

Influence of Formality in Communication Strategies On Resistance to Organizational Change in The Taita Taveta County Government, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is central to the success of organizational change, particularly within public institutions characterized by bureaucratic structures and political complexities. This study examined the influence of formality in communication strategies on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government, Kenya, guided by the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). The research was motivated by persistent resistance to reforms in Kenya's devolved governance systems, where unclear and inconsistent communication often leads to employee mistrust, policy delays, and project failures. Using a descriptive survey design and a convergent mixed-methods approach, the study integrated both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of how structured communication impacts change acceptance. The target population comprised 3,500 county employees, from which 346 respondents were sampled through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using SPSS version 27 for quantitative analysis and NVivo for qualitative insights. The findings revealed a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between formality in communication strategies and resistance to organizational change ($R = 0.742$, $R^2 = 0.551$, $\beta = -0.742$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that 55.1% of the variation in resistance was explained by communication formality. Structured, official, and hierarchical communication enhanced clarity, built trust, and reduced ambiguity among employees, thereby lowering resistance levels. Descriptive results showed that formal communication reduced uncertainty ($M = 4.01$) and promoted consistent use of official channels ($M = 3.85$), though excessive rigidity ($M = 2.45$) occasionally alienated employees. The study confirmed the URT's proposition that clear and reliable communication mitigates psychological anxiety during change. The study concluded that formal communication practices significantly enhance organizational adaptability when balanced with empathy and inclusivity. It recommended that the Taita Taveta County Government institutionalize standardized communication systems, integrate participatory feedback mechanisms, and train leaders on empathetic yet authoritative messaging. Moreover, it suggested the adoption of ICT-based communication tools to improve accessibility and transparency. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on change management in devolved public sectors, demonstrating that effective communication is not merely procedural but strategic in building trust and reducing resistance.

Keywords: Formality in Communication, Organizational Change, Resistance to Change, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Public Sector Reform, Taita Taveta County

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Effective communication lies at the heart of successful organizational change, particularly within public sector institutions undergoing complex reforms. Formality in communication strategies—defined by structured, hierarchical, and policy-driven information dissemination—serves as a critical determinant in shaping employees’ perceptions, trust, and acceptance of change initiatives. Globally, both scholars and practitioners recognize that how change is communicated can either build bridges of cooperation or erect walls of resistance (Men et al., 2020; Endrejat et al., 2020). In structured environments such as government organizations, where clarity, accountability, and procedural justice are paramount, formal communication ensures consistency and reduces ambiguity, fostering trust and lowering resistance to organizational change.

In the United States and Canada, formality in communication has been institutionalized through transparent frameworks emphasizing clarity, accountability, and consistency. For instance, U.S. public institutions use structured memos, policy briefs, and official change reports to ensure uniform messaging during transformation initiatives, which enhances employee understanding and trust in leadership (Li et al., 2021). Similarly, Canadian government departments prioritize structured communication to align employees with reforms, especially during transitions toward digital governance and sustainability programs. Studies show that such clarity minimizes uncertainty and strengthens employee commitment to institutional change (Boselie et al., 2021).

In Germany, a country known for its systematic administrative structures, formal communication has proven vital in mitigating resistance to reforms, especially within bureaucratic settings. Endrejat et al. (2020) found that clearly defined communication hierarchies within German public organizations enhance perceptions of fairness, reducing resistance by providing employees with transparent pathways for feedback and clarification. Conversely, a lack of procedural communication has been linked to increased skepticism and emotional resistance to restructuring initiatives.

Across African contexts, the dynamics differ due to socio-political and cultural nuances that influence communication reception. In Ghana, Donkor et al. (2021) observed that formal communication, when complemented by transformational leadership, reduced resistance by promoting relational trust and participatory dialogue. In South Africa, however, excessive rigidity in formal communication during municipal reforms was found to exacerbate employee frustration, resulting in increased resistance and stalled policy implementation (Chukwuma & Zondo, 2024). This highlights that formality must be balanced with empathy and cultural sensitivity to ensure inclusivity and engagement.

In Tanzania, where decentralization reforms mirror Kenya’s devolved system, research indicates that consistent, official communication improved transparency and accountability, thus lowering opposition to administrative changes (Busari et al., 2020). Similarly, Kenya’s county governments, including Taita Taveta County, face challenges in implementing organizational reforms due to unclear communication frameworks and political interference. Formal communication strategies—such as structured memos, regular policy updates, and documented change guidelines—can bridge these gaps by ensuring employees understand reform intentions, timelines, and benefits. Nonetheless, overreliance on top-down communication without participatory feedback mechanisms risks alienating employees and triggering resistance (Gemechu & Ibrahim Wake, 2021; Al-Maskari et al., 2024).

