

A Study of the Impact of Openness and Trust on the Quality of Interpersonal Relations within Organizations

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Abstract

Organizational efficiencies and effectiveness significantly depend on the motivation, involvement and efforts of employees across all levels. Employee performance, however, is affected by the quality of interpersonal communications within the organization, which plays a key role in influencing relationships, teamwork, conflict resolution, and motivation. Therefore, we need to study interpersonal communication within organizations in order to augment our understanding of the key issues within the field of Organizational Behavior. This exploratory study of interpersonal communication involved 368 randomly selected employees across three different levels from ten service-sector organizations. The objective of the study was to investigate the role of several key variables that are known to affect interpersonal communication, and to identify possible themes for future research. The data (quantitative and qualitative) was collected with the help of elaborate questionnaires and interviews, then tabulated and analysed by applying relevant tests like Chi Square, ANOVA, and Regression Analysis, generating intriguing findings. This paper focuses on the quality of the interpersonal relationships of the employees surveyed, and the role of key variables like Trust and Openness in affecting the perceived quality of these relationships. While the study found a positive relation between openness and the quality of interpersonal relationships within the organizations, surprisingly, it did not find a significant relation between trust and the quality of interpersonal relations. This seems to suggest that, within organizations, the quality of interpersonal relationships across the levels is influenced more by perceptions of openness than by the levels of trust between employees.

Key words: *Interpersonal communication, openness, trust, organizational communication*

JEL Classification:

1. Introduction

Ours was an elaborate exploratory study of interpersonal communication within selected organizations. The study attempted to investigate the effectiveness of communication, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and several variables that could affect them (like age, gender, tenure, educational qualifications, first impressions, listening effectiveness, stereotyping and other biases, openness, trust, and conformity with managerial expectations) across three levels within ten large service-sector organizations. In this paper, we report our findings on the impact of *openness* and *trust* on the quality of interpersonal relations within the organizations, as revealed by the study.

Maintaining competitive advantage is at the core of any organization's efforts to enhance its effectiveness. Whether an organization aims to grow its market share through enhanced competitive advantages or improve its profitability through better organizational efficiencies, it needs a skilled, motivated and committed work force to achieve its immediate and strategic goals. Therefore, as Luthans (2008, pp.5) says, "the basic premise and assumptions of the field of organizational behavior are that managing the people -- the human resources of an organization -- have been, are, and will continue to be, *the* major challenge and critical competitive advantage," for any type of organization.¹

This view is supported by several studies carried out during the last few decades; for example, in a study of 191 top executives at six Fortune 500 companies they found that poor Interpersonal communication within organizations was the single biggest reason for managerial failure (Hymowitz, 1998).² In another study by the Council for Communication Management, they reported that 64% of the employees interviewed do not generally believe what their managers say; 61% aren't well-informed of company's plans; while 54% don't get decisions explained well (Business Week, 1994)³.

Some of the key issues that the field of Organizational Behavior attempts to investigate, understand, and manage for enhancing organizational efficiencies and effectiveness are: Employee motivation, leadership, team work, engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty and organizational citizenship, etc. Each of these is closely related with the employees' interpersonal communication and relationships across the levels within the organization.

Interpersonal communication, a dynamic exchange of information, keeps us connected with others making it possible to exist and function in groups. It is only through communication with others that we learn who we are. In fact, the very genesis of our concept of 'self' lies in our interpersonal communications - as suggested by the sociologist Emile Durkheim who asserted that "the individual is just an abstraction" (Raven and Rubin 1976; Jansen 1997).⁴ The self is an abstract representation of the interpretation of one's past experience that led to the generation of personal data, which in turn is used for self-reference

as an agent in the processing of people-related information (Rogers and Kirker 1977, 2012).⁵ Two-way communication occurs between dyads, which means, two agents process information about each other using their ‘selves’ as references to ascribe intent and purpose to the ‘other;’ whereas, the flow increases by manifold within the group (organization) (Kaul, 1998).⁶ As a result, interpersonal conflict, which results from interpersonal exchanges, is an inescapable part of life (Urisny, 2003 cited in McCorkle and Reese, 2010),⁷ since no two selves are identical. Further, a host of variables like gender, age, tenure, role (and rank), personality, organizational culture, trust, voluntary disclosure (openness), globalization and diversity add to the complexities of interpersonal exchanges within organizations; which in turn influence employee perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. Employees not only use self-reference as an agent to make sense of interpersonal exchanges, they also use the outcomes of these exchanges as interpersonal feedback to evaluate and reassess the ‘self.’ (Sedikides and Strube, 1995, 2012)⁸

It seems, therefore, that employee attitudes towards peers, bosses and juniors may be significantly influenced by their interpersonal experiences within the organization. Further, the outcomes of their interpersonal exchanges are likely to influence job-satisfaction, motivation, team work, engagement, and organizational citizenship behavior. Not only does communication affect employee perception, attitudes and behavior, it is an integral part of the management process itself. For example, according to Koontz and Wehrich (1998), “It is no exaggeration to say that the communication function is the means by which organized activity is unified. It may be looked upon as the means by which social inputs are fed into social systems. It is also the means by which behavior is modified, change is effected, information is made productive, and goals are achieved.” In other words, without communication there can neither be organizations nor management.⁹

Interpersonal communications pervade all levels and forms of organizational communication and can significantly augment, distort or wreak havoc with organizational processes and employee performance, impacting organizational efficiencies and effectiveness as explained above. In this paper we will report on the impact of openness and trust on the quality of interpersonal relations within the organizations studied.

