

Team Communication as a Moderator of Team Effectiveness: A Narrative Review through the Input-Mediator-Output Framework

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i5/28258>

Published Date: 13 May 2026

Abstract

Team communication has become increasingly important in modern organisations due to the growing reliance on multidisciplinary and interdependent teams within complex project environments. Despite its recognised importance, organisations continue to face challenges related to ineffective information flow, fragmented coordination, misunderstandings, and delayed decision-making, all of which negatively affect team effectiveness and project outcomes. Guided by the Input-Mediator-Output (IMO) framework, this conceptual paper examines the role of team communication as a mediator that transforms team inputs into effective performance outcomes. Through a narrative review of literature across construction, healthcare, engineering, agile software development, and project management contexts, the paper synthesises existing theoretical and empirical insights regarding communication, team processes, and emergent relational conditions. The review highlights that communication contributes not only to task coordination and knowledge integration, but also to the development of trust, psychological safety, shared mental models, and long-term team viability. The findings further suggest that communication quality is more critical than communication quantity, particularly within highly interdependent project environments. In addition, the paper identifies gaps in the current literature, including limited conceptual integration across disciplines and insufficient attention to communication complexity within project-based industries. Practical recommendations are proposed to assist organisations in strengthening communication systems, communication competencies, and collaborative team environments to enhance sustainable team effectiveness.

Keywords: Team Effectiveness, Team Communication, Input-Mediator-Output Framework, IMO Model

Introduction

Across industries such as construction, engineering, healthcare, and agile software development, organisational performance is now heavily dependent on the ability of teams to collaborate effectively under conditions characterised by uncertainty, interdependence,

time pressure, and continuous change (Mathieu et al., 2008; Kozlowski & Bell, 2013). When teams become more structurally and functionally complex, communication has emerged as one of the most critical determinants that can influence whether teams are able to perform effectively, adapt successfully, and sustain long-term collaboration.

The importance of team communication extends beyond the simple exchange of information. Within modern organisational settings, communication functions as the mechanism through which team members coordinate responsibilities, integrate diverse knowledge, align understanding, resolve uncertainty, and support collective decision-making (Kwofie et al., 2022; Anyaso et al., 2024). Effective communication enables organisations to improve coordination efficiency, minimise misunderstandings, strengthen collaborative relationships, and enhance responsiveness within rapidly changing project environments. Conversely, ineffective communication has consistently been associated with fragmented coordination, delayed decision-making, knowledge gaps, execution errors, reduced team cohesion, and increased project risks (Chi et al., 2021; Ding et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2025). These communication-related challenges are particularly significant in project-based and multidisciplinary environments where the success of organisational outcomes depends heavily on timely, accurate, and collaborative interaction among team members.

The increasing complexity of organisational projects has further increased the practical importance of understanding communication as a contributor to team effectiveness. In highly interdependent environments, teams are no longer evaluated solely based on productivity or task completion, but also on their ability to sustain collaboration, maintain positive relational dynamics, support learning, and adapt collectively to changing conditions (Mathieu et al., 2008). Consequently, team effectiveness has increasingly been recognised as a multidimensional construct encompassing performance outcomes, team satisfaction, collaborative capability, and long-term team viability. Within this broader perspective, communication becomes not merely an operational activity, but a strategic organisational capability that directly influences both task-related and relational dimensions of effectiveness.

Despite the recognised importance of communication, organisations across multiple industries continue to experience persistent communication-related problems. Previous studies have highlighted recurring issues involving unclear information flow, communication fragmentation, coordination breakdowns, inaccessible knowledge, and ineffective interaction patterns within project teams (Kwofie et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2025). Similarly, communication failures in healthcare and engineering environments have been associated with reduced collaboration quality, lower team resilience, and poorer organisational outcomes (Romijn et al., 2016; Ding et al., 2024). These challenges indicate that team communication remains insufficiently understood and inconsistently managed within many contemporary organisational settings. Hence, there is a need to strengthen theoretical and practical understanding regarding how communication contributes to effective teamwork and sustainable organisational performance.

