

Strategic Organisational Communication and Leadership in a Sufi Institution: A Case Study of the Naqshabandiyyah Centre in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

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Abstract: This study addresses communication inefficiencies within religious organizations, often leading to leadership fragmentation, operational confusion, and public misperception. Focusing on the Naqshabandiyyah Sufi Practice Centre (NSPC) in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, the research explores how strategic organizational communication enhances management decision-making in a spiritually structured institution. The objective is to analyse the roles of vertical and horizontal communication in ensuring administrative fluidity, leadership continuity, and public trust in the tarekat's leadership. Employing a qualitative, descriptive-exploratory approach, the study utilizes document and content analysis to examine internal communications and management practices. The findings reveal that vertical communication supports the clear delegation of authority, vision alignment, and structured leadership formation, while horizontal communication facilitates collaboration, social outreach, and inter-agency coordination. The study also highlights how communication practices rooted in spiritual wisdom contribute to institutional legitimacy and organizational effectiveness. Ultimately, this article contributes to Islamic management and communication by proposing a two-way, value-based communication model suited to the complexities of contemporary spiritual institutions operating within modern governance frameworks.

Keywords: Organizational Communication; Spiritual Leadership; Decision-Making Effectiveness; Sufi Institution; Naqshabandiyyah Malaysia

1. Introduction

Communication lies at the heart of every human and organizational interaction, especially within structured institutions such as religious organizations. In Malaysia, Sufi-based institutions like the Naqshabandiyyah Sufi Practice Centre (NSPC) in Negeri Sembilan have grown from informal spiritual circles into formal organizations with administrative structures and societal responsibilities.



Clear and effective communication becomes essential as these institutions expand their roles—from spiritual guidance to community education and inter-agency cooperation. However, many spiritual institutions face challenges aligning spiritual authority with modern organizational needs, leading to fragmented leadership, poor delegation, and administrative inefficiencies. The failure to articulate vision and transmit responsibilities disrupts decision-making processes and may compromise public perception of these institutions. In the case of NSPC, its success in managing suluk programs, outreach activities, and collaborations with government agencies suggests the presence of an underlying communication framework that deserves scholarly attention. The transformation of the tarekat's role in Malaysian society thus raises an important phenomenon: how do Sufi institutions maintain coherence, spiritual integrity, and managerial effectiveness in the face of increasing organizational demands?

Scholars have increasingly explored the role of communication in organizational effectiveness, particularly in institutions driven by values and spirituality. Prabavathi and Nagasubramani (2018) emphasize that effective communication involves multiple channels—written, oral, verbal, electronic, and nonverbal—collectively forming the WOVEN model that sustains organizational performance. In hierarchical and emotionally bound institutions, such as religious organizations, communication also serves to transmit vision, ensure continuity, and mediate between traditional leadership and contemporary administrative needs (Ahmad Atory Hussain, 1991). Chukwudebelu (2025) notes that leadership communication in religious contexts is key to reinforcing institutional values and integration across levels. Simon (2024) adds that communication strategies rooted in spiritual values enhance ethical decision-making and reinforce collective purpose. Although several studies have addressed organizational communication in corporate or secular settings (e.g., Kalogiannidis, 2020; Mazzei, 2014), fewer have focused on Sufi institutions, particularly in Southeast Asia. This creates a gap in the literature concerning how Islamic spiritual organizations manage internal dynamics while engaging with the broader society and governance systems. NSPC, with its formal structure and social outreach, offers a unique case through which the theoretical frameworks of communication and leadership can be explored in a religious, value-laden setting.

This study examines the relationship between organizational communication and the effectiveness of decision-making processes within the Naqshabandiyyah Sufi Practice Centre (NSPC) management in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Specifically, it investigates how vertical and horizontal communication practices contribute to role clarity, administrative consistency, leadership succession, and public engagement within a spiritually driven institution. The focus is directed toward analyzing the modes of communication used internally among spiritual leaders (mursyid and khalifah), administrators, and members, as well as externally with government bodies and community stakeholders. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the challenges that may arise in implementing effective communication in the unique context of a Sufi organization, where etiquette, privacy, and hierarchy are essential aspects of its tradition. By analyzing how communication influences decision-making accuracy and institutional legitimacy, this research contributes to the discourse on organizational management and the understanding of modern Islamic governance. The goal is to generate knowledge that can inform the design of communication models for other structured spiritual institutions facing similar organizational pressures and social expectations.

