

Communication Actions of Muslim Employees in Indonesian Catholic Institutions: A Study of Message Meaning in Organizational Culture

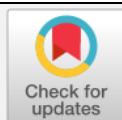
Yuli Nugraheni * , Henri Subiakto , and Santi Isnaini 

Airlangga University, Surabaya, East Java Province, 60132, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author: yuli.nugraheni-2022@fisip.unair.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on communication actions and organizational culture that prioritize the meaning of organizational members whose values differ from those of their organization. The study aims to describe the communication actions of Muslim employees due to the meaning of messages in organizational culture in Indonesian Catholic institutions. Using a qualitative approach, an interpretive paradigm, and a phenomenological method. Data collection techniques through interviews and observations. The study's subjects were Muslim employees at four Catholic universities in East Java who met the criteria. The data analysis technique followed the Moustakas sequence. The study's findings on the communication actions of Muslim employees in Catholic institutions are reflected in interactional communication, with adjustments to communicants. Contextual communication actions through the willingness to position themselves, listen, and understand the cultural context. Improvisational communication actions through communication styles with an emotional, flexible, open, and gimmick approach. Episodic communication actions through the participation of Muslim employees in retreat, recollection, and patron day activities. Virtually no previous research has used the model of organizational culture and organizational communication as a cultural performance to examine the experience of multireligious religiosity in religious organizations in the Indonesian context. This research also interprets it using a functional-performative integration framework. This study offers a multidisciplinary approach that bridges organizational culture theory, organizational communication theory, and religious studies—a practice rarely employed in studies of organizational communication in multireligious contexts in

Indonesia.

Keywords: *Communication Actions; Indonesian Catholic Institutions; Organizational Culture*

1. Introduction

Indonesia is characterized by religious diversity. The majority of the Indonesian population is Muslim. In addition, some residents are Christian, Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist; therefore, religious practices in Indonesia are highly diverse. This diversity is reflected in the national motto, "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*." Indonesian society thus represents a complex social landscape in which religion constitutes an important aspect of individual and organizational identity. As a result, organizations are often recognized based on their religious identity.

One type of organization is an educational organization, and one form of educational organization is the university. Indonesia has the third-largest number of universities in the world, after India in second place and the United States in first place. Indonesia has approximately 2,694 universities (Simanjuntak & Isbah, 2022). East Java is one of the provinces with the largest number of universities in Indonesia, with 107 institutions (Higher Education Data Overview, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Secretary General, Center for Data and Information Technology, 2023). East Java is also known for having many universities with distinct religious identities. There are 16 private Islamic universities and three state Islamic universities. In addition, there are four private Catholic universities and two private Christian universities (PDDikti, 2024).

Religious colleges are particularly interesting to observe as organizations with explicit religious characteristics, in which the foundation of the institution is grounded in the doctrines or teachings of a particular religion. Such organizations possess an organizational culture that is shaped by specific religious values that function as their identity. From Geertz's perspective, religion can be understood as a cultural system, in which culture and religion are deeply interconnected (Zurvani & Zarei, 2024). Referring to Geertz, it is therefore important to examine how religion is used as an organizational identity, including within educational organizations. Religious-based educational institutions often employ religious symbols as markers of organizational identity that contribute to the formation of organizational culture.

Research on organizational culture has been conducted in various countries, including the United Kingdom (Spicer, 2020), Nigeria (Bukoye & Abdulrahman, 2023), Tanzania (Komba, 2023), Finland (Ylönen & Björkman, 2023), and the Czech Republic (Mohelska & Sokolova, 2018). The study of organizational culture is important because it provides practical insights into how organizations can integrate cultural diversity into organizational management (Nugraheni & Puspa, 2023).

Studies on organizational culture are also closely related to communication. Organizational culture can be observed through the ways in which organizational members communicate (Littlejohn & Foss, 2019). Research on organizational culture focuses on communication activities as the site where culture is created and reproduced (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). One essential element of communication is the message, and communication activities involve the interpretation of messages. Organizational culture itself can be understood as a communicative message that is routinely conveyed to organizational members, thereby shaping patterns of communication and shared habits (Pace & Faules, 2015).

Numerous studies have examined communication and organizational culture in different contexts. Research has been conducted in Nigeria (Doonu Gbarale & Lebura, 2020), Saudi Arabia (Nasser & Jais, 2022), Pakistan (Usman, 2019), Spain (Díaz-Soloaga, 2019), and India (Shameem & Rengamani, 2018). Similar studies have also been carried out in Indonesia (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Fikri & Ubaidillah, 2022; Syakur et al., 2020). Research in this field has addressed various organizational settings, including commercial organizations (Solanki et al., 2021), government organizations (Sulaiman et al., 2017), political organizations (Siregar et al., 2020), and educational organizations (Gochhayat et al., 2017).

This study focuses on four Catholic universities in East Java: Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya (UKWMS) Surabaya City Campus, Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya (UKWMS) Madiun City Campus, Universitas Katolik Darma Cendika (UKDC), and Universitas Katolik Widya Karya (UKWK). These universities are members of APTIK (the Association of Catholic Universities). According to Schein, organizational culture can be analyzed at three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 2009). These three levels are present in Catholic universities. The first level, artifacts, is represented by physical structures such as chapels and cross decorations, as well as spiritual activities that are routinely conducted in Catholic university environments. The second level consists of values articulated in the university's vision and mission. The third level comprises underlying assumptions, particularly the principles of Catholic education embodied in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. This study focuses specifically on organizational culture at the first level.

