



**THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN MANAGING CHANGE IN
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION IN GHANA**

BY

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication, UniMAC

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the critical role of communication in managing organisational change within educational institutions, focusing on the merger that created the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) in Ghana. The merger involved the integration of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), and the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL). It aimed to optimize resources and enhance interdisciplinary collaboration but encountered significant communication challenges. The analysis is guided by Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model, which emphasizes clear vision and stakeholder alignment, and the ADKAR framework, which addresses individual readiness for change through awareness, desire, and knowledge. The study employs a qualitative case study approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with faculty, students, and administrative staff. Thematic analysis is used to uncover gaps in communication strategies, particularly the absence of a structured communication plan and inadequate two-way feedback mechanisms. Key findings reveal that while efforts were made to use social media and public relations campaigns, these were reactive and insufficiently tailored to stakeholders' needs, resulting in confusion and resistance. Major recommendations include adopting comprehensive communication strategies, incorporating structured feedback mechanisms, and tailoring messaging to specific stakeholder groups. These improvements are essential to fostering trust, reducing resistance, and ensuring alignment during future institutional transitions.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to **God Almighty**, whose grace and providence have been my foundation throughout this journey. I also dedicate this effort to my beloved wife, **Akua Coffie Ahiabenu**, for her steadfast support, and to my daughter, **Jonelle Dgidula Ahiabenu**, whose arrival during the course of this project brought immeasurable joy and inspiration to my life.

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List of Abbreviations

- **ADKAR** - Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement (Change Management Model)
- **GIJ** - Ghana Institute of Journalism
- **GIL** - Ghana Institute of Languages
- **NAFTI** - National Film and Television Institute
- **PR** - Public Relations
- **TVET** - Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- **UNIMAC** - University of Media, Arts, and Communication

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

The rapid pace of change within educational institutions demands effective communication strategies to ensure smooth transitions and the successful implementation of new policies. This study explores the role of communication in managing change within the context of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC), a newly established entity created through the merger of three distinct institutions: The Ghana Institute of Journalism, the National Film and Television Institute, and the Ghana Institute of Languages. This merger, formalised by the University of Media, Arts and Communication Act, 2020 (Act 1059), represents a significant structural shift aimed at consolidating resources and expertise to enhance the quality of education and research in media, arts, and communication disciplines (Republic of Ghana, 2020).

Effective communication involves not just the transmission of information, but also the alignment of shared meanings and the creation of mutual understanding within organisational settings (Keyton, 2021). In the context of educational institutions, communication is not merely the exchange of information but also includes the engagement and motivation of stakeholders to embrace change. This is particularly crucial during a merger, where aligning the cultures, processes, and expectations of the constituent institutions requires clear, consistent, and transparent communication strategies (Lewis, 2019).

Managing change, which involves planning and implementing strategies to help an organisation transition from its current state to a desired future state, is a complex process that can be fraught with resistance and uncertainty (Hiatt & Creasey, 2003). For UNIMAC, the integration of the Ghana Institute of Journalism, established in 1959 with a focus on journalism and communication training, the National Film and Television Institute, established in 1978 to provide specialized education in film and television production, and the Ghana Institute of Languages, established in 1961 to promote language education, presents unique challenges and opportunities (Republic of Ghana, 2020). Each of these institutions brings its distinct history, culture, and academic focus, necessitating a comprehensive communication strategy to ensure a cohesive and unified transition.

In this context, the administration must manage the expectations and perceptions of diverse groups, including faculty, students and administrative staff. Successful change management in educational institutions requires addressing the concerns and expectations of these groups through effective communication channels (AlHaddad & Kotnour, 2015). For instance, faculty and staff need to understand the rationale behind the merger, the benefits it aims to achieve, and how it will impact their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, students must be reassured about the continuity and enhancement of their educational experience despite the institutional changes.

Undeniably, the role of communication in managing change within the University of Media, Arts, and Communication is critical to the success of the merger and the establishment of a unified institution that leverages the strengths of its constituent parts. This study aims to investigate the communication strategies employed by the administration during this transition, providing insights that could inform future efforts in similar contexts.

1.1 Mergers and Change in Ghana's Tertiary Institutions

In recent years, Ghana's tertiary education sector has undergone significant transformation, driven by a combination of local needs and global trends. These changes are often aimed at enhancing the quality of education, expanding access to higher education, and aligning curricula with global standards (Kwame, 2021). Key reforms in the sector include the conversion of polytechnics into technical universities, the implementation of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) reforms, and various policy initiatives designed to address skills gaps and labour market demands. The government of Ghana, through its Ministry of Education, has made substantial efforts to restructure the tertiary education system to make it more efficient and relevant to the nation's socioeconomic development (Asiedu, 2017).

The University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) was formally established as Ghana's first major educational institution merger in August 2022 (Ministry of Education, 2022). Conversations around merging Ghana Institute of Journalism, National Film and Television Institute, and Ghana Institute of Languages began around 2019 as the Ghanaian government explored ways to improve efficiency and elevate the quality of higher education (Ghana Education Service, 2019). This move was influenced by a broader policy shift towards streamlining educational resources and enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The legal foundation for the merger was set in motion with the passage of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication Act, 2021 (Act 1059), in Ghana's Parliament (Parliament of Ghana, 2021). This act provided the legal framework for combining the three institutions and outlined the governance structure and objectives for the newly proposed university (Parliament of Ghana, 2021). The Act was formally enacted in August 2021, signalling the government's commitment to realizing UNIMAC (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Following the completion of administrative, structural, and logistical arrangements, UNIMAC was officially inaugurated in August 2022 (Ministry of Education, 2022). The Ministry of Education and the governing councils of Ghana Institute of Journalism, National Film and Television Institute, and Ghana Institute of Languages were key stakeholders in facilitating this transition, ensuring that academic programs, faculty, and students from the three institutions were integrated into the new university framework (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The Ministry of Education was instrumental in drafting the policy and legislative framework that led to the merger (Ministry of Education, 2022). It coordinated the activities between the three institutions and oversaw the creation of a single governance structure for UNIMAC (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The Governing Councils of Ghana Institute of Journalism, National Film and Television Institute, and Ghana Institute of Languages also collaborated with the Ministry of Education to manage the integration process, addressing challenges related to academic program alignment, faculty assignments, and student transitions (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Also, the Parliament of Ghana played a central role in approving the merger through the passage of Act 1059, thereby giving UNIMAC a legal mandate as a unified educational institution (Parliament of Ghana, 2021).

The UNIMAC merger was part of the broader educational reforms, representing a strategic consolidation of resources to create a more comprehensive institution capable of providing a wide range of media, arts, and communication programs (Republic of Ghana, 2020). Such mergers are intended to increase operational efficiency, enhance academic offerings, and improve research output by leveraging the unique strengths of the merging institutions (Asiedu, 2017). For example,

NAFTI's expertise in film and television production complements GIJ's strength in journalism and communication, while GIL's focus on language education adds a valuable dimension to the new institution.

While these transformations offer significant opportunities, they also pose considerable challenges, particularly in the realm of change management. Mergers in the educational sector often encounter resistance from stakeholders due to concerns about job security, changes in organisational culture, and shifts in institutional identity (Kwame, 2021). Effective communication is therefore essential to alleviate such concerns, ensuring that stakeholders remain engaged and supportive throughout the process. Previous research on mergers in both corporate and educational settings highlights the importance of clear, consistent communication in minimizing uncertainty and resistance (Garnett et al., 2008). For the UNIMAC merger, strategic communication efforts are necessary to facilitate the integration of the three institutions into a unified entity, aligning their diverse cultures and goals toward a common vision.

1.1.2 The Role of Communication in Change Management

Effective communication is widely acknowledged as a critical factor in the success of organisational change efforts, including those in educational settings (Kotter, 1996). According to Kotter's Eight Step Change Model, "communicating the change vision" is essential to creating alignment among stakeholders and building momentum for the change process. Without clear and consistent communication, misunderstandings can arise, leading to resistance, confusion, and even the failure of the change initiative (Kotter, 1996). In the context of a merger, communication plays a dual role: it not only informs stakeholders about the process but also shapes their perceptions, emotions, and attitudes toward the change (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000).

Studies across various sectors, including corporate, governmental, and non-profit organisations, have underscored the importance of communication in facilitating successful change management. In corporate settings, for example, research shows that communication strategies directly influence employee morale, engagement, and the speed at which change is adopted (Clampitt et al., 2000). Similarly, in governmental organisations, communication has been found to be a key tool for implementing policy changes, ensuring that stakeholders are aware of and aligned with the new directives (Garnett, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2008). Communication also plays a crucial role in mitigating resistance to change, which is often one of the biggest challenges in organisational transformation (Hiatt & Creasey, 2003).

However, the role of communication in managing change within educational settings has not been explored as extensively as in other sectors. Educational institutions are unique in that they involve a diverse range of stakeholders, including faculty, students, administrative staff, and external partners, all of whom may have different concerns and expectations during a change process (AlHaddad & Kotnour, 2015). For instance, faculty members may be concerned about how the change will impact their academic freedom or workload, while students may worry about the continuity of their programs or the reputation of their degrees' post-merger. Therefore, communication in educational change management must be tailored to address the specific needs and concerns of each stakeholder group (Lewis, 2019).

In the case of UNIMAC, effective communication is particularly critical given the complex nature of the merger, which involves three institutions with distinct academic cultures and histories. The administration's ability to convey the benefits of the merger, clarify the process, and address any concerns will significantly impact the success of the transition. Moreover, communication must not only be top down but also involve active feedback loops, where stakeholders can voice their

concerns and have their questions answered (Kotter, 1996). This two-way communication process helps to build trust and foster a sense of ownership among stakeholders, thereby increasing their commitment to the change effort (Clampitt et al., 2000).

By examining the communication strategies employed during the UNIMAC merger, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on change management in educational settings, providing valuable insights into how communication can be used to manage complex organisational transitions.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although substantial research such as studies by Bel, R., Smirnov, V., & Wait, A. (2018); "Managing change: Communication, managerial style and change in organisations" and "Change Communication: Using Strategic Employee Communication to Facilitate Major Change" by D. J. Barrett (2002) has examined communication's role in managing change across various organisational settings, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning its application in educational institutions. Most existing studies on organisational change, particularly mergers, have focused on sectors like business and healthcare, often overlooking the complexity of educational mergers, where the integration of academic cultures and administrative systems requires nuanced communication strategies (Garnett, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2008; Fullan, 2007). This neglect is particularly pronounced in the context of mergers within educational institutions, where the integration of distinct academic cultures and administrative systems necessitates tailored communication approaches (Kezar, 2014; Nordin, 2012).

This study seeks to fill this gap by specifically addressing the lack of research on how communication strategies influence stakeholder engagement and acceptance during mergers in educational institutions. Existing studies tend to focus on either organisational culture or change management broadly, but few examine the critical intersection of communication and change management in the specific context of educational mergers (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Davies & Thomas, 2002). By focusing on how the administration communicates with students and faculty members, this research aims to provide valuable insights into how effective communication strategies can facilitate the successful integration of diverse academic entities, ensuring a smooth transition and the realization of the merger's intended benefits. Through this investigation, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of change management in educational settings, offering practical recommendations for administrators involved in similar endeavours.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to explore the role of communication in managing organisational change within educational institutions, focusing on the merger that formed the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) in Ghana. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the communication strategies used by the administration of UNIMAC in managing the merger of the Ghana Institute of Journalism, the National Film and Television Institute, and the Ghana Institute of Languages.
2. To identify the key challenges and best practices in communicating organisational change within educational institutions, with a focus on mergers.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions aim to investigate the effectiveness and challenges of communication during the merger of UNIMAC's constituent institutions, providing insights into the strategies adopted by the administration and their impact on stakeholders. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What communication strategies were employed by the UNIMAC administration in managing the merger of the three constituent institutions?
2. What challenges and best practices can be identified in the communication of organisational change within educational institutions, particularly in the context of mergers?

1.5 Scope of The Study

The research focuses on the communication strategies employed during the merger of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) in Ghana, specifically analysing the integration of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), and the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL). This scope is limited to evaluating the communication strategies adopted by the administration and their impacts on students and faculty members. Data for this research is drawn from qualitative interviews conducted with key stakeholders involved in the merger process. The study's findings reflect the perspectives of these stakeholders within the defined timeframe of the merger's preparatory and initial implementation phases.

The timeframe of this study aligns with the immediate aftermath of the merger, examining the successes, challenges, and areas for improvement in the communication practices deployed. The rationale for this specific timeframe is detailed on page 3 of this research. The study captures a nuanced understanding of communication strategies by considering the merging entities' varied institutional cultures and administrative practices.

1.6 Significance of The Study.

From an academic perspective, the study's findings will contribute to the body of knowledge on change management by exploring the intersection of communication and organisational transitions in educational settings, an area that has received limited attention in existing literature (Lewis, 2019; Fullan, 2007). The study will provide empirical evidence that can be used by scholars and researchers to better understand the dynamics of communication during educational mergers, particularly how it influences stakeholder engagement, perceptions, and overall institutional success. The theoretical integration of models such as Kotter's Eight Step Change Model and the ADKAR model in this research also offers a framework for analysing similar educational transitions in future studies. In practical terms, the study's insights will be beneficial for administrators involved in managing mergers and other significant organisational changes in educational institutions. By identifying effective communication strategies and highlighting potential challenges, the study will offer actionable recommendations to improve the design and execution of communication efforts during institutional transitions. Specifically, it will assist UNIMAC's leadership and similar institutions in developing communication strategies that are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to the concerns of diverse stakeholder groups, including faculty, students, and external partners.

