



INTERNAL COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN THE PERMADIKSI STUDENT ORGANIZATION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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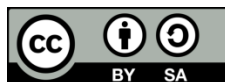
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ABSTRACT

The background of this research is based on the vulnerability of student organizations to miscommunication and slow internal information flow, which can hinder program effectiveness. The purpose of this study is to analyze the implementation of internal communication audits at PERMADIKSI, Panca Budi Development University, Medan, including the obstacles encountered, contributing factors, and mitigation efforts. Using a qualitative case study method with purposive sampling, data was collected through in-depth interviews with the organization's president. The findings indicate that digital coordination through WhatsApp Groups is often hampered by the loss of important messages, scheduling conflicts with members' academic obligations, slow response rates, and miscommunication regarding job descriptions. These obstacles were successfully overcome through procedural steps, including regular post-event evaluations, briefings, and meeting summaries, as well as through interpersonal approaches that foster an open communication environment. The implications of this study emphasize that the success of a student organization's communication system depends not only on the clarity of its digital infrastructure, but also on a commitment to openness and a culture of mutual understanding among board members.

Keywords: Internal Communication Audit, Student Organization, Communication Barriers, PERMADIKSI.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is fundamental to organizational activities because it facilitates information exchange, task coordination, decision-making, and relationships among members (Dalimunthe et al., 2020; Filip, 2022). Organizational communication involves the creation and exchange of messages within interdependent relationships

to respond to changing organizational environments (Dalimunthe, Syam, et al., 2024; Florea & Croitoru, 2025). In student organizations, effective internal communication is particularly important because coordination depends on members who simultaneously manage academic and organizational responsibilities. Ineffective communication may result in delayed information, misunderstanding of instructions, low responsiveness, and overlapping tasks (Atinga et al., 2024; Suhendar, Syam, et al., 2023).

A communication audit provides a systematic framework for evaluating communication channels, information flows, and organizational communication practices (Imaniyati et al., 2025; Munthe et al., 2026). However, internal communication barriers should be distinguished from barriers to implementing a communication audit. Internal communication barriers concern problems such as information overload, delayed messages, unclear instructions, and weak member responses, whereas audit implementation barriers refer to difficulties in conducting an audit, including limited instruments, data access, resources, or member resistance. Accordingly, this study focuses on internal communication barriers, while communication-audit principles are used as an evaluative perspective.

The Bidikmisi and KIP Kuliah Student Information Center (PERMADIKSI) at Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, provides a relevant context for examining these issues. PERMADIKSI functions as a forum for communication, coordination, learning, and support among scholarship recipients. Initial findings indicate recurring problems, including WhatsApp messages being overlooked because of high message density, delayed information, different interpretations of task assignments, low member responsiveness, and coordination difficulties caused by academic schedules. These conditions indicate problems in information distribution and interpretation rather than obstacles to conducting a formal communication audit.

These phenomena are analyzed using Karl Weick's theory of organizing, particularly the concepts of equivocality, enactment, selection, and retention (Kuiken, 2026; Suhendar et al., 2023). Equivocality emerges when organizational information allows multiple interpretations. Members reduce such ambiguity by constructing communication situations, selecting plausible meanings, and retaining effective communication practices. Thus, unclear instructions, dense WhatsApp communication, and differences in member interpretation can be understood as organizational

equivocality, while briefings, confirmations, meeting summaries, and evaluations represent attempts to reduce ambiguity.

Previous studies have examined communication audits in academic services, government institutions, and public organizations (Lino et al., 2026). However, these studies primarily emphasize communication effectiveness and information flows in formal organizational structures. Limited attention has been given to digitally mediated student organizations characterized by voluntary participation, flexible roles, scholarship-related networks, and competing academic responsibilities. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in integrating a communication-audit perspective with Weick's organizing theory to explain how communication barriers emerge, are interpreted, and are addressed within a scholarship-recipient student organization.