The four universities employ staff members from diverse religious backgrounds. Given this diversity, it is important to examine the communication actions of Muslim employees as they interpret organizational culture within Catholic institutions. Islam is the majority religion in Indonesia, and Muslim employees therefore represent members of the religious majority working within organizations characterized by a minority religious identity. The question arises as to how Muslim employees interpret Catholic values as communicative messages embedded in organizational culture. This issue is significant because not all organizational members necessarily interpret symbols and values in ways that align with organizational goals.

Previous studies have examined organizational culture in religious higher education institutions in various countries, including Christian higher education in the United States (Counts et al., 2022; Longman, 2019), Buddhist higher education in Thailand (Kraisin et al., 2020; Channuwong, 2015), Buddhist universities in France (Burmansyah, 2019), Islamic higher education in Tehran (Sholekar & Shoghi, 2017) and Uganda (Farooq, 2019, 2022), Catholic higher education in Mozambique (Vasco & Brandão, 2020), the Philippines (Batugal, 2019), and the United Kingdom (Sullivan, 2019), as well as Hindu colleges in India (Verma & Singh, 2018). In Indonesia, studies have examined Hindu higher education (Suci et al., 2018; Winia, 2020), Catholic universities (Ferdinand, 2021), Islamic work culture (Mufron et al., 2021), and organizational culture in Christian colleges in Java (Widjaja & Kuslina, 2022). In principle, a strong organizational culture supports effective communication among members and helps maintain organizational relationships and behavior (Thelen & Formanchuk, 2022).

Accordingly, the central research question of this study is how the communication actions of Muslim employees function as a form of interpreting organizational culture in Catholic institutions. The purpose of this study is to describe the communication actions of Muslim employees as they interpret organizational culture within Catholic universities. This research is conducted in response to the limited number of studies that integrate organizational culture and religious identity in higher education contexts. Although existing studies demonstrate that religious higher education institutions develop organizational cultures shaped by spiritual

values, relatively little attention has been given to how members of multireligious organizations interpret organizational values that differ from their own religious beliefs. These interpretations form the basis for communication actions within organizations. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the meanings of organizational culture as communicative messages in Catholic higher education institutions in East Java, Indonesia, using the theoretical framework of Pacanowsky and Trujillo, which conceptualizes organizational culture as a communicative performance that is interactional, contextual, episodic, and improvisational.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Edgar H. Schein's Organizational Culture Model

Various definitions of organizational culture have been proposed by scholars. Organizational culture has been described as something that is produced through daily interactions within organizations across various forms of communication (Littlejohn, 2019). Pacanowsky and Trujillo, as cited in West and Turner, argue that organizational culture constitutes an identity that distinguishes one organization from another (West & Turner, 2021). Organizational culture can also be understood as a shared pattern of behaving, thinking, and acting within a coordinated group, accompanied by expectations of reciprocity among its members (Serpa, 2016).

Meanwhile, Schein proposed a model of organizational culture consisting of three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. These levels range from tangible elements to intangible aspects of organizational life (Schein, 2009).

Schein illustrates this model as follows:

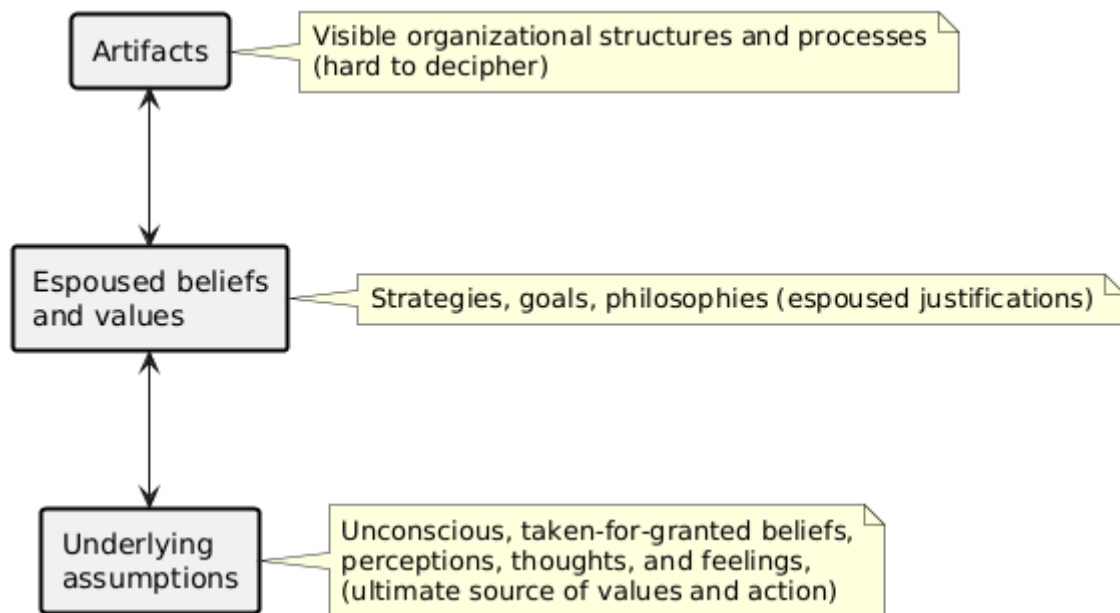


Figure 1. Levels of Culture

Source: Schein (2009)

At the first level, artifacts include all observable phenomena that can be seen, heard, and felt when individuals enter or interact within an organization. The second level, espoused beliefs and values, refers to articulated beliefs about “what ought to be done.” The third level comprises basic underlying assumptions, which consist of deeply embedded beliefs or values that are taken for granted by organizational members (Schein, 2009).