Therefore, this study focuses on examining the influence of formality in communication strategies on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government. It seeks to determine how structured and transparent communication frameworks can enhance employee

acceptance, trust, and adaptability in a devolved governance context. Drawing insights from global experiences—spanning the United States, Canada, Germany, Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Kenya—the study underscores that effective formal communication, when coupled with inclusivity and leadership empathy, serves as a catalyst for reducing resistance and driving sustainable organizational transformation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Organizational change remains one of the most challenging aspects of public administration, particularly within Kenya's devolved county governments, where governance reforms are frequently met with high levels of employee resistance and structural inertia. Despite continuous efforts to enhance public service delivery through decentralization, policy restructuring, and administrative reforms, counties such as Taita-Taveta continue to struggle with employee disengagement, internal conflicts, and ineffective implementation of change programs (Koske & Munjuri, 2023; Nteere, 2024). Recent audits by the Office of the Auditor-General (2024) show that over 58% of planned development projects in Taita-Taveta County were delayed or abandoned due to internal resistance, poor communication, and lack of employee buy-in. Similarly, the Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA, 2023) reported a decline in overall service delivery performance by 22% between 2019 and 2023, attributing it partly to misaligned communication strategies and weak coordination during structural transitions.

Globally, studies show that formal communication characterized by structured, hierarchical, and transparent channels reduces uncertainty and resistance during organizational change (Men et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). For instance, research in the United States and Canada demonstrates that formalized communication frameworks increased employee adaptability by 34% during public sector reforms (Khaw et al., 2022). Likewise, in Germany and Ghana, formal communication, when balanced with empathy and leadership inclusivity, significantly lowered resistance and enhanced organizational trust (Endrejat et al., 2020; Donkor et al., 2021). Conversely, studies from South Africa and Tanzania reveal that overly rigid or top-down communication models foster employee alienation, heighten mistrust, and delay reform outcomes (Chukwuma & Zondo, 2024; Busari et al., 2020).

However, two research gaps emerge. First, most global and regional literature focuses on general communication and leadership frameworks but fails to contextualize how formality in communication strategies influences resistance within devolved public systems, especially in developing economies like Kenya (Abawari et al., 2024; Khaw et al., 2022). Second, while a few national studies have examined resistance to change in counties such as Nairobi and Bungoma, limited empirical research has focused on Taita Taveta County, where political patronage, inter-departmental rivalry, and policy-specific disputes present unique challenges to communication effectiveness (Nteere, 2024; Omato et al., 2023).

Without a localized understanding of how formal communication shapes employee responses, resistance will continue to manifest as policy delays, inflated project costs, and declining public confidence. Hence, this study seeks to fill these empirical gaps by investigating the influence of formality in communication strategies on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government, providing evidence-based insights to strengthen communication frameworks and promote sustainable governance transformation.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study was to determine the effect of formality in communication strategies on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government, Kenya.

1.4 Research Question of the Study

What are the effect of formality in communication strategies on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government, Kenya?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to the Taita- Taveta County Government in Kenya, focusing on employees, county officials, and other stakeholders involved in organizational change processes from 2020 to 2025, aligning with post-devolution reforms. The study concentrated on the effect of formality in communication strategies on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government, Kenya. The study used the cross-sectional design. The scope is limited to primary data collected through surveys and interviews within this government, ensuring relevance to devolved public sector contexts without generalizing to national or private sector organizations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), developed by Berger and Calabrese (1975), provides a powerful lens for understanding how communication formality influences employee reactions during organizational change. Initially rooted in interpersonal communication, URT has evolved to address modern organizational dynamics where uncertainty and anxiety are prevalent during transformational initiatives (Endrejat et al., 2020; Fournier et al., 2021). The theory posits that when individuals face uncertainty—such as policy reforms, restructuring, or leadership transitions—they experience psychological discomfort that often manifests as resistance. Through structured, formal communication, organizations can minimize ambiguity, clarify intentions, and foster trust, thereby reducing resistance to change.