The objectives of this paper are:

1. To report on the quality of interpersonal relationships across three levels within the organizations, as revealed by the study.
2. To report on the impact of trust on interpersonal relationships within the organizations.
3. To report on the impact of openness on interpersonal relationships within the organizations.

2. Literature Review

Interpersonal communication within social contexts has been studied extensively and there are several theories that provide valid insights into the process. We will begin our review of literature by briefly discussing or summarizing some of the theories that are relevant to our study. The manner in which interpersonal communication occurs within organizations is in many ways similar to the way it happens in any other social context (or groups) therefore these theories provide us useful insights and can be used as tools for interpreting and explaining our findings.

According to the *Expectancy Violation Theory* proposed by Judee Burgoon in 1978, communication is the exchange of information that is high in relational content and can be used to violate the expectations of another, which will be perceived either positively or negatively depending on the liking between the two people. The Expectancy Violations Theory assumes that there are norms for all communication activities and if these norms are violated, there will be predictable outcomes (Burgoon, 1978; Afifi and Metts, 1988; Deutsch, Sullivan, Sage & Basile, 1991).¹⁰ According to this theory, the liking between the participants and their expectations influences understanding more than the construct of the messages.¹¹ It is unlikely that there would be any liking between interactants in the absence of openness and trust.

The *Politeness Theory* defines politeness as the expression of the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) toward another. FTAs are behavior of someone else that goes against what you want to put forward. Politeness consists of efforts to save Face for another. There are two types of faces, viz. Positive Face: The want to be thought of as a desirable human being, and Negative Face: The want not to be imposed upon by others. This theory also helps us note that the content of our message has little bearing upon the generation of meaning. Group structure, roles and perceptions seem to dominate nonverbal behavior which carries most of the meaning (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987).¹² This theory helps us justify our attempt to study interpersonal perceptions in order to better understand interpersonal communication within organizations. Politeness, as explained by this theory, would play a key role in determining the strength or quality of interpersonal relationships within organizations.

The *Social Penetration Theory* is a theory about the development of *relational closeness*. It states that relational closeness can progress from superficial to intimate and that closeness develops through self-disclosure. Self-disclosure (openness) is sharing with someone information, which helps him or her understand you. Self-disclosure is most revealing when the sharing is in the present and least revealing when the sharing is about the past (Jhonson, 1997)¹³. As we spend more and more time with others we tend to disclose more information

about ourselves. The theory highlights that satisfaction is derived from interpersonal communication through voluntary disclosure (Altman and Taylor, 1973), and also highlights why it is important to study openness in order to understand interpersonal communication better.¹⁴

Similarly, the *Johari Window*, put forward by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingram, which states that strong interpersonal relationships are based on open communications between or among people (Luft, 1984)¹⁵. By revealing things about oneself, which are not known to others, one builds trust and receives valuable feedback from others. Through such open communications greater self-awareness is achieved which leads to better relationships (Littlejohn, 1999; West and Turner, 2000; Griffin, 2000).¹⁶ Further research in this direction has led to the following findings (Walker, 2007)¹⁷:

1. Disclosure increases as relationships grow in strength.
2. Disclosure increases because people want to reduce uncertainty in relationships.
3. People tend to reciprocate openness or voluntary disclosure.
4. Only positive disclosure results in liking
5. With increasing levels of intimacy there is a greater tendency for negative disclosure than positive disclosure
6. People draw greater satisfaction from moderate levels of disclosure

The *Social Influence Theory* states that there are three ways in which we influence others. We may influence what they do, what they think and what they feel. These influence attempts may be overt or covert. This theory states that we are always involved in affecting behavioral changes in others, either consciously or unconsciously (Kelman, 1958),¹⁸ and probably this is why most behavior is learned and not inherent. In order to get others to alter their behavior we use tools like punishment and rewards and positive and negative reinforcements. Similarly, the theory of *Operant Conditioning*¹⁹ states that if we reinforce voluntarily done desired behavior, then we increase the likelihood of it being repeated, which means learning will occur (Skinner, 1971 and Peel, 2005).²⁰ Thus, behavior is modified by manipulating the consequences of the behavior (Buskit and Gerbing, 1990)²¹, either through positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, extinction or rewards (Robbins, 1998; Mackintosh, 2005)²². Interpersonal communication within organizations is a key tool (perhaps the key tool) used by managers across all levels to shape subordinate behavior, and the quality of their interpersonal relations within the organization can be considered an indicator of how adept managers are at shaping behaviors (which is also a key managerial function).

