

A critical analysis of Communication style of Indian railway officers with their subordinates

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Key words: *Indian Railways, railway officers, communication style*

Date of Submission: 15-03-2023

Date of Acceptance: 31-03-2023

I. Introduction

Indian Railways being a service enterprise at national level, the purpose of its very existence lies in serving the society. The organization primarily a service entity is directly linked to providing smooth transportation facilities to the society at large.

Communication between the hierarchical levels of organisation is essential to run the activities of the department. Communication varies as per the levels of authorities in the department. Communication can be oral or written as per the nature of job. There can be no much work related communication when employees are well acquainted with their job profile. People in the department may communicate with one another to solve the work related problems.

Researcher has attempted to study the communication between Railway officers and their subordinates. Various ways of conveying the messages, bridging the gap between hierarchies, communication styles of the railway officers is analysed through this study.

Objectives of the study

The research focuses on following objectives:

1. To analyse the organisational hierarchy of railway officers.
2. To study their communication style with subordinates.
3. To analyse the impact of age, education and gender of railway officers and their communication style.

Hypothesis

Communication with subordinates is independent of age, education and gender of officers.

The superior-subordinate communication is evaluated by analysis through their responses and demographics. Mainly responses of higher level authorities are analysed as it creates a greater impact on the lower level employees as to how the communication flows in the department and how it is interpreted. The analysis was done by the Chi Square Test.

Operational Definitions

Indian Railways (Aklekar Rajendra) which had a modest beginning in 1853 has since then been an integral part of the nation. The railways in India are the largest rail web in Asia and the world's second largest under one management.

A railway division and Officers (G. S. Khosla) is divided into a number of divisions. With the introduction of divisional system, there was a conceptual change in the machinery of management. A division became a geographical and administrative entity. Railway officers are the authoritative personalities working at different designations in different departments.

Communication - It refers to the process by which information is transmitted and understood between two or more people. Effective communication is vital to all organisations because it coordinates employees, fulfills their needs, supports knowledge management and improves decision making. It influences the quality of decision making.¹

¹Mcshane Steven L., Glinow Mary Ann Von, Sharma Radha R., *Organisational Behaviour*, The McGraw-Hill Publication, 4th edition, 2008, p78.

According to Louis Allen, "Communication is a sum of all the things one person does when he wants to create understanding in the mind of another. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding". It improves organisational effectiveness as well as performance of the members.²

II. Research Methodology

Study Design: Indian Railways is divided into several zones, which are further sub-divided into Divisions. The study is undertaken with special reference to Mumbai division. It covers Mumbai city, Mumbai suburbs, Thane, Navi Mumbai and Raigad part.

Study Location: This study was undertaken at the eleven departments of Mumbai Division, Central Zone of Indian Railways, Mumbai, India.

Sample size: 172 officers

Sample size calculation: Systematic sampling was used to select sample from population. Railway officers are divided into three classes viz. class A, B and C. Class A officers are called Senior Divisional Officers whereas class B are called Assistant Officers and class C are called supervisors. The total numbers of class A officers are 77, class B officers are 145 and class C officers are 325 in 12 different departments.

Table no.1:Designation of Respondents (Railway Officers)³

Sr. No.	Designations	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Officers	67	39.00
2	Assistant Officers	85	49.40
3	Supervisors	20	11.60
	Total	172	100.00

Source: Compiled from Primary data

The highly authoritative people in the department were questioned about their working style. The designation details are provided through table no.1. The role of these officers is basically overall administration of the department and the staff.

Subjects & selection method: There are total twelve departments in Mumbai Division. The Senior Divisional Officers of each department decides the working style of their own department. They set a particular pattern of work in implementing the higher level decisions in their day to day work. Following table shows the number of departments in Mumbai Division and the number of respondents selected from each department.

Table no. 2:Name of the department presently working⁴

Sr. No.	Department	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Personnel	8	4.70
2	Accounts	8	4.70
3	Administration	2	1.20
4	Commercial	14	8.10
5	Electrical	24	14.00
6	Engineering	30	17.40

²Moshal B. S., *Organisational theory and Behaviour- Text and cases*, ANE Books Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2005, pp431to436.

