

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i6.2081>

# The Contribution of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) in Shaping Employees' Experience within the Organizational Communication System (OCS): An Exploratory Investigation

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## Abstract

*Organizational Communication System (OCS) represents a prevalent form of technologically enabled social networking platforms utilized within organizational contexts to facilitate employee interaction and engagement. Despite its growing implementation, empirical studies examining the function and influence of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) on employees within the context of Organizational Communication System (OCS) remain scarce, and the discourse continues to lack a robust theoretical underpinning. Grounded in the framework of Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study seeks to critically examine and elucidate the role of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) within the Organizational Communication System (OCS), specifically focusing on its implications for employee engagement and usage patterns. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, comprising 27 semi-structured interviews and an analysis of 178 firsthand, typewritten computerized comments as part of a content analysis. The findings indicate that the involvement of leadership within the Organizational Communication System (OCS) plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' interactions with and utilization of the platform. This research contributes to the literature through theoretical advancements, the application of a dual-method qualitative design, empirical insights, and practical implications for organizational communication and leadership practice.*

**Keywords:** Organizational Communication System, Frontline and Middle Management, User Generated Content, Social Exchange Theory, Qualitative.

## Introduction

Organizational Communication System (OCS) represents a relatively novel human resource-oriented social networking tool that is garnering increasing attention within organizational settings as a medium for employee interaction (Ma et al., 2025; Dutta et al., 2025; Haddad, 2024; Nayak & Budhwar, 2024; Mukhtar, 2024; Mohiya & Caputo, 2023; van Zoonen et al., 2022; Kauschinger et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Wang, 2022). As a form of internally governed organizational social media, OCS is exclusively accessible to employees and designed for internal use. Organizations have introduced OCS platforms for various strategic purposes, including enhancing employee performance (e.g., Chatterjee et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022), fostering engagement (e.g., Korzynski, 2015; Chin et al., 2015), and facilitating knowledge sharing and transfer (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Awolusi, 2012). However, preliminary findings indicate that organizations often encounter difficulties in motivating employees to utilize the OCS effectively (Chin et al., 2015; Cummings, 2017).

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The role of employees is central to the success of the Organizational Communication System (OCS), as its utility is entirely contingent upon their active participation—highlighting the imperative for employees to be positioned as primary actors in the system (Chin et al., 2015). Beyond merely fulfilling organizational objectives, the effective implementation of OCS is critically dependent on its acceptance and sustained use by its intended users (Sangwan et al., 2009; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016).

A growing body of literature suggests that leadership—particularly that of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM)—plays a crucial role in influencing employees' engagement with OCS (e.g., Ma et al., 2025; Dutta et al., 2025; Haddad, 2024; Nayak & Budhwar, 2024; Mohiya & Caputo, 2023; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Luqman et al., 2023; Zhou, 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Chin et al., 2015). For instance, several studies have associated low levels of user participation with insufficient support or involvement from FMM (e.g., Haddad, 2024; Korzynski, 2015; DiMicco et al., 2009; Millen & Patterson, 2002). Nonetheless, there remains a notable absence of empirical research that explicitly investigates the role and influence of organizational leaders on employee engagement within OCS.

The central impetus for this study lies in the recognition that both leaders and employees serve as foundational stakeholders in the effective deployment of Organizational Communication System (OCS), given that these platforms are implemented specifically for their use within the workplace. Put differently, the successful operation of OCS is inextricably linked to employees' proactive and sustained participation (Mohiya & Caputo, 2023). Although several scholars underscore the significance of leaders' influence on employee engagement with OCS (e.g., Ma et al., 2025; Dutta et al., 2025; Haddad, 2024; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Luqman et al., 2023; Zhou, 2022), there is a conspicuous gap in the literature regarding employees' own perceptions of the role and impact of FMM in fostering effective OCS usage. To date, very limited empirical evidence exists that specifically addresses this dynamic from the standpoint of employees' lived experiences. This research seeks to fill this critical gap in knowledge.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The predominant critique of existing research on Organizational Communication System (OCS) from managerial and technological standpoints lies in its lack of integration with established theoretical frameworks, particularly those grounded in social theory (Dutta et al., 2025; Haddad, 2024; Nayak & Budhwar, 2024; Mukhtar, 2024; Mohiya & Caputo, 2023; Haddad et al., 2016; Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014). Conceptually, most scholarship has addressed OCS as a unidimensional technological instrument, with a predominant focus either on organizational or technological aspects, thereby failing to provide a comprehensive socio-organizational interpretation (Mukhtar, 2024; Mohiya & Caputo, 2023; Nilasari, 2020; Yousaf et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Kauschinger et al., 2022; Alshawabkeh et al., 2018; Berraies et al., 2020).