Social Judgment Theory states that we do not always have a fixed or determined attitude towards things (purport of messages received). We rate things between varying latitudes of most acceptable and most unacceptable. We easily accept messages that are seen as closer to

our most acceptable latitudes while do not seriously consider those, which are towards the most unacceptable latitudes (Sherif, Sherif and Nebergall, 1965)²³. This theory also draws attention to the importance of receiver involvement in the process of persuasion, and helps us justify our approach in this research. “Only understanding the person's judgment of the various alternative positions - only understanding the person's latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and non-commitment - will permit one to understand the individual's reactions to persuasive messages on the issue” (O’Keefe 1990).²⁴ The theory indicates that messages are evaluated and understood not on merit but on attitude. A person’s attitude towards others as well as towards himself affects his behavior. If his self-esteem (attitude toward the self) is high (positive) and he has a strong belief in his abilities then he is also has self-certainty. *Self-certainty* affects the manner in which one judges the self and the others. It also affects emotions. It influences the manner in which we formulate messages and build relationships. Attitudes about the ‘self’ influence emotions and give an indication about the manner in which one would respond to an acceptable or an unacceptable message (Cragan and Shields, 1998).²⁵ It seems from this theory that both openness and trust might also be linked with an individual’s levels of self-certainty. Self-certain people being confident might self-disclose more easily.

The *interpersonal deception theory*, as proposed by Judee Burgoon (1996), states that people purposefully lie and try hard that the lie should not get detected. However, information about the lie leaks in the form of cues visible in the nonverbal signs that accompany the message.²⁶ The theory seems to resonate with this famous quote form Edward T. Hall (1968) “*I have learned to depend more on what people do than what they say in response to a direct question, to pay close attention to that which cannot be consciously manipulated, and to look for patterns rather than content.*” Trust is one of the key variables in our study. If interpersonal deception is rampant and people seem to get a whiff of it through non-verbal cues, as suggested by this theory, then we are likely to find low levels of trust within organizations.

The *Relationship Development theory*, proposed by Mark Knapp, provides a model to explain the development of interpersonal relationships - explaining the experiences which lead to an increase in intimacy between interactants. This theory, too, is useful in the study of interpersonal communication within organizations because it explains how individuals *reciprocate* the interest shown by others leading to predictable increase in the levels of intimacy (Knapp, 1984).²⁷ This theory highlights the importance of reciprocal disclosure (openness) in building interpersonal relations.

The *Uncertainty Reduction Theory* presumes that the beginnings of interpersonal relationships are full of uncertainties, and that people want to reduce uncertainty in relationships through knowledge and understanding. In order to learn about others we may adopt passive, active or interactive strategies. That is, we may simply observe others from a distance or actively seek information by asking questions or we may interact with the person we want to observe (Berger and Calabrese, 1975).²⁸ If this theory is true then we may find a significant relation between biographical variables like age and tenure, and the quality of interpersonal communication within organizations. For example, as tenure increases interpersonal relationships within organizations would tend to get stronger.

The *Social Exchange Theory* proposed in 1952 states that people develop relationships by disclosing personal information when they perceive that the rewards of doing so are more than the costs. This theory is similar to the uncertainty reduction theory and the relational dialectics theory in the sense that the focus here too is on *reciprocity* and *voluntary* disclosure though a sort of cost-benefit analysis seems to be the basis of the communication (Harumi, 1977).²⁹

Having reviewed some of the key theories of interpersonal communication and openness, let us now study the role of trust in interpersonal communication. Baier (1986) defined trust as a reliance on someone's ability and willingness to look after rather than harm what has been entrusted to their care.³⁰ Baier's definition implies that trusting someone means that believing that they will do what we have entrusted them to do. Thus, trust is a belief (perception, if you will) based on the agent (perceiver) ascribing intent and capacity or competence to the target (Heironymi, 2008)³¹. Whether this belief results from the behavior of the target, or assumed characteristics of the target, or the context and situation which mandates a trusting position on the part of the perceiver, or inherent qualities of the perceiver itself, are all valid questions and themes for further research but lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Trust can also be considered an emotion (McLeod, C., 2014, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2014) because, like emotions, it generates intense feelings and clouds our perception making us reject unfavorable or negative information about someone we trust.³²

In this paper, we refer to trust in the light of Baier's definition, for the following reasons: While emotions are intense feelings directed toward a person, an object or an event resulting from experience (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) and can vacillate and change in the short term,³³ attitudes and beliefs are evaluative statements that can function as enduring predispositions to behavior (Breckler, 1984)³⁴. For example, an employee may be angry with his supervisor for not granting him leave on an occasion (an emotional response to the person and the event) but might still trust his supervisor's managerial or professional competence

based on perceptions of the latter's equitable behavior and technical or managerial skills. Therefore, the underlining trust in the manager (within the organizational context) might not necessarily break as a result of a negative emotion directed toward him on some occasion. In spite of the negative emotion, the subordinate might continue to trust the manager (within the organizational context) because of his or her ability and willingness to do what needs to be done in an equitable way. It will require a series of negative emotional responses to the manager's behavior to influence the affective part of the attitude, which could then result in cognitive and behavioral changes, resulting in the modification of the previous attitude, namely, that of trusting the manager (Breckler, 1984; Robbins, 1988, Anant, 2009).³⁵