2.2. Organizational Culture as an Organizational Communication Message

Organizational culture can be understood as a message conveyed from communicators to communicants. Every message transmitted within an organization serves a particular purpose and objective. To achieve organizational goals, the values embedded in organizational culture must be internalized by organizational members. The presence of communicators, messages, and communicants characterizes communication activities within organizations, which Pace and Faules define as organizational communication (Pace & Faules, 2015).

Essentially, organizational communication is the process of creating meaning through interactions that occur within an organization. It is an activity through which relationships are formed, maintained, and transformed, thereby enabling organizations to function and evolve. Communication therefore emphasizes the role of individuals and processes in the construction of meaning (Pace & Faules, 2015).

Within this subjective approach, a well-known metaphor emerges: the cultural metaphor. This metaphor suggests that the existence of an organization is determined by its culture, which is reflected in patterns of interaction among its members (Pace & Faules, 2015). The strength of organizational culture is shaped by the intensity and quality of interactions, which are influenced by the communicators involved. In the process of interaction, communicators seek to maximize the use of available communication channels (West & Turner, 2021). Thus, organizational communication can be understood as a system of interaction and interdependence encompassing all elements of communication—communicators, messages, media, communicants, effects, and feedback—directed toward achieving organizational goals (Pace & Faules, 2015).

2.3. Communication Actions in the Perspective of Mitchell Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo

Pacanowsky and Trujillo are widely recognized as key contributors to organizational culture theory, particularly in its influence on organizational communication research. Their work examines organizational life by focusing on the behaviors of organizational members. Several studies applying organizational culture theory emphasize the role of communication processes. For example, Pacanowsky and Trujillo, as cited in Achmad et al. (2020), define organizational culture as a way of life within an organization. Similarly, Pacanowsky and Trujillo, as discussed by Saragih et al. (2024), explain that organizational members engage in various communication behaviors that contribute to the formation of organizational culture. Gularso and Subekti (2023) further emphasize that, as noted by Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, communication plays a crucial role in the development of organizational culture. According to Pacanowsky and Trujillo, culture is not something an organization possesses; rather, it is what the organization is (Mali et al., 2020).

A central component of organizational culture theory is the concept of performance. Pacanowsky and Trujillo argue that a distinctive organizational culture is produced through specific communication performances. Performance is conceptualized as a symbolic process of human behavior within an organization, focusing on how members acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to contribute to organizational life (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). In this sense, performance refers to the actions undertaken by organizational members to enact and convey organizational culture to others. Communication performances therefore function as mechanisms through which organizational culture is both constructed and demonstrated.

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, as cited in Miller, further argue that the study of organizational culture should concentrate on the communication processes through which culture is created. They propose that these processes can be conceptualized as cultural "performances" that are interactional, contextual, episodic, and improvisational. Cultural performances are interactional because they involve the participation of multiple organizational members and emphasize social action through dialogue rather than solitary behavior. They are contextual because they are embedded within the situational and historical contexts of the organization, and communicative performances are inherently shaped by these contexts. Cultural performances are episodic because they consist of distinct events in organizational life, each with identifiable beginnings and endings. Finally, cultural performances are improvisational because organizational members are not guided by fixed scripts; instead, flexibility emerges in each communicative episode. Although similar performances may recur, they are never enacted in exactly the same way (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).

By emphasizing the significance of cultural performances, Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo highlight the communicative processes through which organizational culture emerges and evolves over time. As noted by Walker (2021), their perspective underscores the central role of communication in shaping organizational culture and in defining organizations within their historical contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research focuses on lived experiences and the situations in which those experiences occur. The research paradigm is interpretive, as it emphasizes the exploration of experiences and meanings and the analysis of organizational culture as reflected in communication actions. This study adopts Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method. The core of Husserl's argument is that a phenomenon can be understood through an investigation of individuals' experiences while temporarily setting aside prior assumptions (Mortari et al., 2023). The distinctive feature of phenomenology lies in its orientation toward knowledge without presuppositions. To achieve this position, Husserl proposed a methodological process known as *epoché*.

The research was conducted at four Catholic universities in East Java: Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya (UKWMS) Surabaya City Campus, Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya (UKWMS) Madiun City Campus, Universitas Katolik Darma Cendika (UKDC) in Surabaya, and Universitas Katolik Widya Karya (UKWK) in Malang. These four universities are located in East Java, which was selected because it is the province with the largest number of Catholic universities in Indonesia, totaling four institutions. Moreover, these universities employ staff members from diverse religious backgrounds.