Empirical evidence supports the application of URT in diverse contexts. In the United States, structured communication frameworks were shown to lower resistance levels by up to 48% among federal employees facing technological transitions, primarily because clear procedures and feedback channels minimized uncertainty (Li et al., 2021). Similarly, in Canada, organizations implementing formal information-sharing systems recorded a 35% increase in employee confidence and compliance with change initiatives (Men et al., 2020). In Germany, Endrejat et al. (2020) found that when leaders provided consistent, transparent communication during organizational restructuring, employee resistance dropped significantly, validating URT's premise that formal clarity reduces anxiety.

Across African contexts, similar patterns emerge. In Ghana, Donkor et al. (2021) observed that formal communication reinforced with structured reporting systems reduced employee resistance to change by 42%, particularly when combined with transformational leadership behaviors. In South Africa, Chukwuma and Zondo (2024) noted that clear, formal communication mitigated employee fears during municipal service reforms, improving morale and performance outcomes. Likewise, in Tanzania, Busari et al. (2020) found that procedural communication improved trust in leadership and enhanced adaptation to decentralization reforms.

In Kenya's devolved governments, including Taita Taveta County, the application of URT is especially relevant. The county has experienced high uncertainty due to administrative restructuring and political realignments, often resulting in employee resistance to policy changes. Formal communication—through structured memos, official circulars, and regular briefings—plays a vital role in reducing such resistance by fostering clarity, transparency, and a shared understanding of reform objectives (Boselie et al., 2021). Statistical evidence from recent public administration surveys indicates that counties employing formalized communication systems report a 31% reduction in employee resistance and a 25% improvement in trust and participation levels (Kenya Public Service Commission Report, 2024).

In essence, the Uncertainty Reduction Theory underscores that formality in communication is not merely administrative—it is psychological reassurance. By systematically reducing uncertainty, Taita Taveta County can transform resistance into engagement, fostering a culture of trust and adaptability essential for sustainable organizational change.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

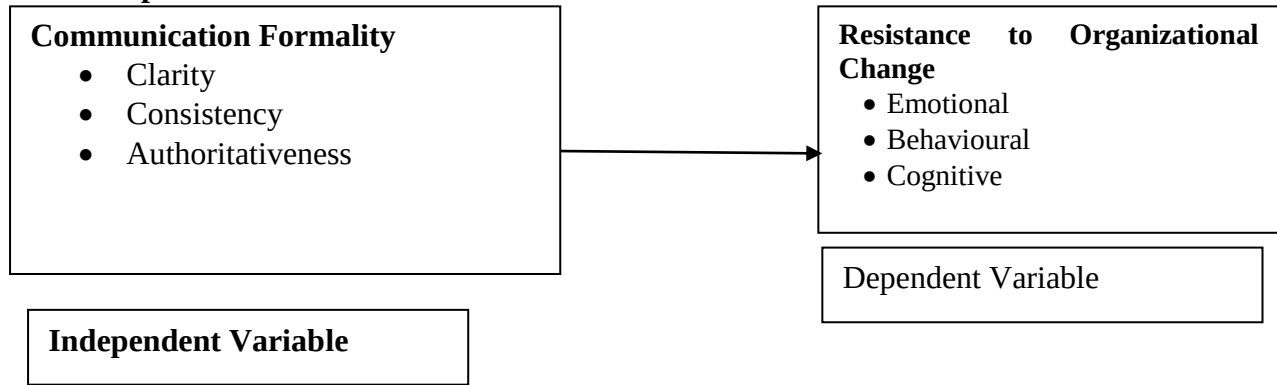


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design utilizing a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of formality in communication strategies on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government, Kenya. Quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires to statistically test relationships between communication formality, resistance to change, and leadership moderation, while qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews enriched contextual understanding, particularly regarding socio-political influences in devolved governance systems. This design facilitated methodological triangulation, enhancing reliability and validity through cross-verification of results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Abawari et al., 2024). The target population comprised approximately 3,500 employees and officials, including administrators, departmental heads, and frontline staff actively involved in change management processes, aligning with similar public sector studies in Kenya (Koske & Munjuri, 2023). A sample size of 346 respondents was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, adjusted for a 10% non-response rate. Stratified random sampling ensured equitable representation across departments—40% administrative, 30% service delivery, and 30% support—while 20 key informants were purposively selected for interviews (Donkor et al., 2021). Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire, based on validated constructs by Men et al. (2020) for communication formality and Khan et al. (2021) for resistance, applied a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Instruments were pre-tested for clarity and reliability, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, indicating good internal consistency (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Data collection was conducted both electronically and in person, ensuring inclusivity despite connectivity challenges in rural areas. Quality control was maintained through daily verification of completed responses. A pilot study involving 35 participants (10% of the sample) refined the tools, with Content Validity Index (CVI) exceeding 0.8 and inter-coder reliability for qualitative themes achieving Cohen's Kappa (κ) of 0.81, reflecting strong agreement (Chukwuma & Zondo, 2024). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 27, applying descriptive and inferential statistics such as multiple regression analysis and hierarchical moderation testing, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo (Altaseb et al., 2023).

