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The Algorithmic Boss: Communication Challenges in Organizations Using AI-Driven Management Systems

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the communication challenges organizations face when adopting AI-driven management systems, a growing trend in digital transformation. The integration of algorithmic management, where AI systems autonomously handle tasks such as scheduling, performance tracking, and decision-making, has led to a shift in traditional communication flows. This research aims to investigate how these systems alter organizational communication, focusing on the implications for employee engagement, feedback mechanisms, and decision-making processes. Using a qualitative approach with multiple case studies across the logistics, e-commerce, and digital services sectors, data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that algorithmic management systems reduce communication to one-way, impersonal directives, resulting in emotional dissonance, alienation, and ambiguity among employees. Informal communication networks emerge as critical spaces for meaning-making and restoring agency. The study concludes that while algorithmic systems optimize efficiency, they must be designed to incorporate dialogic processes and feedback loops to preserve organizational cohesion and trust. This research highlights the need for more communicatively informed approaches to algorithmic management that balance efficiency with relational dynamics.

1. Introduction

The growing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into organizational operations has transformed many traditional managerial functions[1]. Tasks such as scheduling, performance monitoring, decision-making, and employee evaluations are increasingly delegated to AI systems. This shift marks a fundamental departure from human-centered managerial approaches toward data-driven automation. As a result, many organizational decisions that once relied on human

[1] Dr. Bharati Rathore, 'Digital Transformation 4.0: Integration of Artificial Intelligence & Metaverse in Marketing', *Eduzone : International Peer Reviewed/Refereed Academic Multidisciplinary Journal*, 12.01 (2023), doi:10.56614/eiprmj.v12i1y23.248.

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judgment are now determined by algorithmic logic[2]. This development reflects a broader trend in digital transformation across sectors.

A notable phenomenon that arises from this transformation is the concept of the "algorithmic boss." This term refers to management systems that operate autonomously through software and data, replacing or augmenting traditional supervisory roles[3]. These systems make decisions about work assignments, productivity tracking, and compliance enforcement with minimal human input. The algorithmic boss does not merely assist managers but often takes over key control functions[4]. This evolution challenges long-standing assumptions about authority, communication, and accountability in organizational life.

The rise of algorithmic management has been widely discussed in studies of platform labor, gig economies, and digital work[5]. Scholars have examined how these systems affect worker autonomy, job security, and labor relations. Much of this literature focuses on control and surveillance, emphasizing how algorithms enforce compliance and optimize performance. Research on digital labor has explored the implications of datafication and performance quantification[6]. However, these studies rarely foreground communication as a central analytical category.

In many organizations, communication under algorithmic management is reduced to unidirectional data transmission. Systems issue directives through apps, dashboards, or notification tools, and employees are expected to respond accordingly. The nuance, context, and negotiation typically involved in human communication are largely absent. Algorithmic decisions are perceived as final and impersonal, limiting opportunities for clarification or feedback. This reduction of communication to automated output undermines dialogic processes within the workplace[7] [8].

Although several scholars have raised concerns about fairness, transparency, and ethical accountability in algorithmic systems, the communicative implications remain underexplored. AI systems do not simply make decisions—they structure interactions and shape the conditions under which people communicate[9]. When managerial communication becomes automated, the

