

**COMMUNICATION AS A LEVER FOR PREVENTING AND MANAGING  
INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS: AN ANALYSIS OF RELATIONAL DYNAMICS  
AT THE UNIVERSITE CHEIKH ANTA DIOP (UCAD).**

**Sahite GAYE**

Enseignant-Chercheur CESTI-UCAD

Communication des organisations

**ABSTRACT**

*This article explores the role of organizational communication in preventing and managing interpersonal conflicts among the Administrative, Technical, and Service Personnel (PATS) at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar, Senegal. A study of 356 PATS, including 220 women, 40 bac+5 graduates, and 10 division heads, reveals that 240 perceive themselves as victims of injustices, 306 have overlooked an injustice at least once in the past year, 333 believe in the virtues of dialogue, but only 130 trust institutional conflict management mechanisms. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Jean-Louis Le Moigne (systems theory), Christian Le Moëne (organizational communication), François Cooren (communication as constitutive of organizations), and the dimensions of internal communication (Cheney, 1991; Welch & Jackson, 2007), the study analyzes the causes of conflicts, their impact on the organizational climate, and the effectiveness of existing mechanisms. The findings highlight issues of communication, perceived injustices, and low institutional trust. Recommendations include improving information flows, providing conflict management training, establishing neutral mediation committees, and adopting digital tools suited to UCAD's context.*

**Keywords: Organizational communication, interpersonal conflicts, conflict management, internal communication, organizational climate.**

**1.1 Introduction**

---

Public universities, such as the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar, Senegal, are complex environments where interactions among individuals often lead to interpersonal conflicts due to differing perceptions, interests, or roles. These tensions, frequently linked to perceived injustices, unequal task distribution, rivalries, or communication breakdowns, undermine the organizational climate, employee motivation, and overall performance. A quantitative and qualitative study of 356 PATS at UCAD, comprising 220 women (62%), 40 bac+5 graduates (11%), and 10 division heads (3%), reveals critical insights: 240 PATS (67%) report being victims of injustices, 306 (86%) have overlooked an injustice at least once in the past year, 333 (93%) believe in the power of dialogue, but only 130 (36%) trust institutional conflict resolution mechanisms. These findings underscore the urgent need to rethink communication practices to prevent and resolve conflicts at UCAD.

This article is situated within the field of Information and Communication Sciences (ICS) and draws on three primary theoretical frameworks:

1. Jean-Louis Le Moigne's (1977) systems theory, which views organizations as open systems regulated by feedback loops.

2. Christian Le Moëne's (2008) perspective on organizational communication as a structuring process for relationships and power dynamics.

3. François Cooren's (2000) theory of communication as constitutive of organizations (CCO). Additionally, we incorporate the dimensions of internal communication from organizational communication theories (Cheney, 1991; Welch & Jackson, 2007) to analyze communication dynamics at UCAD. The central question is: **\*\*How can organizational communication, through its internal dimensions, prevent and manage interpersonal conflicts among UCAD's PATS?**

Using the quantitative data, this article examines the causes of conflicts, their impact on the organizational climate, and proposes solutions tailored to UCAD's organizational and socio-cultural context.

### **1. Theoretical Framework: A Systemic and Communicational Approach to Conflicts**

1.1. Jean-Louis Le Moigne's Systems Theory Jean-Louis Le Moigne (1977), in *\*The General Systems Theory: Theory of Modeling\**, conceptualizes organizations as open systems characterized by complex interactions among actors, processes, and environments. Interpersonal conflicts at UCAD arise from disruptions in these interactions, often due to ambiguous roles, ineffective information flows, or perceived injustices. Le Moigne emphasizes the need for proactive *\*organizational design\**, incorporating clear communication channels and feedback mechanisms to manage complexity. The data indicate that 306 out of 356 PATS (86%) have overlooked an injustice, suggesting a lack of systemic mechanisms to address tensions, which exacerbates organizational dysfunctions at UCAD.

1.2. Organizational Communication According to Christian Le Moëne Christian Le Moëne (2008), in *\*Communicating Organizations\**, views communication as a central process that structures relationships, hierarchies, and power dynamics within organizations. At UCAD, communication breakdowns are a primary cause of conflicts, reflecting a lack of transparency, active listening, and formal exchange channels. The fact that 333 PATS (93%) believe in the virtues of dialogue signals a strong desire for more inclusive communication practices. Le Moëne (2008) suggests that strategies such as negotiation, clear expectation-setting, and communication rituals (e.g., regular meetings) can defuse tensions before they escalate.

1.3. Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO) by François Cooren François Cooren (2000), in *\*The Organizing Property of Communication\**, argues that organizations are constructed through communicative acts that shape narratives, norms, and collective identities. Interpersonal conflicts often stem from ruptures in these shared narratives, particularly when perceptions of fairness diverge. At UCAD, the 240 PATS reporting injustices (67%) reflect a fracture in organizational narratives about justice and responsibility. Cooren proposes restoring cohesion through inclusive dialogues and clear normative frameworks to realign divergent narratives. The low trust in institutional mechanisms (130 PATS, 36%) suggests that current communication processes fail to foster a sense of equity or legitimacy.