This research directly addresses that theoretical gap by employing Social Exchange Theory (SET) as a foundational lens to analyze the reciprocal interactions between Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) and employees in the context of OCS. SET is particularly well-suited to this inquiry as it conceptualizes both FMM and employees as interdependent actors engaged in mutual exchanges. Widely recognized in business, human resource management, and organizational behavior literature, SET enables a richer understanding of OCS as a medium for resource reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In contrast to traditional organizational approaches that emphasize unilateral communication flow, SET provides a more dynamic and relational perspective, framing OCS as a platform characterized by ongoing bidirectional

exchanges between leaders and employees.

The Organizational Communication System (OCS) is inherently grounded in the principles of User Generated Content (UGC), rendering it a bidirectional communication medium that fosters reciprocal interactions between employees and their employing organization (Dutta et al., 2025). Nevertheless, when organizational actors interfere with the core functionality of OCS—specifically UGC—by imposing filtration mechanisms or editing employee-submitted content prior to publication, this can disrupt the reciprocity dynamic. Such interventions may lead to delays in content dissemination, thereby engendering employee dissatisfaction (Dutta et al., 2025; Haddad, 2024; Turban et al., 2011). These procedural obstructions can cultivate resistance among employees toward OCS utilization, posing considerable challenges for organizational communication effectiveness and contributing to disengagement (Bennett, 2012).

Given that Social Exchange Theory (SET) underpins this research, it is essential to address a significant theoretical lacuna regarding the mechanisms of reciprocity within leader–employee exchanges in OCS environments. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) underscore this gap, conceptualizing it as a theoretical “black box” and encouraging further scholarly inquiry. This study directly engages with that theoretical void, examining the reciprocity process within the unique context of OCS.

A review of existing literature on OCS highlights that insufficient engagement among users may frequently stem from inadequate support by Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) (e.g., Haddad, 2024; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Zhou, 2022; Chin et al., 2015; Korzynski, 2015; Awolusi, 2012). For instance, Chatterjee et al. (2023) found that leadership participation on OCS platforms significantly enhances employee adoption and engagement. Likewise, Korzynski (2015) demonstrated that FMM involvement is positively correlated with effective organizational communication; thus, leaders’ presence and activity on OCS platforms facilitate and encourage employee usage. Additionally, Thomas et al. (2009) revealed that FMM engagement within OCS contributes to employee trust, and Korzynski (2015) further emphasized that visible leadership interaction is essential for cultivating that trust. However, empirical studies delineating the specific functions of leadership and quantifying their influence on employee engagement with OCS remain scarce. This investigation seeks to fill this empirical and conceptual void.

An additional dimension to be considered is the role of recognition and acknowledgment of employee contributions on OCS platforms. When employees perceive that their participation is acknowledged by FMM—particularly through direct interaction or visible engagement—they are likely to interpret this as a form of non-monetary reward, enhancing their intrinsic motivation to remain active on the platform. Specifically, when valuable insights or ideas shared by employees receive public endorsement from leadership, a sense of obligation and motivation may emerge, compelling employees to reciprocate through sustained and increased contributions (Dutta et al., 2025; Mohiya & Caputo, 2023; Treem & Leonardi, 2016).

Despite a general emphasis on the importance of recognition in enhancing employee engagement, several empirical studies have indicated that recognition alone may exert only a transient influence on employees’ use of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) for knowledge-sharing purposes (e.g., Mohiya & Caputo, 2023; Chatterjee et al., 2023; Zhou, 2022; Aboelmaged, 2018; Awolusi, 2012). In contrast, this study, grounded in the theoretical framework of Social Exchange Theory (SET), proposes that social recognition within OCS environments has a more sustained and positive effect on employees’ engagement with the

platform, particularly for the purpose of knowledge exchange. Through the conceptual lens of SET, the engagement of employees in the workplace can be understood as an ongoing series of reciprocal exchanges between the employee and employer, embedded within systems such as OCS that facilitate mutual interdependence (Luqman et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Paroutis and Al Saleh (2009) observed that a significant deterrent to employee participation in OCS platforms was the absence of recognition and reinforcement from Frontline and Middle Management (FMM), highlighting the critical influence of managerial support in encouraging sustained usage. This finding is consistent with McAfee's (2006) argument that successful adoption of OCS technologies is not an automatic process but rather one that requires deliberate organizational efforts, particularly clear communication and leadership engagement. McAfee (2006) also emphasized that organizational leaders play a pivotal role in stimulating the use of such systems to realize their intended benefits. However, it should be noted that these contributions are primarily situated within the context of public social networking systems and are heavily oriented toward managerial considerations. In contrast, the current study centers on internal OCS use and prioritizes employee perspectives, addressing a clear empirical gap in existing research.