Further, while feelings and emotions are transient and vacillate, attitudes and beliefs endure. When we trust someone, we adopt a position toward them that predisposes us to act in a certain way (over the long term); it is not just an intense feeling that could disappear once the moment is gone. Keeping Baier's definition of trust in mind, it can be argued that since managers are appointed by the organization (often not in consultation with subordinates) and not by the subordinates, the subordinates are not the ones who have entrusted the managers with the managerial functions. Therefore, it is unlikely that they will fully trust the managers to do what they have been entrusted to do (well, at least not in the early stages of the relationship; and often, never). However, they still need to work closely with their managers in order to function within the organization, and in order to do this effectively they need to form strong interpersonal relationships with their managers.

Let us proceed further to investigate whether this unavoidable lack of trust, within the organizational context, significantly hinders people's ability to form interpersonal relationships that are conducive enough for the effective day to day functioning of the organization.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

As indicated in the introduction, this paper attempts to answer three research questions. First, what is the quality of interpersonal relations within the organizations studied? Second, what is the relation between openness and the quality of interpersonal relations? Third, what is the relation between trust and the quality of interpersonal relations? Finally, we will also explore the relation between openness and trust, and identify and list the respective predictors of the three variables, as revealed from the study.

3.2 Research Design

We prepared an elaborate questionnaire to collect quantitative and qualitative data from randomly selected employees working across three different levels in ten service sector organizations. We had planned to interview 500 participants (across three levels) from the

selected organizations but managed only 368, which was adequate to apply the statistical tests.

Sample

The organizations chosen for the study are mainly service sector organizations. Every organization is among the best of its kind. The quality of interpersonal communications within the organizations is likely to affect the quality of services provided by the organizations; therefore, interpersonal communication within these organizations is the key to their performance. Being large organizations they provided an excellent opportunity to conduct the said research. The sample was randomly drawn from the organizations and we managed to get adequate number of responses from three different levels within each organization, to be able to apply the required statistical analysis.

Table 3.1: Sample

Organization	Frequency
1	24
2	23
3	11
4	14
5	29
6	46
7	56
8	69
9	37
10	59
Total	368

3.3 Data

The data collected was analyzed by applying relevant statistical tests like Chi-Square, ANOVA and Regression analysis. Once the data was tabulated and grouped we obtained the frequencies for the responses to each of the items in the questionnaire. Then we added the scores of the specific responses which measured specific variables. We classified the scores as low, moderate and high before using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for conducting statistical tests. Chi-Square tests were applied to explore the level of association between the variables. We also applied the Multiple Regression Analysis to know how much of each dependent variable could be explained by the cumulative effect of the independent variables. Finally, stepwise regression analysis was done to eliminate some of the superfluous variables.

The following is a report on our findings pertaining to three variables (quality of interpersonal relations, openness, and trust) and the level of association between them, as revealed from the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Quality of Interpersonal Relationships within the Organization

We obtained the following responses to the items that measured the perceived quality of the respondent's interpersonal relationships within the organization:

Twenty five percent of the respondents said that they enjoyed 'best possible' relations with *the boss*; 44% said they 'generally get along well' with him/her; 28% said they had friendly relations with the boss but admitted to having occasional arguments and 3% reported frequent arguments or 'too much friction'.

Twenty four percent of the respondents said that they enjoyed 'best possible' relations with their *subordinates*; 37% said that they 'generally get along well' with them; 36% enjoyed friendly relations but admitted to having occasional arguments and 2% reported 'frequent' arguments' or 'too much friction' with subordinates.

Twenty nine percent of the respondents said that they enjoyed 'best possible' relations with their peers; 41% reported that they 'generally get along well'; 29% said that the relations were 'friendly' but admitted to having occasional arguments and only 1% of the respondents said that they have 'frequent arguments with their colleagues, or that there is too much friction.

It can be seen from these responses that an overwhelming majority of the respondents reported that they generally get along well with their peers, bosses and subordinates. A greater percentage of respondents reported having occasional arguments with subordinates than with bosses or peers. Could this be an indication that disagreement from a subordinate is more likely to be perceived as an 'argument' than one's own disagreement with the boss? Perhaps there exists a self-serving bias that puts the subordinate at a disadvantage during interpersonal exchanges within organizations.

4.2 Openness in communication

How open do respondents think they are with the boss, with peers and with subordinates? When asked whether they avoid disclosing their feelings or opinions to the *boss*, 5% of the respondents said that they 'always' avoid; 33% said that they mostly do; 45% said 'sometimes' they do; 12% said 'rarely' and 5% said 'never.'

Three percent of the respondents said that they 'always' avoid disclosing their feelings or opinions to their *co-workers (peers)*; 34% said that they 'mostly' do; 37% said they 'sometimes' do; 20% said 'rarely' and 6%, 'never.'

