

## A Questionnaire Based Assessment of Organizational Communication in Indian Railways

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### Abstract

The objective of this research was to explore the Organizational Communications existent in Indian Railways. The satisfaction of employees in Indian Railways has been analyzed with respect to the communication schemes provided. Being the largest employer in the world, South Central Railways has been chosen as a representative zone to evaluate the compensation and benefits offered to railway employees in general. South Central Railways is strategically positioned in the southern peninsula, headquartered at Secunderabad, and serves the economically vibrant states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Parts of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The questionnaire methodology was used following which data were analyzed using Graphpad prism. Data were evaluated to determine the impact of gender as well. While differences do exist between the satisfaction levels of male and females in certain aspects, it can be concluded that the level of organizational communication is at par or exceeds employee expectations overall. Improvements are however required with respect to the frequency of feedback given by managers as well as the avenues provided for future growth.

**Key Words:** Organizational Communication, South Central Railways (SCR)

### Introduction

Established in 1853, Indian Railways is the second largest rail network in the world and caters to the transportation needs to millions of individuals within India annually<sup>1</sup>. Among the sixteen Railway zones, the South Central Railways (SCR) is one of the biggest railway Zone in Indian Railways covering southern peninsula covering the massive transportation of customer and goods<sup>2</sup>. Headquartered in Secunderabad, the South Central Railways serves the economically vibrant states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, parts of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Organizational communication refers to the exchange of information, views, and ideas within and outside the organization. Transmission of ideas is often accompanied by feedback from the individual stakeholders thereby ensuring successful accomplishment of organizational goals<sup>3</sup>. Goals and stakeholders of every business are therefore interconnected in a way such that the attainment of goals relies on communication within stakeholder groups. Communication is therefore considered integral to any organization<sup>4</sup>. Formal flow of ideas and information in an organization may move in several directions i.e. upward, downward, or horizontal. While downward communications address performance related issues and training, upward communications with supervisors are typically associated with complaints or requests for help. Horizontal communications occurs among peers and focus on coordination of tasks or resources with intent to achieve a goal at hand.

Although several case studies have looked into the functional aspects of Indian Railways as a whole, there are no published reports specifically on employee inputs regarding organizational communication in Indian Railways. Similar to other zones, the South Central Railway is bureaucratic and follows a hierarchical model thereby making communication all the more important for efficient functioning. The objective of this research therefore is to provide an insight and critically evaluate the degree of satisfaction among employees with respect to

organizational communication within South Central Railways with emphasis on the following aspects:

1. Understanding whether the current communication pattern within South Central Railways was acceptable to the employees
2. Effect of gender on employee satisfaction with respect to the existing organizational communication structure

### Methods

A questionnaire was prepared and handed out to 20% of employees in each department (accounts, personnel, commercial, language, and medical) so that uniformity is maintained. Approx. 310 employees filled the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of five questions with respondents requested to circle the option they deem most appropriate. Options comprised of **A**- Strongly Disagree, **B**-Disagree, **C**-Neither Agree nor Disagree, **D**-Agree, and **E**-Strongly Agree. Questions posed in the questionnaire were as follows:

1. There is a healthy balance of work and personal life that does not leave me fatigued
2. My manager regularly gives me feedback about the area that I need to develop/improve and helps me to work on them.
3. I feel I have an opportunity to show my leadership skills in the organization
4. The organization follows two-way communication and not just flowing from top to bottom.
5. I feel secure about my future growth and success in the organization

For data analysis, alphabets were converted into numbers (A = 1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5) to arrive at the scoring pattern depicted in the graphs.

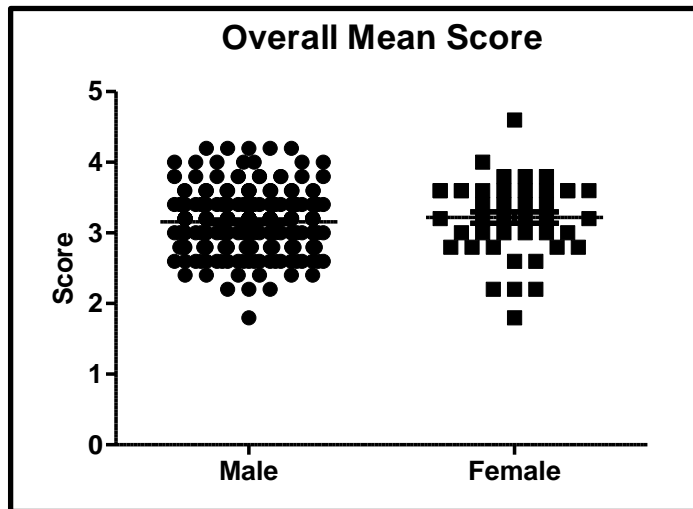
Hypothesis was tested using applicable statistical procedures to determine the correlation between the variables outlined in the questionnaire. Testing includes working out a statistical model based on the data generated on a randomly selected sample assuming that the null hypothesis is true, when the study is on a randomly selected representative sample. Column statistics were employed to analyze the difference between male and female respondents questionnaire for each individual section. Following column statistics, the t test was employed for arriving at a conclusion on the significance of the data and validity of the null hypothesis. Because the number of male respondents were higher than females, an unpaired t test was used. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) followed by post-hoc Tukey's multiple comparison test was employed to determine differences in scores for questions. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to estimate the interaction and impact of gender on the response. All statistical analysis was conducted using Graphpad Prism (Version 5.02) and differences were deemed significant at  $P < 0.05$ .