Furthermore, the study will provide a guide for institutions undergoing similar transformations by offering best practices for communication that can help mitigate resistance to change and promote a smoother transition. These practical insights will also be of value to educational consultants, governmental agencies, and organisations involved in higher education reforms. Ultimately, this research aims to enhance the capacity of educational institutions to manage change effectively, ensuring that communication remains a central element in facilitating successful mergers and restructuring efforts. Through this study, the broader understanding of the role of communication in educational change management will be enriched, providing both theoretical and practical contributions that will benefit future change management initiatives in higher education.

1.7 Organisation of The Study

This study is organized into five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in exploring the role of communication in managing change at the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC). Chapter One introduces the study by outlining the background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, scope and significance of the research. Chapter Two reviews existing theories and literature on change management and communication, identifying gaps in research, particularly regarding educational institution mergers. Chapter Three details the research methodology, including participant selection, data collection methods and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents and analyses the study's findings, focusing on the communication strategies used during the UNIMAC merger and their impact on stakeholders, while comparing the results with the literature. Chapter Five summarizes the findings, provides conclusions, and offers recommendations for improving communication strategies in future mergers, along with suggestions for further research in change management in educational contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines existing research and theoretical perspectives relevant to communication's role in managing change, particularly in educational mergers. It is organized into two main sections: a review of related literature and the theoretical framework. The review of related literature synthesizes key studies on communication strategies in organisational change, while the theoretical framework grounds the research in established models like Kotter's Eight Step Change Model and the ADKAR Model.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Communication in Organizational Change: Thematic Analysis of Literature

Communication has long been acknowledged as a cornerstone of effective organisational change, encompassing processes such as mergers, restructurings, and institutional realignments. Scholars consistently highlight that communication not only facilitates the dissemination of information but also plays a pivotal role in shaping stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors during transitions (Kotter, 1996). As a multidimensional tool, communication influences both the technical and human aspects of change, ensuring alignment with strategic objectives while addressing stakeholder concerns.

Kotter's seminal work on change management underscores the importance of clear, consistent messaging in fostering alignment and reducing resistance among stakeholders. According to Kotter (1996), communication must articulate a compelling vision for change, create urgency, and maintain momentum throughout the process. His Eight-Step Change Model identifies "communicating the change vision" as a critical step, emphasizing that effective communication is not merely about transmitting information but about creating emotional resonance and a shared understanding. Kotter's qualitative research, which analysed organizational change efforts across sectors, revealed that change initiatives often fail due to inadequate communication strategies that neglect stakeholders' emotional and cognitive needs.

Complementing Kotter's insights, Lewis (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of change communication studies, focusing on how communication strategies influence stakeholder engagement and resistance. Her findings revealed that transparent, frequent, and multi-channel communication significantly enhances stakeholders' trust and buy-in during organizational transitions. Lewis highlighted the importance of tailoring messages to specific stakeholder groups, noting that employees, managers, and external partners often have distinct informational needs. Her study relied on both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, offering robust empirical support for the assertion that communication is a mediating factor between leadership intent and stakeholder response.

In educational settings, where mergers often involve the integration of distinct academic cultures and governance structures, the role of communication is even more pronounced. Harman and Harman (2008) explored this dynamic in their study of university mergers in Australia. Their research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining document analysis and interviews with

academic and administrative staff. They found that effective communication strategies—particularly those emphasizing transparency, inclusivity, and respect for institutional histories—were crucial in fostering trust and reducing resistance. For instance, open forums and stakeholder consultations were identified as key practices in aligning diverse institutional goals and values. The study concluded that the absence of such mechanisms often led to perceptions of top-down decision-making, thereby exacerbating resistance and undermining the merger's objectives.

Clampitt, DeKoch, and Cashman (2000) examined communication's role in reducing uncertainty during organizational restructuring. Using a quantitative survey methodology, they identified three distinct communication strategies: "spray and pray," "tell and sell," and "underscore and explore." The latter approach, which involves focusing on key issues and engaging stakeholders in dialogue, was found to be the most effective in fostering understanding and reducing ambiguity. Their findings are particularly relevant to large-scale organizational changes, where the complexity of transitions necessitates a structured and participatory communication framework. In contrast, "spray and pray" strategies, characterized by the dissemination of excessive and unfiltered information, often led to confusion and disengagement among stakeholders.

In corporate mergers, Armenakis and Harris (2009) investigated the psychological dimensions of communication, emphasizing its role in shaping readiness for change. Their conceptual framework highlighted five key messages: discrepancy, efficacy, appropriateness, principal support, and valence that leaders should communicate to align stakeholders with change objectives. Their qualitative case studies in the healthcare and manufacturing sectors revealed that communication strategies focusing on these dimensions significantly enhanced employees' readiness and commitment to change. For instance, emphasizing the rationale behind the merger (discrepancy)

and demonstrating leadership support (principal support) were particularly effective in mitigating resistance. The relationship between communication and resistance to change has also been explored extensively. Kanter (2020) argued that resistance often stems from stakeholders' feelings of exclusion or lack of agency during the change process. Her longitudinal study of organizational transformations in the public sector found that participatory communication mechanisms, such as stakeholder workshops and feedback loops, were instrumental in addressing these concerns. By involving stakeholders in decision-making and acknowledging their contributions, organizations were able to build trust and foster a sense of ownership over the change process.

While much of the literature emphasizes the positive role of communication, several studies also highlight its limitations when poorly executed. Bridges (2009) noted that inadequate communication often exacerbates resistance by creating uncertainty and fear. His case studies in educational institutions undergoing restructuring revealed that delayed or inconsistent messaging led to stakeholder confusion, ultimately hindering the success of change initiatives. Similarly, Taylor (2019) emphasized the importance of empathy in change communication, noting that stakeholders are more likely to engage with messages that acknowledge their concerns and emotional responses.

2.1.2 Educational Institution Mergers

Educational settings differ significantly from corporate environments regarding change management, particularly in their focus, stakeholders, and the intricacies of their operations. While corporations often prioritize financial goals, market competitiveness, and operational efficiency, educational institutions emphasize academic excellence, institutional identity, and stakeholder

inclusivity. These differences profoundly influence how change is managed, especially in the context of mergers, where communication plays a pivotal role in ensuring smooth transitions.

One key distinction lies in the nature of stakeholder engagement. In corporate mergers, stakeholders such as shareholders and employees often have a clear understanding of the financial benefits and risks involved. Communication strategies are typically driven by financial imperatives, with a focus on securing investor confidence and employee alignment (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). In contrast, educational institution mergers involve a broader and more diverse set of stakeholders, including faculty, students, parents, alumni, administrative staff, and government agencies. Each group has distinct concerns, ranging from academic program continuity to institutional reputation and governance structures (Harman & Harman, 2008). Effective communication in educational mergers, therefore, must address these varied needs, creating a sense of inclusivity and ownership among stakeholders.

Another critical difference is the cultural dimension of mergers. Educational institutions are characterized by deeply ingrained academic traditions and values, which are often tied to their historical and disciplinary legacies. Merging institutions with distinct academic cultures requires sensitive communication strategies that honor these histories while promoting a unified vision (Kezar, 2014). For instance, in the merger of three institutions to form the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) in Ghana, communication challenges stemmed from the need to integrate the unique identities of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), and Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL) (Ministry of Education, 2022). The failure to adequately address these cultural differences can result in resistance from faculty and students, undermining the merger's objectives.

The role of communication is particularly evident in the outcomes of educational institution mergers. Successful mergers are often marked by transparent and inclusive communication strategies that build trust and foster collaboration. An example is the merger of the Danish School of Education with Aarhus University in Denmark. By adopting a participatory approach that included regular stakeholder consultations and open forums, the administration was able to mitigate resistance and align the merged institution with its strategic goals (Harman & Harman, 2008). Communication efforts focused on addressing concerns about academic freedom, role changes, and governance structures, ensuring that faculty and students felt included in the transition.

Conversely, failures in communication can exacerbate challenges in educational mergers. The attempted merger of the University of Wales with several smaller institutions in the early 2000s provides a cautionary tale. Poor communication led to widespread confusion and resistance among stakeholders, particularly faculty members who felt excluded from decision-making processes (Gillard, 2009). The lack of clear messaging about the merger's rationale and benefits, coupled with inadequate feedback mechanisms, resulted in significant delays and ultimately a collapse of the initiative. This underscores the importance of two-way communication in educational settings, where stakeholder buy-in is critical for success.

Educational mergers also face unique operational challenges that require careful management of expectations through communication. Unlike corporations, where mergers are often driven by profit motives, educational institutions prioritize academic outcomes and public service. For instance, the merger of the City College of San Francisco with smaller regional colleges aimed to improve access to higher education but encountered logistical challenges due to

miscommunication about resource allocation and administrative restructuring (Kezar, 2014). Clear and consistent communication about such changes is vital to avoid disruptions in academic delivery and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

In conclusion, the differences between corporate and educational settings significantly influence how mergers are managed, particularly in the realm of communication. Educational institutions must navigate a more complex web of stakeholder interests, cultural sensitivities, and operational priorities. Successful mergers, such as Aarhus University's integration, demonstrate the importance of transparent, inclusive, and adaptive communication strategies in building trust and fostering collaboration. Failures, on the other hand, highlight the risks of neglecting stakeholder engagement and feedback mechanisms. As educational mergers become more common, institutions must prioritize communication as a central element of change management, ensuring that transitions are both strategic and stakeholder-focused.

2.1.3 Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback Mechanisms: The Importance of Inclusion and Addressing Gaps in Academia

Stakeholder engagement and the establishment of effective feedback mechanisms are essential components of successful organizational change, particularly in contexts as complex as educational institution mergers. Stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrative staff, and external partners, represent diverse interests and perspectives that must be carefully managed to ensure alignment with organizational objectives. Inclusion is vital in such processes, not only for fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration but also for mitigating resistance to change and improving decision-making outcomes.

The importance of stakeholder inclusion is well-documented in organizational change literature. Bolman and Deal (2017) emphasize that stakeholders are more likely to embrace change when they feel their voices are heard and their concerns addressed. This sense of inclusion fosters trust, a critical factor in managing transitions effectively. In academic settings, where stakeholders often hold strong attachments to institutional identities and traditions, inclusive engagement becomes even more critical. Faculty members, for instance, may resist changes that appear to undermine their academic freedom or professional roles, while students may express concerns about the continuity and quality of their educational experiences (Kezar, 2014). By involving these groups in the change process, administrators can address such fears proactively, thereby reducing resistance and building a collective commitment to the new institutional vision.

Feedback mechanisms play a crucial role in stakeholder engagement, acting as conduits for two-way communication. According to Heathfield (2019), effective feedback systems enable stakeholders to express concerns, ask questions, and provide suggestions, thus fostering a participatory environment. Such mechanisms not only empower stakeholders but also provide administrators with valuable insights that can inform decision-making. For example, in the context of mergers, feedback can reveal specific anxieties, such as fears about job security among staff or uncertainties regarding program alignment among students, which might otherwise remain unaddressed. Addressing these issues through iterative communication processes demonstrates a commitment to transparency and inclusivity, further strengthening stakeholder trust (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

However, despite the recognized importance of stakeholder engagement, significant gaps persist in addressing stakeholder concerns in academic settings. One notable challenge is the hierarchical

and often bureaucratic nature of many educational institutions, which can impede open communication. Faculty and staff may feel excluded from decision-making processes, perceiving a top-down approach that disregards their expertise and contributions (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). This exclusion is particularly problematic during mergers, where decisions about governance structures, academic programs, and resource allocation significantly impact stakeholders at all levels. Research by Lewis (2019) highlights that insufficient communication during such transitions often leads to misinformation, confusion, and resistance, undermining the overall success of the change initiative. Students, as primary stakeholders in educational institutions, often face similar challenges. They are frequently informed about changes rather than being actively involved in shaping them. This lack of agency can result in disillusionment and disengagement, as noted by Bridges (2009), who argues that neglecting the emotional and practical concerns of students during transitions can have long-term negative effects on institutional reputation and student satisfaction. For instance, during the merger of three institutions to form the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) in Ghana, students reported learning about the changes primarily through rumours rather than formal channels (Hiatt, 2006). This reactive communication strategy failed to address their specific concerns, such as the continuity of academic programs and the perceived loss of institutional identity, highlighting the inadequacy of existing feedback mechanisms.

Another gap lies in the underutilization of diverse communication channels to reach stakeholders effectively. While digital platforms like social media have become popular tools for disseminating information, they often fail to accommodate stakeholders who prefer more formal or interactive methods of engagement, such as town hall meetings or structured surveys (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). The lack of a multi-channel approach not only limits accessibility but also

reduces the inclusivity of feedback systems, as certain stakeholder groups may remain marginalized. Anderson (2017) underscores the importance of tailoring communication strategies to the preferences and needs of different stakeholders, a principle often overlooked in academic change management.

Addressing these gaps requires a shift towards more inclusive and participatory practices. Institutions must prioritize the development of comprehensive stakeholder engagement plans that integrate diverse feedback mechanisms and emphasize transparency. Creating spaces for dialogue, whether through online forums, focus groups, or face-to-face interactions, can help bridge the gap between administrators and stakeholders. Furthermore, the feedback collected through these channels should be systematically analysed and incorporated into decision-making processes, demonstrating to stakeholders that their input is valued and impactful (Lewis, 2019). By adopting such strategies, academic institutions can foster a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, paving the way for smoother transitions and more sustainable change outcomes.