The research subjects were selected from organizational members who are Muslim and hold permanent employment status. Referring to Creswell, as cited in Dahal (2024), research participants are individuals who experience the phenomenon under investigation and are able to articulate their conscious experiences. Participants can describe their lived experiences, collaborate with researchers to explore the essence of the phenomenon, and construct meaning from those experiences. The number of participants in this study was four individuals, each representing one of the four universities. The participants included: MHS, a male laboratory assistant at the UKWMS Surabaya City Campus; YW, a female lecturer at the UKWMS Madiun City Campus; NY, a female lecturer at UKDC; and LK, a female lecturer at UKWK.

Data were collected using interview techniques. Seidman, as cited in Somayeh and Robab (2020), proposed a three-stage interview process grounded in Husserl's phenomenological

theory. The first stage focuses on life history, the second stage involves the reconstruction of experience, and the third stage emphasizes reflection on the meaning of experience. The interview process was conducted over a period of approximately one month.

In phenomenological research, data analysis follows a systematic sequence. This study adopted the analytical stages outlined by Moustakas and Polkinghorne, as described by Pelin and Soner (2015). The analysis was based on interview transcripts, focusing on significant statements and quotations that captured participants' experiences and understandings of organizational culture as a communication message within Catholic higher education institutions. These meanings served as the foundation for identifying communication actions. This initial analytical step is referred to as *horizontalization* (Lewis, 2015).

Subsequently, the researcher clustered the emerging meanings into several themes. The identified themes included: self-adjustment through interactional communication actions; understanding the role of the communicator through contextual communication actions; communication style through improvisational communication actions; and spiritual activities through episodic communication actions. Based on these themes, the researcher developed a textural description, which outlines participants' experiences related to organizational culture as a communication message, as well as a structural description, which explains the contextual conditions influencing those experiences. This analytical phase is known as *imaginative variation*.

Finally, the textural and structural descriptions were integrated into a composite description that captures the essence of the phenomenon under study, referred to as the invariant structure. This composite description was interpreted through the lenses of organizational communication theory, communication messages, organizational culture, and communication actions. Through these conceptual frameworks, the researcher examined and analyzed participants' meanings of organizational culture as a communication message that underpins communication actions within Catholic higher education institutions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Various Meanings of Organizational Culture

Table 1 presents the results of interviews with Muslim employees, highlighting significant statements and the diverse meanings that emerged regarding organizational culture in Catholic universities.

Table 1. Key Statements and Formulated Meanings of Organizational Members Regarding Organizational Culture

Informant	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
MHS	When it comes to the cross and the chapel, I consider it as if I am a guest from outside Widya Mandala.	Viewing oneself as a guest and perceiving Catholic institutions as someone else's home. Working in a Catholic institution is likened to being a guest in another person's home, with chapels and crosses viewed as house decorations.
LK	At that time, the recollections seemed rather general to me, not specific.	Interpreting spiritual activities as organizational activities that are open to everyone.
YW	I think the <i>Non Scholae Sed Vitae Discimus</i> slogan is in line with the principles of <i>Hablum Minallah</i> and <i>Hablum Minannas</i> .	Interpreting the slogan <i>Non Scholae Sed Vitae Discimus</i> as consistent with Islamic teachings of <i>Hablum Minallah</i> (relationship with God) and <i>Hablum Minannas</i> (relationships with others).
NY	In Catholicism, to increase spirituality,	Viewing the organizational culture of Catholic institutions

Informant	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
	we are lectured by a priest; in Islam, by a <i>kyai</i> . Your religion is your religion, my religion is my religion.	as fundamentally similar to Islam, in that religious differences coexist without negating one another.

Source: Researcher-processed data

The artifacts of the cross and the chapel are interpreted as decorations displayed in someone's home, leading to the perception that working at a Catholic university is akin to visiting another person's home. As expressed by MHS, these artifacts do not pose a problem because, as he noted, "it is someone else's house, and it is up to the owner to decorate it as they wish."

Another interpretation was conveyed by NY, who regarded the cross as merely a symbol, comparable to Islamic calligraphy of Quranic verses. It is seen primarily as a visual display or decoration. Similarly, the chapel is interpreted as a place of worship equivalent to a mosque. As NY explained, "It is the same as Friday prayers for Muslims; there, Mass is held every Sunday" (NY, UKDC Lecturer, December 6, 2024). NY equates Mass with the Islamic obligation of Friday prayer, emphasizing that its purpose is to remind employees of their religious duties. In Catholicism, spiritual guidance is provided by a priest, while in Islam it is delivered by a *kyai*. The principle upheld by NY is "your religion is your religion, and my religion is my religion," ensuring that religious practices do not interfere with one another.

Artifacts may also take the form of organizational activities or events. LK interprets recollections as organizational activities that are general in nature and not specifically directed toward Catholic doctrine. These events are perceived as open to all employees, regardless of religious affiliation.

Another form of artifact is a published value, such as an institutional slogan. YW interprets the slogan used at UKWMS Madiun, *Non Scholae Sed Vitae Discimus*, as expressing a profound philosophical message. According to YW, a similar understanding exists in Islam, where all actions, including studying and working, are regarded as forms of worship.

Based on Schein's framework, culture can be observed at different levels, allowing researchers to assess the extent to which cultural phenomena are visible to observers. These levels range from tangible elements that can be seen and felt to deeply embedded and largely unconscious basic assumptions, which constitute the essence of culture. At the most visible level, artifacts include all phenomena that can be seen, heard, and experienced when individuals enter or interact within an organization (Schein, 2009). This level is the most readily identifiable manifestation of organizational culture.