This study addresses three questions: (1) How are internal communication patterns organized within PERMADIKSI? (2) What barriers occur in information dissemination, task coordination, and member interaction? and (3) How does PERMADIKSI attempt to reduce these communication barriers and organizational ambiguities? The study contributes theoretically to organizational communication research and practically to improving communication evaluation and coordination within student organizations.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology using a case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the barriers to conducting internal communication audits in PERMADIKSI, a university in the Indonesian province of Panca Budi, Medan. This approach was chosen because it facilitated a more detailed and contextual description of the organization's internal communication conditions and processes. The research subjects consisted of individuals familiar with the organization's internal communication conditions, while the research object focused on the barriers to implementing internal communication audits in PERMADIKSI. This research was conducted within the PERMADIKSI environment at Panca Budi, Medan, during 2026.

The research instrument used was the researcher, supplemented by interview guidelines, documentation, and field notes (Creswell, 2021). The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants based on their knowledge and experience regarding organizational internal communication. In qualitative case studies, the number of informants is not the primary concern; rather, the depth of information obtained is paramount. Thus, one or two informants with an understanding of the research problem are considered sufficient to provide relevant data. Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis uses an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to ensure systematic and in-depth data analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Internal Communication Patterns and Channels

The findings indicate that internal communication within PERMADIKSI is predominantly conducted through WhatsApp groups, supplemented by face-to-face meetings and, when necessary, online meetings through Google Meet or Zoom. From the organizational leader's perspective, WhatsApp is preferred because it enables rapid and flexible coordination among members who have different academic schedules. The informant (I-01) explained that communication within PERMADIKSI was generally active, although information was sometimes received late or was not fully understood by all members.

These findings suggest that PERMADIKSI relies heavily on digitally mediated communication for routine coordination. WhatsApp facilitates rapid information exchange, but its effectiveness depends on members' attention, responsiveness, and ability to distinguish important organizational messages from general conversation. Since the available interview data were obtained from the organizational leader, these findings represent a leadership perspective on internal communication and should not be interpreted as representing all members' experiences.

Technical Barriers in Digital Communication

The most prominent technical barrier concerns the density of messages in WhatsApp groups. According to I-01, important organizational information can be overlooked when group conversations become highly active. This condition is particularly problematic when information concerns schedule changes or urgent activity preparation, because not all members receive or respond to the information simultaneously.

The problem therefore does not primarily originate from the absence of communication channels, but from information visibility and message management within the channels already used. High-volume digital communication increases the possibility that organizational information will compete with less urgent messages, thereby creating unequal access to important information among members.

Academic and Individual Communication Barriers

Internal coordination is also influenced by the dual responsibilities of members as students and organizational participants. Academic schedules, assignments, and personal activities frequently overlap with organizational agendas. I-01 also reported variations in member responsiveness: some members respond quickly, whereas others require repeated reminders.

Rather than categorizing academic activities as purely external factors, these conditions can be understood as characteristics of membership participation within a student organization. Differences in schedules, communication styles, responsiveness, and patterns of information processing shape how members participate in organizational communication. Consequently, communication barriers emerge through the interaction between organizational demands and individual participation patterns.

Misunderstanding of Task Allocation

Another significant finding concerns differences in interpreting task instructions. I-01 reported situations in which members understood their responsibilities differently from the coordinator's intentions, resulting in duplicated work or

incomplete assignments. Such problems were especially apparent during activity preparation and implementation.

This finding indicates that message transmission alone does not guarantee communication effectiveness. Task coordination requires clarity, confirmation, and shared understanding between coordinators and members. When instructions are insufficiently detailed or are interpreted differently, organizational communication may produce ambiguity regarding responsibilities and expected actions.

Evaluation and Follow-up Mechanisms

PERMADIKSI has attempted to address these communication barriers through pre-activity briefings, post-activity evaluations, reminders, clarification of coordination flows, and summaries of meeting results. These practices are intended to ensure that important information is understood and retained by organizational members.