[2] Fatima Gaw, 'Algorithmic Logics and the Construction of Cultural Taste of the Netflix Recommender System', *Media, Culture and Society*, 44.4 (2022), doi:10.1177/01634437211053767.
[3] Diana M. Montoya-Quintero, Luisa F. Bermudez-Ríos, and Juan M. Cogollo-Flórez, 'Model for Integrating Knowledge Management System and Quality Management System in Industry 4.0', *Quality - Access to Success*, 23.189 (2022), doi:10.47750/QAS/23.189.03.
[4] Giovanni Gaudio, 'Litigating the Algorithmic Boss in the EU: A (Legally) Feasible and (Strategically) Attractive Option for Trade Unions?', *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 40.1 (2024), doi:10.54648/ijcl2024002.
[5] Mohammad Hossein Jarrahi and others, 'Algorithmic Management in a Work Context', *Big Data and Society*, 8.2 (2021), doi:10.1177/20539517211020332.
[6] Lisa Gussek and Manuel Wiesche, 'Understanding the Careers of Freelancers on Digital Labor Platforms: The Case of IT Work', *Information Systems Journal*, 34.5 (2024), doi:10.1111/isj.12509.
[7] Daisuke Satoh and others, 'Reduction of Communication Demand under Disaster Congestion Using Control to Change Human Communication Behavior without Direct Restriction', *Computer Networks*, 134 (2018), doi:10.1016/j.comnet.2018.01.049.
[8] Iman Sumarlan, 'Self-Concept of Milenial Generation in Managing the Boundaries of Information on Privacy on Social Media', *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 03.12 (2020), doi:10.47191/ijsshr/v3-i12-07.
[9] Natalia Díaz-Rodríguez and others, 'Connecting the Dots in Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence: From AI Principles, Ethics, and Key Requirements to Responsible AI Systems and Regulation', *Information Fusion*, 99 (2023), doi:10.1016/j.inffus.2023.101896.

organization's social fabric is affected[10]. The reduction of relational exchange can lead to emotional detachment, misalignment of expectations, and organizational fragmentation. These risks highlight the importance of re-centering communication in studies of algorithmic control.

There is a clear gap in the literature regarding how AI-driven systems influence communication patterns, relationships, and organizational meaning-making[11] [12]. Most research assumes that communication is a neutral conduit that remains unaffected by technological changes. However, communication scholars argue that technologies co-constitute communicative practices. In algorithmic environments, what counts as legitimate communication is often pre-coded and limited. This calls for an inquiry that treats communication not as a byproduct of automation, but as a core dimension reshaped by it.

This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing communication challenges in organizations governed by algorithmic systems. The focus is on how these systems alter traditional communication flows, feedback mechanisms, and relational dynamics. Special attention is given to the ways in which employees interpret, adapt to, or resist algorithmic decisions. By applying communication theory, the research offers insights into how organizations are communicatively constituted under algorithmic control. It asks how authority, legitimacy, and interaction are produced and contested in such contexts.

The central problem explored in this study concerns the transformation of communication practices in AI-managed workplaces. Specifically, it investigates how algorithmic management reshapes the nature of message exchange, decision explanation, and interpersonal engagement. Traditional models of organizational communication rely on shared understanding, interpretive flexibility, and relational cues. Algorithmic systems, however, operate on fixed rules and predictive logics that often exclude human nuance. This creates a mismatch between technological efficiency and communicative complexity.

Employees working under algorithmic systems often experience ambiguity, depersonalization, and reduced agency. They may not know how or why certain decisions are made, and they lack clear channels for recourse or negotiation. Furthermore, the impersonality of AI-driven instructions can erode trust and organizational identification. In such environments, employees may turn to informal networks to seek clarity or validation. This dynamic illustrates the importance of communication in mediating power, identity, and belonging.

The objective of this study is to explore and theorize the communication challenges posed by algorithmic management in organizational settings. It aims to go beyond surface-level analysis of automation and consider how communication itself is reorganized. Through qualitative inquiry, the study seeks to uncover the symbolic, relational, and discursive shifts that occur in AI-governed workplaces. It applies theories such as the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) to conceptualize how communication both shapes and is shaped by technological systems. This framework provides a robust lens to examine the organizational consequences of algorithmic control.

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[10] Youlang Zhang, Fan Yang, and Menghan Zhao, 'Managerial Communication and Frontline Workers' Willingness to Abide by Rules: Evidence From Local Security Agencies in China', *American Review of Public Administration*, 51.4 (2021), doi:10.1177/0275074020983798.

[11] Harold J. Leavitt, 'Some Effects of Certain Communication Patterns on Group Performance', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 46.1 (1951), doi:10.1037/h0057189.

[12] Iman Sumarlan, Rizki Firmansyah, and Hendra Darmawan, 'Alquran Communication Patterns and Efforts to Build Positive Communication', *Journal of Social Studies (JSS)*, 17.2 (2021), pp. 255–70, doi:10.21831/jss.v17i2.43624.