³Dr. Deogirikar Sonali, A Study of work culture in Indian railways with special reference to central zone, PhD thesis, Department of Commerce, S.N.D.T Women,s University, Mumbai-20

⁴Dr. Deogirikar Sonali, A Study of work culture in Indian railways with special reference to central zone, PhD thesis, Department of Commerce, S.N.D.T Women,s University, Mumbai-20

7	Mechanical	23	13.40
8	Medical	13	7.60
9	Operating	33	19.20
10	Signal and Telecom	13	7.60
11	Safety	2	1.20
12	Stores	2	1.20
	Total	172	100.00

Source: Compiled from Primary data

The department wise selection of the respondents was done on the basis of number of higher officials in that particular department. Almost all the Class A and Class B Officers are covered in the study as their number is comparatively less. The representation given to the department varies because of difference in its strength. Certain departments are huge and classified into different types of nature of jobs. The departments like Electrical, Engineering, Mechanical and Operating are large in size. Hence their administration is also comparatively widespread. Departments like Personnel, Accounts and Commercial are mainly dealing with administrative matters of the Division. Hence the number of officials is less. Proportionate representation to each department is given by the researcher in this study.

Inclusion criteria:

1. The administrative officers of different demographic profile and different work profile are included in the study.
2. Mumbai division office of central zone is included for the convenience of geographical coverage.
3. Age, education and gender are the demographic profiles included in the study.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Other demographic profiles like marital status, experience, geographic location are excluded as they are irrelevant for the study.
2. The subordinates are excluded from the study as the number is huge.

Data Collection⁵

This study is based on primary data collection. Direct visits to departments of Mumbai division were the major source of primary data collection. A structured questionnaire method was used to collect data. The demographic profile, communication styles adopted by the officers are covered through the questionnaire.

Statistical analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS. The researcher has applied the Chi Square test.

III. Results

Age of the respondents is a crucial factor in understanding the demographics of the respondents. Generally it is said that elder the person, wiser the decisions. The researcher has analysed the age groups of officers' category. It is shown in the table below.

Table No. 3 – Classification of Railway Officers on the basis of Age

Sr.	Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	18 to 25 years	0	00.00
2	26 to 45 years	87	50.60
3	46 to 60 years	85	49.40
	Total	172	100.00

Source: compiled from primary data

The age group of 18 to 25 years is seen with not a single respondent. The reason behind this is Indian Railways have stopped new recruitments since last 12 years. Hence, there is no respondent below 25 years in this category of officers. The number of respondents between 26 to 45 years is 87 and between 46 to 60 years are 85. There is equal representation in these two groups. According to general survey and information gathered by the researcher it is seen that 70 percent of the strength of Mumbai division is beyond 50 years of age. It is

⁵Dr. Deogirikar Sonali, A Study of work culture in Indian railways with special reference to central zone, PhD thesis, Department of Commerce, S.N.D.T Women,s University, Mumbai-20

advantageous from wisdom and experience point of view. But many a times it hampers the growth of the organisation because of the rigid approach of the age old staff. The graph below gives a clear representation of the age groups of the respondents.

Another aspect of demographic profile considered by the researcher is educational qualification. A person's attitude and perception majorly depends upon his educational background. The emotional maturity of the person is largely related to his level of education. The table below shows the educational qualification of the respondents.

Table No. 4 – Educational Qualifications of the Railway Officers⁶

Sr.	Educational Qualifications	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Under Graduate	7	4.10
2	Graduate	125	72.70
3	Post Graduate	30	17.40
4	Others	10	5.80
Total		172	100.00

Source: Compiled from primary data

Class A and Class B railway Officers are appointed through the Union Public Service Commission examinations. Nearly 73 percent of the respondents are graduates. They appear for the UPSC examinations as soon as they complete their graduation from a particular stream. The post graduation degree is obtained by 30 respondents and only 7 are under graduates. The under graduates are mainly from the supervisor's category as they are most senior staff of the department.

There can be large amount of difference in the administrative styles of female officers and male officers. The gender wise representation of respondents is given through following table.