In conclusion, stakeholder engagement and feedback mechanisms are indispensable for managing change in academic settings. Inclusion fosters trust and collaboration, while feedback mechanisms provide a platform for addressing concerns and informing decisions. However, existing gaps in academic change management, particularly the exclusion of stakeholders and the inadequate use of diverse communication channels, continue to hinder effective engagement. To overcome these challenges, institutions must embrace more inclusive, transparent, and participatory approaches, ensuring that all stakeholders feel heard and valued throughout the change process.

2.1.4 Resistance to Change in Educational Institutions: Factors and Strategies for Mitigation

Resistance to change is a common challenge in organizational transformations, particularly in educational institutions, where traditions, cultural norms, and stakeholder expectations often shape the environment. Change in educational settings, such as mergers or restructuring, disrupts established practices, roles, and identities, leading to varying degrees of resistance among stakeholders. Understanding the factors that contribute to this resistance and employing effective communication strategies to mitigate it are crucial for successful change management. Resistance to change in educational institutions often stems from the deeply ingrained values and identities associated with academic environments. Faculty members, for instance, often identify strongly with their disciplines and departments. When institutional changes, such as mergers, threaten these identities, resistance becomes a natural response (Kezar, 2014). Similarly, administrators and staff may feel threatened by alterations to their roles, hierarchies, or job security, fostering uncertainty and scepticism about the change process (Bridges, 2009).

Organizational culture in academia also contributes significantly to resistance. Educational institutions are often characterized by decentralized governance and participatory decision-making processes. When changes are perceived as being imposed in a top-down manner, stakeholders may resist due to a lack of involvement and ownership (Fullan, 2007). This is particularly true when faculty and staff are excluded from key decision-making processes, which they perceive as undermining their professional autonomy and academic freedom (Harman & Harman, 2008).

Fear of the unknown is another significant factor. In mergers, such as the case of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC), stakeholders may fear disruptions to academic programs, potential changes in institutional reputation, and shifts in student enrollment patterns.

Without clear and consistent communication about the rationale and benefits of the change, stakeholders often assume the worst, leading to heightened anxiety and opposition (Hiatt, 2006).

Historical resistance to change also plays a role. Previous experiences with poorly executed change initiatives can create a culture of scepticism. For instance, if past attempts at change resulted in unmet promises or negative outcomes, stakeholders may be less willing to trust new initiatives (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). This inertia is compounded in institutions with long histories, where traditions and routines are seen as integral to their identity.

To address and mitigate resistance to change, communication plays a pivotal role. The process must begin with clear, transparent, and inclusive communication that not only informs but also engages stakeholders at every stage of the change process. According to Kotter's (1996) Eight-Step Change Model, communicating the change vision is critical to building alignment and reducing resistance. In educational institutions, this involves more than simply disseminating information; it requires creating a narrative that stakeholders can connect with on both intellectual and emotional levels. One effective strategy is to provide a clear and compelling rationale for the change. Stakeholders need to understand why the change is necessary, how it aligns with institutional goals, and what benefits it will bring. For example, during the UNIMAC merger, articulating the synergy between the merging institutions—such as the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration—could have alleviated concerns about loss of institutional identity. Research has shown that when stakeholders see a clear connection between the change and improved outcomes, their resistance decreases (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000).

Another critical strategy is to involve stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes. Studies have emphasized the importance of participatory approaches in reducing resistance

(Fullan, 2007). Faculty, staff, and students should be given opportunities to provide input, voice concerns, and contribute to shaping the change process. This not only builds trust but also fosters a sense of ownership, which is key to overcoming resistance. For instance, using focus groups or town hall meetings to gather feedback can ensure that stakeholder voices are heard and addressed.

Two-way communication is equally essential. Resistance often stems from stakeholders feeling excluded or ignored. Establishing feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, suggestion boxes, or dedicated communication channels, can create a dialogue between the administration and stakeholders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). This allows the administration to address misconceptions, clarify doubts, and adapt strategies based on stakeholder input. For instance, during the UNIMAC merger, creating a platform for students and faculty to ask questions and receive timely responses could have mitigated rumours and reduced anxiety.

Empathy and emotional intelligence are also critical components of effective communication. Change leaders must acknowledge and validate stakeholder concerns, even if they cannot immediately address all of them. This involves demonstrating a genuine understanding of the fears and uncertainties that stakeholders may be experiencing (Taylor, 2019). For instance, during a merger, faculty may worry about job security or changes in departmental leadership. By acknowledging these concerns and providing regular updates, leaders can foster a sense of transparency and trust.

Lastly, employing a multi-channel communication approach ensures that messages reach all stakeholders effectively. Different groups may have varying preferences for how they receive information. While faculty might prefer detailed memos or email updates, students may respond

better to social media posts or campus announcements. Anderson (2017) recommends using a combination of digital and traditional channels to maximize reach and ensure inclusivity.

2.1.5 Research Trends in Communication and Change Management

The field of communication and change management has evolved significantly over the years, particularly as organizations grapple with increasingly complex transitions. Early studies primarily emphasized the role of communication as a linear process of information dissemination, highlighting its importance in ensuring stakeholders are informed about organizational changes (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). This foundational perspective paved the way for more nuanced analyses, which explored how communication could facilitate alignment and stakeholder engagement during change processes (Kotter, 1996). Recent scholarship has extended these ideas, focusing on the strategic use of communication to build trust, mitigate resistance, and foster collaboration, particularly in contexts requiring extensive stakeholder buy-in, such as educational mergers (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000; Hiatt, 2006).

A key trend in this area is the growing recognition of communication as more than a top-down directive mechanism. Instead, it is now viewed as a multidirectional process involving feedback loops and active participation from stakeholders (AlHaddad & Kotnour, 2015). This shift aligns with broader organizational studies that emphasize participatory approaches to change management. Scholars have increasingly highlighted the importance of creating platforms for two-way communication, where stakeholders are not merely recipients of information but active contributors to the change process (Lewis, 2019). For example, research on mergers in the corporate sector has demonstrated that transparent and inclusive communication significantly reduces employee resistance and enhances the likelihood of successful integration (Garnett,

Marlowe, & Pandey, 2008). This insight has since been applied to other settings, including education, where the complexity of institutional cultures necessitates tailored communication strategies.

In the context of educational institutions, research has underscored the unique challenges of managing change. Unlike corporate environments, where hierarchical structures often facilitate directive communication, educational institutions are characterized by decentralized governance and deeply ingrained academic traditions (Kezar, 2014). This complexity requires communication strategies that are not only clear and consistent but also sensitive to the diverse concerns of faculty, students, and administrative staff. For instance, Harman and Harman (2008) argue that the success of educational mergers depends on the ability to integrate the cultural identities of merging institutions while articulating a unified vision. Their study of Australian university mergers found that frequent, transparent updates were instrumental in fostering trust and reducing anxiety among stakeholders.

Another notable trend is the increasing focus on the psychological and emotional dimensions of communication during change. Scholars such as Bridges (2009) have emphasized the importance of addressing stakeholders' fears and uncertainties through empathetic and honest communication. This perspective builds on earlier work by Kotter (1996), who argued that creating a compelling change vision is critical to engaging stakeholders emotionally and intellectually. Recent studies have expanded on these ideas by exploring how digital communication platforms can enhance or hinder emotional engagement. For example, Keyton (2021) highlights the potential of social media to foster real-time dialogue and build a sense of community during organizational transitions, while cautioning against the risks of misinformation and misinterpretation in these digital spaces.

Research trends have also increasingly examined the intersection of communication and resistance to change. Resistance is often cited as one of the most significant barriers to successful organizational transformation (Hiatt, 2006; Kanter, 2020). Studies have shown that poor communication is a primary driver of resistance, particularly when stakeholders feel excluded or inadequately informed (Burnes, 2004). This finding is particularly relevant in educational settings, where stakeholders are highly invested in institutional identities and values. Nordin (2012) argues that tailored communication strategies, which address the specific concerns of faculty and students, are essential in mitigating resistance and fostering a sense of ownership during mergers.

Recent research has also highlighted the importance of aligning communication strategies with organizational goals and stakeholder expectations. Bolman and Gallos (2011) propose a multi-channel approach that combines traditional methods, such as town hall meetings and newsletters, with digital platforms to ensure inclusivity and accessibility. This approach is particularly relevant in diverse educational settings, where stakeholders may have varying preferences and levels of access to communication channels. For instance, Doe and Smith (2019) found that integrating face-to-face interactions with online updates was effective in bridging generational and cultural gaps during a university restructuring process.

Despite these advances, gaps remain in the literature, particularly concerning the application of communication theories to specific contexts such as educational mergers. Much of the existing research focuses on either corporate settings or generalized organizational change, with limited attention to the unique dynamics of academia (Fullan, 2007). This gap is particularly pronounced in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, where educational institutions face distinct challenges, including resource constraints and sociocultural complexities (Asiedu, 2017). Addressing these

gaps requires further research that combines theoretical insights with empirical studies, focusing on the role of communication in navigating the complexities of educational mergers.

2.1.6 Critical Gaps in the Literature

Existing studies on communication in organizational change management have provided significant insights into its role in facilitating successful transitions. Scholars such as Kotter (1996) and Hiatt (2006) have emphasized the importance of transparent, consistent, and inclusive communication in reducing resistance and fostering stakeholder alignment during change processes. However, a critical analysis of the available literature reveals notable gaps, particularly in the context of educational institution mergers, which present unique challenges compared to corporate settings. These gaps underscore the need for further research into the nuanced dynamics of communication in academic mergers and the integration of diverse institutional cultures.

One of the most glaring omissions in the literature pertains to the integration of academic cultures in mergers involving higher education institutions. Unlike corporate mergers, where operational goals and profit motives often dominate, academic mergers must reconcile deeply ingrained institutional identities, values, and traditions. Harman and Harman (2008) argue that academic mergers require tailored communication strategies to address decentralized governance structures and the preservation of academic freedom. However, few studies have explored how communication can facilitate the alignment of these cultural dimensions. The integration of academic cultures involves not only unifying organizational policies but also addressing stakeholders' emotional attachments to their original institutions. This challenge is particularly pronounced in the case of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) merger, which combined three institutions with distinct academic focuses: journalism, film production, and

language studies. Existing research does not sufficiently address how communication strategies can be designed to bridge such disciplinary divides while respecting the unique identities of each institution.

Another significant gap lies in the under-exploration of stakeholder-specific communication needs during mergers in educational contexts. Studies on corporate mergers often emphasize top-down communication approaches, where executives disseminate information to employees and other stakeholders (Clampitt et al., 2000; Armenakis & Harris, 2009). While this model may be effective in hierarchical corporate environments, it is less applicable in academia, where stakeholders—including faculty, students, and administrative staff—operate with varying degrees of autonomy and influence. For instance, faculty members often view themselves as stewards of their disciplines and may resist changes that appear to undermine their academic freedom or professional autonomy (Kezar, 2014). Similarly, students, who are directly affected by changes in academic programs and institutional branding, require assurances about the continuity and value of their education. Despite these unique dynamics, the literature offers limited guidance on how to develop communication strategies that cater to the diverse and often conflicting needs of academic stakeholders.

The role of feedback mechanisms in fostering two-way communication during educational mergers also remains underexplored. Effective change communication is not only about disseminating information but also about creating opportunities for stakeholders to voice their concerns and contribute to the decision-making process (Hiatt, 2006). However, existing studies rarely delve into how feedback loops can be institutionalized in academic settings to enhance trust and engagement. This gap is particularly evident in the UNIMAC merger, where stakeholders reported limited opportunities to provide input or receive timely responses to their concerns. The

absence of structured feedback mechanisms not only undermines stakeholder confidence but also hinders the administration's ability to address resistance proactively.

Furthermore, the literature lacks a comprehensive examination of the long-term impacts of communication strategies on the success of educational mergers. While some studies provide anecdotal evidence of effective communication practices during the initial phases of organizational change, few investigate how these practices influence post-merger integration and stakeholder satisfaction over time. For example, research on corporate mergers has shown that communication strategies play a crucial role in shaping organizational culture and employee morale in the years following a merger (Lewis, 2019). However, similar longitudinal studies in the context of higher education are notably absent. This gap limits our understanding of how early communication efforts can set the tone for long-term collaboration and institutional cohesion in academic settings.

The unique aspects of the UNIMAC merger further highlight the need to address these gaps. Unlike many educational mergers, which often involve institutions with similar academic focuses, the UNIMAC merger brought together three entities with distinct disciplinary orientations: The Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), and the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL). Each institution had a long-standing reputation and specialized curriculum that appealed to specific stakeholder groups. The challenge of unifying these diverse academic cultures while preserving their unique strengths required a level of strategic communication that the existing literature does not adequately address. Moreover, the merger occurred within a context of limited resources and heightened stakeholder scepticism, further complicating the communication landscape.

Additionally, the UNIMAC merger exposed the inadequacies of relying solely on digital communication platforms, such as social media, to engage stakeholders. While platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were used to share updates, these channels were insufficient for addressing the nuanced concerns of faculty, students, and administrative staff. The literature on digital communication in organizational change management often assumes a level of accessibility and engagement that may not exist across all stakeholder groups (Anderson, 2017). However, in contexts like UNIMAC, where digital literacy and access vary significantly, a more inclusive approach that combines digital and traditional communication methods is essential. This need for a hybrid communication model, tailored to the specific context of educational mergers, remains largely unexplored in the literature.