This research is urgent because the use of algorithmic management is expanding rapidly across industries. From logistics and transportation to healthcare and education, AI systems are becoming central to managerial decision-making. However, this transformation is often implemented without adequate attention to its communicative consequences. Organizations risk undermining collaboration, morale, and innovation if communication is not deliberately designed into AI systems. Understanding these risks is vital for creating systems that are both efficient and relationally sustainable.

Policymakers and designers of AI systems require better insights into how automated management impacts workplace interactions. Without this understanding, they may unintentionally reproduce forms of control that are opaque, unaccountable, or alienating. Communication research can offer valuable guidance in crafting systems that respect human dignity and promote mutual understanding. This includes designing interfaces that allow for feedback, explanation, and participatory dialogue. Such efforts are crucial for maintaining ethical and democratic principles in technologically mediated workplaces.

This study contributes to the growing scholarship on algorithmic management by centering communication as a site of inquiry. It challenges the assumption that technological efficiency can replace human judgment and interaction without consequences. By examining how AI-driven systems reshape the communicative infrastructure of organizations, the research offers new perspectives on authority, coordination, and identity. It calls for a more communicatively informed approach to the design and evaluation of algorithmic management. Such an approach is essential for building organizations that are not only automated but also communicatively competent.

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multiple case study design to explore communication challenges in organizations that implement algorithmic management systems. Three organizations from the logistics, e-commerce, and digital services sectors were purposively selected due to their intensive adoption of AI-based management tools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with employees and managers (n=15), observations of system use, and internal document analysis. The primary aim of data collection was to identify how communication is enacted and mediated within digitally structured work environments.

The analytical framework of this research draws on two core theories. First, Peter-Paul Verbeek's Technological Mediation Theory (TMT) was applied to examine how algorithmic systems act as mediating agents that influence perception, action, and meaning-making in work practices [13]. Second, Karl Weick's Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) theory was used to investigate how communication between humans and systems constitutes organizational structures, authority, and collective identity[14] [15]. The integration of these two frameworks enabled a comprehensive analysis of the role of technology and communication in shaping organizational dynamics.

Data analysis was conducted thematically using NVivo software. The coding process was guided by key concepts from TMT and CCO, such as sensemaking, enactment, delegation, and

[13] Sadjad Soltanzadeh, 'Peter-Paul Verbeek's Moralizing Technology: Understanding and Designing the Morality of Things', *NanoEthics*, 6.1 (2012), doi:10.1007/s11569-012-0143-5.
[14] Karl E. Weick, 'Theory Construction as Disciplined Imagination', *The Academy of Management Review*, 14.4 (1989), doi:10.2307/258556.
[15] Iman Sumarlan and Ibrahim T.I.Ukka, 'Public Relations to Foster Organization's Values and Identity: The Case of Muhammadiyah', *Komunikator*, 16.2 (2024), pp. 146–59, doi:10.18196/jkm.23747.

reduction. The analysis focused on identifying communication patterns that emerge from human-algorithm interactions, including adaptation strategies, resistance, and collective meaning-making. This methodological approach aimed to demonstrate that algorithmic systems are not merely technical instruments but integral components in the communicative construction of organizations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Algorithmic Mediation and the Restructuring of Workplace Communication

The study found that algorithmic management systems fundamentally restructured the flow of communication within organizations. Rather than engaging in interpersonal dialogue, employees received task-related instructions via dashboards, mobile applications, or automated notifications. These communications were largely unilateral, offering no opportunities for negotiation or contextual clarification. This mechanization of instruction delivery reflects Verbeek's concept of delegation, in which technology assumes decision-making responsibilities traditionally held by human managers.

In all three organizations studied, informants reported that the lack of two-way communication created a sense of detachment and confusion. Algorithmic decisions regarding work schedules, productivity benchmarks, and task prioritization were often perceived as opaque and non-negotiable. From Karl Weick's Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) perspective, this represents a disruption in the organizational sensemaking process[16]. The absence of interactive discourse prevented employees from collectively interpreting and understanding the intent behind managerial actions.

The result was a communication landscape defined by transactional efficiency but devoid of relational nuance. Employees, particularly in logistics and digital service sectors, described feeling "managed by code" rather than by people. This condition diminished their capacity to engage in proactive feedback and organizational learning[17]. As a result, workplace interactions became reactive and compliance-driven, undermining the collaborative dynamics typically fostered through human interaction.