The study assumes that effective organizational communication, when aligned with spiritual values and hierarchical traditions, enhances the quality and legitimacy of decision-making in Sufi

institutions. It argues that communication within the NSPC is not limited to information transmission but plays a strategic role in maintaining leadership authority, institutional coherence, and public trust. The hypothesis underpinning this research is that vertical communication (e.g., instruction from mursyid to khalifah to members) and horizontal communication (e.g., collaboration among departments and external partners) significantly influence the effectiveness of management decisions. Vertical communication ensures alignment with spiritual vision and administrative delegation, while horizontal communication fosters trust, integration, and outreach. This dual communication structure, when functioning optimally, acts as a stabilizing mechanism that supports the sustainability and relevance of the tarekat in contemporary society. Drawing from theories of communication and spirituality (Simon, 2024; Mkhize & Mutambara, 2025), the article posits that NSPC's success is rooted in a value-based communication model—adaptive, hierarchical, yet participatory—which could be applied to similar institutions within or beyond the Islamic world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organizational Communication in Religious Institutions

Organizational communication refers to the structured and purposeful exchange of information within and between the various components of an organization to achieve its objectives. In religious institutions, especially those rooted in hierarchical and spiritual traditions like Sufi orders, communication serves as a technical process and a vehicle for transmitting authority, values, and vision. Garner (2017) emphasizes that religious organizations possess unique communication dynamics, where formal instructions are often intertwined with symbolic language and moral authority. Unlike secular organizations, spiritual institutions prioritize clarity and adab (etiquette), influencing the content and form of communication. This reinforces the idea that communication within these institutions is simultaneously functional and ethical, impacting not just administrative outcomes but also spiritual cohesion. In this sense, the practice of communication in an organization like the Naqshabandiyyah Tarekat blends managerial strategies with ritual language and spiritual expectations.

Scholars have categorized communication within religious organizations into three primary types: vertical (hierarchical), horizontal (collaborative), and diagonal (cross-functional). Men and Stacks (2013) observe that these categories interact differently in religious institutions due to spiritual hierarchies that often override administrative protocols. For example, instructions from a mursyid carry theological weight, making their delivery a form of communication and spiritual transmission. Cases from Islamic organizations in Indonesia and Turkey (Arslan, 2021; Çaha, 2016) illustrate that religious leaders often rely on oral transmission, personal mentoring, and structured ritual meetings to guide institutional direction. These communicative forms are essential in maintaining coherence among members, preserving tradition, and enabling adaptation to societal change. Thus, religious institutions develop multi-layered communication models, combining formal strategy with sacred symbolism, directly influencing leadership structure, decision-making, and public legitimacy.

2.2 Vertical and Horizontal Communication: Concept and Application

Vertical communication involves the flow of information along the hierarchical levels of an organization, typically categorized into downward (from leaders to subordinates) and upward (from subordinates to leaders) communication. In structured institutions like Sufi organizations, vertical communication supports delegating authority, role clarity, and adherence to institutional values. Arby (2021) asserts that when clear and strategic, downward communication enhances team member motivation and performance in hierarchical organizations. In contrast, effective upward communication enables feedback, supports participatory leadership, and enhances transparency in decision-making. These dynamics are particularly significant in spiritual institutions, where roles are defined not only by administrative function but by levels of spiritual attainment and legitimacy. Thus, vertical communication becomes a conduit for transmitting spiritual vision and maintaining structural continuity.

Horizontal communication, meanwhile, refers to information exchange among peers or departments at the same organizational level. In religious institutions, horizontal communication fosters collaboration across functional areas such as education, dakwah, welfare programs, and inter-agency cooperation. Kalogiannidis (2020) emphasizes that lateral communication enhances organizational performance by promoting trust, speeding up conflict resolution, and improving coordination. In institutions like the NSPC, such communication often occurs through team meetings, joint programs, and task-based collaboration, particularly in social outreach or interfaith dialogues. Case studies from Islamic NGOs in the UK and Malaysia (Birt, 2016; Mohd Yusoff, 2019) show that successful religious organizations rely on a healthy balance between vertical authority and horizontal coordination to maintain discipline and adaptability. Hence, effective institutional communication is not linear but multi-directional, and its design must reflect the institution's organizational values and cultural expectations.