1.4. Dimensions of Internal Communication in Organizational Theories Theories of organizational communication, particularly those of Cheney (1991) and Welch and Jackson

(2007), identify key dimensions of internal communication that influence organizational dynamics. Welch and Jackson (2007) propose a framework with four dimensions:

1. **Team-level internal communication** Interactions among colleagues within small groups, fostering collaboration and local problem-solving. At UCAD, the lack of structured team-level communication contributes to misunderstandings, such as those related to unequal task distribution.

**2. Project-level internal communication:** Exchanges tied to specific objectives, often across departments. Poor coordination between PATS and the 10 division heads limits the effectiveness of administrative projects at UCAD.

3. **Organization-level internal communication** Top-down (from management to employees) and bottom-up (from employees to management) information flows. The low trust in institutional mechanisms (130 PATS, 36%) reflects a deficit in bottom-up flows, where PATS' concerns are not adequately addressed.

4. **-organizational internal communication** Interactions with external stakeholders (e.g., other UCAD departments or academic partners). While less relevant to internal conflicts, this dimension could be leveraged to share best practices in conflict management. Cheney (1991) emphasizes that internal communication must be bidirectional and participatory to enhance employee engagement. At UCAD, the 333 PATS who value dialogue (93%) indicate a demand for participatory communication, but the lack of formal channels hinders this aspiration. Men (2014) notes that effective internal communication reduces perceptions of injustice, a critical issue for the 240 PATS reporting injustices.

1.5. **Theoretical Synthesis and Complementarity** The frameworks of Le Moigne, Le Moënne, Cooren, and the dimensions of internal communication complement each other in analyzing conflicts at UCAD. Le Moigne provides a systemic view of organizational dysfunctions, Le Moënne highlights structuring communication processes, Cooren underscores the constitutive role of communication, and Welch and Jackson's (2007) dimensions offer a practical framework for analyzing information flows. The quantitative data (240 reporting injustices, 306 overlooking injustices, 333 valuing dialogue, 130 trusting institutional mechanisms) provide an empirical basis for applying these frameworks. –

## **2. Analysis of Communication Dynamics at UCAD**

2.1. **Profile of PATS and Causes of Conflicts** The study of 356 PATS (220 women, 136 men; 40 bac+5 graduates; 10 division heads) provides a robust foundation for analyzing conflict dynamics at UCAD. The main causes of conflicts include: -

**Tables – UCAD PATS Study****Table 1. Profile of Administrative, Technical, and Service Personnel (PATS)**

Category	Number	Percentage
Total PATS	356	100%
Women	220	61.8%
Men	136	38.2%
Bac+5 Graduates	40	11.2%
Division Heads	10	2.8%

Perceived injustices: 240 PATS (67%) report being victims of injustices, indicating widespread perceptions of inequity in task distribution, recognition, or opportunities. Cooren (2000) interprets this as a rupture in organizational narratives about fairness..

Unequal task distribution: Ambiguity in roles, exacerbated by a rigid hierarchical structure, is a major source of tension. The 306 PATS (86%) who overlooked an injustice demonstrate resignation, which intensifies conflicts and undermines motivation.

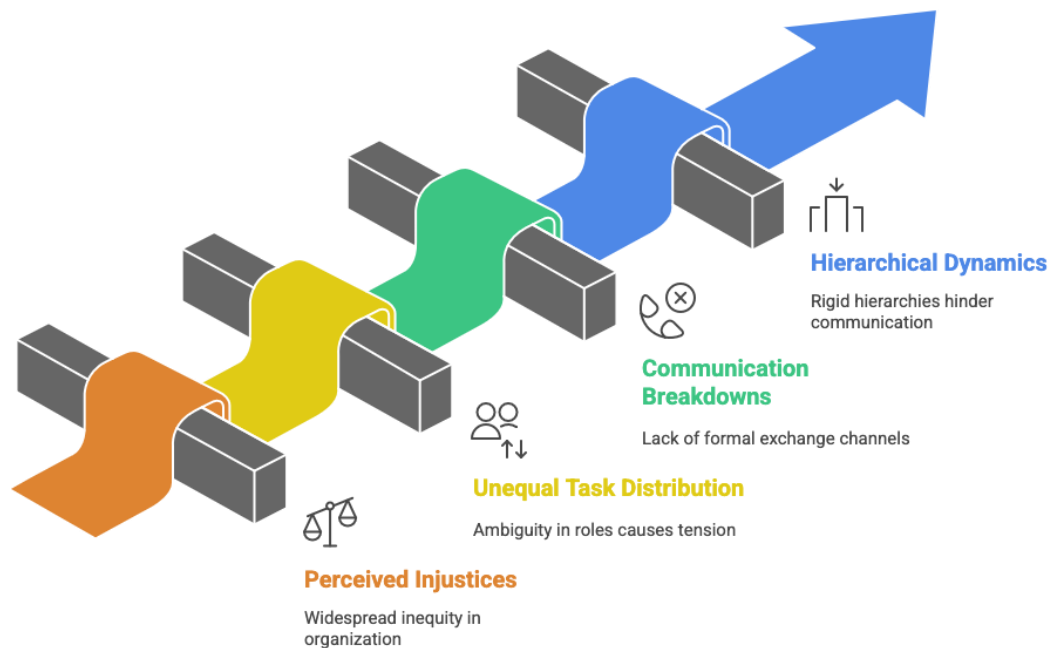
**Table 2. Perceptions and Experiences of Injustice**