In conclusion, the critical gaps in the literature on communication in educational mergers highlight the need for a more nuanced and context-specific approach to understanding this complex phenomenon. The integration of academic cultures, the diverse communication needs of stakeholders, the institutionalization of feedback mechanisms, and the long-term impacts of communication strategies are all areas that warrant further investigation. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide more actionable insights for managing educational mergers, particularly in contexts as unique and challenging as the UNIMAC merger.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as the foundation of a research study, providing the lens through which the phenomena under investigation can be analysed and interpreted. For this study on the role of communication in managing organizational change within educational institutions, particularly in the context of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) merger, two complementary models have been chosen: Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR model. These models offer both organizational-level and individual-level perspectives on managing change and provide a robust theoretical basis for examining the communication strategies employed during institutional transitions.

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model, developed by John Kotter in 1996, is a widely used framework for managing organizational change. The model comprises eight sequential steps: (1) creating a sense of urgency, (2) building a guiding coalition, (3) developing a vision and strategy, (4) communicating the vision, (5) empowering broad-based action, (6) generating short-term wins, (7) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (8) anchoring new approaches in the culture (Kotter, 1996). Each step emphasizes the importance of leadership, stakeholder alignment, and sustained effort in achieving successful organizational transformation.

The first step, creating a sense of urgency, focuses on helping stakeholders understand the need for change by highlighting its importance and the risks of maintaining the status quo. Building a guiding coalition involves assembling a group of influential individuals who can lead and support the change initiative. Developing a vision and strategy provides a clear and inspiring picture of the desired future state and outlines the steps needed to achieve it. Communicating the vision is critical; Kotter (1996) underscores that consistent, clear messaging is necessary to ensure that all

stakeholders understand and support the change. Empowering broad-based action entails removing barriers and enabling individuals to take initiative in implementing change. Generating short-term wins helps to build momentum by achieving visible, meaningful progress early in the change process. Consolidating gains ensures that early successes are leveraged to drive further change, while anchoring new approaches in the culture focuses on institutionalizing changes by embedding them in organizational norms and practices. The ADKAR model, introduced by Jeffrey Hiatt in 2006, complements Kotter's approach by focusing on individual readiness for change. ADKAR is an acronym representing five key building blocks of successful change at the individual level: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (Hiatt, 2006). This model posits that organizational change is ultimately achieved through individual transitions, as each person must move through these stages for the change to be successful.

Awareness involves helping individuals understand why the change is necessary. Desire focuses on motivating individuals to support and participate in the change, which often requires addressing personal concerns and aligning the change with their values and interests. Knowledge equips individuals with the information, skills, and tools needed to implement the change effectively. Ability refers to the actual application of these skills and knowledge, ensuring that individuals can perform in the new environment. Reinforcement emphasizes the importance of sustaining the change through mechanisms such as rewards, recognition, and continuous support.

Both Kotter's and Hiatt's models are highly relevant to the context of the UNIMAC merger, which involved the integration of three distinct institutions with unique cultures, processes, and stakeholder expectations. Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model provides a macro-level framework for understanding how communication strategies could be structured to guide the merger process.

For example, the steps of creating a sense of urgency and communicating the vision are particularly pertinent to the challenges identified in this study, where the lack of timely and clear communication contributed to stakeholder resistance and confusion. By emphasizing the need for clear and consistent messaging, Kotter's model highlights the critical role of communication in aligning diverse stakeholder groups and fostering a shared commitment to the merger's goals.

On the other hand, the ADKAR model offers a micro-level perspective that is invaluable for addressing the individual experiences of faculty, students, and administrative staff during the merger. The stages of Awareness and Desire, for instance, align with the need to address stakeholder concerns about the impact of the merger on their roles and academic programs. Knowledge and Ability are crucial for ensuring that stakeholders are equipped to navigate the new institutional framework, while Reinforcement underscores the importance of sustaining stakeholder engagement and commitment over time. The integration of these two models provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing the role of communication in managing the UNIMAC merger. Kotter's model emphasizes the importance of organizational-level strategies for fostering alignment and momentum, while the ADKAR model highlights the need for tailored communication that addresses individual readiness and adaptation. Together, these frameworks underscore that effective communication is not merely about disseminating information but about fostering understanding, building trust, and facilitating both collective and individual transitions. This dual perspective is particularly critical in the context of educational mergers, where the success of organizational change depends on the alignment of diverse stakeholder groups with unique concerns, expectations, and needs.

2.2.1 Application of Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR Model to Educational Settings

Organizational change within educational institutions, particularly mergers, demands a nuanced understanding of both institutional and individual dynamics. Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR Model have proven useful frameworks for managing such transitions, offering complementary perspectives on organizational and individual change. Applying these models to the merger of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) in Ghana or similar contexts reveals both their strengths and limitations when employed in educational settings.

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (Kotter, 1996) emphasizes a sequential approach to managing change, beginning with creating a sense of urgency and culminating in embedding new practices into the organizational culture. This model's emphasis on communication is particularly pertinent to educational mergers. For instance, during the UNIMAC merger, establishing a sense of urgency was essential to mitigate resistance among stakeholders, including students, faculty, and administrative staff, who were skeptical about the rationale and implications of the merger. The model's focus on "communicating the vision" aligns with the need for transparent messaging, as stakeholders required clarity on how the merger would enhance interdisciplinary collaboration and optimize resources. The UNIMAC administration's partial use of Kotter's principles, such as appointing a Public Relations officer to spearhead communication, resonates with the model's guidance on building a guiding coalition and leveraging effective communication channels. However, significant shortcomings were evident. The absence of comprehensive stakeholder engagement mechanisms, a critical element in Kotter's model, hindered the administration's ability to build a shared commitment to the merger's vision. While the model advocates for creating short-

term wins to sustain momentum, the delayed implementation of integrated academic programs and visible benefits limited stakeholders' confidence in the merger process.

The ADKAR Model, developed by Hiatt (2006), focuses on individual readiness for change through five stages: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement. This granular approach is particularly relevant in educational settings, where stakeholders' responses to change are deeply personal and influenced by their unique roles within the institution. For example, during the UNIMAC merger, faculty members required specific knowledge about changes to their roles and responsibilities, while students sought assurances regarding the continuity and value of their academic programs. The ADKAR framework underscores the importance of tailoring communication to address these concerns, fostering individual readiness and reducing resistance.

Despite its theoretical relevance, the ADKAR Model's practical application during the UNIMAC merger was uneven. While efforts were made to create awareness through social media updates and public outreach, these measures lacked the depth and consistency needed to build desire and knowledge among stakeholders. For instance, the administration's failure to provide timely and detailed explanations of the merger's long-term benefits limited stakeholders' ability to transition effectively to the new institutional framework. Additionally, the absence of robust feedback loops undermined the reinforcement stage, as stakeholders did not feel adequately supported in adapting to the changes. Comparing the two models highlights their complementary strengths and limitations in the context of educational mergers. Kotter's model excels in offering a strategic roadmap for managing change at an organizational level, emphasizing the importance of vision, communication, and cultural alignment. However, it does not provide sufficient guidance on addressing individual stakeholder needs, a critical oversight in educational settings where

resistance often stems from personal concerns about role changes and institutional identity. Conversely, the ADKAR Model's focus on individual readiness offers valuable insights for addressing these concerns but falls short in providing a cohesive framework for managing complex, multi-stakeholder transitions like mergers.

In practice, the limitations of both models became apparent during the UNIMAC merger. While Kotter's model advocated for proactive communication and stakeholder engagement, these principles were not fully realized, resulting in confusion and scepticism. Similarly, the ADKAR Model's emphasis on tailored communication was undermined by the administration's inability to address the diverse needs of faculty, students, and staff effectively. These shortcomings underscore the need for a hybrid approach that integrates the strategic guidance of Kotter's model with the individualized focus of the ADKAR framework, ensuring both organizational alignment and stakeholder buy-in.

2.2.2 Conclusion

The literature review underscores the critical role of communication in managing organizational change, particularly in the unique context of educational mergers. Effective communication has been repeatedly highlighted as a cornerstone for aligning stakeholder expectations, mitigating resistance, and fostering a cohesive institutional identity during transitions (Kotter, 1996; Hiatt, 2006). However, the complexity of educational settings, characterized by deeply ingrained academic cultures and decentralized governance structures, necessitates tailored strategies that go beyond conventional change management frameworks (Harman & Harman, 2008; Lewis, 2019). By synthesizing existing research, this review identifies key trends, theoretical contributions, and gaps that inform the research questions and methodology of this study.

Central to the review is the observation that communication in educational mergers serves dual purposes: it disseminates critical information while also shaping perceptions, emotions, and attitudes toward change (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). Studies across sectors have consistently shown that strategic communication facilitates trust-building, reduces uncertainty, and fosters stakeholder engagement, all of which are essential for successful organizational change (Burnes, 2004; Bridges, 2009). However, in the context of educational institutions, where stakeholders include diverse groups such as students, faculty, administrative staff, and external partners, communication must be nuanced and inclusive. This review finds that while corporate models like Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR framework provide valuable insights, their application in educational settings often requires adaptation to address the unique dynamics of academic environments. Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model emphasizes the importance of creating urgency, building coalitions, and communicating a clear vision to drive change (Kotter, 1996). This model's emphasis on structured, step-by-step processes is particularly relevant for managing the large-scale transitions inherent in educational mergers. For instance, the "communicate the change vision" step aligns closely with the need for transparent and inclusive messaging in fostering stakeholder alignment. Meanwhile, the ADKAR model focuses on individual readiness for change through stages such as Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (Hiatt, 2006). This granular focus on individual stakeholder needs is invaluable for addressing specific concerns, such as students' apprehensions about program continuity or faculty's uncertainties regarding role changes.

Despite their strengths, these theoretical frameworks reveal certain limitations when applied to educational mergers. For example, Kotter's model assumes a largely top-down approach, which may overlook the participatory and consultative processes valued in academia (Kezar, 2014).

Similarly, the ADKAR framework's individualistic focus may need to be complemented by strategies that address collective identities and institutional cultures. This study aims to bridge these gaps by integrating both models to analyze how communication strategies can be optimized to meet the specific needs of educational institutions undergoing mergers. The findings from the literature review directly inform the research questions and methodology of this study. By identifying communication as a critical yet underexplored factor in educational mergers, the review validates the focus on understanding how communication strategies influence stakeholder engagement and acceptance during such transitions. Furthermore, the identified gaps such as the limited research on integrating academic cultures and the insufficient exploration of two-way communication mechanisms highlight the need for qualitative methodologies that capture the nuanced perspectives of diverse stakeholders. This study's use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis is thus grounded in the need to explore these complexities in depth, providing insights that are both empirically robust and contextually relevant.

In addressing the identified gaps, this study contributes to the broader discourse on change management by offering a nuanced understanding of communication in educational mergers. By integrating theoretical insights from Kotter's and ADKAR models with empirical findings from the UNIMAC merger, the study not only advances academic knowledge but also provides practical recommendations for administrators. These contributions are particularly significant in light of the increasing prevalence of mergers in higher education, where effective communication is essential for ensuring successful outcomes. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of strategic, inclusive, and adaptive communication in navigating the complexities of organizational change in educational settings.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology employed to collect and analyse data for the study. It includes the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis approach. Additionally, ethical considerations are discussed to ensure the integrity of the research process.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative case study approach to investigate the communication strategies employed during the UNIMAC merger. A case study method is particularly well-suited for examining complex phenomena in specific contexts, enabling an in-depth understanding of stakeholder perceptions and experiences (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of communication as a dynamic and context-dependent process, addressing the specific needs of an educational merger.

3.1.1 Case Study Design

A crucial component of the research methodology employed in this study is the case study design, which is specifically tailored to investigate the communication strategies employed during the merger of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC). The case study

approach is particularly suited for this research as it allows for an in-depth examination of a complex, real-world phenomenon within its contextual setting (Yin, 2018). By focusing on the UNIMAC merger as a single case, this study aims to explore the unique challenges and opportunities presented by communication in the context of institutional mergers within the higher education sector in Ghana. This section elaborates on the specific aspects of the case study design applied in this research, including the rationale for its adoption, its key features, and the methodological strategies used to ensure its rigor.

The choice of a case study design is informed by the study's overarching aim to understand the role of communication in managing organizational change during the UNIMAC merger. According to Stake (1995), case studies are particularly effective for exploring "how" and "why" questions, making them well-suited for research that seeks to uncover processes and mechanisms underlying complex phenomena. The merger of three distinct institutions—the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), and the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL) presents a unique context characterized by diverse stakeholder groups, varying institutional cultures, and significant organizational restructuring. By using a case study design, this research delves deeply into these complexities, providing rich, contextual insights that would be difficult to achieve through other methodological approaches.

3.1.2 Key Features, Application and Contribution of the Case Study Design

The case study design applied in this research is both descriptive and explanatory in nature. A descriptive case study focuses on providing a detailed account of the phenomenon under investigation, while an explanatory case study seeks to identify causal relationships and mechanisms (Yin, 2018). This dual approach is critical for understanding not only the

communication strategies employed during the merger but also their effectiveness in addressing stakeholder concerns, fostering engagement, and mitigating resistance.

Furthermore, this research adopts a holistic single-case design, as defined by Yin (2018), where the UNIMAC merger serves as the single unit of analysis. The holistic approach is appropriate given the study's focus on the entire merger process rather than specific sub-components. This allows for a comprehensive analysis of the communication strategies employed, their implementation, and their impact on various stakeholder groups, including students, faculty, and administrative staff.

The case study design is operationalized through a combination of data collection and analysis methods that align with its descriptive and explanatory objectives. Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders including faculty, students, and administrative staff—serve as the primary data collection method. This approach allows for the elicitation of detailed narratives and perspectives, capturing the nuanced experiences of stakeholders during the merger process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The analysis of the case study data is guided by thematic analysis, which involves identifying, coding, and interpreting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By linking these patterns to the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study namely Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR framework the research elucidates how specific communication strategies align with or diverge from established principles of change management.