Several participants highlighted a phenomenon of emotional dissonance, wherein they felt compelled to follow directives that contradicted their understanding of contextual demands. For example, warehouse staff described how automated scheduling often failed to account for inventory fluctuations or local delivery constraints. Yet, no channel existed to adjust or question these instructions. This disconnects between algorithmic authority and real-world variability contributed to rising workplace stress and misalignment[18].

To cope with the communication vacuum left by algorithmic systems, employees developed informal networks to exchange interpretations, seek clarification, and emotionally support one another. These backchannels emerged as critical spaces for restoring sensemaking and co-creating shared meanings within the workplace. According to Weick's theory, this indicates that

[16] Karl E Weick, 'Enactment and the Boundary Less Career: Organizing as We Work', in *The Boundaryless Career*, 2023, doi:10.1093/oso/9780195100143.003.0003.
[17] Lise L. Evenseth, Maria Sydnes, and Anne H. Gausdal, 'Building Organizational Resilience Through Organizational Learning: A Systematic Review', *Frontiers in Communication*, 2022, doi:10.3389/fcomm.2022.837386.
[18] Caitlin Lustig and others, 'Algorithmic Authority: The Ethics, Politics, and Economics of Algorithms That Interpret, Decide, and Manage', in *Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - Proceedings*, 2016, 07-XII-MAY-MMXVI, doi:10.1145/2851581.2886426.

communication remains central to organizational formation, even when it circumvents official channels [19].

Importantly, the impersonality of AI-driven communication also challenged traditional notions of leadership. The absence of visible, empathetic authority figures reduced perceptions of legitimacy and organizational cohesion. Participants across all cases questioned who, if anyone, was ultimately responsible for managerial decisions. This uncertainty weakened identification with organizational values and mission, as leadership became dissociated from human presence.

Despite these challenges, some informants acknowledged minor benefits. They noted increased standardization, reduced interpersonal conflict, and quicker information delivery. However, these efficiencies were consistently offset by the psychological costs of alienation and ambiguity. The findings suggest that technological optimization must be balanced with communicative responsiveness to preserve the social fabric of work [20].

The evidence supports the need for designing algorithmic systems that integrate dialogic principles and maintain channels for interpretive engagement. Treating communication as more than mere data transmission—as a constitutive organizational force—can inform the development of systems that are both functionally efficient and socially responsive. This aligns with the view that algorithmic management must evolve beyond control to embrace the communicative complexity inherent in human organizations.

Table 1. Data of Informant

Informant ID	Organization	Position	Key NVivo Code	Emergent Theme
INF-01	Digital Services	Customer Support	Loss of Dialogue	Reduced Agency
INF-02	Logistics	Warehouse Manager	Task Allocation Frustration	Technological Opacity
INF-03	Retail Chain	Store Supervisor	Managerial Absence	Lack of Relational Communication
INF-04	Digital Services	Team Leader	Performance Pressure	Algorithmic Accountability
INF-05	Logistics	Field Operator	Opaque Decision-Making	Workplace Ambiguity

3.2. Informal Communication Networks and the Reassertion of Sensemaking

While algorithmic systems formalized one-way communication, the study also uncovered the emergence of informal communication networks that served to restore human interpretive processes. In all three organizations, employees reported relying on peer-to-peer interactions to interpret, adapt, and occasionally resist algorithmic directives[21]. These interactions occurred

[19] Karl E Weick, 'Sense and Reliability. A Conversation with Celebrated Psychologist Karl E. Weick. Interview by Diane L. Coutu.', *Harvard Business Review*, 81.4 (2003).
[20] Changchun Li and Sen Wang, 'Digital Optimization, Green R&D Collaboration, and Green Technological Innovation in Manufacturing Enterprises', *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 14.19 (2022), doi:10.3390/su141912106.
[21] Monideepa Tarafdar, Xinru Page, and Marco Marabelli, 'Algorithms as Co-Workers: Human Algorithm Role Interactions in Algorithmic Work', *Information Systems Journal*, 33.2 (2023), doi:10.1111/isj.12389.

through private chat groups, hallway conversations, and unofficial team huddles, functioning as critical spaces for meaning-making absent from formal communication channels.