Eight percent of the respondents said that they ‘always’ avoid disclosing their feelings or opinions to their *subordinates*; 28% said that they ‘mostly’ do; 39% said ‘sometimes;’ 19% said ‘rarely;’ and 6% said ‘never.’

Thus, if a little under 40% of the people in organizations generally do not disclose their true feelings and opinions to their colleagues (bosses, peers and subordinates), and another 40% at times refrain from doing so, what can be inferred about the level of openness in communications within organizations?

How open respondents think their bosses are?

Six percent of the respondents ‘always’ felt that their boss avoids disclosing his feelings or opinions to them; 30% felt that he ‘mostly’ does so; 41% said ‘sometimes’ he does; 18% said ‘rarely’ and 4% said ‘never.’

How open do respondents think their subordinates are?

Two percent of the respondents said that their subordinates ‘always’ avoid disclosing their feelings or opinions to them; 19% said that they ‘mostly’ do so; 57% said ‘sometimes;’ 19% said ‘rarely,’ and 3% said ‘never.’

There seems to be a significant difference in the perceptions of the openness of bosses and that of subordinates. Thirty six percent of the respondents always or mostly felt that their bosses avoided disclosing their feelings or opinions; only 21% felt the same about their subordinates. It seems that although most people believe that they have good interpersonal relations with their bosses, peers and subordinates, interestingly, the percentage of people who feel that their bosses are not open is about twice the percentage of people who feel the same about their subordinates.

In addition, this is what we found regarding how candid people are when it comes to voicing disagreement with the boss: Nineteen percent of the respondents ‘strongly agree’ with the statement, “*if you totally disagree with your boss it is best to let him/her know how you feel;*” 49% ‘agree; 21% ‘can’t say;’ while 11% disagree. Thus, most people seem to be willing to openly express their opposition to the boss but there are a significant 32% who aren’t so sure.

Further, nine percent of the respondents ‘always’ feel that, “*in their organization it always pays to speak the truth;*” 33% ‘mostly’ feel this way; 33% ‘sometimes’ do; 16% ‘rarely’ do and 8% ‘never’ do.

Thus we can see from these responses that *over half* the people in the organizations do not believe that honesty pays. Twenty four percent ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ feel it pays while 33% only ‘sometimes’ feel it does. When we contrast this with the 75% of the respondents who said that they are effective communicators and that they ‘always’ or ‘mostly’ communicate effectively

(reported in a previous paper), we realize that a significant number of ‘effective communicators’ seem to feel that it generally does not pay to speak the truth.

These responses indicate that a large number of employees probably do not believe in open and honest communication (especially when it involves upward communication).

On the other hand, a large number of employees had said that they have excellent relation with bosses, peers and subordinates. Therefore, from the frequencies of the responses it seems that there is either a weak relation or no relation between openness in communication and the quality of interpersonal relations within the organizations. However, this would be an erroneous conclusion as the factors which affect openness are also important factors affecting the quality interpersonal relationships within organizations. For example, culture could be one of the reasons why most people do not regard it best to be open with managers. Similarly, people would be less likely to be open if they did not trust that the information disclosed would not be used against them. In this sense, openness and trust, or culture and openness do affect each other. We will see later in this paper what the statistical tests revealed about these variables.

4.3 Interpersonal relations and trust

Downward trust

Eight percent of the respondents ‘strongly agree’ with the statement that, “*managers do not appreciate disagreement from subordinates;*” 49% ‘agree;’ 24% ‘can’t say;’ while 18% ‘disagree’ and 1% ‘strongly disagree’. Thus, a significant majority reported that ‘disagreement’ from the subordinates is generally scorned at by higher-ups within organizations.

An even greater number of people (75%) seemed to believe that, “*most managers expect subordinates to ‘strictly follow’ instructions.*” Thirteen percent of the respondents ‘strongly agree’ with this statement; 62% ‘agree;’ 14% ‘can’t say;’ while 9% ‘disagree;’ and 2% ‘strongly disagree.’ Recent trends in corporate training lean towards fostering creativity in employees but this attitude of managers seems to be a big creativity killer.

Twelve percent of the respondents said that they ‘always’ believed the information received from their subordinates; 55% said they ‘mostly’ do; 29% said ‘sometimes;’ and 4% said ‘rarely’ or ‘never’. It seems that though most managers tend to believe the information received from subordinates they do not trust their abilities and expect them to strictly follow instructions. Therefore, though it seems that generally speaking most managers trust their subordinates, it seems that that they trust the subordinates’ words more than they trust their actions (evident from the fact that 75% believe managers want subordinates to strictly follow instructions).

Upward Trust

A significant number of people within organizations seemed to believe that, “*even when the boss invites opposition to his views it is best to agree with him.*” Eleven percent ‘strongly agree’ with this statement; 35% ‘agree;’ 22% ‘can’t say;’ while 27% ‘disagree;’ and 5% ‘strongly disagree.’ This indicates that a large number of people either do not generally trust their bosses’ intentions or feel the boss is incapable of accepting divergent viewpoints.