Table No. 5 – Gender Classification of Railway Officers

Sr. No.	Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Male	96	55.80
2	Female	76	44.20
Total		172	100.00

Source: Compiled from primary data

The above table shows that there are 96 male officers and 76 female officers in Mumbai division. The number of female officers is comparatively less. The blame goes to the UPSC exam system. It is time consuming and very complicated. It becomes difficult for women to pass these exams along with managing the household responsibilities.

Communication at Railway officer's level

Table No. 6 – Communication at railway officer's level

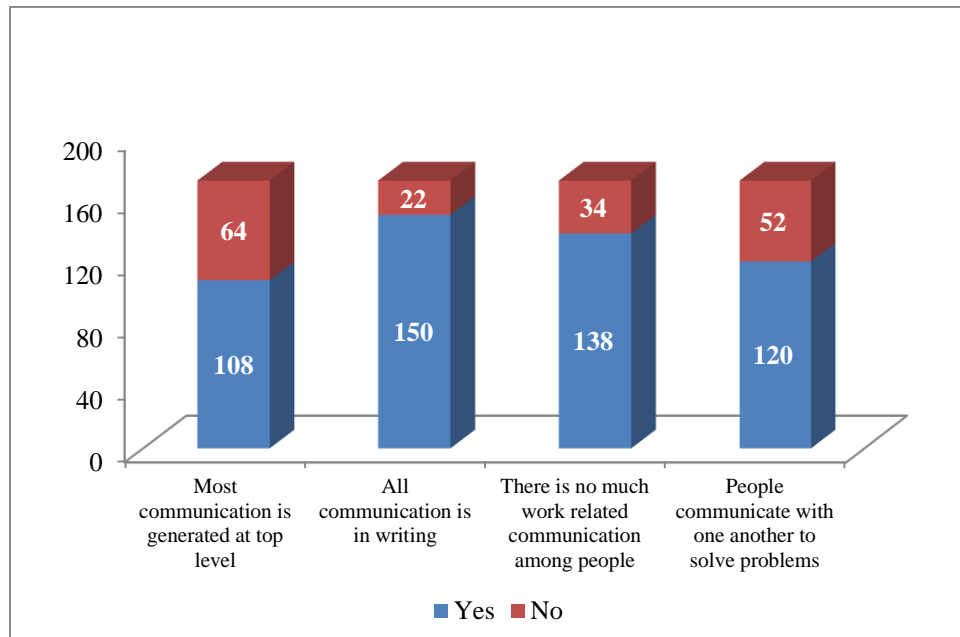
Sr. No.	Communication at railway officer's level	Yes		No	
		No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
1	Most communication is generated at top level	108	62.80	64	37.20
2	All communication is in writing	150	87.20	22	12.80
3	There is no much work related communication among people	138	80.20	34	19.80
4	People communicate with one another to solve problems	120	69.80	52	30.20

Source: Compiled from primary data

The table above shows the opinions of the officers in terms of kind of communication in their departments. The Railway Ministry and Railway Board are the decision making authorities in case of Indian railways. They convey the administrative decisions to zonal and divisional levels. The divisional level officers have the authority to implement these decisions according to their working style. The departmental officers get

⁶Dr. Deogirikar Sonali, A Study of work culture in Indian railways with special reference to central zone, PhD thesis, Department of Commerce, S.N.D.T Women,s University, Mumbai-20

the orders from the divisional managers and have to convey the same to the subordinates in their respective department. Nearly 63 percent of the respondents say that the communication is generated at top level and what remains with them is mere implementation of those orders. All communication is writing according to 87.20 percent respondents. Almost 80 percent say that there is no much work related communication. Nearly 70 percent of the respondents are of the opinion that people communicate with one another to solve their work related problems.



