct effects on employee efficiency, and employee performance is significantly mediating the effect of internal communication on employee efficiency. Thus, management should invest to build computer-generated information and communication technology podiums to simply employee communication and, subsequently improve employee work performance. Our findings provide insights into how employee performance interacts in the demands of internal communication to employee efficiency. In terms of theory, practices, and policy, the results make contributions to the literature.

Keywords: Internal Communication, Employee performance, Telecommunication, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is an important factor in any organization because it affects overall performance. Several companies are dealing with internal issues that are affecting employee performance. Internal communication is one of the most important factors influencing employee performance (Thao & Hwang, 2015). Staff members have become less effective in their tasks, which has harmed their overall performance in most organizations with weak and extensive internal communication chains caused by the highly structured nature of such organizations. This is complicated further by the fact that each organization has its own culture and patterns for carrying out its functions and activities.

The relationship between communication and organizational efficiency has been the subject of previous research, which has yielded useful information. The majority of previous research has indicated that, internal communication has impact on overall efficiency of an organization, but no study has investigated such relationships more elaborately to comprehend the effects of mediating variables. Given this, the primary goal of this study is to examine the impact and extent to which internal communication impact employee efficiency with the mediating role of employee performance.

Furthermore, despite the fact that much research has been conducted on the relevance of current corporate communication, studies on such relationships are more focused on developed countries; however, none have been examined from the perspective of an emerging economy. Therefore, this study examines from an emerging economy perspective, Cameroon.

In addition, many studies conducted researches on organizational communication, but none of the studies combined the formal and informal communication, as previous studies examined the formal and ignored the informal (Luarn & Huang, 2015, Tinofirei, 2013).

From a managerial perspective, it is vital to discuss the management-employee relationship in terms of communication, because there are several components that relate to communication and increase employee performance in the workplace. Keeping this in mind, researching communication and managerial behaviour necessitates a thorough evaluation of all instances in which the organization's functions are carried out. Like a consequence, effective communication channels ensure that employees inside a firm receive, respond to, adapt to, and improve the flow of information (Zhang & Venkatesh, 2013). Structure, employee input, change adaptability, and openness, all of which contribute to increased employee performance, are all ensured through strong communication channels.

The study used upward, downward, and peer to peer communications as organizational flow dimensions regarded as effective information flow. In reality, proper information flow helps

to foster company identity, teamwork, productivity, involvement, retention, and job performance (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012).

Hence, the finding of both formal and informal information sharing has a greater impact on employee efficiency. Therefore, using the telecommunication in Cameroon, the study assesses the mediation role of employee performance on the relationship between internal communication and employee efficiency.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several definitions from the extant literature on internal communication attempt to define and understand the communication phenomena. Internal communication, according to Welch and Jackson (2007), is “the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organizations.” However, internal communication is regarded as the process which individuals create and share knowledge with one another in order to attain a shared understanding (Rogers1976).

Employee efficiency which is often used interchangeably with job efficiency, is a relatively recent and evolving phenomenon in the literature on communication and management. The motivation or incentive factor is a key variable in human resource management that is always tied to an employee's performance or productive effort. Every organization must have a circumstance or occasions when individuals are endowed with the obligation to take initiative, also known as discretionary effort, when presented with a task that needs a long and centralized line of communication. However, the focus of this research is not to look at motivation but at other elements that may also invariably impact on employee efficiency in an organization.

Internal communication is about “managing interdependence and building mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its employees” (Men & Bowen, 2017). It is through internal communication that organizational leaders shape and transmit values and missions of the organization to employees and therefore involve employees in fulfilling bigger organizational purpose (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Welch, 2011).

Efficiency literature on internal communication has been lacking but the topic is on the rise in recent years (Tkalac & Sriramesh 2012; Welch, 2012). Internal communication system mainly comprises three components: downward, upward and peer communication (Men & Bowen, 2017).

Luarn & Huang (2015) examined the effect of internal communication on employee efficiency and find positive effect on internal communication on organizational efficiency. Similarly, Saeed et al., (2013) conducted an interview of employees in a company in Malaysia.

The results indicate that, employees recounted on how involving them in decision making makes them efficient. Moreover, Argenti (2013) recognized the need of key players and two-way communication in internal communication. The results symbolize the important role of internal communication in an organization, specifically on the effectiveness of employees.

Managers seek ways to boost employee efficiency through the creation of supportive communication channels that encourages stress relief and effective decision-making. By improving the work environment, employee performance is improved because employees feel free to voice their opinion and be more efficient. Besides, they feel more important because they are informed about corporate developments, organisational policies, corporate goals, but most importantly how all these changes possibly affect them and their future in the organisation.