A significant number of people believed that, “*by disagreeing with the boss one always invites trouble.*” Nine percent of the respondents ‘strongly agree’ with this statement; 35% ‘agree;’ 22% ‘can’t say;’ while 31% ‘disagree;’ and 3% ‘strongly disagree’. *When such a large number of people seem to ‘agree’ with whatsoever the boss says just to avoid trouble, it does not bode well for the organization.*

A large number of people seemed to believe that, “*it is practically impossible to give honest feedback to the boss.*” Eight percent of the respondents ‘strongly agree’ with this statement; 34% ‘agree;’ 16% ‘can’t say;’ while 36% ‘disagree;’ and 6% ‘strongly disagree’. Thus, it seems that about half the *people* in the organization never attempt to give ‘honest’ feedback to their bosses.

Twenty five percent of the respondents said that they ‘always’ believe the information they receive from their bosses; 54% said that they ‘mostly’ do; 20% said ‘sometimes’ they do and 1% said ‘rarely’ or ‘never’. Thus, 21% of our respondents indicated that they generally do not believe the information received from managers as compared to the figure of 64% reported by the Council for Communication Management, (Business Week, May 16, 1994, p. 8).³⁶ Hence it seems that that the average Indian subordinate is more likely than the average American subordinate to believe the information received from his or her manager.

However, it seems that the trust between bosses and subordinates exists only as far as believing the information received is concerned. There seems to be a mutual distrust when it comes to actions. This seems to be a drawback and may negatively affect teamwork and even routine activities for which people are indirectly dependent on others within the organization. It seems that neither the bosses nor the subordinates expect each other to walk the talk.

Trust in general

A majority of the people (57%) were confident that people in their organizations work hard while only half the respondents asserted that they are honest in their work. Eleven percent of the respondents said that they ‘always’ feel that by and large people are hard-working; 46% ‘mostly’ feel that way; 35% feel it ‘sometimes;’ 7% rarely feel so; and 1% ‘never.’

Seven percent of the respondents said that they ‘always’ feel that by and large people are honest in their work; 43% said that they ‘mostly’ feel that way; 37% said that they ‘sometimes’ do; and 12% said ‘rarely’ or ‘never’. Therefore we found that the respondents were somewhat polarized around Theory X (which states that individuals cannot be trusted to take initiative and work hard) and Theory Y (which states that individuals like to work and can be trusted to work hard) (McGregor 1960, Sahin, 2012) when it comes to trusting employees to work hard.³⁷

An almost equal number of people agreed and disagreed with the statement that, “*most managers in their organization always state the truth.*” Six percent ‘strongly agree;’ 30% ‘agree;’ 29% ‘can’t say;’ while 32% ‘disagree;’ and 3% ‘strongly disagree’. It seems that about half the people in organizations believe that their managers do not always state the truth.

Eleven percent of the respondents ‘strongly agree’ that *there is great trust among managers in their organization*; 50% ‘agree;’ 27% ‘can’t say’ while 12% ‘disagree.’ We see that the majority of the respondents perceive high levels of trust among managers in their organizations *though a significant number among them feel that managers do not always state the truth.* Strangely, even though most people perceive that managers in their organization do not generally speak the truth they also feel that there exists a great trust among managers.

4.4 Statistical Analyses

4.4.1 Results from the Chi Square tests

Quality of Interpersonal Relations and Levels of Openness in communication:

Table 4.1: Openness * Quality of Interpersonal Relationships

Crosstab						
			Quality of IR			Total
			Low	Moderate	High	
Openness	Low	Count	25	43	29	97
	Moderate	Count	51	94	33	178
	High	Count	17	43	33	93
Total		Count	93	180	95	368

Pearson Chi-Square Value: 11.363; degrees of freedom: 4

The calculated value of χ^2 (11.363) is more than the tabulated value (9.488) for 4 degrees of freedom at .05 level of significance. Therefore we conclude that there is a relation between the quality of interpersonal relationships and openness in communication within the organizations.

Interestingly, the percentage of people who perceived ‘low’ quality of interpersonal relationships in their organizations was highest in the group which also perceived ‘low’ levels of openness. The percentage of people who perceived ‘high’ quality of interpersonal

relationships was highest in the group which also perceived 'high' levels of openness in communication. And, the highest percentage of people who perceived 'moderate' quality of interpersonal relations was also the group that perceived 'moderate' levels of openness.

The results show that there seems to be a positive relation between the two variables and that people who perceive high levels of openness in interpersonal communication within organizations are also likely to perceive better quality of interpersonal relationships.

The Quality of Interpersonal Relationships and Trust:

Table 4.2: QIR * Trust

Crosstab						
			Trust			Total
			Low	Moderate	High	
QIR	Low	Count	26	46	21	93
	Moderate	Count	39	87	54	180
	High	Count	21	47	27	95
Total		Count	86	180	102	368

Pearson Chi-Square Value: 2.391; degrees of freedom: 4

The calculated value of χ^2 (2.391) is less than the tabulated value (9.488) for 4 degrees of freedom at .05 level of significance. Therefore, we conclude that trust does not seem to have a relation with the quality of an employee's interpersonal relationships within the organization.