Graph 1 - Communication at Railway Officer's Level

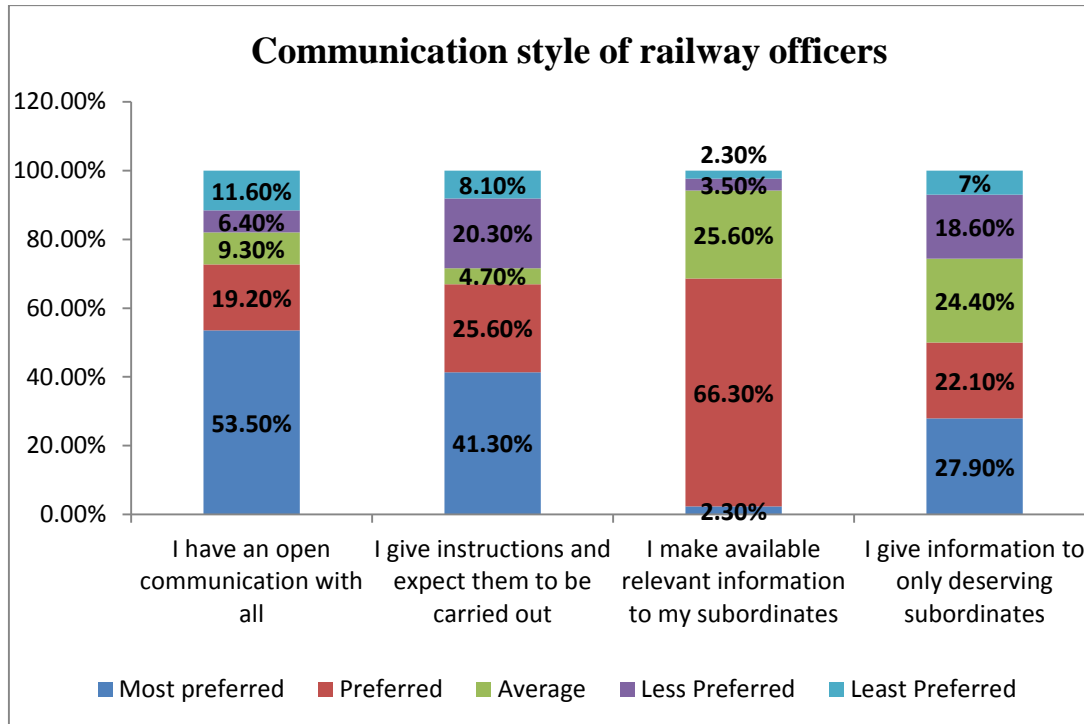
The communication between the officers and his team is only work related. Informal communication happens in the department but to a small extent. Employees discuss about not only work related problems but also the family matters which creates a bond amongst them. The number of officers positive towards sharing of information through communication is high. The researcher tried to analyze the communication style of the departmental officers on five point scale of preference and the results are as follows:

Table No. 7 – Communication style of railway officers

Sr. No.	Communication style	Percentage				
		Most preferred	Preferred	Average	Less Preferred	Least Preferred
1	I have an open communication with all	53.50	19.20	9.30	6.40	11.60
2	I give instructions and expect them to be carried out	41.30	25.60	4.70	20.30	8.10
3	I make available relevant information to my subordinates	2.30	66.30	25.60	3.50	2.30
4	I give information to only deserving subordinates	27.90	22.10	24.40	18.60	7.00

Source: Compiled from primary data

The communication styles differ according to the personalities. The officers may have an open approach towards the subordinates and may communicate to them with the open mind. Some superiors may give instructions and the subordinates are supposed to follow them. It is a strategy of some officers to make available the information regarding the task to be performed. Some might give the information only to deserving candidates. The graphical presentation is given below.



Graph 2 - Communication style of railway officers

The percentage of respondents who prefer this style the most is 53.50 percent. Nearly 19 percent prefer to have open communication to all subordinates. Only 18 percent prefer this way of communication less as they find it ineffective. Only 4.70 percent of the respondents prefer this communication style on average scale but 41.30 prefer it the most. The overall percentage of preference to this communication styles is around 72 percent. Most of the officers were observed by the researcher following this particular communication style. The highest percentage of preference goes for this communication style. The respondents who prefer this style are 66.30 percent. The relevant information is equally necessary along with the instructions for the job to be carried out. The preference is given to this style by 22.10 percent whereas 27.90 percent prefer it the most. It is a sort of biased attitude towards the subordinates but sometimes it works effectively. The deserving and bright subordinates make the best out of it. Nearly 24 percent have shown their average preference for such communication. The researcher concluded that the bureaucratic approach by the superiors is prevailing in the departments of Mumbai division. Superiors give the instructions and subordinates follow it is the most used communication style. It leaves less scope for the intellectual subordinates to do the things in their own way.