To ensure the rigour of the case study design, this research adheres to established criteria for quality in qualitative research. These include construct validity, internal validity, external validity,

and reliability (Yin, 2018). Construct validity is achieved through the use of multiple data sources, as well as the development of a clear chain of evidence linking data to research objectives. Internal validity is addressed by grounding the analysis in well-established theoretical frameworks, which provide a robust lens for interpreting the findings. External validity, while inherently limited in single-case designs, is enhanced by situating the case study within the broader literature on educational mergers and communication strategies. Finally, reliability is ensured through the meticulous documentation of research procedures, enabling replication by future researchers.

The use of a case study design contributes significantly to the study's ability to address its research questions and achieve its objectives. By focusing on the UNIMAC merger as a specific and bounded case, the research provides a detailed and context-sensitive understanding of how communication strategies were employed to navigate the complexities of organizational change. This design also allows for the identification of best practices and challenges that may inform future mergers in similar contexts. Ultimately, the case study approach underscores the importance of context in shaping the dynamics of communication and change management, offering insights that are both theoretically grounded and practically relevant.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study's population comprises all stakeholders involved in the UNIMAC merger, including faculty, students, administrative staff, and senior management from the three merging institutions. To ensure diversity and relevance, purposive sampling was employed to select participants directly impacted by the merger. This method allows for the intentional inclusion of individuals with unique insights into the communication strategies and their effectiveness (Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.2.1 Sample Size

The sample includes 30 participants, distributed as follows: nine faculty members (lecturers and heads of departments from the faculty of Public Relations, Advertising and Integrated Marketing, UNIMAC-IJ, Faculty of Integrated Communication Sciences, UNIMAC-IJ, Faculty of Journalism and Media Studies, UNIMAC-IJ, School of Graduate Studies and Research, UNIMAC-IJ, Broadcast Journalism Department, UNIMAC-IFT, Film and TV Artistic Department, UNIMAC-IFT, School of Languages, UNIMAC-IL, School of bilingual Secretaryship, UNIMAC-IL), fifteen students (five students from UNIMAC IJ Graduate School, Five students from Degree across the three institutes and five students from diploma across the three institutes) and six administrative staff across the three institutes which include the three heads of Academic Affairs, and the three heads of Public Affairs). This distribution ensured a comprehensive representation of stakeholder groups.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via phone calls. This method was chosen for its flexibility and accessibility, accommodating participants' diverse locations and schedules (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While phone interviews offered logistical ease and privacy, they also posed challenges, such as the inability to observe non-verbal cues. Additionally, technical issues like poor connectivity could affect the flow of conversations (Hew & Cheung, 2020). Recognizing these limitations, the researcher ensured thorough preparation and followed up with participants when necessary. Semi-structured interviews provided a robust framework for capturing detailed and nuanced perspectives while allowing for the exploration of emerging themes.

Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share insights into the communication strategies employed during the merger, including their perceived strengths and weaknesses. Interview topics included stakeholder engagement, transparency, and the effectiveness of communication channels.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved several stages:

3.4.1 Data Familiarization

The researcher became deeply familiar with the data by reviewing interview transcripts multiple times. Key themes and patterns were noted during this initial phase.

3.4.2 Coding

Data were segmented into meaningful chunks and assigned descriptive labels (codes). Coding was iterative, ensuring that the labels captured both explicit and implicit meanings within the data (Saldaña, 2016).

3.4.3 Theme Development

Codes were grouped into overarching themes that aligned with the study's objectives. For example, themes such as "Role of Communication in Managing Uncertainty" and "Stakeholder Engagement Strategies" were identified.

3.4.4 Refinement

Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. Overlapping themes were consolidated, and sub-themes were developed for greater clarity.

3.4.5 Coding Strategies Applied

The researcher employed both descriptive and pattern coding strategies to capture nuanced insights. Descriptive coding summarized key content, while pattern coding identified relationships between themes (Miles et al., 2014). These strategies facilitated a deeper understanding of how communication influenced stakeholder experiences during the merger.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and ensure data integrity. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymization of data ensured that individual identities were protected.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology, emphasizing the use of a qualitative research design to explore communication strategies during the UNIMAC merger. Purposive sampling ensured diverse representation, while semi-structured phone interviews provided rich, context-specific data. Thematic analysis facilitated the identification of key themes, linking empirical findings to theoretical frameworks. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study, ensuring its credibility and rigor.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the data collected from interviews with stakeholders at the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC), which included students, faculty members, and administrative staff. The analysis addressed the study's research objectives, which were centred on examining the communication strategies employed by the administration during the UNIMAC merger and identifying the challenges and best practices associated with communicating organisational change in educational institutions, particularly in the context of mergers. The role of communication during organisational change has been widely recognized in both academic and practical settings. Scholars such as Kotter (1996) and Lewis (2019) emphasized that effective communication play a crucial role in ensuring stakeholders remain informed while also reducing resistance to change. This reduction occurred through fostering understanding, building trust, and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders. In the context of educational institutions, where organisational change often involved integrating distinct institutional cultures, aligning academic programs, and harmonizing administrative processes, communication is even more essential. Harman and Harman (2008) highlighted how educational mergers required tailored communication strategies to navigate these complexities, while Kezar (2014) underscored the need for clear messaging to unite diverse institutional goals and values.

A thematic approach was adopted to align the analysis with the study's objectives and research questions. From the data, several key themes emerged, including the effectiveness of

communication channels, the extent of stakeholder engagement, the resistance to change observed during the merger, and best practices for facilitating smoother transitions.

The findings also connected these communication experiences to established theoretical frameworks, providing a deeper understanding of the process. Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (1996) highlighted the importance of articulating a clear and compelling vision for change, which was a critical factor in addressing stakeholder concerns and building momentum for the merger. Similarly, Hiatt's ADKAR Model (2006) emphasized the need to focus on individual readiness, awareness, and understanding to ensure a more inclusive and effective transition. These models served as interpretative tools, offering valuable perspectives on the successes and shortcomings of UNIMAC's communication strategies.

Through this analysis, the chapter provided a detailed account of how communication shaped the outcomes of the UNIMAC merger and influenced its impact on stakeholders. By examining the gaps, successes, and recommendations shared by interview respondents, the study contributed to the broader field of communication and change management within educational institutions. Furthermore, it offered practical insights and actionable strategies that could inform the planning and execution of future mergers in higher education settings.

4.1 Demographic Overview of Respondents

This section provides an overview of the participants involved in the study, highlighting their categories, institutional affiliations, and roles within the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC). A total of thirty individuals participated in the research, representing a diverse cross-section of stakeholders who had varying experiences and perspectives on the communication strategies adopted during the merger process. These participants included students,

faculty members, and administrative staff from the three institutions that formed UNIMAC: The Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI), and the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL). The inclusion of respondents from these distinct yet interconnected institutions ensured that the analysis captured a comprehensive understanding of the communication efforts and their perceived effectiveness during the institutional merger.

The student participants were drawn from various programs and levels of study, including diploma, undergraduate, and graduate programs. Their affiliations reflected the diversity within UNIMAC's student body, with students from GIJ primarily focusing on journalism, communication, and public relations; those from NAFTI concentrating on film, television production, and multimedia arts; and students from GIL specializing in language studies and cultural communication. This diversity provided a well-rounded perspective on how the merger impacted different academic disciplines and programs. Students' responses reflected their unique concerns about the communication process, particularly regarding its timeliness, clarity, and accessibility in addressing academic uncertainties, such as program continuity and faculty availability. Faculty members who participated in the study represented a critical group of stakeholders whose roles and responsibilities were significantly influenced by the merger. They were primarily senior lecturers, department heads, and deans drawn from the constituent institutions. These faculty members played dual roles as both recipients and facilitators of information during the transition, as they were often tasked with disseminating information to students while also grappling with their own concerns regarding departmental realignments, workload distribution, and academic freedom.

In addition to students and faculty, administrative staff also formed an integral part of the respondent pool. These individuals were primarily drawn from the management and support teams within the three institutions, including personnel from public affairs and academic affairs. Their

responses provided valuable insights into the communication strategies adopted at the institutional level, as well as the operational challenges encountered during the merger process. Administrative staff were uniquely positioned to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication mechanisms and external publicity efforts, such as media engagements and stakeholder outreach. Their perspectives underscored the critical role of administrative communication in facilitating institutional transitions and addressing stakeholder concerns. The composition of participants across these three stakeholder categories—students, faculty, and administrative staff—offered a holistic understanding of the communication dynamics during the merger. By incorporating voices from the three constituent institutions, the study ensured that the findings were representative of the broader UNIMAC community. The diverse affiliations and roles of the respondents also reflected the interconnectedness of the academic, administrative, and student structures within the newly merged institution. This demographic overview, therefore, laid a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis of communication strategies, and the challenges encountered during the merger process.

The inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives aligns with the assertion by Creswell and Poth (2018) that qualitative research benefits from a diverse participant pool, which enhances the depth and richness of the data. Similarly, Yin (2018) emphasized that case study research requires the incorporation of multiple sources of evidence to build a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena such as organisational change. By including students, faculty, and administrative staff from all three institutions, the study adhered to these principles, ensuring that the data were both comprehensive and contextually grounded.

In summary, the respondents in this study were purposively selected to capture the breadth of experiences and perceptions within the newly established UNIMAC. Their categories—students,

faculty members, and administrative staff—reflected the key stakeholder groups affected by the merger. Their diverse institutional affiliations further ensured that the analysis would provide a nuanced understanding of the communication strategies employed, the challenges encountered, and the areas for improvement in future organisational transitions. The perspectives of these respondents set the stage for a detailed exploration of the communication process and its impact on the UNIMAC community.

4.2 Data Analysis Approach

The data collected from semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that emphasizes identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within textual data. The analysis began with a familiarization process where the researcher repeatedly read the transcribed interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This preliminary phase enabled the identification of recurrent patterns and facilitated the initial categorization of data into meaningful segments. The study prioritized coding as an iterative process, employing both descriptive and pattern coding to encapsulate explicit ideas and underlying themes within participant responses (Saldaña, 2016). These codes were further refined through careful review, consolidating overlapping themes and ensuring coherence with the research objectives.

Thematic development focused on aligning stakeholder experiences with the study's primary goals, particularly regarding communication strategies and their perceived effectiveness during the merger. For instance, participant feedback revealed gaps in proactive communication, which was often replaced by informal networks of information sharing. This insight was pivotal in framing themes such as “Stakeholder Perceptions of Communication” and “Challenges in Communication

Strategy.” These themes were not only descriptive but also analytical, providing an interpretive lens to understand the administration's approach to managing stakeholder concerns.

The analytical process also adhered to ethical research practices, ensuring that participants' narratives were presented anonymously to protect their identities. The methodological rigor included cross-referencing the findings with theoretical frameworks such as Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model, which emphasizes the critical role of communication in fostering a shared vision during organisational transitions (Kotter, 1996). Similarly, the ADKAR model underscored the importance of addressing individual readiness for change through tailored messaging and feedback loops (Hiatt, 2006). These frameworks offered a structured lens for evaluating the merger's communication strategies, highlighting both congruencies and gaps between theoretical ideals and practical execution.

The use of thematic analysis proved instrumental in drawing out nuanced insights from the data, enabling the study to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and real-world applications of communication strategies in educational mergers. By grounding the analysis in both empirical data and established theoretical frameworks, this chapter provided a comprehensive examination of how communication influenced the dynamics of the UNIMAC merger. The findings set the stage for a broader discussion on the implications of communication in managing change, which is elaborated upon in subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.3 Themes Identified from Data

4.3.1 Communication Strategies Employed

The communication strategies employed by the UNIMAC administration during the merger were varied and often ad hoc, reflecting the challenges of integrating three distinct institutions.

"We didn't really have a strategy, or UNIMAC didn't have a comprehensive strategy for the merger. We had, let me see, kind of like, how do I put it? An ad hoc strategy. An ad hoc strategy for, or an interim strategy for the event and to communicate the merger. Some media houses came to cover the story, like Graphic and others, which extended the publicity for us." – AdminIJ(P1)

One notable approach for the Institute of Film and Television was the introduction of a Public Relations (PR) officer to manage the communication process. This appointment represented a significant shift from the previous practice, where communication responsibilities were dispersed across administrative offices, particularly the registrar's office. The PR officer was tasked with designing and disseminating tailored messages aimed at increasing awareness of the merger among students, alumni, and the general public. AdminIFT(P3) commented,

"Management introduced a PR person to enhance communication, as previously, all communication and advocacy efforts were managed by the registrar's office. This step aimed to increase student enrollment by crafting targeted messages for potential students and also established a liaison role to strengthen ties with alumni, leveraging NAFTI's 45-year legacy since 1978."

This role became instrumental in articulating the rationale and benefits of the merger, addressing initial resistance and scepticism among stakeholders (Kotler et al., 2021).

Social media platforms were leveraged to disseminate information about the merger. For example, Facebook was frequently used to post updates, stream events such as the launch of the UNIMAC logo, and respond to inquiries from stakeholders. These efforts were supplemented by limited outreach programs, including visits to secondary schools and churches, which aimed to enhance public understanding of the merger's objectives. However, these engagements were constrained by time and resources, which limited their overall impact.

"I first heard about the merger through the school's Facebook page. But those who weren't active on social media missed out on critical updates, and there was little follow-up using other channels like emails or notices", DIP/IFT (P6) shared.