2.3 Communication, Spiritual Legitimacy, and Organizational Performance

In religious institutions, communication is intricately tied to spiritual legitimacy—recognizing an organization's authority based on its moral, theological, and communal credibility. Simon (2024) argues that organizational spirituality cannot be sustained without consistent, ethical communication that bridges leadership's intention with followers' understanding. In tarekat institutions, this connection is even more pronounced. The mursyid's ability to guide, direct, and inspire relies heavily on his capacity to communicate vision in a spiritually resonant yet organizationally effective manner. As such, communication is not merely transactional but existential; it affirms roles, reinforces purpose, and sustains the continuity of tradition. Without this communicative thread, even well-established institutions risk fragmentation, loss of authority, and operational confusion.

Moreover, empirical research supports the argument that communication practices influence internal coherence and broader organizational performance. Pološki Vokić et al. (2021) found that trust-based communication practices in a value-driven organization significantly improve organizational resilience and responsiveness. In religious settings, this includes mobilizing members for social action, maintaining alignment with government regulations, and sustaining long-term community engagement. For instance, the collaborative model adopted by the NSPC—through its

educational, outreach, and suluk programs—is facilitated by communication strategies that merge spiritual intention with structured planning. These strategies enable the tarekat to perform as a spiritual guide and as a socially embedded institution with measurable outcomes in public service and moral education. Thus, communication is the axis connecting spiritual legitimacy, administrative coherence, and social performance..

3. Methods

3.1 Material Object

The material object of this study is the Naqshabandiyyah Sufi Practice Centre (NSPC) in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, a formally structured spiritual institution rooted in Sufi Islamic tradition. As an organization balancing spiritual authority and managerial practices, NSPC offers a unique setting to explore how organizational communication enhances institutional functionality. Religious institutions like NSPC serve as material objects that reflect the intersection between spiritual vision and modern governance (Garner, 2017; Simon, 2024).

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory research design suitable for investigating symbolic processes within complex organizational environments. Qualitative design enables researchers to access deep meanings and uncover patterns of communication embedded in cultural and religious practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the case of NSPC, this design allows for examining how communication upholds leadership structure, role distribution, and internal coherence within the framework of Islamic spiritual discipline (Ahmad Munawar Ismail & Mohd Nor Shahizan, 2020).

3.3 Data Sources

The study relies on secondary textual sources from NSPC and affiliated bodies, such as reports, correspondence, educational materials, and institutional brochures. These texts reflect the voices of various stakeholders, including the mursyid, khalifah, and supporting administrators. Using document-based data enables researchers to understand formal organizational discourse in religious settings, where access to live participants may be limited or restricted due to spiritual hierarchies (Bowen, 2009; Sabitha, 2005).

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using document analysis and qualitative content analysis. Document analysis allows for the systematic review of textual material to identify institutional narratives, leadership directives, and communication patterns (Bowen, 2009). Content analysis was employed to code themes related to vertical and horizontal communication, both explicit and symbolic. This method is particularly effective in religious research contexts where much data is embedded in spiritually encoded language (Ahmad Munawar Ismail & Ali, 2020).

3.5 Data Analysis

An integrated inductive-deductive approach was used for data analysis. Inductive reasoning enabled the identification of emergent themes from institutional texts, while deductive analysis tested those findings against organizational communication frameworks. This dual approach ensures empirical richness and theoretical grounding, allowing the researcher to interpret the spiritual, ethical, and managerial aspects of communication within the NSPC (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Prabavathi & Nagasubramani, 2018). It also highlights how structured communication strengthens leadership and organizational legitimacy in a religious setting.