Korzynski (2015) investigated the efficacy of communication within OCS, as well as through external platforms such as LinkedIn. His research examined the extent of leader participation but primarily focused on communication effectiveness rather than on how employees themselves engage with OCS. Furthermore, Korzynski's analysis involved outsourced OCS platforms, such as Yammer, whereas the present study examines internally developed and managed OCS systems that may be more vulnerable to organizational oversight and control. Another limitation of Korzynski's (2015) work is its exclusive focus on individuals in FMM roles, thereby omitting the viewpoints and usage behaviors of general employees. While his study did establish a positive correlation between leader involvement and communication efficacy, it did not extend to behavioral patterns of OCS use among employees, nor did it explore contextual variables such as how FMM support might facilitate or hinder employee engagement with OCS.

This study utilizes Social Exchange Theory (SET) as a theoretical foundation to explicate the mechanisms through which leadership engagement may shape employee behavior within the OCS environment. By employing SET as a guiding framework, this theory-driven investigation has informed the formulation and development of its core research questions. Accordingly, the following research inquiries have been articulated to advance understanding in this underexplored domain:

**RQ1.** To what degree does the involvement and support of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) influence employees' engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS)?

**RQ2.** What specific functions do Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) perform within the Organizational Communication System (OCS) that affect employees' utilization of the platform?

**RQ3.** In what ways can Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) shape or facilitate employees' use of the Organizational Communication System (OCS)?

## Research Methodology

This investigation adopts a qualitative research design to address the previously outlined research questions. A review of extant literature reveals that the majority of prior studies have predominantly employed quantitative methodologies (e.g., Haddad, 2024; Nayak & Budhwar, 2024; Haddud et al., 2016; Korzynski, 2015; Zhou, 2022; Awolusi, 2012; Chatterjee et al., 2023). As a result, there exists a notable gap in qualitative empirical research that explores the influence of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) on employees' utilization of the Organizational Communication System (OCS). In addition, scholarly understanding of OCS within workplace contexts remains underdeveloped. To bridge this methodological void, the current study employs two qualitative data collection methods, thereby offering a more comprehensive exploration of the research objectives.

To effectively address the research questions, this study employs a triangulated qualitative design involving two distinct, yet complementary, methods of data collection. Triangulated qualitative approaches are particularly valuable as they enhance the robustness of inquiry by compensating for limitations inherent in any single method (Steckler et al., 1992). This approach contributes to improved data reliability and allows for a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Specifically, this study utilizes semi-structured interviews and document analysis as its dual data sources. Both methods are treated as methodologically equivalent and equally significant in answering the research questions. To the researcher's knowledge, this represents the first empirical examination of OCS in the workplace that integrates these two qualitative approaches. The document analysis comprises 178 first-hand, typewritten employee and OCS team comments collected over a two-year period. Additionally, 27 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of organizational leaders and employees.

The rationale for adopting this dual-method approach is multifaceted. First, it enhances objectivity by mitigating the potential biases associated with reliance on a single data source. Second, the richness and depth of data derived from two distinct sources improve the analytical quality and the overall credibility of the findings. For instance, the employee-generated comments offer longitudinal insight into OCS usage, while the interviews provide real-time perspectives from both FMM and employees. Cross-validating data between these two sources thus strengthens the empirical foundation of the study's conclusions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

Third, the application of two triangulated qualitative methods mitigates potential bias inherent in single-method designs (Denzin, 1978). The integration of these mixed qualitative approaches serves to minimize the likelihood of common method bias, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness and validity of the research outcomes (Denzin, 1978). Fourth, the inclusion of two distinct qualitative data sources allows the study to embody both longitudinal and cross-sectional dimensions. Specifically, this research utilizes both types of data. One of the core datasets—comprising documents that capture participants' reactions and experiences related to their interaction with the Organizational Communication System (OCS) over a two-year period—exemplifies the defining characteristics of a longitudinal study.

This investigation is grounded in a single case study design. As noted in case study methodology, employing multiple sources of evidence—commonly referred to as triangulation—is not only acceptable but also frequently advocated (Flyvbjerg, 2011). While triangulation itself does not inherently define a case study, it often contributes to the fulfillment of the methodological

requirement for depth, detail, and contextual richness—elements considered essential to a robust case study inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301).

The present study adopts an instrumental case study approach, which facilitates in-depth analytical exploration of the research questions. According to Yin (2009), the objective of such a design is to “capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation” (p. 48), thereby enabling a nuanced understanding of causal mechanisms and underlying processes. Stake (1995) further posits that the instrumental case study is not centered on the case itself, but rather serves as a lens through which broader phenomena or specific issues are examined. This approach is particularly valuable for exploring complex organizational dynamics and is supported by purposive sampling strategies, which are explicitly aligned with targeted phenomena or events (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, this study employs purposive sampling to select participants and data sources relevant to the investigation.