In this circumstance, Input-Mediator-Output (IMO) framework provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding this relationship. Unlike earlier linear models of team effectiveness, the IMO framework recognises that team outcomes emerge dynamically

through interaction processes and emergent relational conditions such as trust, psychological safety, cohesion, and shared mental models (Ilgen et al., 2005; Mathieu et al., 2008). Within this perspective, communication functions as a central mediating mechanism that transforms team inputs, including competencies, leadership, and team composition, into effectiveness outcomes. Communication therefore plays a dual role by facilitating both task coordination and the development of relational conditions necessary for long-term team functioning.

Although communication and team effectiveness have attracted growing scholarly attention, the existing literature remains fragmented across disciplines and organisational contexts. Much of the current research examines communication within isolated settings such as healthcare, engineering, construction, or agile software development, with comparatively limited conceptual synthesis integrating these perspectives through the IMO framework. Furthermore, insufficient attention has been given to understanding communication as a multidimensional mediator that simultaneously influences behavioural processes, emergent states, and sustainable team effectiveness within complex project environments.

The study aims to synthesise existing theoretical and empirical literature to strengthen understanding of how communication contributes to coordination, collaboration, relational development, and performance outcomes within multidisciplinary organisational environments. Practically, the review provides insights that may assist organisational leaders, project managers, and institutions in designing more effective communication systems, communication practices, and collaborative team environments to support sustainable team effectiveness in complex organisational settings.

Theoretical Overview

The Input-Mediator-Output (IMO) model is a theoretical advancement of the earlier Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework introduced by McGrath (1964) to explain team effectiveness. While the IPO model conceptualised team performance as a linear relationship between inputs, processes, and outcomes, it is questioned for inadequately captured the dynamic and psychological complexity of modern teams (Ilgen et al., 2005; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Consequently, the IMO model was developed to better reflect the evolving and multilevel nature of team interactions and effectiveness (Mathieu et al., 2008; Mathieu et al., 2019).

Within the IMO framework, inputs refer to relatively stable antecedent conditions that shape team interaction, for e.g. members' competencies, personalities, leadership influences, team composition, and organisational context (Mathieu et al., 2008). These inputs establish the foundation that influences how teams communicate, collaborate, and coordinate throughout task execution. The mediator component represents the key theoretical contribution of the IMO model. Unlike the traditional IPO framework, the IMO model recognises that team effectiveness is influenced not only by behavioural processes such as communication and coordination, but also by emergent states, including trust, cohesion, confidence, psychological safety, and shared mental models (Mathieu et al., 2008). Emergent states are cognitive, motivational, and affective conditions that develop dynamically through repeated team interaction and subsequently shape future behaviours and performance.

The output dimension extends beyond task accomplishment to include broader indicators of team effectiveness such as member satisfaction, learning, adaptability, and long-term team viability (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2019). Empirical studies have demonstrated the relevance of the IMO model across engineering, healthcare, and agile project environments, particularly in explaining how communication, knowledge sharing, and resilience influence team performance (Ding et al., 2024; Hammond & Kedrowicz, 2022). Despite challenges related to conceptual overlap and measurement complexity, the IMO model remains a comprehensive framework for understanding team effectiveness in complex organisational settings.

Literature Review

Team Effectiveness in IMO

A team is commonly defined as a group of interdependent individuals who work collectively towards shared objectives while coordinating their efforts and responsibilities to achieve organisational goals (Barrick et al., 2007; Kozlowski & Bell, 2013). Cohen and Bailey (1997) further emphasised that teams are characterised not only by collective accountability for common goals, but also by the management of relationships and interactions across organisational boundaries.

Hackman's foundational perspective (1987) proposed that an effective team is one that achieves or exceeds performance expectations, enhances members' willingness to continue working together, and contributes positively to individual learning and fulfilment. Similarly, Mathieu et al. (2008) conceptualised team effectiveness through three broad dimensions, namely performance outcomes, members' affective responses such as satisfaction and commitment, and team viability, which refers to the team's capacity to sustain collaboration over time.

