

SUBORDINATE-SUPERIOR COMMUNICATION:

TRAIT AND STATE CHARACTERISTICS

[A study on employees' willingness to communicate to their immediate superiors]



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Abstract

I argue that while an individual's communication behavior is a trait-like characteristic that is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers; in an organizational context, the trait-like communication behavior could be state-like. Taking clue from interactionist model of personality research, I reason that organizations contain strong situations that interact with an individual's personality based predispositions to evoke state-like communication behavior. Based on extant literature, organizational situations that can affect the state-like communication behavior of a subordinate in a subordinate-superior dyadic relationship are identified.

A comprehensive model linking trait-like communication behavior, state-like communication behavior, and the moderating situations is attempted and the methods for testing the model in an organizational context are described. Through a multi-phased study that includes application of mixed methodologies including semi-structured interviews, scale development, instrument validation, multiple-staged questionnaire translation, pilot testing, and comprehensive field-work for large scale data collection, the hypotheses are tested. Support is found for person situation interaction model in cases of state-like in-role and extra-role communication behavior. Taking clue from person-environment (P-E) fit studies, it is further suggested that a difference between trait-like communication behavior and their state-like form at the workplace can lead to psychological and physiological stress. Application of response surface methodology to polynomial regression analysis suggests statistically significant relationship between P-E fit and psychological stress; partial relationship is found in case of physiological stress. The study also explores linkages among organizational situational factors and personal level psychological and physiological stress.

Based on the present study, it is suggested that organizations that provide a favorable organizational climate to employees may end up with more communicatively efficient and less stressed workforce. Finally, research implications and limitations are discussed, and direction for future research is outlined.

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