4. Result

4.1 Institutional Foundations and Spiritual Framework of NSPC

The Naqshabandiyyah Sufi Practice Centre (NSPC), also known as Rumah Suluk Kampung Dulang, was officially established in 1969 by Shaykh Samsudin bin Buyung al-Khalidi al-Naqshabandi. His founding of the institution was not merely a personal initiative. However, it was rooted in spiritual legitimacy conferred by his teacher, Shaykh Mahmud bin Indin, who in turn was a direct disciple of the legendary Shaykh Abdul Wahab Roka—an eminent figure in the spread of Tasawuf in the Malay Archipelago. This lineage forms part of the Naqshabandiyyah Baha'iyah Mujaddidiyyah Khalidiyyah Dziya'iyah order, as one of the tarekat mu'tabarah with an unbroken spiritual chain (silsilah) reaching back to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The continuity of this spiritual lineage affirms NSPC's theological authenticity and provides the institution with a stable leadership model based on transmission, discipline, and piety (Zainal Abidin, 2021). This historical backdrop becomes essential in understanding NSPC's organizational maturity today, where spiritual authority is tightly linked with managerial responsibilities. In this context, communication emerges not merely as a means of coordination but as a sacred trust, transmitting values, guidance, and responsibilities through an authoritative yet ethical system that preserves tradition and adaptability.

Over the decades, NSPC has evolved from a modest spiritual retreat into a comprehensive institution with structured facilities and operational systems. A significant milestone was the completion of its two-story suluk building in 2015, which now serves as the primary hub for spiritual retreats, daily prayers, and training programs. The building accommodates up to 200 congregants and over 50 salik simultaneously, with infrastructure that supports intensive activities such as qiyam al-layl, group dhikr, spiritual consultations, and ritual instruction. These practices are not conducted randomly but are highly regulated and systematized by the mursyid. For instance, the spiritual journey of each salik is assessed at regular intervals, and progression through levels of dhikr (Lata'if, Nafi Isbat, Wuquf, and Tahlil) depends on personal readiness and muraqabah (spiritual supervision). Hierarchical approval is required before advancing to the next stage, reflecting the high degree of organizational planning underlying religious instruction. Such formalization transforms NSPC from a purely spiritual retreat into a spiritual-educational institution that demands reliable communication channels. Each activity—from announcing suluk schedules to assigning mentors—is facilitated by planned communication structures, highlighting how ritual practice at NSPC is deeply intertwined with administrative efficiency and managerial intentionality.

The leadership structure at NSPC is highly formalized. It follows a tiered spiritual hierarchy: mursyid at the top, followed by appointed khalifahs, and finally, the salik as the spiritual trainees or followers. This arrangement is theological and organizational, with clear lines of authority, responsibility, and supervision. The mursyid, as the spiritual and administrative head, exercises his leadership through structured communication tools such as ijazah (written spiritual authorizations), instruction letters, periodic briefings, and documented delegation of tasks. Khalifahs, who serve as spiritual guides and managerial liaisons, are selected based on demonstrated loyalty, spiritual maturity, and communication competence. They manage local suluk operations, report to the mursyid, and implement standardized procedures in their respective branches. Programs such as Zikir Khatam Tawajjuh and suluk retreats follow standard operating guidelines, ensuring doctrinal consistency and organizational order across different locations. These verbal and written communication processes serve to instruct, monitor, and evaluate. As such, the organizational structure of NSPC becomes a living framework that embodies both the theological transmission of barakah (spiritual blessings) and the administrative enforcement of consistency, making it a vital foundation for understanding the institution's vertical and horizontal communication systems.

4.2. Vertical Communication and Leadership Continuity

Vertical communication at NSPC follows a top-down flow from the mursyid to khalifahs, administrators, and supporting officers. This communication stream includes spiritual guidance, operational instructions, delegation of roles, and long-term vision alignment. It is done through oral instruction and formal documentation, including ijazah letters, appointment memos, and written guidelines outlining functional duties. Each communication act is designed to reduce ambiguity in interpretation while reinforcing the centralized authority of the mursyid. As Mkhize and Mutambara (2025) explain, structured downward communication increases clarity, shapes expected behavior, and fosters a sense of shared purpose among subordinates. In the NSPC context, this is reflected in the consistent training of khalifahs, standardization of suluk modules, and dissemination of administrative protocols across various suluk centers. By employing traditional (oral) and modern (written/electronic) forms of communication, the mursyid ensures that each leadership tier receives uniform guidance rooted in spiritual wisdom and managerial discipline. This system reduces fragmentation and minimizes the risk of deviance or misalignment with tarekat values, reinforcing organizational unity and spiritual coherence at every operational level.