Overall, Muslim employees interpret the organizational culture of Catholic universities in several ways. They tend to view themselves as guests and perceive Catholic institutions as someone else's home. Working in a Catholic institution is therefore likened to visiting another person's residence. Artifacts such as chapels and crosses are interpreted as household decorations and religious symbols. Spiritual activities, including retreats, recollections, and Patron Days, are understood as organizational activities that are general in nature and open to all employees regardless of religion. The slogan *Non Scholae Sed Vitae Discimus*, meaning "we learn not for school but for life," is interpreted as consistent with Islamic teachings of *Hablum Minallah* and *Hablum Minannas*, which emphasize relationships with God and with fellow human beings. From this perspective, the organizational culture of Catholic institutions is perceived as compatible with Islam: priests and *kyai*, chapels and mosques, crosses and Quranic calligraphy coexist without negating one another.

Culture contains values that organizational members are expected to internalize. According to Pacanowsky and Trujillo's organizational culture theory, there are three underlying assumptions. First, organizational culture emphasizes the importance of members' presence and participation. Second, organizational culture is formed through symbols, which are inherently meaningful and are continuously created, interpreted, and perceived by organizational members through both verbal and nonverbal communication. Third, organizational culture is characterized by diversity and variation, which emerge from the differing perceptions held by organizational members (West & Turner, 2021).

4.2. Communication Actions of Muslim Employees in Catholic Institutions

This section presents the results of interviews with Muslim informants and the various meanings that underlie organizational members' communication actions within Catholic universities.

Pacanowsky and Trujillo's perspective emphasizes communication as a cultural process in which culture is not only transmitted through communication but is also constituted by it. They argue that the study of organizational culture should focus on communication activities as the site where culture is created. Furthermore, they conceptualize these communication activities as cultural "performances" that are interactional, contextual, episodic, and improvisational.

4.2.1. Self-Adjustment: A Performance of Organizational Culture Through Interactional Communication Actions

Table 2 presents the statements and meanings of Muslim employees regarding organizational culture in Catholic institutions as interactional communication actions.

Table 2. Organizational Members' Statements and Meanings Regarding Organizational Culture as an Interactional Performance

Informant	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
MHS	If I am here, I adjust to whom I am talking.	Interactional communication involves adjustment and conformity.
YW	I get along with everyone.	Interactional communication involves openness and getting along with anyone.
LK	That is my character; it is difficult for me to be passive.	Interactional communication involves positioning oneself to initiate relationships.
NY	We do not call them by name so that they become accustomed to being respectful.	Interactional communication involves mutual respect.

Source: Researcher-processed data

Interactional communication is enacted by organizational members through processes of self-adjustment. This was expressed by MHS based on his interpretation of organizational culture in Catholic universities:

"Here, I adjust to whom I am talking. For example, with senior colleagues, it is different from juniors; the level of politeness is different. With younger colleagues, I can use everyday language and be less formal. When chatting with employees, I consider their age, position, and work unit before adjusting my communication. With students, it is also different – some students are quiet, others try to appear relaxed – so

we also have to adjust to make the interaction comfortable.” (MHS, Administrative Staff, UKWMS Surabaya City Campus, November 6, 2024)

MHS’s adjustments involve modifying communication styles when interacting with colleagues and students. Differences in seniority, age, position, and organizational unit are taken into account. In interactions with students, adjustment is based on students’ personal characteristics, such as whether they are quiet or more expressive.

YW interprets interactional communication as a willingness to be open. As a Muslim employee working in a Catholic institution, YW stated that openness toward everyone is essential, and that social interactions should not be selective:

“For me, I feel equally comfortable because I socialize with everyone.” (YW, Lecturer, UKWMS Madiun City Campus, November 29, 2024)

Interactional communication is also interpreted as the courage to initiate communication. LK explained that working in a Catholic institution encourages her to take the initiative and actively assume the role of a communicator:

“That is just my character. Being passive is difficult for me.” (LK, Lecturer, UKWK, December 12, 2024)

Another dimension of interactional communication is mutual respect and politeness among organizational members. As described by NY:

“We do not call people by name because it helps cultivate respect. Even when I teach students, I get them used to addressing administrative staff as ‘Mr.’ or ‘Mrs.’ There is a hierarchy, right?” (NY, Lecturer, UKDC, December 6, 2024)

Cultural performances are interactional because they are collectively enacted and involve the participation of multiple organizational members. These performances are social in nature rather than solitary, emphasizing dialogue and interaction. Pacanowsky and Trujillo particularly highlight the interactional dimension of organizational life (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).

In Catholic universities, interactional performances of organizational culture enacted by Muslim employees are manifested through continuous adjustment to communicants. This adjustment is reflected in their willingness to be open, their courage to initiate communication, and their commitment to maintaining respect and politeness toward other organizational members. Thus, self-adjustment emerges as a form of organizational culture performance enacted through interactional communication actions.

4.2.2. Seeing the Role of Communicators: Organizational Culture Performances Through Contextual Communication Actions

This section presents the statements and interpretations of Muslim employees regarding organizational culture in Catholic institutions as contextual communication actions.