Despite numerous findings related to the nexus between internal communication and employee efficiency, the studies failed to elaborate by incorporating mediating factor. As a result, the study fills this literature gap by mediating employee performance to examine employee efficiency and internal communication relations. In addition, studies in the literature examined from an industrialized country, but this study examines from an emerging country.

Hypotheses Development

Internal communication impacts Employee Efficiency

Understanding how to connect with managers and communicate with employees is crucial because communication is critical for all members of the organization. Communication tactics differ depending on the participants, the communication channel used within the firm, and the goals to be achieved.

The literature on the impact of internal communication on employee performance in small and medium-sized businesses has grown significantly, fuelled primarily by studies of large and, to a lesser extent, small businesses. The rapid rise in the literature is likely inspired by the understanding that internal communication, left to its own devices, will not be able to handle the issues of employee efficiency. However, it is for the purpose of providing an overview of what the literature says about the primary methods in which internal communication has focused on the declaration of management findings and the packaging of management thought into messages for mass distribution to employees (Quirke 2008).

Schein (2004) conducts a quick review of the literature on how internal communication influences employee efficiency. Prior research on the impact of internal communication on employee efficiency has largely focused on how organizational knowledge influences employees' behaviour and, as a result, their performance.

Literature has failed to establish the link between internal communication and employee's efficiency. Larkin (1994) found the relationship between internal communication and efficiency positives. However, there was positive but insignificant relationships between internal communication and efficiency (Comelissen, 2004; Schein, 2004, and Quirke (2008). As results, efficiency is a sophisticated strategy that incorporates several individual and organizational elements. Internal communication is closely linked to employee productivity (Yates, 2006). As a result, numerous perspectives show that internal communication is a cornerstone for employee efficiency since it builds trust, instils a sense of belonging, raises awareness, and engages people (Hoyos,2015; Yates, 2006).

Verghese, (2017) finds downward, and upward communication positively related to the efficiency of employees in Kenya. In addition, Titang (2016), indicate positive and significant effects on employee efficiency in (Country). Therefore, internal communication is mechanism affecting the efficiency of employees. Hence, the study assumes that internal communication impacts employee efficiency:

H1: Internal communication impacts employee efficiency

H1-1 Downward communication impacts efficiency employee

H1-2 Upward communication impacts efficiency employee

H1-3 Peer to peer communication impacts employee efficiency

The mediating Role of Employee Performance

Communication is critical for maintaining positive working relationships, clarifying and explaining decisions, and providing direction for job completion. People, communication, organization, and administration are all interconnected elements that must be thoroughly investigated (Thayer, 2012). Internal communication is to help employees understand their values and engage in initiatives that help the company achieve its goals. The personnel in charge of this area should persuade upper management those employees need to be informed about the organization's goals and outcomes (Verghese, 2017; Abdullah & Antonay, 2012).

Because the performance of the business is dependent on the manner of communication, top management has a clear and secure communication, linking their efforts for effective management (Verghese, 2017). Communication must be ethical and responsible, which means that people should engage, participate, and express their thoughts so that their peers and the company as a whole can benefit.

This enrichment should include not only increased earnings for the organization, but also personal and professional development for everyone engaged (Bueno, 2005). It is a primary and non-secondary ingredient for employee efficiency, according to Zaremba (2003). As a

result, it outperforms the traditional methods of receiving and transmitting communications such as bulletins, letters, warnings, crafts, memos, Intranet, Internet, videoconferencing, blogs, wikis, and phone conversations, (Yates,2006), also refers to the formal and informal exchange of information between management and staff (Titang,2016). When an employee's performance improves, their efficiency improves as well, thanks to improved internal communication.

While the study demonstrated a link between communication and overall employee efficiency or performance, there is no convincing evidence of the mediation effect of performance on efficiency, according to Woodroffe (2006). However, in order to keep the researcher's position and interest, this study propose that employee performance mediates the relationships between internal communication and efficiency, which guaranteeing that the findings or outcomes of the analysis will be clearly and elaborately explained. Accordingly, the research proposes:

H2: EP mediates the effect of internal Communication on EE

H2a: EP mediates the effect of DC on EE

H2b: EP mediates the effect of UC on EE

H2c: EP mediates the effect of PTP on EE

RESEARCH METHODS

The study aims to examine the mediating role of employee performance on the relationship between internal communication, and employee efficiency in Cameroon. In order to test the proposed hypothesis, the study conducted an empirical study.