The rationale for employing a single instrumental case study also lies in the novelty of the technological platform under study. Given that the Organizational Communication System (OCS) constitutes a newly adopted digital communication tool within the organizational setting, and considering the importance of capturing its contextual nuances, the instrumental case study framework is particularly well suited to the research goals. As Bryman (2016) explains, the use of exemplary or instrumental cases enables researchers to investigate essential social processes: “For example, researchers may seek access to an organization because it is known to have implemented a new technology and he or she wants to know what the impact of that new technology has been” (p. 62).

Ultimately—and of greatest significance—this study is fundamentally theory-driven, and the selection of an instrumental case study design aligns with methodological approaches that emphasize theoretical integration. As Bryman (2016) notes, researchers employing this approach are often guided by established theoretical perspectives concerning the interplay between technology and work, and they aim to explore the practical and conceptual implications of such frameworks within a specific empirical setting: “The researcher may have been influenced by various theories about the relationship between technology and work and by the considerable research literature on the topic, and as a result seeks to examine the implications of some of these theoretical and empirical deliberations in the particular research site” (p. 63).

In this regard, the instrumental case study design enables a thorough and contextually grounded application of the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which serves as the conceptual foundation for the present study. Specifically, the design facilitates an in-depth investigation and elucidation of critical theoretical elements—such as the reciprocity process within the Organizational Communication System (OCS)—by providing the necessary depth and focus to interpret how SET principles operate within the lived experiences of employees and Frontline and Middle Management (FMM). Thus, the instrumental case study serves as an effective vehicle for the clear articulation and empirical application of SET within the context of OCS.

## **Results Analysis**

The data analysis indicates that employees hold clear expectations regarding the involvement of organizational leaders in the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Specifically, employees anticipate two primary forms of engagement from Frontline and Middle Management (FMM): (1) the active encouragement and recognition of employee participation in the OCS, and (2) the direct involvement of FMM in the platform itself. However, the findings reveal a

noticeable deficiency in leadership engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). As noted previously, the OCS manager reported during an interview that approximately 97 percent of platform contributors were drawn from entry-level and middle-level roles, highlighting the minimal participation of senior leaders in OCS-related activities.

Document analysis further substantiated this observation, revealing employees' concerns and inquiries about the absence of leadership presence within the Organizational Communication System (OCS). These perceptions were interpreted as having a tangible influence on employee engagement with the platform. One employee remarked:

“Supervisors should strive to engage employees with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). This includes giving employees positive feedback, making them feel included by asking them for opinions and suggestions like this [Organizational Communication System (OCS)].”

Such statements underscore the significance of leadership presence and interaction within the OCS for fostering a sense of inclusion and responsiveness among staff.

The synthesis of both interview and document data revealed that FMM support within the Organizational Communication System (OCS) is understood by employees to encompass two critical dimensions: direct participation in the OCS platform and proactive encouragement of employee engagement. Notably, approximately 13 employees expressed doubts and concerns regarding the apparent lack of FMM support, both in terms of their visibility on the platform and in motivating employee involvement. Overall, the analysis emphasizes that employees not only expect, but also attribute high importance to FMM support—through both active participation and encouragement—as fundamental drivers for their own sustained use of the Organizational Communication System (OCS).

### **Influence and Impact of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) Participation in Organizational Communication System (OCS)**

A critical determinant identified is the engagement of leadership through active participation in the Organizational Communication System (OCS). According to insights provided by a team leader overseeing the OCS, there exists a conspicuous deficiency in engagement from supervisory personnel, Frontline and Middle Management (FMM), and senior executives—including vice presidents and the chief executive officer. Within the OCS platform, employees have directly questioned whether executive leadership has ever interacted with or accessed the system. The perceived absence of participation from supervisors, managers, and top-tier leadership remains a salient concern among staff. As one Human Resources Advisor stated:

“I don't see huge support for it at a higher management level.” (HR Advisor, Interview #16)

Numerous employee comments have underscored their dissatisfaction with the non-engagement of the Chief Executive Officer in OCS activities. This perceived disengagement has led employees to conclude that OCS is of minimal strategic importance to senior management. Furthermore, the limited support from FMM has been interpreted by some employees as an indication of the low value attributed not only to the platform itself but also to the contributions made by its users. Consequently, the absence of visible leadership engagement is perceived as a lack of endorsement of employee voice and feedback, thus weakening the motivational and reciprocal dynamics of OCS participation.