While downward communication ensures directive transmission, NSPC also institutionalizes upward communication to maintain transparency and operational feedback. Khalifahs and program coordinators must submit periodic reports covering suluk implementation, salik progress, program challenges, and broader community engagement. These reports, often delivered in writing and supplemented through review meetings with the mursyid, serve as crucial feedback tools that enable responsive decision-making. Gbarale and Leburu (2020) emphasize that upward communication enhances organizational sensitivity and trust-building, especially when leadership is receptive and evaluative rather than punitive. In the NSPC framework, this dynamic creates a sense of mutual responsibility, where subordinates are not merely passive recipients of commands but are also active contributors to institutional development. This model fosters a participatory spiritual bureaucracy, wherein communication is a two-way conduit for governance and growth. Moreover, such bottom-up feedback enables the mursyid to monitor spiritual trends, correct misunderstandings, and make

context-specific program adjustments. It also allows Khalifahs to share innovations or contextual adaptations, allowing institutional practices to evolve while staying rooted in tradition.

The role of vertical communication in sustaining leadership continuity within NSPC is foundational. Leadership appointments—whether for khalifahs, spiritual trainers, or administrative heads—are based not only on spiritual qualifications but also on a history of communicative trust and demonstrated responsibility. Before appointments are made, candidates undergo strategic consultations and performance observations, followed by formal authorization through *ijazah* or *surat perlantikan*. These appointments are not ad hoc but are part of a well-documented, vertically oriented leadership succession plan. Once appointed, the mursyid maintains regular supervisory communication through evaluation sessions, instructional briefings, and written advisories. This system ensures continuity, minimizes disruptions during leadership transitions, and strengthens institutional resilience. According to Prabavathi and Nagasubramani (2018), effective vertical communication is not limited to information dissemination but also supports moral reinforcement and behavioural alignment, both of which are vital in a spiritually rooted organization. Within the NSPC, this is visible in the continuity of suluk programming, standardization of rituals, and the sustained loyalty of followers to the institutional leadership. Vertical communication thus becomes both the channel and the glue that upholds spiritual authority and administrative consistency in the long term.

4.3. Horizontal Communication and Organizational Cohesion

Horizontal communication at NSPC significantly contributes to the institution's internal cohesion, particularly across departments that operate at the same hierarchical level, such as education, dakwah, administration, and community outreach. These units maintain synergy through regular coordination meetings, collaborative document drafting, WhatsApp groups, and shared planning sessions for events and religious programs. This real-time, peer-level communication ensures that organizational initiatives are not implemented in isolation but rather through shared understanding and collective execution. According to Kalogiannidis (2020), such horizontal communication is essential in a multi-functional organization as it enhances cooperation and enables seamless role integration. Within NSPC, joint efforts are obvious in large-scale spiritual events—such as *Majlis Khatam Tawajjuh*, public Maulid celebrations, and suluk registration—where different units collaborate on logistics, content, and participant management. These initiatives depend heavily on open and responsive communication, without which coordination failures or duplication of effort may occur. The culture of lateral information sharing also promotes inclusivity, as all involved parties are granted the opportunity to contribute to planning, offer insights, and address issues proactively, thus reinforcing team identity and commitment to NSPC's mission and spiritual values.

The establishment of Darul Hasani, a registered NGO affiliated with NSPC, exemplifies how horizontal communication extends beyond internal operations into broader societal engagement. Staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds—spiritual mentors, welfare officers, youth coordinators, and educators—work together in programs such as drug rehabilitation, food distribution, and public spiritual seminars. These cross-functional initiatives require continuous lateral communication to coordinate logistics, mobilize resources, and harmonize messaging. Such practices align with Mazzei (2014) and Kim et al. (2016), who argue that horizontal communication fosters trust, accountability, and shared purpose across functional boundaries. At Darul Hasani, for

instance, program planning often involves open-floor discussions where all participants, regardless of formal position, can share perspectives based on field experience. This egalitarian communication culture enhances creativity, allows context-specific adjustments, and builds a sense of ownership over outcomes. The effectiveness of this model is evident in Darul Hasani's ability to respond swiftly to community needs while maintaining alignment with NSPC's spiritual ethos. In this sense, horizontal communication bridges spiritual commitment and social responsibility, enabling the organization to adapt traditional values into modern, functional service delivery.