Table 3. Statements and Meanings of Organizational Members Regarding Organizational Culture as a Contextual Performance

Informant	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
YW	Thank God, I try to place myself. If I am with A, I speak this way, and if I am with B, I speak differently.	Understanding communication context means recognizing the communicator's role and ability to position oneself appropriately when communicating.
LK	There may be levels, meaning that dealing with leaders is different from dealing with colleagues or students.	Understanding communication context means recognizing the hierarchical position of communicants.
NY	Whether male or female, I look at their character – whether they are flexible, casual, or require formal communication – and I adjust.	Understanding communication context means recognizing and adapting to the character of the communicant.
MHS	So that they know the communication culture at Fikom – this is how we communicate.	Understanding communication context means understanding the prevailing communication culture.

Source: Researcher-processed data

Contextual communication actions are interpreted by YW as an awareness of oneself as a communicator. Understanding context implies that communicators must be able to position themselves appropriately, perform their roles effectively, recognize communicative boundaries, and demonstrate a willingness to listen in order to be accepted within the organizational environment.

"Alhamdulillah, I try to place myself in the situation. If I am with A, I speak one way; if I am with B, I speak another way. Even though it does not always work, I try to listen so that we can be accepted anywhere." (YW, Lecturer, UKWMS Madiun City Campus, November 6, 2024)

LK understands contextual communication as a communicator's willingness to adjust to the communicant. Communicators must recognize social and organizational hierarchies when interacting with leaders, colleagues, or students. Although the core message may remain the same, the choice of words and forms of address must differ. For example, when speaking to leaders, more formal terms of address such as "Sir" or "Madam" are used instead of informal pronouns.

"There may be levels – dealing with leaders, friends, and students is different. Even if the message is the same, the way of speaking changes, using terms like 'Sir' or 'Madam' to be more polite." (LK, Lecturer, UKWK, December 12, 2024)

NY defines contextual communication as the ability of communicators to understand the characteristics of their communicants. Various factors are considered, including gender, age, and communicative style – whether interaction should be formal or informal, relaxed or serious. Understanding these characteristics allows communicators to present themselves appropriately.

"I look at whether the person is male or female, whether they are flexible, can be joked with, or require formal communication. I also consider age and personal character. So, yes, we need to know how to carry ourselves." (NY, Lecturer, UKDC, December 6, 2024)

MHS defines contextual communication as an understanding of communication culture. Recognizing the context of communication involves understanding the norms and customs that govern interaction, even when communication occurs through digital media such as WhatsApp. Polite language must still be maintained to reflect the established communication culture.

“Even for something as simple as chatting with staff from another unit, we still use polite language. For example, if the laboratory lights go out and the technician is younger than me, I still communicate politely on WhatsApp so they understand the communication culture at Fikom – this is how we communicate.” (MHS, Administrative Staff, UKWMS Surabaya City Campus, November 6, 2024)

Cultural performances are contextual because organizational members’ actions both reflect and produce their communicative contexts. Communicative performances in organizational life are inherently contextual, as they are shaped by who the participants are, where interactions take place, and the occasions on which they occur (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). The contextual communication actions of Muslim employees in Catholic institutions are reflected in their ability to position themselves appropriately, perform communicative roles, recognize boundaries, and demonstrate a willingness to listen in order to gain acceptance within the organizational environment. These actions also involve sensitivity to hierarchical relationships, adaptation to the characteristics of communicants, and awareness of prevailing communication norms. Thus, by examining the role of communicators, organizational culture can be understood as being enacted through contextual communication actions.

4.2.3. Communication Style: A Performance of Organizational Culture Through Improvised Communication Actions

Table 4 presents statements and interpretations of Muslim employees regarding organizational culture in Catholic institutions as improvised communication actions.

Table 4. Statements and Meanings of Organizational Members Regarding Organizational Culture as an Improvised Performance

Informant	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
LK	With the students, I am quite close; I understand them quite well.	Improvisation in communication is enacted through an emotional communication style.
NY	It is still trial and error and adaptation; the system does not have to be rigid, and adjustments must be made to keep up with the times.	Improvisation in communication actions is enacted through a flexible communication style.
YW	The educational environment must be willing to listen to subordinates. Subordinates must also be able to speak up as long as there is a reasonable basis.	Improvisation in communication is enacted through an open communication style.
MHS	In the laboratory, there are routine meetings every two weeks, and to keep them from becoming boring, there are gimmicks.	Improvisation in communication is enacted through a communication style that incorporates gimmicks.

Source: Researcher-processed data

According to LK, improvisation in communication actions is enacted through the use of an emotional communication style, in which messages are conveyed by emphasizing emotions and

feelings. This style is commonly employed in interpersonal communication when the communicator and communicant share a relatively close relationship.

"I happen to be quite close to the students, and I understand them well. If I call them 'Le Ndok,' it means I care about them, but if I call them by their name, it means I am annoyed – especially if I use the term 'koe-koe,' which signals that I am upset." (LK, Lecturer, UKWK, December 12, 2024)

NY describes improvisational communication as a flexible communication style. Individuals who employ this style are able to adapt easily to different situations, audiences, and contexts, adjusting their manner of speaking in both formal and informal settings.