This perception of organizational neglect has had a detrimental cognitive impact on employees, who begin to view OCS as irrelevant due to its non-utilization by key decision-makers (i.e.,



FMM). As noted in employee feedback:

“We need higher management support.” (OCS User, Interview #21)

“Does Organizational Communication System (OCS) ever accessed by CEO?” (Employee OCS Comment)

“I believe, if some of the management position holders think participation in this [Organizational Communication System (OCS)] is a waste of time, this is not acceptable behavior.” (Employee OCS Comment)

These statements collectively reflect the urgent necessity for visible and consistent leadership engagement to affirm the organizational value of OCS and foster a reciprocal exchange climate consistent with Social Exchange Theory (SET))

Several contributors to the platform suggested that the evident absence of leadership engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS) may reflect a lack of awareness among top-level managers regarding the existence of the system. In light of these perceptions, some employees proposed that the OCS team should proactively promote and publicize the Organizational Communication System (OCS) to senior leadership. This recommendation illustrates a broader concern: the system appears to suffer from insufficient managerial endorsement and visibility.

“Advertise [Organizational Communication System (OCS)] to managements.” (Employee OCS comment)

According to employee commentary, when Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) actively participate in the Organizational Communication System (OCS), such engagement affirms the platform’s legitimacy and value in the eyes of employees. As a result, employees are more likely to perceive their contributions as meaningful and accountable. Conversely, in the absence of visible FMM involvement, employees experience uncertainty regarding whether their input is acknowledged or even reviewed.

“In fact, I did not receive an acknowledgment whether my suggested topic was even read or not.” (Employee OCS comment)

This disconnect between leadership and employees through the OCS platform underscores a broader issue related to the perception of value and responsiveness. Ongoing analysis will explore how employee-generated content on the platform corresponds with tangible organizational outcomes and the degree to which content remains relevant to OCS participants. Crucially, employees are more inclined to believe that their contributions matter when leadership visibly engages with the platform. The absence of FMM activity communicates an implicit message that the Organizational Communication System (OCS) lacks strategic importance and is not prioritized within leadership agendas. Consequently, employees may begin to feel their participation is undervalued—thereby weakening the social exchange process that underpins meaningful engagement in OCS.

“I like the [Organizational Communication System (OCS)] idea although I have always wondered: who reads them?? I know that employees do but the question is: do the decision-makers read them? If they do, they must have a good idea about what are the employee’s major concerns in the areas you have opened for discussion. If they don’t know about it already, and if they do, what have they done about it to overcome the employee’s concerns and challenges?”



(Employee OCS comment)

These insights further demonstrate how leadership presence, recognition, and reciprocal engagement—central to Social Exchange Theory (SET)—are critical for reinforcing employee trust and motivating sustained participation in the Organizational Communication System (OCS).

### **Forms of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) Support in Organizational Communication System (OCS)**

The second dimension of FMM support within the Organizational Communication System (OCS) pertains to the active encouragement of employee engagement with the platform. Beyond the observable lack of FMM participation, employees noted that even verbal acknowledgment or promotion of OCS by supervisors significantly influences their likelihood of using the system. Analysis of interview data revealed that a majority of participants reported that their immediate supervisors or managers had not mentioned the Organizational Communication System (OCS) at any point since its launch, approximately four years ago. This lack of reference or endorsement further substantiates the notion that FMM support—both in terms of usage and motivational reinforcement—is generally absent.

“I have never heard my manager encouraging me to use [Organizational Communication System (OCS)].” (OCS User, Interview #4)

“My supervisor and manager never, never, no one has ever mentioned it to me.” (OCS User, Interview #7)

The sustained absence of managerial references to OCS over an extended period requires critical evaluation and explanation. When asked in-depth questions regarding the perceived impact of leadership support, many respondents stated that their supervisors appeared to lack confidence in the Organizational Communication System (OCS) itself. Some believed this hesitation stemmed from concerns about how employee contributions might be received or interpreted. Others speculated that certain leaders might not even be aware of the system’s existence.

“Some managers do not want their employees to participate in [Organizational Communication System (OCS)].” (HR Advisor, Interview #15)

This perception highlights an emergent cognitive interpretation among employees, whereby the absence of FMM engagement is implicitly understood as a signal of discouragement. This cognitive stance, in turn, shapes behavioral outcomes—namely, reduced participation and disengagement from the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Notably, only a single participant indicated having received direct encouragement from their supervisor:

“My last supervisor says hey [employee name] there is a [Organizational Communication System (OCS)] here, and you may get e-mails and announcements, etc. your participation is appreciated.” (OCS User, Interview #22)

Despite pervasive concerns and skepticism regarding FMM support, the frequency and thematic weight of employee responses confirm that such support—both through direct participation and motivational messaging—plays a pivotal role in shaping engagement with OCS. The apparent lack of FMM involvement was also found to correlate with diminished trust among employees.

Additionally, the data revealed that some employees exhibited apprehension and reluctance toward using OCS, attributing these sentiments to both the absence of FMM endorsement and

limited managerial involvement. These doubts and speculations ultimately contributed to a broader atmosphere of distrust surrounding the platform.