Horizontal communication at NSPC plays a vital role in institutional governance through *musyawarah*, or consultative decision-making. While vertical structures ensure authority clarity, *musyawarah* empowers departments and individuals at equivalent levels to engage in open dialogue and joint decision-making processes. This practice is most apparent in program planning sessions, budgeting discussions, and proposal drafting, where input is solicited from various units to create consensus-based outcomes. Men and Stacks (2013) assert that inclusive communication—particularly among peers—enhances institutional legitimacy by reinforcing participatory ethics and organizational transparency. In NSPC's case, this inclusivity nurtures a sense of communal responsibility, where staff and members feel morally and spiritually invested in decisions that affect the organization. The horizontal flow of ideas and experiences also mitigates the risk of top-down authoritarianism by embedding accountability within each decision node. Moreover, this communication style reflects Sufi values such as humility, mutual respect, and collective wisdom. By institutionalizing *musyawarah*, NSPC strengthens operational efficiency and deepens the spiritual brotherhood that sustains its identity. As a result, horizontal communication emerges not just as a technical necessity but as a spiritual practice rooted in the organization's core principles.

4.4. Communication and Institutional Legitimacy

Communication is a fundamental pillar for NSPC's institutional legitimacy, particularly in its engagements with external stakeholders such as government agencies, religious departments, and civil society. The center's consistent formal correspondence with institutions like the Negeri Sembilan Mufti Department (JMKNNs), Pejabat Agama Islam Daerah Jempol (PAIDJ), and the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (ILIM) exemplifies its integration into the formal religious governance structure of Malaysia. These partnerships are not superficial; they are documented through letters, memoranda of understanding, and program reports that reflect NSPC's commitment to transparency, legal compliance, and inter-institutional collaboration. Tkalc Vercic and Vercic (2019) assert that institutional trust is built through consistent and transparent communication, especially in faith-based organizations that seek public validation. In NSPC's case, external communication is handled with precision and cultural sensitivity, often using official Malay-Islamic discourse to align with national religious protocols. These efforts enhance the organization's credibility in the eyes of regulators and protect it from being viewed as fringe or unregulated. By adopting formal communication channels and adhering to institutional norms, NSPC reinforces its position as a professional Islamic body that bridges traditional Sufi values with contemporary governance expectations.

Beyond regulatory engagement, NSPC strongly emphasizes public-oriented communication to maintain visibility, convey values, and manage institutional reputation. This is done through regular publication of brochures, books, educational pamphlets, and newsletters that detail the center's

programs, spiritual teachings, and social outreach. Public events such as weekly religious classes, open suluk sessions, and interfaith dialogues are advertised through physical banners and digital platforms, expanding the institution's reach and reinforcing its credibility as a spiritually grounded yet publicly accessible organization. Simon (2024) underscores that in value-based institutions, public legitimacy depends on communication strategies that convey purpose and vision without compromising authenticity. NSPC's communications are thus crafted for informational purposes and as part of a broader strategic positioning. By producing scholarly works and engaging in collaborative events with academics and other religious bodies, NSPC positions itself as both a spiritual center and a knowledge-producing institution. This hybrid identity increases public trust and facilitates broader societal integration. In this way, public communication serves not just as image management, but as a mission-driven practice rooted in da'wah, education, and transparent accountability to the community it serves.

Internally, communication at NSPC plays a pivotal role in legitimizing leadership structures, maintaining operational discipline, and reinforcing ethical values across its tiers. Before any program or decision is implemented, detailed written guidelines are prepared, discussed, and disseminated to all involved personnel. Post-program evaluations—often conducted in the form of structured reports or spiritual reviews—help assess the effectiveness of implementation while offering feedback loops to enhance future initiatives. These practices align with Pološki Vokić et al. (2021), who highlight that internal communication fosters trust when it is transparent, systematic, and inclusive. In the NSPC context, such communication promotes organizational efficiency and cultivates spiritual integrity, as the process mirrors the Sufi principle of self-accountability (*muhasabah*). The mursyid and senior khalifahs actively model this communication ethic by maintaining open, respectful dialogue with subordinates, reinforcing a culture of mutual respect. Trust within NSPC is thus not merely functional; it is deeply spiritual, anchored in the belief that clear communication manifests sincerity, transparency, and spiritual responsibility. By institutionalizing these communication mechanisms, NSPC upholds its structural order and the moral credibility necessary to sustain its spiritual and community leader role.