From Karl Weick's Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) lens, these informal practices illustrate how organizational reality is actively constructed through ongoing communicative acts. Employees engaged in collective retrospection—sharing experiences, testing interpretations, and seeking consensus on how to respond to system-generated instructions. This communicative process reinjected agency into work routines otherwise dominated by algorithmic rigidity[22].

The prevalence of these networks varied depending on organizational culture and leadership flexibility. In one digital services firm, team leaders encouraged informal coordination as a buffer against algorithmic errors, recognizing that system outputs were often detached from situational nuances. In contrast, a logistics company with rigid hierarchies discouraged such informal communication, leading to higher levels of frustration and disengagement among staff[23].

Importantly, these networks did not merely function as mechanisms of resistance but also facilitated adaptive behaviors. Employees collaborated to re-sequence tasks, redistribute workloads, and interpret ambiguous metrics, thereby maintaining operational flow. This collective improvisation aligns with Weick's emphasis on sensemaking as an organizational survival strategy, especially in complex, uncertain environments.

Another pattern observed was the emotional support embedded in these informal exchanges. Employees expressed that discussing algorithmic decisions with peers alleviated feelings of isolation and stress. Through shared storytelling, workers made sense of confusing directives, which in turn fostered solidarity and strengthened group cohesion. This underscores that organizational communication is not solely instrumental but also affective[24].

The dependence on informal networks also revealed organizational fragility. In the absence of formal systems that support feedback and contextual reasoning, employees bore the burden of compensating for technological shortcomings. This not only added to their cognitive load but also revealed how communication systems, when poorly designed, externalize complexity onto workers.

The findings suggest a paradox: while algorithmic systems seek to streamline operations, they may inadvertently produce organizational noise—requiring more, not less, communicative effort from employees[25]. This reinforces the CCO view that communication is not peripheral but constitutive of organizing. When formal systems fail to support interpretive processes, informal communication becomes the primary engine of organizational continuity.

To ensure resilience, organizations must recognize and integrate these informal practices into their formal structures. Designing communication systems that allow feedback loops, encourage collective interpretation, and honor the human role in organizational sensemaking can bridge the gap between algorithmic efficiency and communicative sustainability. These