“The Organizational Communication System (OCS) [is] distrusted by users.” (OCS User, Comment #3950)

“Back on your question, having received nothing, I had zero incentive to continue with their system.” (OCS User, Interview #23)

The findings demonstrate that trust is a critical variable in employees’ decisions to use OCS, with trust being conceptualized as a product of both cognitive judgment and accumulated experience over time. Many participants stressed that for trust to be established, FMM must take the initiative to demonstrate leadership engagement and institutional credibility, especially considering the organization’s role as both creator and administrator of the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Once trust is established at the managerial level, reciprocal trust from employees is more likely to follow—thereby facilitating sustained and meaningful interaction with the platform.

However, trust is further undermined by structural and policy-related deficiencies. The absence of clear guidelines and a formalized policy framework has created significant concerns regarding data privacy and user protection. Several users expressed hesitation to contribute content unless anonymity could be guaranteed.

“I want to post truly anonymously without being tracked.” (OCS User, Interview #2)

Concerns over privacy and identity protection were a recurring theme among respondents. Some explicitly stated their refusal to use OCS until they could do so anonymously. This hesitation is directly linked to the lack of clarity and absence of formal data governance protocols.

“Policy helps to reduce users’ fear and make them feel protected.” (OCS User, Interview #12)

Overall, the findings underscore the necessity of FMM support—both behavioral and procedural—as well as the implementation of robust policy measures to mitigate perceived risks and promote trust in the Organizational Communication System (OCS)..

## **Discussion**

A prominent theme that emerged from the data analysis was the significance of FMM support. Employees consistently expressed expectations for Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) to play a vital role in facilitating and endorsing their engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). For instance, findings revealed that employees anticipated both visible usage of OCS by leaders and verbal encouragement to utilize the platform. However, according to the OCS team manager, approximately 97% of user participation originated from individuals occupying entry-level and middle-level roles, reflecting a marked absence of FMM involvement and advocacy. Corroborating this, the majority of interview participants indicated that OCS had never been mentioned or promoted by their supervisors or managers. This perceived omission prompted employees to question the disengagement of FMM from the platform, both in terms of direct usage and motivational support in the workplace context. While this form of managerial endorsement—like recognition or reward—was observed to have only a limited direct effect on increasing platform usage, it was found to exert a more consequential negative influence on employee trust in the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Specifically, a lack of managerial involvement gave rise to employee doubts and assumptions

that leaders were disinterested or deliberately avoiding OCS, thus undermining confidence in the platform.

The analysis further emphasized that FMM has a meaningful role in shaping the perceived legitimacy and trustworthiness of OCS. Many employees conveyed the belief that managerial usage and encouragement of the system enhances its perceived value and contributes to building trust in both the tool and the communication process it enables. While most respondents stated that FMM support did not directly determine whether they used OCS, several participants questioned the absence of leadership engagement, which implicitly shaped their attitudes toward the platform's importance. From the standpoint of Social Exchange Theory (SET), FMM support within OCS functions as a form of socioemotional resource that may influence employee engagement cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. Such influence is mediated through interpersonal exchanges and interactions that occur via the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Prior studies grounded in SET have demonstrated a positive relationship between FMM support and employee engagement in domains such as knowledge sharing and creativity (e.g., Chatterjee et al., 2023; Luqman et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). However, these investigations predominantly adopted a managerial lens, focusing on organizational outputs related to task performance and innovation, rather than the employee-centric communicative dynamics emphasized in the present study.

Unlike earlier research, this study, through a Qualitative analysis of employee responses and interpretations, demonstrates that when FMM actively supports the Organizational Communication System (OCS), employees are more likely to perceive the platform as credible and worthwhile. Moreover, they feel their contributions are acknowledged and valued. In contrast, the absence of such support led many participants to conclude that OCS lacked utility and significance, fostering negative cognitive appraisals. These individuals perceived OCS as unimportant to leadership and not worth their time and effort. This lack of support was seen to negatively affect both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of employee engagement within the Organizational Communication System (OCS), ultimately diminishing the quality of social interactions facilitated through the platform.

Several technological investigations have demonstrated that the utilization of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) is predominantly contingent upon the endorsement and involvement of both Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) and senior leadership (Bennett, 2012; Brzozowski, 2009; Cook, 2008; Turban et al., 2011). A number of these studies have identified that inadequate participation from users often stems from insufficient support from FMM (e.g., DiMicco et al., 2009; Millen & Patterson, 2002). One technological study indicated a positive correlation between leadership participation and communication efficacy, highlighting that when leaders actively use the Organizational Communication System (OCS), it enhances and facilitates its adoption among employees (Korzynski, 2015). Nevertheless, this body of work primarily emphasizes the communicative dimension of OCS, overlooking employee-related factors that influence their engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS).