Population and sampling

The target population comprised telecommunications in Cameroon, where companies were recorded in the ministry of trade and industry (MTI, 2018). A cross-sectional study was carried out and a standardised survey was disseminated to top management, middle management, lower management and non-management employees of the sampled telecommunications. The study used random sampling technique on respondents, and a total 501 were the sample size.

Survey and data collection

The survey was adapted from previous studies, and a pilot survey was conducted to validate it. This was done to ensure that no irrelevant questions were included and to facilitate a correct understanding of the survey questions in order to receive accurate answers from respondents. All questions were scored on a five-point Likert scale, which is broadly applied in

studies in the extant literature (Welch, 2011; Orpen, 2012; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012; Bambacas, & Patrickson, 2013).

Questionnaires were deployed to the targeted respondents of the sampled telecommunications in Cameroon. The questionnaires were made of four sections. The first section asked questions relating to the respondent profile. The remaining sections asked questionnaires relating to relating to upward, downward and peer-to peer group internal communication impact on the performance of employees and efficiency. Likert-type scale (1-Strongly disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Satisfactory; 4-Agree; and 5-Strongly agree were used for all questions.

Variable Measures

Employees Effectiveness

The measurement of Employee Effectiveness was adapted from Welch (2011). This self-administered questionnaire included 6 items on employee effectiveness. A 1-5 Likert scale was used to score the employee effectiveness (ranging from strongly disagree =1 to strongly agree =7).

Upward Communication

The independent factors were adopted from previous literature (Orpen, 2012; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012; Bambacas, & Patrickson, 2013), and comprised 4 items classified as channels of communication, organizational goals, and employee's engagement. The content of upward communication was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree =5).

Downward Communication

The research used downward communication as an independent variable on the internal communication on the impact of employee's effectiveness. The research self-administered questionnaires used 4 items on a 5 Likert scale ranging (from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree =5). However, the items used were adopted from the literature (Kalla, 2015; Ledingham, 2011, Watson-Wyatt, 2004). These terms shared the same idea as channel of communication which has been discussed by other scholars in the extant literature (Drafke, 2013).

Peer- peer communication

The peer group communication was adapted from the literature by Drafke (2013) and Wilcox & Cameron (2011). This self-administered questionnaire included 3 items on peer-to-

peer communication. A 1-5 Likert scale was used to score the employee efficiency (ranging from strongly disagree =1 to strongly agree =5). Based on previous studies, the subjective approach of employee efficiency was adopted from the extant literature (Wilcox & Cameron, 2011; Harris & Nelson, 2013). Hence, the study presents the model on the role of internal communication on employee efficiency including the mediating factor:

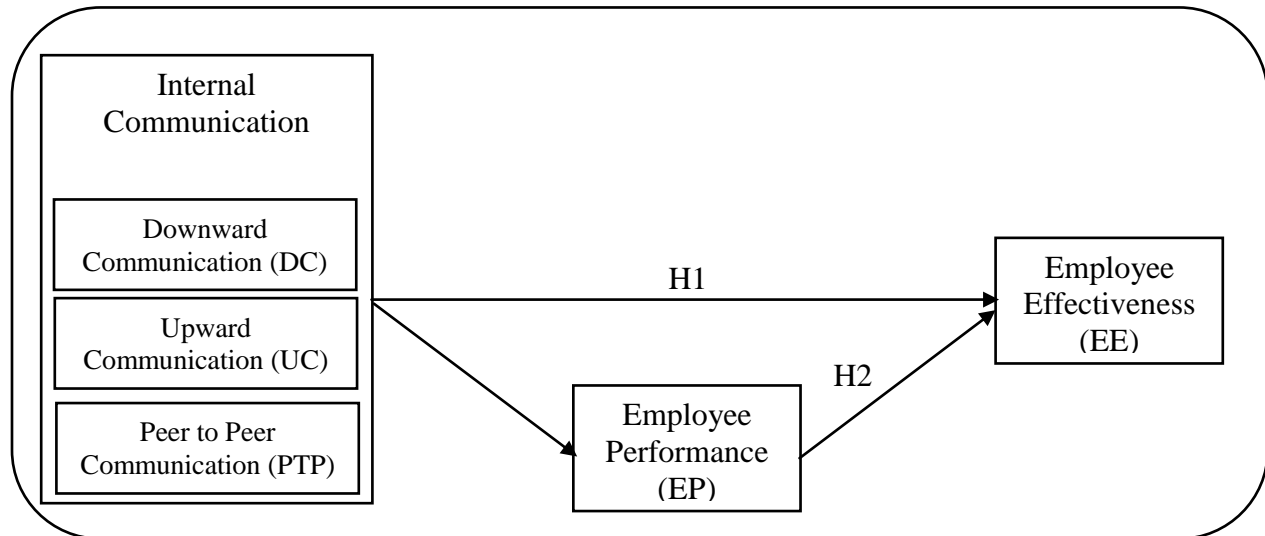


Figure 1 Research framework of internal communication and employee efficiency

Analytical approach

The study used Smart Partial Least Squares (PLS-version 3) technique, a variance-based SEM technique to carry out SEM and to test hypotheses by creating path analyses.

RESULTS

Demographic profile

The study issued 501 questionnaires to respondents via email using a link from online Google survey because of the novel pandemic Corona Virus (COVID 19). The study conducted a respondent analysis using the respondent profile collected during the research to determine where the responses to the research were obtained and the number of respondents sampled for the study. Table 1 presents the profile of respondents. Of the total 501 respondents, the 261 representing 52.1% were male, 47.9 were females. On the part of age, majority of the respondents were between the ages of 36-45 with 23.2%, 66.1 % were staff, 20.4% were management, and majority (74.6%) of the respondents earn between 100-150CFA embodying 136 as numbers.

Table 1 Respondent Profile Table

Variables	Description	Frequency N	Percentage %
Age	Below 25	77	15.4
	26-35	112	22.4
	36-45	116	23.2
	46-55	88	17.6
	56-65	57	11.4
Gender	66 above	51	10.2
	Female	240	47.9
Organizational rank	Male	261	52.1
	Staff	331	66.1
	Management	102	20.4
Income Rank	Top Management/Leadership	68	13.6
	25.000-50.000CFA	56	11.2
	50.000-100.000 CFA	130	25.9
	100.000-150.000 CFA	135	26.9
	150.000-200.000 CFA	96	19.2
	200.000 CFA and above	84	16.8

Validity and reliability testing

The study used constructs for internal communication including upward communication, downward communication, and peer to peer communication respectively. However, the study asked respondents questions on employee effectiveness in firms, the explanatory roles of internal communication, and the mediating factor of employee performance. Using the SEM, the constructs' validity and reliability were determined on the items used to measure internal communication, employee efficiency and employee performance.

Results (Table 2) show that, all factor loadings and AVEs were higher than 0.7 and 0.5, respectively, exceeding the usual criterion. As a result, convergent validity has been established (Henseler et al., 2009). The composite dependability of the discovered constructs exceeded Hair et al (2014) recommended level of 0.7. However, deciding upon the number of factors that can be retained is difficult but initial runs- based on eigenvalues showed none variables. To determine the reliability test of the variables used in the research as suggested by Hair et al. (1992) suggested that variables with greater than 0.7 is considered fit for analysis, hence shows significant. Not a single factor has dropped out which means the reliability analysis was a success. The result of highlighted the number of results of the reliability test by the factors. This shows that in this investigation, the reliability of all scales was maintained.

Table 2 Constructs with items showing reliability, factor loading, and convergent validity values

Constructs	Item	FL	CR	CA	AVE
Upward Communication		0.821		0.896	
UP-1	Involving employees in decision making	0.793	0.913		0.636
UP-2	Free communication with superiors	0.771			
UP-3	Employee providing opinions and suggestions to superiors	0.772			
Downward communication		0.815		0.873	
DC-1	Sharing information by superiors with employees	0.813	0.876		0.647
DC-2	Superiors always communicate directly with employees	0.855			
DC-3	Superiors always give feedback to employees on performance	0.749			
Peer to Peer Communication				0.886	
PTP-1	Constructive team work in the organization	0.823			
PTP-2	Ability of employees to share information, collaborate and solve problems	0.826	0.923		0.670
PTP-3	Ability of employees to understand each other's ways of communication	0.827			
Employees Efficiency		0.821		0.885	
EE-1	The company is responsible for training employees on the use of social media for internal communication	0.793			
EE-2	Would you agree that your level of social media competence is good enough for internal communication	0.771			
EE-3	How many contacts work related contacts do you have in your social media account.	0.772	0.913		0.636
EE-4	How many hours do you spend on social media for a week	0.815			
EE-5	Employees are comfortable using their personal social media accounts for communications with peers, clients, and top management	0.813			
EE-6	On typical week, you are likely to use social media work related activities	0.772			
Employee Performance				0.875	
EP-1	Our firm develop an evaluation form	0.813			
EP-2	Our firm identify performance measures	0.831	0.872		0.651
EP-3	Our set guidelines for feedback	0.772			

Note: CA Cronbach Alpha; AVE - Average Variance Extracted;
CR - Composite Reliability; FL- Factor loading.