Recent empirical studies further reinforce the multidimensional nature of team effectiveness. Yoo et al. (2022) described team effectiveness as incorporating work quality, work quantity, team satisfaction, and growth experiences among members. Similarly, Peralta et al. (2015) suggested that effectiveness includes both internal and external dimensions, including organisational reputation, citizenship behaviour, and collaborative performance. Chiu et al. (2022) additionally identified team viability as a critical component of effectiveness, referring to the team's ability to maintain functional relationships and retain members over time. Collectively, these findings indicate that effective teams are not only capable of delivering high-quality outcomes, but are also able to foster sustainable collaboration, positive interpersonal experiences, and confidence in future teamwork.

Team Communication

Team communication refers to the structured exchange of project-related information through interpersonal and social interactions that enable coordination, collaboration, and collective task execution among team members (Kwofie et al., 2022; Anyaso et al., 2024). Within contemporary organisational environments, communication extends beyond the simple transmission of information and functions as a dynamic mechanism for aligning understanding, integrating expertise, and facilitating collective decision-making. In construction and engineering projects, communication performance is commonly conceptualised through information flow and information composition, reflecting how

information is transmitted, interpreted, and utilised across multidisciplinary teams (Kwofie et al., 2022). Effective communication systems enhance cooperation, strengthen coordination, and improve task-processing capability, thereby contributing positively to organisational and project performance (Chi et al., 2021).

The significance of communication becomes increasingly critical in highly interdependent and knowledge-intensive environments. Ding et al. (2024) argued that communication networks constitute the structural foundation through which project teams exchange knowledge, coordinate actions, and develop resilience in complex engineering projects. Their study demonstrated that communication patterns significantly influence team performance by shaping knowledge-sharing behaviour and relational interaction among team members. Similarly, Truong et al. (2025) highlighted that effective teams are characterised by seamless communication, mutual respect, and collaborative interaction, all of which are essential for maintaining shared understanding and adaptive coordination within Scrum teams. These findings reinforced that communication is not merely a supporting activity but a central mechanism underlying team effectiveness.

Conversely, ineffective communication has consistently been associated with coordination failure, misunderstandings, delayed decision-making, and reduced project performance. Communication barriers such as unclear information, fragmented information flow, and limited accessibility undermine collaboration and increase execution risks within complex project environments (Kwofie et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2025). Similarly, the Project Management Institute (2021) identified effective communication as one of the primary determinants of project success, particularly in environments characterised by multidisciplinary coordination and high uncertainty.

Evidence from healthcare and engineering contexts further reinforces the importance of communication as a foundational teamwork condition. Romijn et al. (2016) found that poor interprofessional communication significantly contributed to adverse clinical outcomes in multidisciplinary healthcare teams. Similarly, McEwan et al. (2017) conceptualised communication as a core teamwork behaviour that enables teams to transform member capabilities and contextual inputs into effective performance outcomes. These findings suggested that communication functions not merely as an operational activity, but as a central mechanism through which team effectiveness is enacted in complex organisational settings.

Communication as a Mediator of Team Effectiveness

Within the IMO framework, communication functions as a critical mediating mechanism through which team inputs are transformed into performance outcomes. Communication enables teams to coordinate activities, integrate expertise, resolve problems, and maintain shared understanding throughout task execution. As such, communication represents one of the most fundamental teamwork processes underlying team effectiveness (Mathieu et al., 2008).

McEwan et al. (2017) identified communication as a core teamwork behaviour that enables teams to convert member capabilities and contextual inputs into effective performance outcomes. Similarly, Ding et al. (2024) demonstrated that communication structures and

relational interaction patterns significantly influence engineering project team performance through mediators such as knowledge-sharing behaviour and team resilience. Their findings supported the IMO assumption that team interaction processes act as the mechanisms linking structural conditions to effectiveness outcomes.

Communication also contributes to the development of emergent states such as trust, psychological safety, and shared mental models. Truong et al. (2025) identified communication, mutual respect, and shared mental models as key coordinating mechanisms underlying Scrum team effectiveness. Their findings suggest that effective communication enhances cognitive alignment and collaborative interaction, thereby strengthening coordination and adaptive capability within agile project teams. Similarly, Hammond and Kedrowicz (2022) found that communication-focused training interventions improved team coordination, engagement, openness, and collaborative effectiveness through enhanced listening, feedback, and interaction quality.