5. Discussion

This study reveals that organizational communication is central in sustaining the management, leadership continuity, and legitimacy of the Naqshabandiyyah Sufi Practice Centre (NSPC). The results show that vertical communication—from the mursyid to khalifahs and administrative staff—ensures spiritual coherence and operational discipline, while bottom-up communication enables responsive governance and participatory feedback. Horizontal communication, meanwhile, fosters interdepartmental collaboration and strengthens institutional cohesion, particularly through initiatives like Darul Hasani. These findings support the view that communication in religious organizations is not merely instrumental but integral to identity formation, moral accountability, and strategic direction (Men & Stacks, 2013). Moreover, NSPC's use of communication mechanisms—from spiritual authorization documents to program evaluations—demonstrates the integration of traditional religious practices with contemporary organization methods. This institutional synthesis is essential for balancing doctrinal authenticity with administrative efficiency. The effectiveness of NSPC's internal and external communication also reinforces its legitimacy in the public sphere, as evidenced by its collaborations with governmental agencies and widespread visibility through

publications and social programs. In short, communication functions as a spiritual, managerial, and symbolic mechanism within NSPC's governance, validating the assumption that strong organizational communication is key to the vitality of modern Islamic institutions (Tkalac Vercic & Vercic, 2019).

The findings underscore the importance of communication as a structural and symbolic element in religious leadership. At NSPC, communication is not simply about task delegation or event coordination; it becomes an act of *amanah*—a moral trust that reinforces the ethical dimensions of leadership and spiritual guidance. This reflection aligns with Abu-Nimer (2019), who emphasizes that leadership effectiveness is inseparable from ethical communication that reflects sincerity, humility, and shared purpose in Islamic organizations. The study also highlights how NSPC's organizational culture is shaped by communication that reflects Sufi values such as *musyawarah* (consultation), *muraqabah* (spiritual reflection), and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood). These values are operationalized through formal communication channels, suggesting that spiritual leadership can coexist with managerial sophistication without compromising authenticity. Furthermore, the participatory nature of bottom-up communication observed in NSPC challenges the stereotype that Sufi organizations are entirely top-down and mystical. Instead, the institution reflects a dynamic interplay between structure and spontaneity, where spiritual practices are continuously adapted based on member feedback and contextual needs. This reality invites a broader reflection on how traditional Islamic institutions can remain relevant by embedding participatory ethics into their organizational frameworks through strategic communication (Abugre, 2017).

Theoretically, the integration of vertical and horizontal communication at NSPC can be interpreted through strategic communication and institutional theory. According to Hallahan et al. (2007), strategic communication involves organizations' purposeful use of communication to fulfill their mission. NSPC operationalizes this by embedding communication into leadership development, program management, and inter-agency relations, aligning spiritual goals with operational outcomes. Moreover, the institution exhibits characteristics of a "value-based organization" (Kangas, 2010), where mission-driven communication reinforces both internal cohesion and external legitimacy. The mursyid's communication style—anchored in spiritual authorization, ethical clarity, and systematic feedback—functions as a form of charismatic legitimacy, which Weber (1978) identifies as crucial in religious leadership. However, NSPC goes further by institutionalizing charisma through documented procedures and consultative structures. This interpretation reveals that Sufi-based organizations can transcend purely mystical orientations to develop into complex, adaptive systems grounded in modern organizational logic. The communicative rationality that underpins NSPC's operations allows it to translate spiritual authority into sustainable leadership practices. In this sense, communication is not simply a management tool but becomes the architecture through which institutional memory, spiritual values, and administrative coherence are continuously regenerated.