While social media proved effective in reaching certain audiences, the reliance on this medium highlighted gaps in inclusivity, as not all stakeholders were active on these platforms.

Despite these efforts, there was no comprehensive communication strategy in place at the merger's inception. Communication activities were often reactive, addressing specific events such as the launch rather than providing a consistent and strategic framework for stakeholder engagement. AdminIJ(P2) mentioned that,

"Initially, there was no specific communication strategy in place. For instance, the publicity for the launch of UNIMAC's name and logo was handled in just two weeks if I am right, utilizing interviews on media platforms to explain the merger. Beyond this event, communication efforts lacked consistency and strategy"

According to participant accounts, this approach led to significant information gaps, particularly among students and faculty, who often relied on informal networks to obtain updates about the

merger. These deficiencies underscored the challenges of managing organisational change without a robust and cohesive communication plan, as emphasized in studies on change management in educational institutions (Clampitt et al., 2000; Kotter, 1996).

"Most of us relied on rumours or casual conversations to learn about major decisions. "It created confusion and scepticism about the administration's transparency and intentions". – DEG/IL(P14)

4.3.2 Stakeholder Perceptions and Reactions

Stakeholders, including students and faculty members, exhibited diverse perceptions and reactions to the communication strategies employed during the merger. Many students expressed frustration over the administration's lack of timely and clear communication. A significant portion of students reported that they initially learned about the merger through rumours rather than official channels, which contributed to confusion and scepticism.

"I first heard about the merger through rumours on campus, my first thought was that it was a lie. one student from MA/IJ(P18) recalled. "The lack of formal communication made it hard to trust the process".

This lack of direct engagement was exacerbated by the administration's failure to provide detailed explanations of the merger's benefits, particularly regarding academic programs, faculty availability, and institutional identity (Bridges, 2009). Consequently, students perceived the administration's communication efforts as insufficient, often describing them as reactive rather than proactive.

"They later created platforms, but not everyone knew about them, and even when created, they didn't communicate effectively to the students," DIP/IL(P9) remarked.

Faculty and administrative staff also faced challenges in adjusting to the new institutional framework. The merger necessitated significant organisational changes, including new reporting lines and governance structures. However, the absence of clear communication regarding these changes led to resistance and uncertainty among some staff members.

"The merger brought a lot of structural changes, but without proper explanation or engagement, many staff members were left feeling alienated," noted LEC/IFT(P13)

This response aligns with existing literature, which highlights that poor communication is a primary driver of resistance to organisational change (Harman & Harman, 2008). Faculty members, for instance, expressed concerns about the lack of consultation during the merger process, which they perceived as undermining their autonomy and professional identity.

Alumni and parents, as external stakeholders, encountered similar difficulties in accessing information about the merger. The administration's reliance on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp excluded those who were less active on these platforms, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the merger's goals. Furthermore, the lack of two-way communication mechanisms, such as forums or feedback channels, hindered stakeholders' ability to voice their concerns or seek clarifications. This omission highlighted a critical gap in the administration's approach, as effective change communication requires active feedback loops to foster trust and collaboration (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). DEG/IL(P4) emphasized,

"the whatsapp group they created did not have a lot of students on it. Only admins could chat there. There was no room for interactions or for us to express our feedback. We were expected to accept decisions without any dialogue or explanation".

Overall, stakeholders perceived the communication strategies as inconsistent and insufficiently inclusive, which diminished their confidence in the administration's ability to manage the merger effectively. These findings emphasize the need for a more strategic and participatory approach to communication during institutional transitions, as supported by theoretical models such as Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR framework (Hiatt, 2006; Kotter, 1996).

"they could have involved the Student Representative Council (SRC) then we could say they are involving we the students. But no, it was like an obey before complain situation" remarked DEG/IJ(P8)

4.3.3 Effectiveness of Communication Channels

The effectiveness of communication channels during the UNIMAC merger was a key concern raised by stakeholders, including students, faculty, and administrative staff. Social media emerged as a widely used platform for disseminating information about the merger. Students reported that much of the merger-related information they received was either via the institution's social media platforms, particularly Facebook, or through informal networks such as peer discussions and WhatsApp groups. This reliance on social media was seen as both a strength and a weakness. While platforms like Facebook allowed for a broad dissemination of information, it often failed to reach all stakeholders consistently. Some students noted that they discovered critical updates indirectly through forwarded posts or unofficial sources, which sometimes led to confusion and

misinformation. For instance, administrative delays and inconsistent updates on these platforms undermined stakeholder confidence in the institution's communication capabilities (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000).

Email communication, which could have been a more formal and reliable medium, was underutilized during the process. Stakeholders, particularly students, expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of official emails providing detailed updates about the merger's implications. Many students mentioned that they were accustomed to checking their emails regularly for institutional updates, yet important announcements about the merger were not communicated through this channel. This created a perception of disorganisation and a lack of commitment to effective internal communication practices. Heathfield (2019) emphasized that in organisational change processes, the selection of appropriate communication channels is crucial to maintaining stakeholder trust and engagement, yet this principle appeared to be overlooked in the UNIMAC context.

Moreover, traditional communication methods, such as physical notice boards, were reported to have been sporadically utilized, further contributing to stakeholder dissatisfaction. Participants noted that these channels could have served as accessible and visible tools for delivering consistent updates to all stakeholders on campus. However, the lack of integration between digital platforms and physical communication tools fragmented the communication process. For instance, a student from the UNIMAC Diploma program stated, "Notice boards still work in a lot of places. Even with digitalization, I think the school could have implemented digital notice boards right on the grounds of the school". The findings underscore the need for a multi-channel communication strategy, as

advocated by Anderson (2017), to ensure inclusivity and reliability in organizational change efforts.

4.3.4 Challenges in Communication

The UNIMAC merger encountered significant challenges in communication, which had profound implications for stakeholder engagement and the overall success of the transition. One of the most prominent issues was the absence of a structured and comprehensive communication strategy during the early phases of the merger. Stakeholders described the initial communication efforts as reactive and uncoordinated, with much of the information about the merger emerging informally through rumours and speculations among students and staff. This lack of an organized approach created uncertainty and scepticism, particularly among students who felt that their concerns regarding academic programs, faculty availability, and institutional reputation were not adequately addressed. According to Kotter (1996), a clear and consistent communication plan is essential in building stakeholder alignment during organisational change, yet this foundational principle was not effectively applied in the UNIMAC case.

Resistance to change among faculty and staff was another critical challenge, largely stemming from inadequate communication about new roles and responsibilities within the merged institution. Faculty members, who were accustomed to their traditional academic structures, expressed frustration over the lack of clarity regarding administrative and academic adjustments post-merger. Administrative staff similarly faced difficulties in adapting to the new hierarchical arrangements, particularly when reporting structures shifted to align with the merged institution's governance. Bridges (2009) highlighted that resistance to change often arises when stakeholders feel excluded

from the change process or perceive a threat to their roles, both of which were evident in the UNIMAC merger.

In addition to resistance, delays in addressing stakeholder queries exacerbated the communication challenges. Students and faculty members reported significant delays in receiving responses to their concerns, which further eroded trust in the administration's ability to manage the merger effectively. For example, some participants shared that they had to make multiple visits to academic and administrative offices before receiving clarity on issues, such as course registration and faculty assignments. These delays reflected an underinvestment in feedback mechanisms, which are critical in facilitating two-way communication during organisational change. As Bolman and Gallos (2011) observed, robust feedback systems enable institutions to address concerns promptly, fostering a sense of inclusion and ownership among stakeholders.

Overall, the UNIMAC merger highlighted the risks associated with inadequate communication planning and execution in managing large-scale organizational transitions. While ad hoc strategies, such as using social media and public relations personnel, addressed some gaps, they were insufficient in addressing the deeper structural and cultural challenges of the merger.

4.3.5 Perceived Impact of the Merger

The perceived impact of the UNIMAC merger revealed a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges for stakeholders. Participants highlighted that the merger presented significant potential for interdisciplinary collaboration and the unification of resources across the constituent institutions. For instance, some students expressed optimism about the possibility of accessing broader academic resources and diverse course offerings. DEG/IJ(P5) remarked,

"I was thinking if the merger actually happens, the other schools will complement GIJ. GIJ will also complement the other schools in making that program excellent. Perhaps, broadcast journalism will be done in all the three institutes but with a slight difference such as change in language, maybe French? It will just be perfect".

They believed that combining the distinct strengths of the three merging institutions—journalism from GIJ, film production expertise from NAFTI, and language studies from GIL—could create a more robust educational environment. This perception aligned with theories of synergy in mergers, which emphasize the value of resource consolidation to enhance institutional efficiency (Harman & Harman, 2008). Despite these perceived benefits, concerns were equally prominent, particularly regarding the loss of institutional identity and continuity in academic programs. Many stakeholders feared that the merger might dilute the distinct reputations of the original institutions, particularly those with established histories like GIJ and NAFTI, which were well-known for their specialized fields of study. MA/IJ(P20) expressed,

"When you mention GIJ, you associate it with Kwame Nkrumah. Unlike now, when you mention UNIMAC, everybody will think about Akufo-Addo and nothing else".

Students reported feeling uncertain about how the merger would impact the quality and recognition of their qualifications. Some participants noted that they were initially confused about why the merger was necessary, as they felt the individual institutions were functioning adequately before the transition.

"We were doing fine as students of GIJ alone... We didn't understand fully why the merger was being done". – DIP/IJ(P7)

This scepticism was exacerbated by insufficient communication from the administration regarding the long-term benefits of the merger. According to Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model, creating a clear vision and effectively communicating it are critical for ensuring stakeholder alignment during organisational transformations (Kotter, 1996). However, participants felt the administration's efforts in this area were inadequate. While some students acknowledged improvements in infrastructure and administrative processes following the merger, they believed these benefits were overshadowed by frustrations stemming from inconsistent messaging and delayed responses to concerns.

"At times, you can send a message, and then you won't get the feedback... Maybe at the time they reply harm is already being done, and now they are joining other institutes. I just hope that aspect will be addressed". - DIP/IL(P10)

Faculty members also expressed ambivalence about the merger's impact on their professional roles. They were concerned about changes to their academic freedoms and workloads, noting that integrating administrative systems across the three institutions created additional bureaucratic hurdles. The merger's organisational restructuring, which included the introduction of new reporting lines and governance structures, often left faculty and administrative staff feeling uncertain about their roles and responsibilities. To LEC/IL(P19),

"If we are merging with other institutions... some sort of work be done together—not just putting our names together and that's it".

This sense of disorientation mirrored findings from previous studies, which have shown that organisational change can lead to resistance if stakeholders are not adequately informed or involved in the transition process (Hiatt, 2006; Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

Furthermore, the lack of integrated academic programs and cross-campus collaboration at the time of the study contributed to the perception that the merger had not yet delivered its promised benefits. Students and faculty anticipated more opportunities for joint projects, shared resources, and collaborative learning experiences. DEG/IJ(P5) noted,

"If we are merging with other institutions... I expected some sort of work between students of all the institutions to work on maybe a project such as a collaborative project between news reporting and TV production"

However, these expectations remained largely unmet, leaving many to view the merger's impact as limited in scope. Research on mergers in educational settings has underscored the importance of fostering collaborative cultures early in the process to ensure alignment and stakeholder buy-in (Kezar, 2014). The limited progress in this area at UNIMAC underscored the need for a more strategic approach to post-merger integration. Amidst the challenges, the study identified some effective communication practices that resonated positively with stakeholders. Notably, the use of social media, especially Facebook, emerged as a critical tool for disseminating important information, such as the unveiling of the UNIMAC logo and other key announcements.

LEC/IL(P19) observed, *"The school's Facebook page was very active during events like the logo unveiling, and these live streams made it easier for us to stay informed"*.

These instances underscore the potential of leveraging digital platforms to enhance communication and stakeholder engagement during organizational transitions.

Overall, while the merger created a framework for potential growth and interdisciplinary collaboration, the immediate impact was marked by stakeholder concerns about identity loss, academic continuity, and a lack of strategic communication. These findings highlight the critical role of transparent, inclusive, and proactive communication in shaping perceptions of organisational change. The administration's ability to address these concerns moving forward will determine the merger's long-term success in achieving its goals.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a complex interplay between communication strategies and stakeholder perceptions during the UNIMAC merger. At its core, the merger faced significant challenges due to the administration's inability to deliver a cohesive and structured communication strategy. Stakeholders frequently expressed dissatisfaction, citing inconsistencies, lack of transparency, and delayed responses as major impediments to their understanding of the merger's rationale and processes. These findings underscore the critical role of strategic communication in organizational change and the consequences of neglecting comprehensive planning.

The use of social media, particularly Facebook, served as a notable example of effective communication, albeit in a limited capacity. Stakeholders highlighted that events like the UNIMAC logo unveiling and other major announcements were well-communicated through these platforms. One participant reflected, "The school's Facebook page was very active during events

like the logo unveiling, and these live streams made it easier for us to stay informed”. However, the overreliance on social media without complementary channels, such as emails or in-person meetings, alienated certain stakeholder groups. This outcome emphasizes the need for a multi-channel communication approach to meet diverse preferences and foster inclusivity, as noted by Anderson (2017).

Despite the benefits of social media, the findings reveal systemic gaps in feedback mechanisms, which hindered meaningful two-way communication between the administration and stakeholders. Students and faculty alike reported feeling excluded from the decision-making process, noting a lack of platforms to voice concerns or provide input. For instance, one participant lamented, “There were no platforms where we could express concerns or ask questions about the merger. We just had to accept it”. This failure to engage stakeholders undermined trust and exacerbated resistance to the change, aligning with research by AlHaddad and Kotnour (2015), which identifies exclusion as a primary barrier to successful organizational transitions.