Trust and openness:

Table 4.3: Trust * Openness

Crosstab						
			Openness			Total
			Low	Moderate	High	
Trust	Low	Count	24	49	13	86
	Moderate	Count	51	76	53	180
	High	Count	22	53	27	102
Total		Count	97	178	93	368

Pearson Chi-Square Value: 9.036; degrees of freedom: 4

The calculated value of χ^2 (9.036) for 4 degrees of freedom is less than the tabulated value (9.488) at .05 level of significance. Therefore we conclude that trust does not seem to be related with the levels of openness in communication.

These are interesting findings and contrary to expectations. Let's now see what the results from the Regression analyses revealed:

4.4.2 Results from Regression Analyses

Predictors of Trust in Communication:

From multiple regression analysis we found that the following predictors had a cumulative effect of 4.7% on Trust:

Effective communication (what respondents perceive it to be); openness in communication; conformity with expectations; quality of interpersonal relations within the organization; age; perceptions of the communication effectiveness of managers (within the organizations); listening effectiveness; awareness of the impact of physiological factors on communication; respondents' perception of their own communication effectiveness; perceived communication effectiveness of the boss; conflict resolution; and the importance accorded to first impressions. (*Dependent Variable: Trust; R Square value: .047*)

From stepwise regression we found that the perception of the communication effectiveness of managers within the organization was the most important variable which had an effect of 1.5% (Revised R Square value: .015)

**Table 4.4: Stepwise Regression
Dependent Variable: Trust in Communication**

Model Summary										
Model	Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	L-H Communication effectiveness of managers	.124(a)	.015	.013	.707	.015	5.582	1	359	.019

From these findings it seems that the perception of a manager's efficacy (in this case his or her ability to communicate effectively) is probably the most significant predictor of the level of trust in interpersonal communication within organizations. Further, it is interesting to note that when we applied stepwise regression analysis, openness was eliminated as one of the superfluous variables. Therefore, it seems that, within the organizational context, openness does not necessarily lead to the formation of trust.

Predictors of openness in communication:

Through multiple regression analysis we found the following predictors of openness in communication within organizations:

The following variables had a cumulative effect of 20.2% on openness: Trust; conflict resolution; importance accorded to first impressions; age; awareness of the impact of physiological factors on communication; conformity with expectations; listening effectiveness; effective communication (what respondents perceive it to be); communication effectiveness of respondents; communication effectiveness of boss; quality of interpersonal

relations; and communication effectiveness of managers within the organization. (Dependent Variable: Openness in communication. R Square Value: .202)

From stepwise regression we found that listening effectiveness had a 10.4% effect on openness; the boss' communication effectiveness had a 2.5% effect; importance accorded to first impressions had a 3.2% effect and the effectiveness of managers had a 1.9% impact.

**Table 4.5: Stepwise Regression
Dependent Variable: Openness in Communication**

Model Summary										
Model	Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	L-H listening effectiveness	.322(a)	.104	.101	.680	.104	41.649	1	359	.000
2	L-H Communication effectiveness of boss	.359(b)	.129	.124	.671	.025	10.199	1	358	.002
3	L-H Importance of First Impressions	.401(c)	.161	.154	.659	.032	13.734	1	357	.000
4	L-H Communication effectiveness of managers	.424(d)	.180	.170	.653	.019	8.057	1	356	.005

It is not surprising that the quality of listening had the most significant effect on openness in communication, but what is interesting is that the perceptions of the boss' effectiveness as a communicator and of other managers within the organizations, along with the importance accorded to first impressions were the other main predictors. (Revised R Square: .180)

Therefore we can conclude that effective listening between interactants is a key predictor of openness in interpersonal communication within organizations. It is interesting to note that from stepwise regression trust in communication was eliminated as a significant predictor of openness. Probably, people within organizations, are not necessarily open with those whom they trust. These results seem to cast a doubt on the validity of the Johri Window and some of the theories related to voluntary disclosure, discussed earlier, which suggest that trust and stronger interpersonal relationships can be built through openness and voluntary disclosure in communication.

Now, we come to the most important part of our study, namely, to investigate whether openness and trust contribute to the strength of interpersonal relationships within organizations.

Predictors of the strength of interpersonal relations within organizations:

Almost 21% of the dependent variable (quality of interpersonal relationships within the organization) was explained by the cumulative effect of the following variables: listening effectiveness, respondents' perception of their own communication effectiveness; trust; respondent's awareness of the impact of physiological factors on communication; conformity with expectations; perceived communication effectiveness of the boss; conflict resolution, importance accorded to first impressions, age, effective communication (what respondents perceive it to be), openness; and perceptions of the communication effectiveness of managers (within the organization). (Dependent variable: Quality of interpersonal relationships. R Square Value: .209)

By applying Stepwise Regression Analysis we eliminated the superfluous variables and found that awareness of the impact of physiological factors had a 7.4% effect on the quality of interpersonal communication; communication effectiveness of the boss had a 5.9% effect; importance accorded to first impressions had a 3% effect; respondents' perceptions of their communication effectiveness had a 1.3% effect; and the respondents' perception of what effective communication means had a 1.1% effect. (Dependent variable: Quality of Interpersonal Relationships. Revised R Square Value: .187)