Compared with other Islamic organizations, particularly pesantren in Indonesia or Islamic da'wah movements in South Asia, NSPC presents a unique hybrid of tradition and managerial modernity. Studies by Azra (2004) and Hasan (2016) reveal that many Islamic institutions struggle with bureaucratic rigidity or charismatic over-centralization. In contrast, NSPC demonstrates a model where communication mechanisms counterbalance between both extremes. Its systematic use of *ijazah* documentation, program reports, and structured spiritual evaluations resembles

practices observed in professional religious boarding schools (*madrasah*). However, the institution remains anchored in the mystical and experiential ethos of Tasawuf. Compared to da'wah-based NGOs such as Jamaat-e-Islami or the Tablighi Jamaat, which often function through informal communication and charismatic leadership (Sikand, 2011), NSPC offers a more formalized and institutionally embedded model of spiritual governance. This suggests a possible alternative trajectory for Islamic organizations seeking to maintain theological integrity while responding to administrative and legal expectations in modern nation-states. Furthermore, the combination of vertical trust and horizontal cooperation positions NSPC closer to models found in civil society-based Islamic institutions in Turkey, such as the Nurcu and Hizmet movements (Yavuz, 2013), where communication is central to leadership development and public legitimacy.

Future studies should explore how NSPC's communication model can be adapted or replicated in other Sufi institutions and Islamic organizations facing pressures to modernize while preserving their spiritual identities. One key area of follow-up is the examination of gender dynamics in NSPC's communication flows, particularly how female participants are included in decision-making or leadership pathways. A comparative study between NSPC and other transnational Sufi orders operating in Southeast Asia, such as the Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandiyyah or Shadhiliyyah branches, could offer insights into communication as a cultural and institutional variable. Another potential research trajectory lies in digital transformation. While NSPC uses WhatsApp groups and digital publications, the impact of digital communication tools—such as livestreamed *dhikr* sessions or online suluk—on spiritual supervision and communal authenticity warrants deeper exploration. As Mazzei (2014) notes, communication technology can enhance participation but also risks diluting experiential depth in spiritually immersive organizations. Finally, future research should investigate the long-term effects of NSPC's communication strategies on youth engagement, sustainability, and intergenerational leadership succession. Through such inquiries, scholars and practitioners alike can better understand how communication in Islamic institutions functions as an administrative mechanism and as a theological imperative and strategic resource.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that organizational communication is pivotal in enhancing decision-making effectiveness, leadership continuity, and institutional legitimacy at the Naqshabandiyyah Sufi Practice Centre (NSPC). Vertical communication ensures that the mursyid's spiritual and administrative guidance is systematically conveyed to khalifahs and staff, while bottom-up communication supports transparency, feedback, and mutual accountability. Meanwhile, horizontal communication strengthens internal collaboration across departments responsible for education, dakwah, administration, and social outreach. These dynamics demonstrate that communication at NSPC is not merely a technical tool but a moral and spiritual mechanism rooted in Sufi ethics. It preserves doctrinal integrity, facilitates operational coordination, and transmits institutional values across hierarchies. In this light, communication emerges as the unifying force that integrates spiritual leadership with structured governance, enabling NSPC to operate as a traditional Sufi order and a modern Islamic organization responsive to contemporary social demands.

This research contributes significantly to the academic discourse on organizational communication within Islamic religious institutions, particularly Sufi-based organizations. Unlike conventional studies focusing on bureaucratic or charismatic leadership models in Islamic contexts,

this study illustrates how structured communication fosters institutional resilience, spiritual integrity, and organizational cohesion. The integration of vertical and horizontal communication within NSPC exemplifies a value-based communication model that is both participatory and ethically grounded. Methodologically, the study provides a qualitative framework for analyzing communication as a mechanism that shapes operational effectiveness and religious legitimacy. The findings enrich theoretical perspectives on strategic communication, spiritual leadership, and religious management, offering a blueprint for similar institutions aiming to balance traditional values with modern governance structures. The study bridges a scholarly gap and lays the groundwork for future research in Islamic organizational studies, particularly within spiritual institutions and communication ethics.

Future research should consider expanding the scope of inquiry in several directions. First, examining gender dynamics within NSPC—particularly women's roles and communication access in decision-making—could offer new insights into inclusivity in religious organizations. Second, studies could explore how digital transformation affects spiritual communication, including online religious instruction and community-building platforms. Third, comparative research across different Sufi orders in Southeast Asia or the broader Muslim world would help contextualize the uniqueness or universality of NSPC's communication practices. Investigating generational communication within the institution may also be critical, especially in understanding how younger members engage with traditional leadership and contribute to institutional sustainability. These avenues will expand scholarly knowledge and support institutional capacity-building by highlighting the importance of adaptive, ethical, and spiritually informed communication systems in contemporary Islamic organizations.

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