SEM Results

In the study, the bootstrapping technique with the samples in Smart-PLS of SEM was used to test hypotheses and path coefficients after establishing the measurement model's sufficient for reliability and validity. The research presents the SEM results, including path estimates and p-values. The figure 2 shows SEM results.

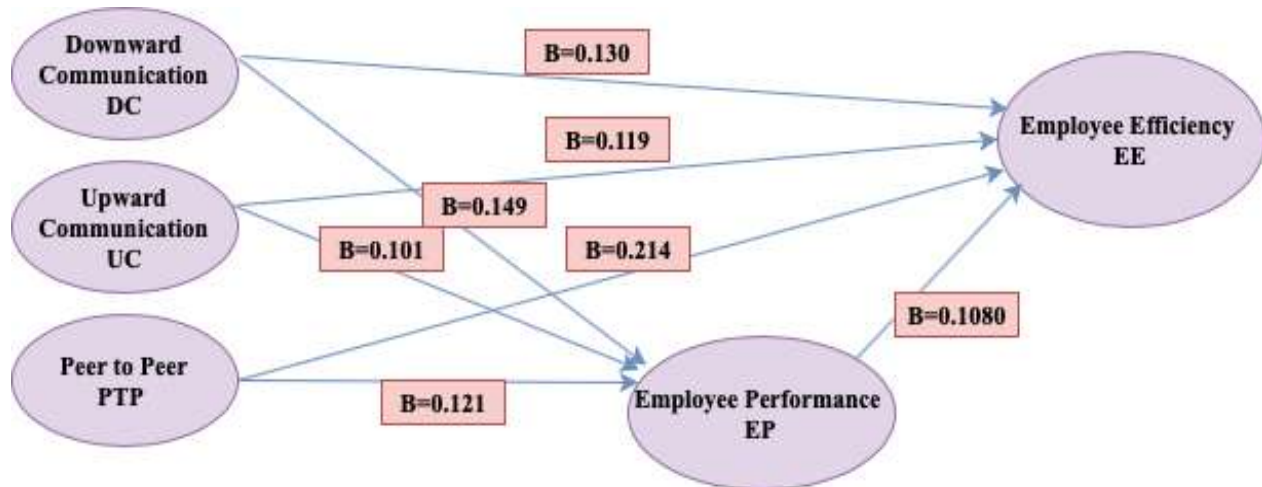


Figure 2 SEM results

The path analysis shows that, all the hypothesized in the SEM, were positive and significance as evidence $p=0.000$. Every hypothesis showed great significance at $p=0.000$. To begin, the research finds that, downward communication directly effects the efficiency of employees in firms. Therefore, it is obvious to posit that, downward communication enhances employee efficiency in every organization. However, we also find upward has direct effect on employee efficiency in the telecommunication firms in Cameroon. Therefore, H1-2 is accepted at ($B=0.119$, $p=0.000$). Effective upward communication gives employees a clear understanding of the message they have received.

Regarding the H1-3, the research accepted it as the $P=0.000$. This implies that, peer to peer has direct ($B=0.214$), positive and significant effect on employee efficiency. Being able to communicate effectively with peers helps get jobs done by answering questions, sharing information, and offering feedback. Not to mention that effective communication can bring fun and energy to the workplace. The findings are consistent with the literature Zapata & Ramirez (2009), Bertucci (2016), Verghese (2017) and Titang (2016). However, the studies in the literature used descriptive modelling as this study used SEM, hence contributes to the extant literature. However, employee performance has positive and significant effect on the relationship between internal communication and employee efficiency. This suggest that,

downward, upward and peer to peer communications and employee efficiency is positively and significantly mediated by employee performance. ($\beta < 0.5$, $p < 0.001$). The results indicate that all the hypothesis stated in this current study is accepted which suggest that, internal communication positively and significantly affect employee efficiency in telecommunication firms in Cameroon. However, the findings support that, employee performance mediates the impact internal communication have on employee efficiency.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 4 Path coefficients significance

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficients	t-statistics	p-value	Decision
H1-1	DC→EE	0.130***	4.020	0.000	Accepted
H1-2	UP→EE	0.119***	5.651	0.000	Accepted
H1-3	PTP→EE	0.214***	3.632	0.000	Accepted
H2-1	DC→EP→EE	0.016***	1.231	0.016	Accepted
H2-2	UP→EP→EE	0.010***	1.121	0.016	Accepted
H2-3	PTP→EP→EE	0.013***	1.211	0.016	Accepted

Note: EE is employee's efficiencies is employee performance, UC is upward communication, DC is downward communication, PTP is peer to peer communication respectively.