"It is still trial and error – continuous adaptation. The system does not have to be rigid; adjustments are necessary to keep up with the times. Needs also vary depending on whether we are dealing with students, lecturers, or the foundation, and these must be integrated." (NY, Lecturer, UKDC, December 6, 2024)

According to YW, improvisation in communication style is characterized by openness. An open communication style is transparent, honest, and two-way, allowing individuals to express their thoughts and feelings freely while receiving feedback constructively. This style involves a willingness to listen to and consider others' opinions and to respect differing perspectives. Such a communication style is particularly important in educational and organizational settings because it fosters an inclusive and supportive environment.

"When organizational leaders provide updates, they must be more creative. In education, leaders must be willing to listen to subordinates rather than merely giving orders. Subordinates should also feel able to speak up, as long as their input is reasonable and well grounded." (YW, Lecturer, UKWMS Madiun City Campus, November 29, 2025)

MHS describes improvisational communication as a communication style that incorporates gimmicks. A gimmick is a communication strategy that employs unique, interesting, or unconventional elements to capture attention and make messages more engaging and memorable. Some gimmicks are interactive in nature, encouraging participation through activities such as challenges or small incentives.

"In the laboratory, we have routine meetings every two weeks. To prevent them from becoming boring, we always include gimmicks – for example, someone whose name starts with a certain letter has to buy snacks. If it is Yuli, whose name starts with 'Y,' she buys candy. We then take a 15-minute break to eat before continuing the meeting." (MHS, Administrative Staff, UKWMS Surabaya City Campus, November 6, 2024)

Cultural performances are improvisational because flexibility emerges in each episode of communication enacted by organizational members (Littlejohn & Foss, 2019). Organizational performances differ significantly from theatrical performances because the communicative "scripts" of organizational members are not fixed; instead, many actions and interactions are

improvised (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). The improvisational communication actions of Muslim employees are therefore expressed through a variety of communication styles, including emotional, flexible, open, and gimmick-based approaches.

4.2.4. Spiritual Activities: A Performance of Organizational Culture Through Episodic Communication Actions

Table 5 presents the statements and meanings expressed by Muslim organizational members regarding organizational culture in Catholic universities as episodic performances.

Table 5. Key Statements and Formulated Meanings of Organizational Members Regarding Organizational Culture as an Episodic Performance

Informant	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
NY	For those who are Catholic, it might increase spirituality; for us, it is like being lectured by a cleric or a priest.	Retreats function as episodic acts of communication.
LK	We regularly have recollections, which I think are rather general.	Recollections function as episodic acts of communication.
MHS	It is still relevant to the world of education, including Patron Day; if I am not mistaken, its history is also related to education.	Patron Day functions as an episodic act of communication.
YW	We need reflection during Patron Day, not only to honor Saint John Paul II, but also to engage with a specific theme.	Patron Day functions as an episodic act of communication.

Source: Researcher-processed data

According to NY, retreats constitute episodic communication actions because they carry particular significance. Retreats are not merely religious events but also moments of deep reflection for employees on spiritual values.

"For Catholics, it might increase spirituality; for us, it is like being lectured by a kyai or a priest, and I listen." (NY, Lecturer, UKDC, November 6, 2024)

According to LK, episodic actions are reflected in the organization of recollections. These activities are considered episodic because they represent the values and identity of the institution. Recollections are not solely religious events but also moments for deeper reflection on spiritual values.

"We routinely hold recollections, and in my opinion, they are rather general." (LK, Lecturer, UKWK, November 6, 2024)

MHS interprets Patron Day as an episodic event marking the university's patron celebration. Each year, the UKWMS Surabaya City Campus and the Madiun City Campus routinely organize Patron Day events. Patron Day commemorates the university's patron saint, Saint John Paul II, and typically includes seminars and a thanksgiving Mass. This ritual is significant because it reaffirms the university's identity as a Catholic institution. Through this episodic event, employees develop a stronger sense of connection to the institution's history and values.

"Perhaps because there are symbolic figures, Catholic teachings become more pronounced. The presentation is well designed and remains connected to the world of

education, including its history.” (MHS, Administrative Staff, UKWMS Surabaya City Campus, November 6, 2024)

According to YW, Patron Day is episodic due to its symbolic meaning and collective identity. On Patron Day, a series of rituals and activities are conducted that reflect shared cultural values, traditions, and institutional identity. Communication during this event is rich in symbolism and often incorporates historical narratives that strengthen collective identity.

“Every event must have a theme. I think it helps unify perspectives – regardless of religion, we share the same goal. Patron Day requires reflection, not only honoring Saint John Paul II, but also engaging with a topic, such as listening to others. These themes are meaningful so that members of the community can coexist harmoniously.” (YW, Lecturer, UKWMS Madiun City Campus, November 29, 2024)

Cultural performances are considered episodic because they consist of distinct events within organizational life. Organizational members experience these events as having clear beginnings and endings, enabling them to distinguish one episode from another (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). Retreats, recollections, and Patron Days are episodic activities because they are conducted routinely and hold particular significance as moments for collective reflection on organizational values. Through these activities, organizational culture is reinforced, as they embody and communicate the institution's identity and core values.

Figure 2 presents a summary of the research findings.