### Results and Discussion

The research questionnaire provided to randomly selected employees of South Central Railways was an attempt to understand the extent of satisfaction provided by the practices currently employed by the human resource department with respect to organization communication. Besides, the impact of gender on the overall response was determined by enrolling both males and females for the survey. A total of 312 employees (268 male and 44 female) were surveyed across designations with varying years of service. Employees were handed over the questionnaire and the duly filled responses were entered into an excel database for analysis.

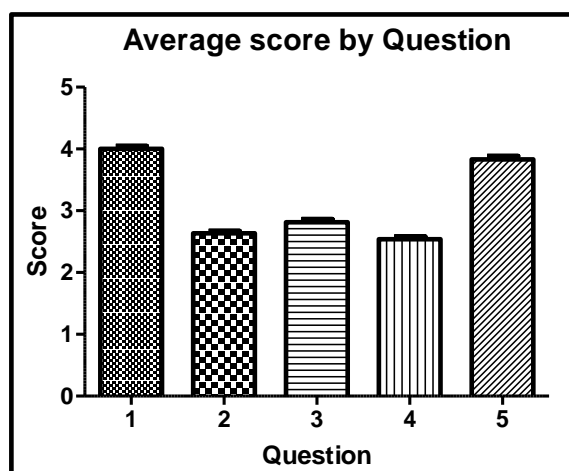
Scores were not different ( $P = 0.35$ ) between male and female respondents (**Figure 1**) for questions on organizational communication (difference between means = 0.06). However, average scores were different ( $P < 0.0001$ ) within males and females indicating a variability in their responses. Mean values for scores across all the questions posed among males and females were  $3.156 \pm 0.395$  (Range = 1.8-4.2; Median = 3.2) and  $3.218 \pm 0.538$  (Range = 1.8-

4.6; Median = 3.2). Overall, data indicate an absence of gender effect with both sets of responders scoring above average on the questionnaire.



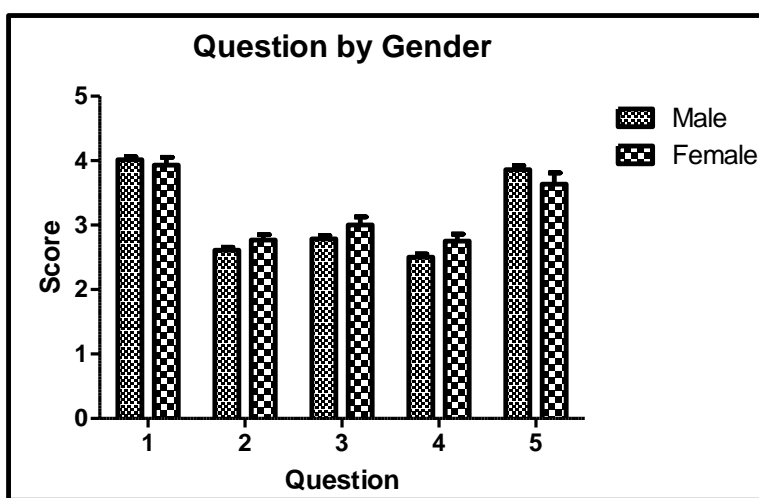
**Figure 1.** Overall mean score across gender

A Tukey multiple comparisons test was employed to determine the differences in average score between each question across all responders (**Figure 2**). Differences in scores were significant ( $P < 0.05$ ), between most questions asked except for 1 (there is a healthy balance of work and personal life that does not leave me fatigued) *vs.* 5 (I feel secure about by future growth and success in the organization), 2 (my manager regularly gives me feedback about the area that I need to develop/improve and helps me work on them) *vs.* 3 (I feel I have the opportunity to show my leadership skills in the organization), and 2 ((my manager regularly gives me feedback about the area that I need to develop/improve and helps me work on them) *vs.* 4 (the organization follows two-way communication and not just flowing from top to bottom). Rank order of scores for question within this section was 1 > 5 > 3 > 2 > 4 indicating that employees were satisfied with the work-life balance and were secure about their future and growth prospects at South Central Railways. Employees however, appear to be less than satisfied with the frequency of feedback given to them by their managers and desire more avenues to display their leadership skills. Because communication forms a backbone to success for most hierarchical organizations, it is imperative that communication mechanisms are streamlined to achieve maximal efficiency and avoid inter-personal conflicts<sup>5</sup>.



**Figure 2.** Average score by question across all respondents

**Figure 3** depicts the effect of gender on the responses to the questions posed to the employees at South Central Railways on organizational communication. While differences between scores for individual questions ( $P < 0.0001$ ) were obvious for both males and females, a trend towards significance ( $P = 0.051$ ) was observed for the question by gender interaction indicating that gender did have a role to play in deciding outcomes to the questionnaire. Females tended to score higher on questions 2, 3, and 4, but lower on question 5 when compared to males indicating that they were happy with the quality of feedback and communication followed at South Central Railways. Males on the other hand tended to be more assured about their success and future in their organization. As elucidated by Karima Merchant<sup>6</sup>, psychological differences in communication styles between men and women create gender stereotypes. Leadership skills and abilities of females are often portrayed negatively thus making it hard for women to achieve success and thereby creating a blanket of job insecurity. To eliminate gender stereotyping and bias, organizations must proactively plan initiatives that nurture growth and advancement of female leaders.



**Figure 3.** Average score by question between males and females

**Summary:** Being the largest employer in the world, organization communication at Indian Railways is undoubtedly a complex and mammoth task. However, based on a representative sample of respondents comprising of both males and females within the South Central Railway zone, it can be concluded that the level of organizational communication is at par or exceeds employee expectations overall. Improvements are however required with respect to the frequency of feedback given by managers as well as the avenues provided for future growth.

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