Importantly, recent literature suggests that communication quality is more influential than communication quantity alone. Frequent communication does not necessarily improve coordination if information remains ambiguous, inconsistent, or poorly structured. Consequently, effective communication depends on clarity, accessibility, responsiveness, and contextual appropriateness rather than merely communication frequency (Chi et al., 2021; Kwofie et al., 2022).

The literature further indicates that communication effectiveness can be strengthened through both behavioural and structural interventions. Behavioural interventions include teamwork training, communication competency development, and collaborative learning activities, while structural interventions involve communication protocols, reporting templates, and standardised communication systems (McEwan et al., 2017; Romijn et al., 2016). Together, these approaches improve both communication processes and emergent relational conditions, thereby enhancing overall team effectiveness.

Accordingly, communication within the present study is positioned as a central mediator linking project team inputs to effectiveness outcomes. Effective communication enables multidisciplinary teams to align goals, coordinate interdependent activities, and develop the shared understanding necessary for successful project execution within complex property development environments.

Discussion

Team communication plays a central and multidimensional role in enhancing team effectiveness within the Input-Mediator-Output (IMO) framework. The reviewed literature demonstrates that the IMO framework provides a strong theoretical lens for explaining the relationship between communication and team effectiveness. While inputs such as competencies, leadership, personalities, and organisational context establish the structural foundation of teams, communication functions as the interactional mechanism through which these resources are integrated and translated into performance outcomes (Mathieu et al., 2008). This reinforces the argument that teams do not achieve effectiveness solely because capable individuals are assembled together, but because members are able to

communicate effectively to coordinate expertise, resolve uncertainty, and sustain collaboration over time.

Team effectiveness is inherently multidimensional. The reviewed studies consistently conceptualised effectiveness beyond conventional measures of productivity and task completion. Instead, team effectiveness encompasses performance outcomes, team satisfaction, collaborative experience, learning, and long-term viability (Aubé & Rousseau, 2005; Mathieu et al., 2008). This broader understanding aligns closely with the IMO perspective, which recognises that emergent relational conditions such as trust, cohesion, and psychological safety are essential for sustaining long-term team functioning. Communication therefore contributes simultaneously to both task-related effectiveness and relational effectiveness.

A key synthesis emerging is that communication quality appears more important than communication quantity. While communication frequency facilitates interaction, the literature consistently indicates that frequent communication alone does not guarantee effective coordination. Communication that is unclear, fragmented, delayed, or poorly structured may instead generate misunderstandings, duplication, and coordination failure (Kwofie et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2025). Consequently, effective communication depends on clarity, consistency, accessibility, responsiveness, and contextual appropriateness. This finding is particularly important within project-based environments such as property development, where multidisciplinary coordination and time-sensitive decision-making increase communication complexity.

The reviewed studies also demonstrate that communication contributes directly to the formation of emergent states within the IMO framework. Effective communication facilitates the development of trust, psychological safety, shared mental models, and collaborative confidence among team members. Truong et al. (2025) identified communication, mutual respect, and shared understanding as key coordinating mechanisms underlying Scrum team effectiveness, while Hammond and Kedrowicz (2022) demonstrated that communication-focused interventions improved openness, engagement, and collaborative interaction. These findings suggested that communication does not merely transfer information, but also shapes the relational and cognitive conditions necessary for effective teamwork.

Another important insight concerns the relationship between communication structures and team coordination. Ding et al. (2024) demonstrated that communication networks significantly influence team performance through knowledge-sharing behaviour and team resilience. This finding extends traditional perspectives of communication by suggesting that communication effectiveness depends not only on interpersonal interaction, but also on the structural configuration of communication flows within teams. Communication networks therefore shape how knowledge is distributed, how quickly information moves across the team, and how effectively members respond to uncertainty and project challenges.

The previous studies indicated that communication effectiveness can be enhanced through both behavioural and structural interventions. Behavioural approaches such as teamwork training, communication competency development, and collaborative learning activities strengthen interpersonal communication capabilities, listening skills, and collaborative

behaviours (McEwan et al., 2017; Hammond & Kedrowicz, 2022). Simultaneously, structural interventions such as communication protocols, standardised reporting systems, templates, and formal communication channels improve consistency and reduce ambiguity in information exchange (Romijn et al., 2016). Importantly, the literature suggests that these approaches are complementary rather than independent. Communication tools alone may not improve effectiveness without corresponding behavioural capability development, while communication training without structural support may result in inconsistent application across complex project environments.