The findings further highlight that communication inconsistencies affected stakeholder perceptions of the merger’s benefits. While some participants expressed optimism about interdisciplinary collaboration and shared resources, others questioned the merger’s necessity. Faculty members expressed concerns over the potential loss of academic freedom and increased workloads due to bureaucratic inefficiencies. Similarly, students reported confusion regarding the continuity of academic programs and the impact on their qualifications. These challenges illustrate the critical importance of clearly articulating the goals and benefits of organizational change, as advocated by Kotter (1996).

Despite these challenges, the findings suggest isolated instances of improvement over time. Some participants noted that as the merger progressed, the administration took steps to address gaps in communication. Structured internal communication channels were introduced, albeit belatedly, to clarify processes and objectives. However, these efforts were insufficient to counteract the negative perceptions already formed during the merger's initial stages. This underscores the importance of initiating robust communication strategies from the outset of organizational change, as highlighted in Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model.

4.5 Conclusions

The study concludes that the UNIMAC merger was significantly hindered by the absence of a comprehensive communication strategy. While social media was effectively used to disseminate certain key updates, the overall approach lacked coherence and failed to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders. This insufficiency resulted in confusion, frustration, and resistance among students and faculty members. The lack of a structured feedback mechanism further limited stakeholder engagement, highlighting the importance of two-way communication in fostering trust and alignment during organizational transitions. These findings align with established change management theories, such as Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR framework, which emphasize the need for transparent and inclusive communication. However, the practical application of these models in the UNIMAC context revealed gaps, particularly in addressing stakeholder-specific concerns and creating a sense of ownership.

In conclusion, the UNIMAC merger demonstrates the critical role of tailored, multi-channel communication strategies in achieving successful organizational change. The findings suggest that future mergers in educational settings must prioritize early and continuous stakeholder

engagement, implement robust feedback mechanisms, and adopt diverse communication channels to address the unique challenges of such transitions. By doing so, institutions can mitigate resistance, build trust, and realize the intended benefits of organizational change more effectively.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The fifth chapter served as a culminating section of the study, presenting a synthesis of findings, conclusions, and recommendations based on the investigation of communication strategies during the merger at UNIMAC. The primary aim of the research was to understand how communication facilitated or hindered the management of this complex organisational transition. Specifically, the study examined the communication strategies employed by the administration, their effectiveness in addressing stakeholder concerns, and the challenges encountered throughout the process. The merger, which brought together three distinct institutions—the Ghana Institute of Journalism, the National Film and Television Institute, and the Ghana Institute of Languages—posed significant communication demands due to the diversity of its stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrative staff, alumni, and external partners. The findings were contextualized within existing frameworks, such as Kotter’s Eight-Step Change Model and the ADKAR Model, which emphasize the role of transparent and adaptive communication in organisational change (Kotter, 1996; Hiatt, 2006).

This chapter presented a summary of the major findings from the analysis, linking them to the research objectives outlined in the study. It also offered a conclusion that addressed the core research questions, focusing on the lessons learned about the intersection of communication and change management within educational institutions. Additionally, the chapter provided actionable

recommendations for UNIMAC's administration to enhance its communication strategies in ongoing and future merger processes. The broader implications of the findings for other institutions undergoing similar transitions were also discussed, offering insights into best practices and potential pitfalls. Finally, the chapter concluded with suggestions for future research, emphasizing areas that remained underexplored, such as the long-term impact of communication on stakeholder integration and institutional success.

By structuring the chapter in this way, the study highlighted the centrality of communication as a tool for navigating change in higher education settings. The synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical insights underscored the need for proactive, inclusive, and transparent communication strategies in achieving successful mergers. This approach aligned with existing research that emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement and two-way communication in mitigating resistance and fostering collaboration during periods of organisational change (Clampitt et al., 2000; Lewis, 2019). The chapter therefore provided a comprehensive and reflective conclusion to the research, grounded in both practical relevance and academic rigor.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study revealed that the communication strategies employed during the merger of UNIMAC were varied in their design and implementation, reflecting a mix of planned and reactive approaches. Initial strategies were centred around public engagement through social media platforms and traditional media outlets. For instance, interviews and publicity campaigns were used to inform stakeholders about the merger, albeit in an ad hoc manner. These efforts included engaging media houses to disseminate information about the merger, its goals, and its implications

for stakeholders. However, these strategies lacked a structured and comprehensive framework, which created inconsistencies in how messages were conveyed to different groups (Kotter, 1996; Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). Stakeholders expressed mixed views regarding the effectiveness of these strategies. Many participants noted that they first heard about the merger through informal channels such as rumours or peers rather than direct communication from the administration, which led to initial confusion and scepticism. This finding aligns with communication theory, which emphasizes the critical role of transparent and proactive messaging in managing change (Burnes, 2004). Social media emerged as the primary platform through which updates were provided, particularly during the early stages of the merger. However, this approach was often perceived as insufficient, as it failed to address the more nuanced concerns of faculty, students, and other stakeholders (Lewis, 2019).

The study also highlighted significant challenges with two-way communication during the merger process. While some platforms, such as WhatsApp groups and notice boards, were used to share updates, they were neither consistently utilized nor effective in fostering meaningful engagement. Many stakeholders reported that their feedback and concerns were either overlooked or not addressed in a timely manner. This lack of reciprocal communication contributed to feelings of exclusion and diminished trust in the administration's ability to manage the merger effectively (Garnett, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2008).

Furthermore, the reactive nature of the communication strategies compounded the difficulties faced during the merger. Stakeholders frequently noted delays in receiving critical information, such as updates on academic programs, faculty availability, and institutional changes. This delay often resulted in frustration and uncertainty among students and staff. According to the ADKAR

model, effective communication must address stakeholders' need for timely and relevant information to build awareness and desire for change (Hiatt, 2006). The absence of these elements in the UNIMAC merger process underscores the limitations of the communication strategies employed.

Despite these challenges, some stakeholders acknowledged that certain aspects of the communication efforts were beneficial. For instance, the use of social media to announce new academic programs and celebrate institutional milestones was seen as a positive step toward creating a unified institutional identity. However, these successes were isolated and did not compensate for the broader deficiencies in strategy and execution. Ultimately, the findings underscore the need for a structured and inclusive communication framework that prioritizes stakeholder engagement, transparency, and responsiveness during organisational transitions.

Stakeholder perceptions of the merger at UNIMAC highlighted significant concerns regarding the adequacy of communication during the transition. Students often felt left out of the decision-making process and relied heavily on informal networks and rumours for updates. Many participants reported that the administration did not provide timely, transparent, or sufficient information to address their concerns, such as the implications of the merger on academic programs, faculty availability, and the institution's reputation. For instance, some students revealed that they first heard about the merger through hearsay or social media, rather than official communication channels, which created uncertainty and scepticism about the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Faculty and administrative staff also experienced a lack of clarity about new roles and expectations, further exacerbating feelings of unease and resistance to change (Hiatt, 2006). This sentiment was consistent with the literature, which suggests that inadequate communication

can lead to stakeholder disengagement and resistance during organisational transitions (Kotter, 1996).

The implications of these perceptions were profound, influencing how stakeholders interacted with the new institution and its vision. Many students expressed doubts about the potential benefits of the merger, noting that communication from the administration often failed to articulate the rationale or long-term goals of the process. Faculty and staff, meanwhile, indicated that they struggled to adapt to the new organisational structure, as the merger introduced hierarchical shifts and altered reporting lines without adequate explanation or training. These dynamics reflect the broader challenge of fostering trust and collaboration in the midst of significant institutional change, as noted by Armenakis and Harris (2009), who argue that stakeholder buy-in is crucial for the success of such transitions.

In terms of challenges, the absence of a comprehensive communication strategy during the early phases of the merger was a critical shortcoming. The administration primarily relied on ad hoc communication efforts, including sporadic social media updates and limited engagement with traditional media, which proved insufficient in reaching all stakeholders effectively (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). Furthermore, participants highlighted the lack of two-way communication mechanisms, which prevented students and staff from voicing concerns or providing feedback in a structured manner. This lack of inclusivity likely contributed to the dissatisfaction observed among stakeholders, as communication strategies that fail to prioritize dialogue often undermine the sense of ownership and shared purpose required for successful change management (Lewis, 2019).

Areas for improvement were clearly evident in the findings. The administration's failure to implement a consistent and accessible communication platform hindered its ability to build trust and alignment among stakeholders. Social media, while somewhat effective in disseminating updates, could not substitute for more formalized and interactive channels, such as dedicated email newsletters, institutional websites, or structured town hall meetings. The delay in addressing stakeholder queries and concerns further compounded the problem, as timely responses are essential for maintaining confidence and morale during periods of uncertainty (Burnes, 2004).

These findings align with Kotter's (1996) assertion that effective communication is not merely about transmitting information but about fostering understanding and emotional engagement. The lack of a proactive approach at UNIMAC reinforced the need for communication strategies that are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of stakeholders. By addressing these gaps, the institution could have minimized resistance and created a more cohesive environment for organisational change, as recommended by Hiatt (2006) in the ADKAR model.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the communication strategies employed during the UNIMAC merger were multifaceted, albeit inconsistent. Initially, communication efforts appeared fragmented, as stakeholders, including students and staff, reported learning about the merger primarily through informal channels such as rumours and word of mouth rather than official institutional communication (Kotter, 1996). This lack of clear and structured dissemination created confusion and uncertainty among stakeholders, as they struggled to understand the rationale, process, and implications of the merger.

The administration attempted to address these challenges by employing a range of communication methods, including the use of social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to share updates and announcements. However, these efforts were reactive rather than proactive, resulting in a perception of poor communication planning. For example, students noted that critical information about the merger, such as the impact on academic programs and faculty arrangements, was often delayed or inadequately explained (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Although the use of social media did provide some accessibility to information, it lacked the depth and personalization needed to address specific stakeholder concerns effectively.

The study also found that limited face-to-face engagements, such as town hall meetings or open forums, restricted opportunities for stakeholders to seek clarification or voice their concerns. Administrative staff acknowledged the absence of a comprehensive communication strategy during the initial phases of the merger, describing the process as ad hoc and improvised. This contributed to challenges in managing resistance to change, as stakeholders felt excluded from the decision-making process and uninformed about key developments (Bridges, 2009). While some initiatives, such as outreach to media houses and targeted messaging campaigns, were undertaken to increase public awareness, these were sporadic and lacked alignment with broader institutional objectives.

In examining the effectiveness of the strategies used, it became evident that the lack of a cohesive approach undermined stakeholder trust and engagement. For instance, participants highlighted the inconsistent use of email, which was a preferred mode of communication for many, but was underutilized by the administration (Clampitt et al., 2000). Similarly, feedback mechanisms were either absent or ineffective, leaving many students and staff without a platform to express their

concerns or contribute to the merger process. This not only impeded two-way communication but also fostered feelings of alienation among stakeholders, which could have been mitigated through more inclusive and transparent practices (AlHaddad & Kotnour, 2015).

Despite these shortcomings, some positive outcomes emerged, particularly in the latter stages of the merger. The administration's decision to appoint a Public Relations (PR) officer at UNIMAC-IFT and UNIMAC-IL, for instance, led to improved communication and engagement with students and alumni. Through the efforts of the PR office, initiatives such as outreach programs to secondary schools and active social media campaigns helped to clarify the new identity of the institution and its objectives. These efforts, while beneficial, were localized and did not fully address the broader communication gaps that persisted across UNIMAC as a whole (Kotter, 1996).

In conclusion, the communication strategies employed during the UNIMAC merger were characterized by significant limitations in planning and execution, particularly in the early stages. While there were efforts to engage stakeholders and disseminate information, these were often inconsistent and insufficiently tailored to the diverse needs of the institution's stakeholders. The findings underscore the critical importance of adopting a structured and inclusive communication strategy in managing organisational change, particularly in complex contexts such as institutional mergers. Such strategies should prioritize transparency, stakeholder engagement, and the timely dissemination of information to foster trust and reduce resistance to change (Hiatt, 2006).

5.2.1 Lessons on Best Practices in Educational Institution Mergers

The findings from the study highlighted several key lessons about best practices in managing educational institution mergers, particularly emphasizing the centrality of communication. First, it became evident that strategic communication was indispensable for fostering stakeholder engagement and alleviating resistance. Communication during the UNIMAC merger, while operational, lacked the proactive and structured approach necessary to address stakeholder concerns comprehensively. This observation aligns with the assertions of Kotter (1996), who emphasized that clear and consistent communication is critical for building alignment and creating momentum in any organisational change process. Stakeholders who are uncertain or uninformed are more likely to resist change, a challenge that was observed during the merger.

One significant lesson was the importance of transparency in communicating the rationale behind the merger. Stakeholders including students and faculty members expressed frustration over the lack of clarity regarding the merger's purpose and its potential benefits. This gap in communication contributed to scepticism and diminished trust, reflecting what Armenakis and Harris (2009) identified as a common barrier to successful change. Their research indicated that when stakeholders are not adequately informed, their engagement and buy-in are compromised. The UNIMAC case underscored this, as rumours and informal channels became the primary sources of information for many stakeholders, creating confusion rather than clarity.

Another critical insight was the need to integrate two-way communication mechanisms that allow stakeholders to voice concerns and seek clarifications. While social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were leveraged for disseminating information, they were not consistently used to gather feedback or address grievances. This lack of engagement limited the

administration's ability to understand and respond to stakeholder needs effectively. Clampitt, DeKoch, and Cashman (2000) argued that communication in organisational change should not only inform but also involve stakeholders, creating a participatory process that fosters trust and reduces resistance. The absence of such participatory mechanisms during the UNIMAC merger led to perceptions of top-down decision-making, which further alienated some stakeholders.