**Table 4.6: Stepwise Regression
Dependent variable: Quality of Interpersonal Relationships within Organizations**

Model Summary										
Model	Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	L-H Awareness of physiological factors	.272(a)	.074	.071	.691	.074	28.621	1	359	.000
2	L-H boss' communication effectiveness	.364(b)	.132	.127	.670	.059	24.140	1	358	.000
3	L-H First impressions	.403(c)	.162	.155	.659	.030	12.795	1	357	.000
4	L-H Respondents' communication effectiveness	.419(d)	.176	.167	.654	.013	5.814	1	356	.016
5	L-H Perceptions of effectiveness	.433(e)	.187	.176	.651	.011	4.931	1	355	.027

At first glance, the results from the stepwise regression analysis seem rather surprising as both openness and trust have been eliminated from the model, indicating that these two variables play a minor (or negligible) role as predictors of the quality of an employee's

interpersonal relations within the organization. However, if we revert to the frequencies of the responses reported in sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 of this paper we can see a pattern emerging. A significant number of respondents seem to have reported having high quality of interpersonal relationships with bosses, peers and subordinates, while simultaneously reporting low levels of trust.

Further, the chi-square tests too showed no relation between trust and the quality of interpersonal relationships. However, they showed a significant relation between openness and the quality of interpersonal relations within the organizations.

A reflection on the all the findings from the study reported in this paper brings us to the following conclusions and recommendations:

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The following is a summary of our key findings pertaining to the three variables:

Quality of interpersonal relations: Most of the respondents (61-70%) reported that they generally get along well with their peers, bosses and subordinates. More people reported having occasional arguments with subordinates than with bosses or peers. Perhaps disagreement from a subordinate is more likely to be perceived as an 'argument' than one's own disagreement with the boss, and there exists a self-serving bias that puts the subordinate at a disadvantage during interpersonal exchanges within organizations.

Openness: Forty percent of the people in organizations generally do not disclose their true feelings and opinions to their colleagues (bosses, peers and subordinates). Thirty six percent always or mostly feel that their bosses do not disclose their true feelings and opinions; while only 21% feel the same about their subordinates. Thus, although most people believe that they have good interpersonal relations with their bosses, peers, and subordinates, interestingly, the percentage of people who feel that their bosses are not open is about twice the percentage of people who feel the same about their subordinates.

While most people seem to be willing to openly express their opposition to the boss a significant 32% seem to generally refrain from doing so. Twenty four percent rarely or never feel that it pays to speak the truth, while 33% only sometimes feel it pays. It seems that a large number of employees probably do not believe in open and honest communication (especially when it involves upward communication).

Trust: Fifty seven percent of the respondents report that 'disagreement' from the subordinates is generally scorned at by higher-ups within organizations. Seventy Five percent feel that managers expect employees to strictly follow instructions. It seems, therefore, a sort of mechanistic culture prevails in these organizations stifling creativity and adversely affecting trust. While most managers seem to believe the information they receive from subordinates they do not seem to believe in their ability or willingness to act as needed.

Alarming, 46% of the respondents believe that even when the boss invites disagreement it is best to agree with his views, while 44% feel that it is practically impossible to give honest feedback to the boss. On the other hand, 79% tend to believe the information received from the boss. Thus, while people across the levels seem to tend to believe the information received from both upward and downward communication (albeit cautiously, and often with undertones of skepticism), there seems to be a mutual distrust when it comes to expecting others to walk to talk. Respondents were polarized in their beliefs about the honesty and truthfulness of people from other levels, however, paradoxically, the majority of the respondents felt that generally speaking people were hard-working.

Results from the analyses: From the chi-square tests we found a positive relation between openness and the quality of interpersonal relations; however, surprisingly, we did not find any relation between trust and the quality of interpersonal relations. We also failed to find any relation between trust and openness.

From regression analyses we found that the perception of the communication effectiveness of managers within the organization was the key predictor of trust, whereas listening effectiveness was the most significant predictor of openness. The perceptions of the communication effectiveness of the boss, of other managers within the organization, and the importance accorded to first impressions were the other key predictors of openness.

The key predictors of the quality of interpersonal relations within organizations were: The awareness of the impact of physiological factors on communication effectiveness; the perceptions of the boss' effectiveness, respondents' own effectiveness, and of what effectiveness means; and the importance accorded to first impressions.

To sum up, it seems that, within the organizational context, trust is not necessarily a key factor in the formation of strong interpersonal relationships. It seems that people can perceive high quality of interpersonal relationships with moderate levels of openness even when they do not really trust their colleagues across the levels.

Finally, we recommend that organizations invest in providing training to employees on enhancing listening effectiveness if they wish to foster a culture of openness. There is ample evidence in literature that a culture of openness (disclosure) facilitates communication (exchange and flow of information), and openness to experience facilitates creativity within organizations (McCrae, 1987).³⁸

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