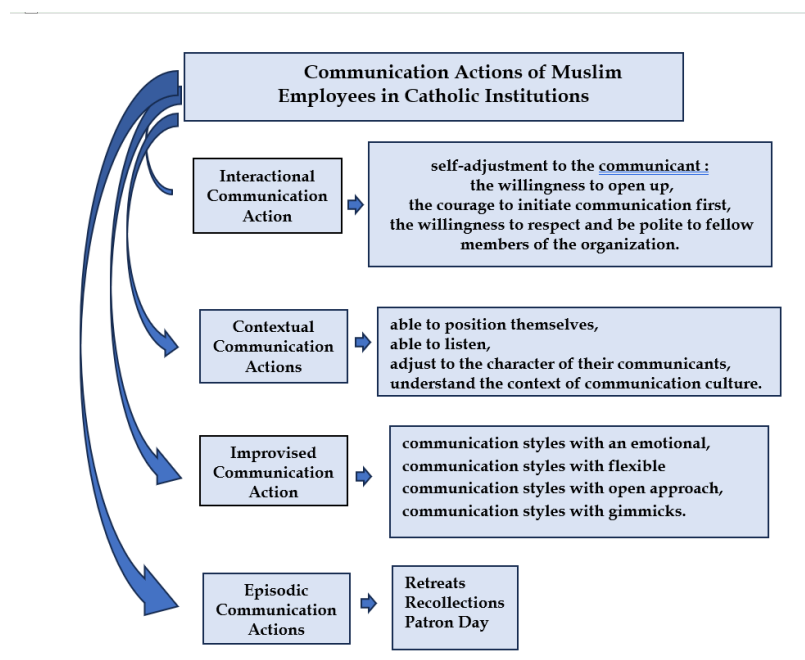


Figure 2. Summary of Research Results

The proportion of Muslim employees across the four Catholic universities ranges from approximately 10% to 35% of the total workforce. The figure illustrates the diversity of communication practices demonstrated by Muslim employees.

When examining the communication actions of Muslim employees as interpretations of communication messages embedded in the organizational culture of Catholic universities,

values of diversity, openness, and equality become evident. This finding is particularly noteworthy in institutions characterized by an exclusive organizational culture, defined by adherence to specific religious values that must nevertheless be maintained. This observation is consistent with Nugraheni et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of two-way communication and interpersonal dialogue in fostering a positive organizational culture.

Theoretically, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how communication messages are conveyed through organizational culture in higher education institutions within the Indonesian context. Practically, the findings provide insights for administrators of religious higher education institutions, offering a basis for strengthening organizational identity and developing communication strategies that accommodate the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of organizational members.

5. Conclusion

Muslim employees interpret organizational culture in Catholic universities as a form of communication message in several ways. They tend to view themselves as guests and perceive Catholic institutions as someone else's home. Working in a Catholic institution is therefore likened to visiting another person's residence. Chapel and cross artifacts are interpreted as household decorations and religious symbols. Muslim employees do not perceive these artifacts as problematic because they are installed in what is understood as another person's home, and thus it is considered the owner's right to decorate the space as they wish. Spiritual activities are also interpreted as organizational activities that are general in nature and open to all employees, regardless of religious affiliation. In addition, the motto *Non Scholae Sed Vitae Discimus* is interpreted as being aligned with the Islamic teachings of *Hablum Minallah* and *Hablum Minannas*, which emphasize relationships with God and with fellow human beings. From this perspective, the organizational culture of Catholic institutions is perceived as compatible with Islam: there are priests and *kyai*, chapels and mosques, crosses and Quranic calligraphy, all of which coexist without negating one another.

The communication actions of Muslim employees, as a result of interpreting organizational culture in Catholic universities, take the form of interactional, contextual, improvisational, and episodic actions. Interactional communication actions are enacted through self-adjustment to communicants, reflected in a willingness to be open, the courage to initiate communication, and a commitment to respect and politeness toward fellow organizational members. Contextual communication actions are demonstrated by communicators' ability to position themselves appropriately, listen actively, adapt to the characteristics of communicants, and understand prevailing communication norms. Improvisational communication actions are expressed through various communication styles, including emotional, flexible, open, and gimmick-based approaches. Episodic communication actions are reflected in participation in spiritual activities such as retreats, recollections, and Patron Days.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted exclusively at Catholic higher education institutions in East Java; therefore, the findings reflect the cultural context, organizational settings, and communication practices specific to that region. Second, the limited number of participants, which emphasizes the depth of Muslim informants' subjective experiences, restricts the generalizability of the findings. Third, the theoretical focus on organizational communication through the lens of organizational culture limits the discussion of other communication aspects that may also influence communication practices but were not explored in this study.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal affiliations that could have influenced the research or findings presented in this article.

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About the Authors

1. **Yuli Nugraheni** is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia. Her research interests include organizational communication, communication management, and public relations.
Email: yuli.nugraheni-2022@fisip.unair.ac.id
2. **Henri Subiakto** received his doctoral degree from Universitas Airlangga in 2010. He is a Professor in the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia. His research interests focus on communication policy.
Email: henri.subiakto@fisip.unair.ac.id
3. **Santi Isnaini** received her doctoral degree from Universitas Indonesia in 2014. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia. Her research interests include organizational communication, public space, city branding, and corporate studies.
Email: santi.isnaini@fisip.unair.ac.id