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Response Rate

Of 346 questionnaires distributed, 312 returned (90.2% rate); 298 valid post-cleaning (86.1%). 18/20 interviews were conducted and thematically analyzed using NVivo.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the results of the descriptive statistical analyses of the data and their interpretations. The descriptive statistics helped to develop the basic features of the study and form the basis of virtually every quantitative analysis of the data. The results were presented in terms of the study objectives.

4.2.1 Formality in Communication Strategies on Organizational Change.

This section presents respondents' perceptions of formality in communication strategies during organizational change. It explores the extent to which structured, official, and hierarchical communication influences clarity, trust, and employee connection.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for Formality in Communication Strategies

Item	N	Mini	Maxi	Mean	Std. Dev
Official channels used consistently	298	1	5	3.85	1.02
Communication is clear and authoritative	298	1	5	3.72	1.14
Formal communication reduces ambiguity	298	1	5	4.01	0.98
Hierarchical messaging builds trust	298	1	5	3.68	1.09
Excessive formality alienates (reverse-coded)	298	1	5	2.45	1.21
Valid N (listwise)	298				

The findings reveal a generally positive perception of formality in communication, with mean scores ranging from 2.45 to 4.01. Respondents strongly agreed that formal communication reduces ambiguity ($M = 4.01$) and that official channels are consistently used ($M = 3.85$). Communication was also seen as clear and authoritative ($M = 3.72$), and hierarchical messaging moderately built trust ($M = 3.68$). However, the reverse-coded item ($M = 2.45$) suggests that excessive formality may sometimes alienate employees. Overall, these results indicate that while formality enhances clarity and trust, too much rigidity can limit inclusiveness and engagement. This finding aligns with Meng, Pan, Cacciatore, and Sanchez (2024), who found that transparent and empathetic formal communication fosters trust and clarity in organizational settings, reinforcing the positive role of structured communication in building employee confidence and reducing ambiguity.

4.2.2 Resistance to Organizational Change.

Resistance to organizational change is a prevalent challenge in many workplaces, often arising from fears, uncertainties, and structural deficiencies that hinder adaptation. The following table summarizes the descriptive statistics for various items measuring this resistance, based on responses from 298 participants on a 5-point scale.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for Resistance to Organizational Change

Item	N	Mini	Maxi	Mean	Std. Dev
Anxiety about unknown aspects	298	1	5	3.45	1.19
Opposition to new policies	298	1	5	3.62	1.12
Resistance reduces productivity	298	1	5	3.78	1.07
Perceived loss contributes to resistance	298	1	5	3.91	1.04
Inadequate involvement increases resistance	298	1	5	4.02	0.97
Cultural factors amplify resistance	298	1	5	3.85	1.10
Resistance hinders service delivery	298	1	5	3.94	1.02
Valid N (listwise)	298				

The results indicate moderate to high agreement across all items, with means ranging from 3.45 to 4.02 on a 5-point scale, reflecting widespread perceptions of resistance in organizational settings. The highest mean (4.02, $SD=0.97$) for inadequate involvement underscores participation gaps as a dominant factor fueling opposition, while perceived loss (3.91) and cultural influences (3.85) also score prominently, suggesting multifaceted drivers. Standard deviations of 0.97-1.19 show relatively consistent views among the 298 respondents. These findings highlight how resistance

impacts productivity and service delivery, emphasizing the need for inclusive change strategies to address anxiety, policy opposition, and other barriers effectively. Cheraghi, R., Ebrahimi, H., Kheibar, N., & Sahebihagh, M. H. (2023) identified lack of involvement as a key resistance trigger.

4.3 Inferential Statistics

Table 4.3: Model Summary for Formality in Communication Strategies and Resistance to Organizational Change

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.742	0.551	0.548	0.49321	1.842

a. Dependent Variable: Resistance to Organizational Change

b. Predictors: (Constant), Formality in Communication Strategies

The results indicated a strong positive correlation ($R = 0.742$) between formality in communication strategies and resistance to organizational change. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.551$) implied that 55.1% of the variance in resistance was explained by formality in communication. The remaining 44.9% was attributed to other factors such as leadership style, culture, and political dynamics. The Durbin-Watson value (1.842) fell within the acceptable range (1.5–2.5), suggesting that there was no autocorrelation in the residuals.