However, the available data do not demonstrate that PERMADIKSI has conducted a formal and systematic communication audit involving defined audit objectives, instruments, indicators, respondents, data collection procedures, audit reports, and measurable follow-up mechanisms. Therefore, these practices are more appropriately characterized as informal communication evaluation and coordination mechanisms rather than a formal communication audit. Their effectiveness also cannot yet be claimed conclusively because no comparative data before and after their implementation are available.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the major communication problems within PERMADIKSI concern information overload, delayed information reception, differences in interpreting task instructions, variable member responsiveness, and coordination difficulties associated with academic obligations. These findings confirm that the primary issue investigated in this study is internal communication barriers, rather than barriers to implementing a formal communication audit (Kholil et al., 2024; Taylor & Kazembe, 2024).

Karl Weick's theory of organizing provides an important framework for interpreting these findings. Szukits (2022) explains that organizations continually encounter equivocality, namely situations in which information permits more than one possible interpretation. Within PERMADIKSI, message density in WhatsApp groups may increase equivocality because members must identify which information is organizationally important among numerous messages. Similarly, unclear task instructions produce multiple interpretations concerning responsibilities, potentially resulting in duplicated or incomplete work (Akkasi, 2024; Dalimunthe et al., 2024).

These processes can also be interpreted through Weick's concepts of enactment, selection, and retention (Cristofaro, 2022; Sikumbang et al., 2024). Enactment occurs when members encounter and construct meaning from organizational situations, such as schedule changes or task instructions (Afshari, 2023; Ritonga et al., 2024). Selection occurs when members determine how a message should be interpreted and what action should follow. When coordinators and members select different interpretations, misunderstanding may occur. Retention can be observed in PERMADIKSI's use of meeting summaries, reminders, and evaluation results to preserve information that can guide subsequent activities. Thus, these mechanisms may function as attempts to reduce equivocality, although they have not yet developed into a systematic communication-audit procedure.

The findings are broadly consistent with Florea & Croitoru (2025), who demonstrated that organizational communication can remain operational while still experiencing problems in information dissemination. They also correspond with Meneses-La-Riva et al. (2025), particularly in demonstrating that communication media can simultaneously facilitate organizational coordination and generate communication challenges. Similarly, Sun et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of evaluating internal communication to identify areas requiring organizational improvement. However, the present study differs in its organizational context. PERMADIKSI operates as a student organization in which participation is relatively flexible, communication is strongly dependent on digital messaging, and members must continuously negotiate organizational responsibilities alongside academic obligations.

These characteristics have implications for communication evaluation in student organizations (Brinia et al., 2022; Humaizi et al., 2024). An appropriate communication-audit model should not only assess whether communication channels exist but also examine message visibility, information overload, instruction clarity, member responsiveness, task interpretation, and mechanisms for confirming that information has been understood. Regular briefings, written meeting summaries, standardized task descriptions, and structured confirmation mechanisms may provide an initial foundation for such an evaluation system.

Nevertheless, the available findings are based primarily on the perspective of the organizational leader. Therefore, they cannot establish how communication barriers are experienced by members in different organizational positions. Further evidence from division coordinators, active members, less active members, and members who have directly experienced delayed information or task misunderstandings is necessary to strengthen source triangulation and determine whether the patterns identified by the leader are shared across the organization.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the implementation of an internal communication audit at PERMADIKSI, Panca Budi Development University, Medan, fulfills its strategic function as a periodic evaluation instrument to identify weaknesses in information flow and optimize the role of participatory leadership. Although the digital coordination system, which utilizes WhatsApp Groups, operates dynamically, its operational effectiveness continues to face technical challenges. Overcrowded group chats often drown out important messages, resulting in miscommunication regarding job descriptions, delays in communicating agenda changes, and even overlapping tasks during event preparation.

These communication barriers are primarily caused by a combination of external and internal factors among executive members. External factors stem from members' busy academic schedules as students, while internal factors are driven by low individual discipline in responding to information, as well as diverse backgrounds, personalities, and cognitive frameworks in interpreting messages. As a remedial solution, PERMADIKSI successfully mitigated these challenges through a procedural

approach, including regular post-event evaluations, pre-event briefings, and the creation of meeting summaries, combined with an interpersonal approach that fosters an environment of open communication and a culture of mutual care and respect. The success of this internal communication underscores that the strength of an organization depends not only on its digital infrastructure, but more on its commitment to openness and mutual understanding among its members.

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