Collectively, the reviewed literature suggested that communication occupies a central position within the IMO framework because it simultaneously influences team processes and emergent states. Communication enables coordination, supports knowledge integration, facilitates adaptive problem-solving, and strengthens relational conditions that sustain long-term collaboration. This integrated role explains why communication repeatedly emerges as one of the strongest predictors of team effectiveness across engineering, healthcare, agile software development, and project management contexts.

This narrative review reveals several theoretical and practical gaps. Although communication is widely acknowledged as critical to team effectiveness, existing literature remains fragmented across disciplines and contexts. Much of the current evidence originates from healthcare, construction, and agile software development environments, while comparatively limited research specifically examines communication within property development project teams. Furthermore, many studies focus primarily on positive communication outcomes, with less attention given to communication overload, hierarchical communication asymmetry, or tensions between communication standardisation and flexibility in dynamic project environments.

Practical Recommendations to be adopted by Organization

Based on the synthesis of the literature, organisations and institutions should treat team communication as a strategic mechanism for improving team effectiveness rather than as a routine administrative activity. Within the Input-Mediator-Output framework, communication functions as the mediator that translates team inputs, such as competencies, leadership, team composition, and organisational context, into performance, satisfaction, learning, and team viability (Mathieu et al., 2008; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Therefore, organisations should deliberately design communication systems that improve both task coordination and relational quality.

First, organisations should prioritise communication quality rather than merely increasing communication frequency. Frequent meetings, reports, or messages do not necessarily improve team effectiveness if information remains unclear, incomplete, delayed, or poorly structured. Institutions should therefore establish clear expectations for communication clarity, timeliness, accessibility, and relevance by implement structured communication protocols (Kwofie et al., 2022; Anyaso et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2025).

Second, organisations should invest in communication competency development. Team members should be trained in active listening, feedback, questioning, conflict resolution, role clarification, and concise information sharing. Training should not be limited to lectures or

awareness sessions. Instead, institutions should use workshops, simulations, role-play, project review sessions, and reflective learning activities that allow team members to practise communication in realistic work situations (McEwan et al., 2017; Hammond & Kedrowicz, 2022).

Third, leaders should actively shape communication networks within teams. Managers should ensure that information does not become overly centralised around a few individuals, as this may create bottlenecks, delay decision-making, and reduce knowledge sharing. At the same time, fully decentralised communication without structure may create confusion. Organisations should therefore balance formal reporting lines with cross-functional communication channels that support timely knowledge exchange, resilience, and coordinated action (Ding et al., 2024).

Finally, organisations should use communication as a tool to develop emergent states such as trust, psychological safety, shared mental models, and mutual respect. Leaders should create team environments where members feel safe to raise concerns, clarify uncertainties, challenge assumptions, and share incomplete information early. This is particularly important in complex project environments, where silence or delayed communication may conceal risks until they become costly problems (Truong et al., 2025; Hammond & Kedrowicz, 2022).

Overall, organisations should integrate structural communication systems with behavioural communication development. Standardised tools provide consistency, while training develops the human capability to use those tools effectively. This combined approach is more likely to enhance team effectiveness than relying on either communication procedures or interpersonal skills alone.

Conclusion

This narrative review examined the role of team communication in enhancing team effectiveness through the lens of the Input-Mediator-Output (IMO) framework. The review demonstrated that communication functions as a central mediating mechanism that transforms team inputs into effective performance outcomes. Across the reviewed literature, communication consistently emerged as a multidimensional process that supports coordination, knowledge integration, collaborative problem-solving, and adaptive decision-making within complex organisational environments.

Despite the growing recognition of communication as a critical determinant of team effectiveness, the review identified that existing literature remains fragmented across industries and contexts, with limited studies specifically focusing on property development project teams. Future research should therefore examine communication dynamics within project-based industries more extensively, particularly regarding communication overload, hierarchical communication asymmetry, and the balance between communication standardisation and flexibility in dynamic organisational environments. Overall, this review reinforces the importance of team communication as a foundational mechanism for enhancing sustainable team effectiveness within modern organisations.

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