In contrast to other determinants, the current study reveals that support from FMM significantly influences employee engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). The presence of FMM support was shown to bolster participants' trust in the system. As previously noted regarding FMM involvement in the Organizational Communication System (OCS), the analysis of findings revealed that some employees perceived FMM as occupying two principal roles: firstly, engaging behaviorally with the OCS, and secondly, encouraging staff to adopt the

system. However, empirical data from this investigation suggests that FMM fulfillment of these roles was minimal. For instance, according to the Organizational Communication System (OCS) manager, most participants were from entry and middle-level positions. Interview data indicated that a majority of participants reported their supervisors neither discussed the Organizational Communication System (OCS) with them nor promoted its use.

Due to the limited support from FMM, certain employees expressed apprehension and reluctance toward using the Organizational Communication System (OCS). This hesitancy ultimately led to disengagement, as some users perceived the OCS as a potential threat to job security. This outcome evidences participants' lack of trust in the Organizational Communication System (OCS), a sentiment rooted in the absence of FMM advocacy. Participants consistently indicated that trust in and utilization of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) were substantially influenced by the degree of FMM support.

The findings of this study are congruent with previous literature, such as that by Korzynski (2015) and Thomas et al. (2009), which established that FMM plays a critical role in motivating employee engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). It has been posited that leadership presence and activity within the OCS platform are essential for cultivating trust (Korzynski, 2015). Furthermore, Thomas et al. (2009) contended that interactions between leaders and employees within the Organizational Communication System (OCS) directly affect the level of trust formed. Leadership participation and encouragement within the OCS constitute essential mechanisms for establishing employee trust in the system. Given the inherent challenges in fostering virtual trust via an Organizational Communication System (OCS), previous scholarship has suggested the formation of "swift trust" in online environments (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). However, the current research diverges from this viewpoint, suggesting instead that trust is a gradual process that develops over time, rather than being instantly formed.

In conclusion, this study has identified several influential variables previously underexplored in the literature. Notably, FMM support was found to significantly affect employee engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Moreover, the absence of FMM involvement emerged as a critical factor contributing to employee mistrust and apprehension, ultimately deterring the use of the Organizational Communication System (OCS).

### **Research Contributions and Limitations**

The objective of this study is to investigate and critically assess the role of Frontline and Middle Management (FMM) in influencing employees' engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). This research extends beyond the conventional understanding of the OCS as a mere technological infrastructure by delving into the influence of FMM and the associated dynamics that shape participants' interactions within the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Despite the proliferation of social applications in organizational settings, scholarly exploration into employee engagement with such innovations—particularly OCS—remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, the extant literature regarding the operational reality of Organizational Communication System (OCS) in the workplace, including employee-centric concerns, remains emergent, limited in scope, and theoretically ambiguous.

A substantial body of scholarship has articulated the potential organizational benefits of implementing Organizational Communication System (OCS) for employees (e.g., Chatterjee et al., 2023; Luqman et al., 2023; Zhou, 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Chin et al., 2015). Nevertheless,

empirical validation remains insufficient, and this study seeks to address this gap. Specifically, it argues that the effective use of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) by employees is inherently dependent on the active support of FMM (Ellison et al., 2015; Parren, 2016).

The findings of this study have yielded multiple insights. While some corroborate prior research, others introduce novel evidence on the potential of Organizational Communication System (OCS) to function as an engaging platform for employees in professional contexts. Notably, this appears to be the first investigation to differentiate between various types of Organizational Communication System (OCS), with a particular emphasis on those forms that are entirely developed and implemented by employers. This necessitated a critical examination of how employers' interpretations and enactments of the intended purpose of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) were perceived and experienced by employees, and how these perceptions shaped their engagement with the system. This focus is essential given that the design architecture of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) significantly influences employee participation.

From a theoretical standpoint, given the scarcity of empirical studies underpinned by robust theoretical frameworks, the present research provides both theoretical enrichment and practical insight into employee engagement with Organizational Communication System (OCS). By employing Social Exchange Theory (SET)—a leading framework in business and human resource management—the study investigates its applicability in the novel context of Organizational Communication System (OCS), with the intent of elucidating FMM's influence on employee usage.

The research yields several theoretical contributions. First, it enhances understanding of the reciprocity mechanism—conceptualized as the “black box”—within the Organizational Communication System (OCS), particularly between FMM and employees. The findings indicate that this reciprocal process requires strategic support and facilitation from leadership to optimize the utility and effectiveness of the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Second, the study reveals how interactions and responses are generated within the Organizational Communication System (OCS) framework, emphasizing that such exchanges between leaders and employees are characterized by interdependence. This interdependence implies that employee engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS) is conditional upon leaders' actions; it is neither wholly autonomous nor entirely subordinate.