1.1 Hypothesis Testing

The researcher has tested hypothesis for departmental officers of Mumbai division.

Communication with subordinates is independent of age, education and gender of officers.

Communication style of officers was analysed against their age, education and gender. It was assumed that it is independent of each other. Whether there is any relation between age, education, gender of officers and their communication style can be seen through following table.

Table No. - 8 : Summary of Chi Square test for Communication with Subordinates

Sr.	Variables	Chi Square Value	I	Chi Square Value	I	Chi Square Value	I
		Age		Education		Gender	
1	Communication is generated at top level	0.062	A	0.000	R	0.286	A
2	All communication is in writing	0.001	R	0.273	A	0.068	A
3	No much work related communication	0.002	R	0.000	R	0.042	R
4	Communication to solve problems	0.144	A	0.029	R	0.204	A

Source – Statistical analysis of primary data
(I – Interpretation; A – Accepted; R – Rejected)

The researcher has used Chi Square test for analysis of this hypotheses. The communication in the department is described in four different ways. Most of the communication is either generated at top level and also it is in writing. There is no much work related communication according to some officers. Problems can be solved through use of communication between officers and subordinates.

Different age groups were compared against the communication aspects. The age groups of officers are 18 to 25 years, 26 to 45 years and 46 to 60 years. The first and fourth statement is accepted against all age groups whereas the second and third statement is rejected according to the chi square values. It indicates that officers of all age groups accept that communication is generated at top level and it can be effectively used to solve problems. Officers deny that there is no much work related communication and also all communication is not in writing. Hence this hypothesis is accepted for variables 1 and 4 and rejected for variables 2 and 3 against age.

The educational qualifications of the officers were divided into four classes i.e. undergraduate, graduate, post graduate and any other professional qualification. The chi square values are accepted for variable 2 and rejected for variables 1, 3 and 4. It indicates that the officers of different education groups accept that the communication is in writing but deny all other variables related to communication.

Gender wise analysis says that both male and female officers accept that the communication is generated at top level and it is in writing. They deny that there is no much work related communication. They feel that communication can be used for problem solving. Hence, this hypothesis is accepted for variables 1, 2 and 4 and rejected for variable 3 against gender. Different groups have different perceptions about communication and it is proved that officers use communication for problem solving in the department.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

Most of the officers prefer to be cooperative with subordinates. It is their preferred working style. The limitation for this style of working is large span of control under each officer. It becomes impossible to have one to one communication frequently and for every particular task. Most of the officers show typical bureaucratic approach and are concerned more with strict follow up of rules and regulations than actual productive performance.

Being the government organisation Indian Railway strongly believes in written communication. A pat on back is equally effective but some special tasks need acknowledgement in written words only. Technical and complicated work is acknowledged by a letter or certificate whereas a quick task is appreciated through an oral word of appreciation.

Most of the decisions in railway offices are generated at Railway Board level. They are communicated to the zonal and divisional levels and the departmental officers have to implement it. The interpersonal communication is much stronger than the vertical communication. The work related communication is comparatively less because the job profile of every employee is fixed and they do this routine task for years together.

Very few officers like to communicate the decisions from the higher authorities but the working style of the organisation compels them to do so. The concentrated system of decision making does not give much freedom to the officers to take their own decisions.

The communication style in the department is typically bureaucratic. The officers will give the instructions and the subordinates are supposed to follow them. Even though officers prefer open communication with all there are lot of restrictions on such system. Active involvement of subordinates is very less.

There is lot of communication gap between two layers of hierarchy and the message does not reach clearly to the next level. The section officer of each department should take the responsibility to divide the work among the superintendants and they should get it done through the employees under their span of control. Values like impartiality and transparency in work should be strictly followed by the officers and they should set an example for their subordinates as well.

Span of control of each superior should be reduced to have proper control and effective administration. Due to large number of staff under the supervision of one officer the control becomes difficult and the superior lose his hold on the staff.

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Dr. Sonali Bhushan Deogirikar. "A critical analysis of Communication style of Indian railway officers with their subordinates." *International Journal of Business and Management Invention (IJBMI)*, vol. 12(3), 2023, pp. 79-86. Journal DOI- 10.35629/8028