** Significant correlation at the 0.5 level, 5%. *** $p < .001$

Table 4 indicates that, there is statistical positive effect between downward and employee efficiency with path coefficient less than 0.5 with $p=0.000$. Similarly, result shows that, upward communication has significant and positive effect on employee efficiency at 1% significance level and ($\beta = 1.119$). Likewise, peer to peer communication also have positive and significant on employee performance ($\beta = 0.214$; $p\text{-value} = 0.000$).

Employee performance was used as the mediating variable to test the relationship among internal communication elements and employee efficiency. Hypothesis H2-1 to H2-3 were mediated models. In order to test the significance of the mediated variables, the research used the bootstrapping method of the structural equation model. The results (table 4) that, all the three (H2-1, H2-2, H2-3) were accepted. The total effect shows large mediation effects with (coeff= 0.3), and 5% significance level. The positive and significance mediation role of employee performance on the internal communication and employee efficiency suggests that, employees receiving effective downward, upward, and peer to peer have clear comprehension of the message they have heard, thus increase their performance to efficiency. However, effective communication, whether informative or persuasive, results in recipients taking action or otherwise behaving in accordance with the communicators' expectations. The result is fairly new

to the literature as this is the first study to establish the mediation role of employee performance on the relationship between internal communication and employee efficiency. Therefore, the results contribute to the communication and performance literature.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The study examined the mediating role of employee performance on the relationship between internal communication and employee efficiency. The findings warrant the following implications:

To begin, the results add to the body of knowledge about the relationship between internal communication and employee efficiency, which claims that, internal communication has favourable role on the business performance, and effectiveness of employees. By studying the role of internal communication factors such as downward, upward, and peer to peer communication in a developing country, this study adds to the literature on communication and management theories and contributes to the existing literature.

Second, it is undeniable that internal factors such as downward, upward, and peer to peer communication are sources of employee efficiency, few studies have looked into how these factors improve the efficiency of employees in Cameroon (Welch 2011). As a results, the study adds to the new literature on the nexus between internal communication and employee efficiency. Finally, this research looked into the processes through which internal communication impact the efficiency of employees, as well as the mediating effects of employee performance on the relationship between internal communication and efficiency from the perspective of Telecommunications in a developing country.

The findings from the research have warranted several policy practical implications and are four-folds. First, the research finds that downward, upward, and peer to peer communication has significant role of the efficiency of employees in Telecommunication companies. Therefore, management should place measures to improve downward, upward, and peer to peer communication as it was found positive and significant. The study suggests that, management should enable information sharing between top management and employees, ensuring that top management frequently communicate to employees and enabling effective communication of instructions and work procedures to ensure that work is performed effectively. However, management of firms are suggested to improve having multiple channels such as telephone, email, chat and instant messaging to enable employee improve their access to superiors. Superiors also need to be encouraged to embolden their employees to enable them have the courage to approach them for assistance, clarification or advice. Finally, firm should continue encouraging the already effective peer to peer communication to make it improve further. Since

the organization operates in a project environment, it should ensure that teamwork is enhanced and staff meetings are encouraged regularly. However, top management should have their input by ensuring that there are resources and information that would make teamwork by employees and the meetings to be more fruitful.

Finally, a mediating role of employee performance between internal communication elements such as upward, downward, and peer to peer and employee efficiency have been tested. All three variables show significance affecting employee efficiency. This test has implied that all three variables showed the most significance affecting efficiency mediated by employee performance. With that, the results conclude that, that all the factors are decisive factors which eventually leads to employee performance, and makes them efficient.

Despite the findings of the study, we encountered several limitations. First, the study sampled Telecommunications in Cameroon, therefore, generalization could not be applied to all companies in Cameroon. This is avenue for further studies. However, study used cross sectional survey which centred on telecommunications from June 2020 to October 2020. This will expand the sample size, allowing for a more thorough understanding and conclusive inference that internal communication has an effect on a company's employee performance and efficiency.

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