Third, the study identifies trust as a key factor influencing the efficacy of interactions in the Organizational Communication System (OCS), asserting that such trust evolves incrementally over time. This aligns with Blau's (1964) assertion that reciprocity entails a willingness to “trust others” (p. 94). In the context of Organizational Communication System (OCS), the research discovered that many participants felt as though their contributions disappeared into a metaphorical “black hole,” highlighting a lack of feedback and reciprocal communication. Fourth, the analysis indicates that employees expect not only socioemotional resources from their leaders within the OCS environment but also tangible outcomes such as goods and services. This discovery suggests that employee needs in the Organizational Communication System (OCS) context are multifaceted and extend beyond interpersonal emotional exchanges.

From a methodological standpoint, this study employed a qualitative triangulation approach incorporating two principal methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews, in order to comprehensively address the research questions. Specifically, the research design integrated

both longitudinal and cross-sectional methodological orientations. The document analysis reflected a longitudinal framework as it spanned multiple years, while the semi-structured interviews represented a cross-sectional design, capturing participant experiences at a specific point in time. Although longitudinal and cross-sectional strategies are individually prevalent in empirical investigations, this study distinctively utilized both concurrently to enhance the depth and breadth of data collection.

A noteworthy innovation in this research lies in the incorporation of a novel data source—document analysis—based on original and previously untapped materials. The documents analyzed in this study were unique and had not been utilized in prior research, thereby contributing a fresh and valuable empirical dimension. This component of the methodology involved the analysis of 178 digitized, first-hand comments authored by participants and members of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) team, all posted on an OCS platform over a two-year period. Complementing this, the study also conducted twenty-three semi-structured interviews with individuals who had direct experience using the Organizational Communication System (OCS). Together, these triangulated methods facilitated a rigorous and temporally sensitive exploration of the phenomenon.

The practical implications derived from the findings of this study offer several actionable recommendations for human resources (HR) scholars, consultants, and practitioners concerning the strategic role of leadership in promoting effective use of the Organizational Communication System (OCS) among employees. This practical objective was foundational to the empirical inquiry and emerged directly from the analytical process. First, the findings underscore the necessity of visible leadership engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS), embodying the principle of leading by example. Leaders must acknowledge that their active participation in the OCS sets a precedent that encourages employee involvement. Second, it is essential for leaders to recognize and reinforce employee contributions within the Organizational Communication System (OCS) context. Third, beyond platform participation, leaders must proactively encourage employee engagement through formal mechanisms such as meetings and internal communications, including emails.

A fourth and critical implication is that the Organizational Communication System (OCS) should not be perceived as a static technological implementation. Rather, it demands sustained social interaction and continuous provisioning of employee-relevant resources. Following the deployment of the Organizational Communication System (OCS), leaders must ensure the ongoing availability of resources that align with employee needs, preferences, and expectations. Based on the research findings, certain resources and contextual factors were found to significantly influence employee utilization of the Organizational Communication System (OCS). This study identifies and critically assesses these employee-related factors by examining employees' feedback, lived experiences, and expectations, which collectively inform their engagement with the Organizational Communication System (OCS). These insights offer substantive contributions to enhancing OCS adoption and effectiveness within organizational settings.

To delineate the scope of this study's contributions to both scholarly literature and organizational practice, it is also essential to acknowledge the study's limitations. Although the rationale for employing a single case study was previously articulated and justified within the methodological section, it must be recognized that the empirical outcomes of this research are context-specific and thus not statistically generalizable. The study was conducted within a single organizational

setting. However, the theoretical implications possess broader generalizability, as they highlight the interdependent and reciprocal relationship between leaders and employees within the context of the Organizational Communication System (OCS). It is further acknowledged that Organizational Communication System (OCS) implementations may vary significantly across different organizational environments, contingent on factors such as the specific type of OCS employed, the nature of the industry, and organizational scale.

### **Ethical Approval**

The ethical matters were taken into account seriously during the research process to fulfill the requirements of the Ethics Committee at the Deanship of Research.

### **Informed Consent**

The informed consent was received from all participants. The email sent was to the access company to forward to prospective participants mentioning the research's information and purpose and plain language statement to be read and the consent form to be filled. Moreover, the email also included a confidentiality statement. The email also stated that the participants' information would remain confidential and used solely for the study.

### **Competing Interests**

The author declares no competing interests.

### **Author Contributions**

The author made his contributions to conceptualization, designing methodology, investigation, supervision, visualization, writing the original draft, analyzing the data, and project administration.

### **Data Availability**

The collected data are available upon a reasonable request.

### **Funding Statement**

The author extends his appreciation to the Deanship of Research and Graduate Studies at King Khalid University for funding this work through Large (Group Project under grant number RGP.2/590/45).

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