Additionally, the study illustrated the value of tailoring communication strategies to different stakeholder groups. Faculty, for instance, required detailed information about role changes and academic program continuity, while students were more concerned with how the merger would affect their educational experience and the institutional reputation. This reinforces the findings of Kezar and Eckel (2002), who noted that successful mergers in higher education depend on communication that addresses the unique concerns of diverse stakeholder groups. The failure to address these varying needs during the UNIMAC merger limited the administration's ability to build widespread support for the transition. Timing also emerged as a critical factor. Delayed communication or inconsistent updates created uncertainty, exacerbating anxiety among stakeholders. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasized that communication must be timely to preempt misinformation and foster a sense of stability during periods of transition. In the case of UNIMAC, delays in official announcements and the lack of regular updates allowed rumours to fill the void, undermining trust and stakeholder confidence in the process.

5.3. Recommendation for UNIMAC Administration

The UNIMAC administration could have significantly benefited from the development and implementation of a comprehensive and structured communication strategy during the merger process. Effective communication was found to be pivotal in ensuring stakeholder engagement

and reducing resistance to organisational changes, particularly in complex transitions such as educational mergers. One critical recommendation was the establishment of regular updates through official communication channels. Research in organisational change management consistently emphasizes the importance of transparency and consistency in communication to build trust among stakeholders (Kotter, 1996). UNIMAC's reliance on ad hoc and fragmented communication methods, such as sporadic social media updates and informal rumours, likely exacerbated stakeholder uncertainty and mistrust. Had the administration proactively established a structured schedule for disseminating information—such as weekly or bi-weekly updates through emails, newsletters, or official website announcements—stakeholders could have received timely and accurate information, thereby minimizing speculation and misinformation. Regular updates would have ensured that all stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrative staff, and external partners, were consistently informed about key decisions, timelines, and the merger's anticipated benefits. This practice could have mirrored successful approaches outlined by Armenakis and Harris (2009), who stressed that predictable communication schedules contribute to alignment and confidence during organisational transitions.

Furthermore, the UNIMAC administration could have addressed stakeholder concerns more effectively by establishing dedicated feedback mechanisms and digital platforms. The absence of structured avenues for stakeholders to voice their concerns or seek clarification created a sense of alienation among students, faculty, and staff, as reflected in interview data where participants frequently expressed frustration over unaddressed grievances and poor communication practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An integrated digital platform, such as a centralized intranet or mobile application, could have provided stakeholders with access to real-time updates, FAQs, and forums for submitting questions or feedback. Platforms of this nature, according to Taylor (2019), foster

two-way communication by allowing organisations to listen actively to stakeholders while disseminating critical information. Such platforms could also have included dedicated sections for each stakeholder group—students, faculty, and administrative staff—ensuring tailored communication that addressed their specific concerns.

For example, students could have used the platform to track changes to academic programs, class schedules, and graduation requirements, while faculty could have accessed updates on role adjustments or curriculum integrations. Similarly, administrative staff could have used it for operational updates related to their new organisational structure. This tailored approach would have aligned with the recommendations of Bridges (2009), who argued that differentiated communication strategies are essential in addressing the diverse concerns of stakeholders during change processes. Moreover, the incorporation of interactive features, such as live chats or virtual town hall sessions, could have allowed stakeholders to engage directly with decision-makers, fostering a sense of inclusion and shared ownership of the merger's outcomes. The deployment of digital platforms could have been complemented by robust offline feedback mechanisms, such as regular stakeholder forums, focus groups, and suggestion boxes strategically placed across the UNIMAC campuses. These offline mechanisms would have ensured accessibility for individuals who might have faced barriers to using digital tools. As highlighted by Clampitt et al. (2000), the provision of multiple communication channels caters to diverse stakeholder preferences and enhances overall engagement. Additionally, feedback received through these mechanisms could have been systematically analysed to identify recurring concerns or misconceptions, enabling the administration to address these issues proactively in subsequent communications.

In summary, the UNIMAC administration's communication strategy should have prioritized regular, structured updates and the establishment of robust feedback mechanisms to address the communication gaps observed during the merger. The integration of digital and offline platforms for real-time updates and stakeholder engagement would have aligned with best practices in organisational change management, as articulated by Kotter (1996) and Armenakis and Harris (2009). By adopting these measures, the administration could have fostered a more transparent, inclusive, and responsive communication environment, ultimately enhancing stakeholder trust and support for the merger process.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could focus on exploring the long-term impacts of communication strategies on stakeholder engagement and institutional success within the context of educational mergers. The current study primarily analysed immediate responses and short-term outcomes related to the merger of the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC). However, it is essential to understand how communication strategies employed during the merger process influenced the long-term integration of the three institutions and the extent to which stakeholders—faculty, students, administrative staff, and external partners—felt genuinely included and valued over time.

This line of inquiry would benefit from longitudinal studies that assess stakeholder perceptions and organisational outcomes years after the merger. These studies could examine whether initial communication strategies contributed to the development of trust, sustained engagement, and shared institutional identity among stakeholders. For example, researchers could evaluate how the transparency and inclusiveness of communication efforts impacted faculty morale and retention or

whether students experienced long-term academic benefits and a sense of belonging to the unified institution. Scholars such as Armenakis and Harris (2009) have highlighted the importance of trust-building through communication in change management, suggesting that effective communication has implications far beyond the initial phases of organisational restructuring. Therefore, it would be valuable to assess whether UNIMAC's communication practices fostered a culture of collaboration and whether such efforts translated into measurable improvements in institutional success metrics such as enrolment, program quality, and research output.

In addition to exploring long-term impacts, comparative studies on mergers in other educational contexts would provide a richer understanding of how communication strategies differ based on organisational, cultural, or regional factors. While the current study was situated within a Ghanaian tertiary education framework, mergers in other countries or regions may involve unique challenges and opportunities influenced by different socio-political and cultural dynamics. For instance, Harman and Harman (2008) found that mergers in Australian higher education required strategies that respected the autonomy and traditions of individual institutions, while Kezar (2014) observed that U.S. educational mergers often emphasized shared governance as a central communication strategy. These findings suggest that comparative studies could illuminate best practices by identifying commonalities and divergences across contexts. Researchers might consider conducting cross-case analyses of communication approaches used in mergers in various regions, focusing on how institutional histories, stakeholder priorities, and national education policies shaped the design and implementation of these strategies.

Such comparative studies could also evaluate the role of technological advancements in communication. For example, the integration of digital tools such as learning management

systems, social media platforms, and virtual town halls has become increasingly central to institutional communication strategies. Studies could assess how institutions in different settings have utilized these tools to address stakeholder concerns, foster engagement, and ensure the continuity of academic and administrative processes during mergers. Bolman and Gallos (2011) argued that effective communication during periods of change involves leveraging multiple channels tailored to the needs of diverse audiences. Comparative research could explore whether technological approaches have been equally effective in various educational systems or whether their impact varies based on access and familiarity with digital tools.

Furthermore, examining the intersection of communication strategies and organisational outcomes in different types of mergers—such as those involving public versus private institutions, specialized versus comprehensive universities, or domestic versus international partnerships—could yield valuable insights. Nordin (2012) emphasized that the complexity of mergers often requires tailored approaches that align with the specific objectives and contexts of the institutions involved. Comparative research could reveal whether communication practices that succeeded in one type of merger were equally applicable in others or whether certain strategies were uniquely effective in specific scenarios.

By exploring these dimensions, future studies could contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted role of communication in educational mergers. Such research would not only provide theoretical contributions to the field of change management but also offer practical guidance for administrators navigating similar transitions. This expanded body of knowledge would be particularly relevant as higher education institutions worldwide continue to face pressures to adapt to shifting economic, social, and technological landscapes.

5.5 Closing Remarks

The conclusion of this study reaffirmed the centrality of effective communication in ensuring the success of organisational mergers within educational settings. The findings from the research demonstrated that communication served not merely as a functional tool for disseminating information but also as a strategic mechanism for fostering alignment, reducing resistance, and promoting trust among stakeholders. The UNIMAC merger exemplified how the absence of a well-structured communication strategy could lead to confusion, speculation, and limited stakeholder buy-in, as evidenced by the reliance on informal networks and rumours among students during the early phases of the transition. This highlighted the need for educational administrators to recognize communication as an indispensable component of change management efforts, aligning with theoretical insights on the subject. Kotter's (1996) Eight-Step Change Model, particularly the step focused on "communicating the change vision," underscored the role of clear and consistent messaging in building a shared sense of purpose among stakeholders. Similarly, Hiatt's (2006) ADKAR model emphasized the need to address awareness and desire at an individual level through tailored communication strategies. The results of this study affirmed these theoretical assertions, illustrating their practical applicability in an academic context.

Effective communication was found to be a critical determinant of stakeholder engagement, particularly in environments characterized by diverse expectations and deeply ingrained institutional cultures. By addressing stakeholder concerns transparently and inclusively, communication not only reduced uncertainty but also fostered a sense of ownership among those affected by the merger. For example, students and staff expressed frustration when communication was delayed or when platforms for providing feedback were absent or poorly managed. These

findings echoed prior research by Burnes (2004), who noted that frequent and transparent updates minimized resistance by cultivating trust. Furthermore, the study illuminated the broader implications of poor communication, such as the perpetuation of misinformation and the erosion of institutional credibility. These outcomes demonstrated that communication strategies in educational mergers required deliberate planning, a multi-channel approach, and ongoing feedback loops to be effective.

The broader implications of these findings extended beyond the specific case of UNIMAC, highlighting essential lessons for change management in the educational sector. The complexity of educational institutions, with their multiple stakeholder groups and decentralized governance structures, demanded a nuanced approach to communication that balanced top-down directives with stakeholder-specific messaging. The study emphasized that communication during mergers should not be treated as a one-time effort but as an iterative process that evolves with the needs of the organisation and its stakeholders. Effective communication strategies in educational settings thus required the integration of empathy, responsiveness, and cultural sensitivity, as suggested by Fullan (2007). This approach not only enhanced the operational efficiency of mergers but also ensured the preservation of institutional values and identities, which were critical for stakeholder satisfaction and long-term success.

The lessons derived from the UNIMAC merger underscored the potential for communication to serve as a transformative force in educational change management. By fostering open dialogue, building trust, and aligning diverse interests, communication facilitated the creation of a unified institutional identity that leveraged the strengths of its constituent parts. This highlighted the strategic importance of embedding communication frameworks into broader change management

plans, ensuring that they were not merely reactive but proactive and inclusive. The practical and theoretical insights gained from this study offered valuable guidance for policymakers, educational leaders, and change management practitioners, emphasizing that communication was not a peripheral activity but a central pillar in navigating complex organisational transformations.

In conclusion, the findings reaffirmed that effective communication was pivotal in achieving the intended outcomes of mergers in educational institutions. It served as the foundation for stakeholder engagement, institutional cohesion, and the successful realization of organisational goals. The broader implications suggested that the principles of strategic communication extended well beyond mergers, offering a model for managing change in various contexts. By adopting structured, inclusive, and responsive communication strategies, educational institutions could navigate the challenges of change with greater clarity and resilience, ensuring that the needs of all stakeholders were met and that the integrity of the institution remained intact.

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW GUIDE

ON

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN MANAGING CHANGE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION IN GHANA.

The interview guides provided herein aim to support a comprehensive exploration of the **role of communication in managing organizational change within educational institutions**, with a particular focus on the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UNIMAC) in Ghana.

These guides are structured to align with the overarching research objectives and are tailored to gather diverse perspectives from key stakeholders, including administrative staff, faculty members, and students.

The central research objectives guiding these interviews include:

1. Identifying the communication strategies utilized by the administration of UNIMAC during the merger of the Ghana Institute of Journalism, the National Film and Television Institute, and the Ghana Institute of Languages.
2. Uncovering the key challenges and best practices associated with communicating organizational change in the context of mergers within educational institutions.

The questions within each guide are designed to elicit insights into stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and evaluations of the communication processes during the merger. Through these

interviews, we aim to understand the effectiveness of the communication strategies employed, as well as their impact on stakeholder engagement and satisfaction.

Interview Guide for Administrative Staff

1. What specific communication strategies were employed by the administration during the UNIMAC merger process?
2. In what ways did these communication strategies contribute to the administration's achievement of its merger goals?
3. How did stakeholders respond to or interact with the communication strategies implemented during the merger?
4. What were some of the key challenges faced by the administration during the UNIMAC merger process?
5. What recommendations can be made to improve communication strategies for similar mergers in the future?

Interview Guide for Faculty Members

1. How did the administration communicate the vision and rationale behind the merger to faculty members?
2. Were your concerns about workload, academic freedom, or departmental roles adequately addressed through the communication strategies?
3. To what extent were you involved or consulted during the planning and implementation phases of the merger?

4. Which communication channels were most frequently used, and how effective were they in conveying key information?
5. How has the communication during the merger influenced your understanding of your evolving role and responsibilities within UNIMAC?

Interview Guide for Students

1. How were you informed about the merger of your institution into UNIMAC, and what was your initial reaction?
2. Do you feel the communication provided by the administration addressed your concerns regarding academic programs, faculty availability, and institutional reputation?
3. What communication methods (e.g., emails, meetings, social media) were most effective in keeping you updated?
4. How has the communication from the administration shaped your perception of the merger's impact on your academic journey?
5. Were there platforms available for you to express concerns or provide feedback, and how effectively were your inputs addressed?