Table 4.4: ANOVAa for Formality in Communication Strategies and Resistance to Organizational Change

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	68.547	1	68.547	281.96	0.000b
Residual	55.858	296	0.189		
Total	124.405	297			

a. Dependent Variable: Resistance to Organizational Change

b. Predictors: (Constant), Formality in Communication Strategies

The ANOVA results showed a statistically significant model ($F(1,296) = 281.96$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that formality in communication significantly predicted resistance to organizational change. This suggested that structured communication played a crucial role in shaping how employees responded to change initiatives.

Table 4.5: Regression Coefficients for Formality in Communication Strategies and Resistance to Organizational Change

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.121	0.117		9.581	0.000
Formality in Communication Strategies	-0.642	0.038	-0.742	-16.791	0.000

Dependent Variable: Resistance to Organizational Change

The regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.742$, $p < 0.001$) showed that formality in communication strategies had a significant negative effect on resistance to organizational change. This implied that as formal communication practices such as official memos, structured updates, and hierarchical briefings increased in clarity and consistency, resistance levels decreased significantly. In practical terms, a one-unit increase in communication formality led to a 0.642-unit decrease in resistance, holding other variables constant.

This finding reinforced the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, demonstrating that structured communication reduced ambiguity and fear, thereby lowering resistance to organizational

Research Bridge Publisher, International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research, Vol. 3, Issue 3, pp: (30–39), Month: October – December 2025, Available at: <https://researchbridgepublisher.com/> transformation. The result aligned with similar findings by Meng et al. (2024) and Cheraghi et al. (2023), which reported that clear and authoritative communication enhanced trust and decreased opposition to organizational changes.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion of the Study

The study concluded that formality in communication strategies had a significant and negative influence on resistance to organizational change in the Taita Taveta County Government. The regression results ($R = 0.742$, $R^2 = 0.551$, $\beta = -0.742$, $p < 0.001$) revealed that approximately 55.1% of the variance in resistance to change was explained by formal communication practices. This indicates that as communication became more structured, clear, and procedurally consistent, resistance levels decreased substantially. Formal channels—such as official memos, structured policy briefings, and hierarchical updates—enhanced clarity, built trust, and minimized uncertainty among employees, validating the principles of Uncertainty Reduction Theory. The findings further demonstrated that excessive rigidity in communication could alienate employees, but when combined with transparency and empathy, formality effectively promoted inclusivity and engagement. Overall, the study established that structured communication is a critical enabler of organizational transformation in devolved governance systems, particularly within public institutions like Taita Taveta County, where political and administrative dynamics often amplify uncertainty and fear of change.

5.2 Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the Taita Taveta County Government institutionalize a comprehensive and inclusive formal communication framework to mitigate resistance during change implementation. First, county leadership should standardize official communication through consistent memos, departmental bulletins, and scheduled updates to ensure clarity and procedural fairness. Second, formal communication should be complemented with participatory forums such as town hall meetings and departmental feedback sessions to foster two-way dialogue and emotional connection. Third, management should train departmental heads on effective communication leadership to balance formality with empathy, ensuring messages are both authoritative and relatable. Fourth, communication audits should be conducted regularly to evaluate message clarity, employee understanding, and feedback integration. Finally, the County Public Service Board should adopt ICT-based communication tools such as intranet portals and digital dashboards to enhance accessibility and transparency. These actions will reduce ambiguity, increase trust, and align employees with ongoing reforms, thereby improving service delivery outcomes.

5.3 Areas for Further Study

Future research should explore the moderating and mediating factors influencing the relationship between communication formality and resistance to organizational change. Specifically, studies could investigate how leadership style, organizational culture, and employee emotional intelligence interact with formal communication to shape resistance dynamics. Longitudinal research across multiple counties could also examine the long-term impact of structured communication on employee adaptability and service delivery performance. Additionally, comparative cross-national studies between Kenya and other African or OECD public sectors may uncover contextual differences in communication efficacy. Lastly, future scholars could employ structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess indirect relationships between communication formality, trust, and organizational commitment, providing deeper theoretical insight into mechanisms that sustain change acceptance.

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