[22] Maha Shaikh and Emmanuelle Vaast, 'Algorithmic Interactions in Open Source Work', *Information Systems Research*, 34.2 (2023), doi:10.1287/isre.2022.1153.
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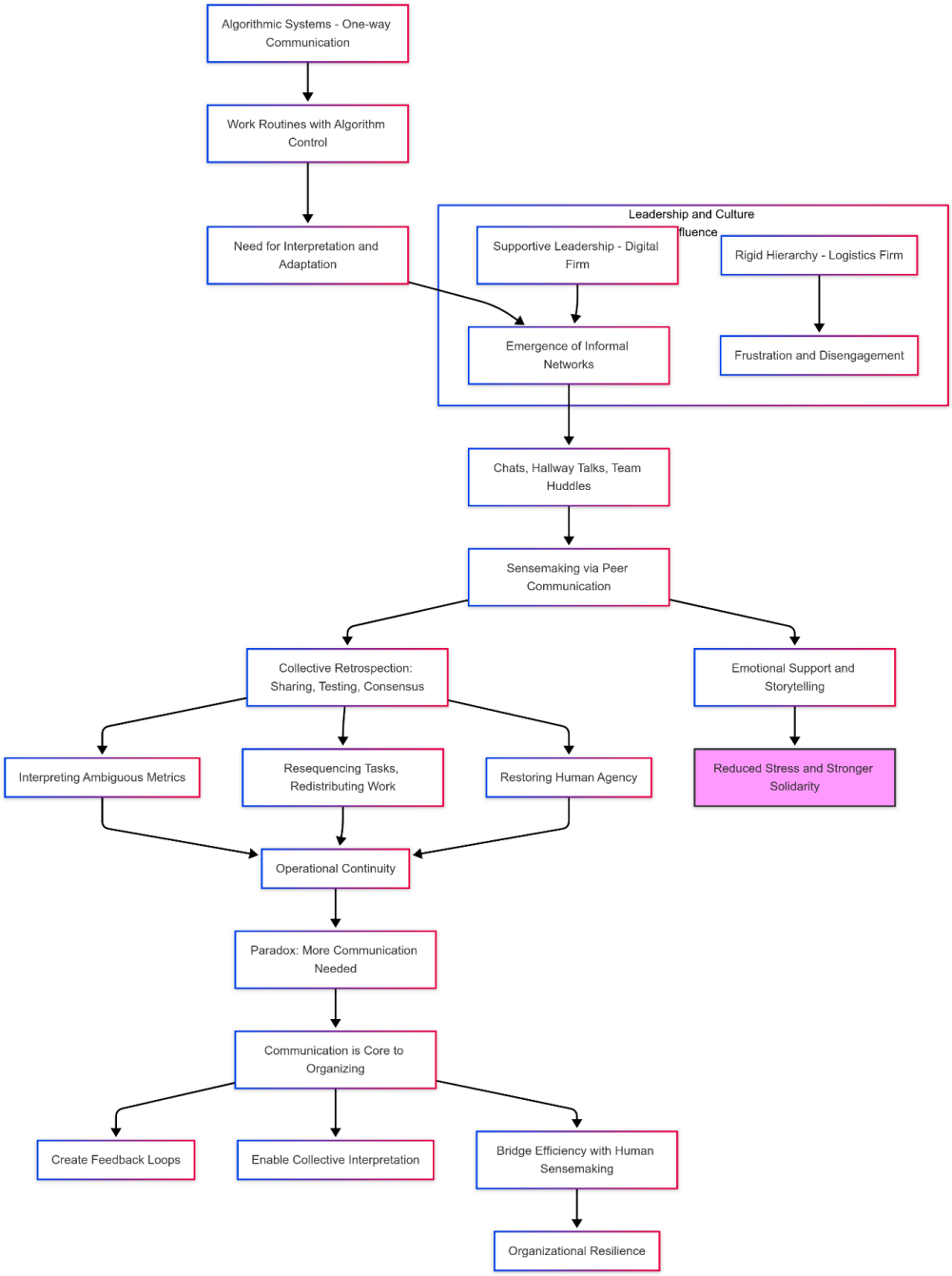
adjustments are essential for organizations aiming to preserve trust, clarity, and cohesion in an increasingly digital work environment[26].

Figure 1. Informal Communication as Sensemaking in Algorithm-Driven



[26] Laura Bordi and others, 'Communication in the Digital Work Environment: Implications for Wellbeing at Work', *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 8.Specialissue3 (2018), doi:10.18291/njwls.v8iS3.105275.

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4. Conclusion

The study highlights the profound impact of algorithmic management systems on organizational communication, revealing significant challenges in the way communication is structured and enacted. As AI-driven systems replace traditional managerial roles, communication in the workplace has become increasingly transactional, reducing opportunities for negotiation and feedback. Employees often find themselves subject to automated directives that lack contextual nuance, leading to confusion, emotional detachment, and misalignment with organizational goals. The study underscores the importance of reconsidering how communication is integrated into AI systems to ensure that human interaction, negotiation, and sensemaking are not lost in the pursuit of operational efficiency.

The emergence of informal communication networks within organizations is a critical response to the communication vacuum left by algorithmic management. These networks, composed of peer-to-peer interactions and backchannel discussions, play a crucial role in restoring agency and collective meaning-making among employees. By sharing experiences and seeking clarification, workers adapt to and, at times, resist algorithmic decisions, thus reasserting their sense of identity and connection to the organization. These informal exchanges also offer emotional support, mitigating feelings of isolation and frustration. However, the reliance on these networks highlights the fragility of organizations that fail to incorporate adequate feedback loops and interpretive channels within their formal communication structures.

The findings call for a more nuanced approach to the design of algorithmic systems that balances technological efficiency with communicative responsiveness. While automation can streamline operations, it must be complemented by systems that facilitate dialogue, contextual understanding, and participatory decision-making. By acknowledging the constitutive role of communication in organizational life, organizations can ensure that their algorithmic systems support both the functional and relational aspects of work. This approach will not only improve operational outcomes but also foster trust, engagement, and organizational cohesion in increasingly digitized workplaces.

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