Indicator	Number	Percentage
<b>Victims of injustices</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>67.4%</b>
<b>Overlooked an injustice (past year)</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>86.0%</b>

Communication breakdowns ; The lack of formal exchange channels, such as regular meetings or structured feedback, contributes to misunderstandings. Welch and Jackson (2007) note that deficiencies in organization-level communication (top-down and bottom-up) limit employees' ability to voice concerns, as evidenced by the low trust in institutional mechanisms (130 PATS, 36%). –

Hierarchical dynamics: The 10 division heads, as authority figures, may be perceived as favoring certain employees, fueling perceptions of injustice (240 PATS). Cheney (1991) argues that rigid hierarchies hinder bidirectional communication, a clear issue at UCAD. The significant representation of women (220 PATS, 62%) suggests that gender dynamics may influence perceptions of injustice. Tannen (1990) notes that women in public organizations often face specific barriers, such as stereotypical expectations, warranting further analysis in UCAD's context.

### UCAD Conflict Dynamics: Key Challenges



Made with Napkin

2.2. Impact of Conflicts on the Organizational Climate Interpersonal ,conflicts at UCAD adversely affect the organizational climate, employee motivation, and performance. Le Moëne (2008) highlights that a degraded organizational climate leads to increased distrust, reduced engagement, and fragmented relationships. The low trust in institutional mechanisms (130 PATS, 36%) reflects this distrust, while the 306 PATS who overlooked an injustice (86%) indicate resignation that undermines cohesion. Le Moigne (1977) would interpret these tensions as disruptions in organizational feedback loops, preventing the system from self-regulating. Cooren (2000) sees this as a fracture in discursive practices, where narratives about fairness and collaboration are not shared by all actors. Women, comprising 62% of the sample, may be particularly affected. Eagly and Carli (2007) show that women in public organizations often face additional barriers, such as lower recognition, which could amplify perceptions of injustice at UCAD.

2.3. Evaluation of Current Mechanisms Institutional conflict management mechanisms at UCAD are deemed inadequate. The Thomas-Kilmann (1974) model identifies five conflict management styles: competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation. At UCAD, avoidance predominates, as evidenced by the resignation of 306 PATS who overlooked an injustice and the denial of conflicts by leadership. Rahim (2002) notes that avoidance may maintain superficial harmony in the short term but exacerbates tensions over time. The low trust in institutional mechanisms (130 PATS, 36%) reflects perceptions of bias or ineffectiveness, a problem highlighted by De Dreu and Weingart (2003).

**Table 3. Attitudes Toward Dialogue and Institutional Mechanisms**

Indicator	Number	Percentage
Believe in the virtues of dialogue	333	93.5%
Trust institutional mechanisms	130	36.5%

2.4. Comparison with Other Contexts Comparing UCAD to other public organizations enriches the analysis. A study by Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah (2011) on Ghanaian public organizations reveals similar dynamics, with conflicts stemming from perceived injustices and communication failures. However, some Ghanaian institutions have implemented independent mediation committees, improving employee trust.

**This suggests that solutions tested in similar African contexts could be adapted to UCAD.**

**General Summary Table of Findings**

Dimension	Indicator	Number	Percentage
Profile	Total PATS	356	100%
Profile	Women	220	61.8%
Profile	Men	136	38.2%
Profile	Bac+5 Graduates	40	11.2%
Profile	Division Heads	10	2.8%
Injustice	Victims of injustices	240	67.4%
Injustice	Overlooked injustice (past year)	306	86.0%
Attitudes	Believe in the virtues of dialogue	333	93.5%
Attitudes	Trust institutional mechanisms	130	36.5%

**3. Communication Strategies for Conflict Prevention and Management at UCAD**

3.1. Improving Information Flows Through Internal Communication Dimensions To address communication breakdowns at UCAD, Welch and Jackson’s (2007) four dimensions of internal communication can guide improvements: - Team-level communication ; Regular team meetings among PATS to clarify roles and resolve misunderstandings. Weekly sessions could

allow the 220 women and 40 bac+5 graduates to voice concerns, reducing perceptions of injustice (240 PATS). –

**Project-level communication:** Enhancing coordination between PATS and the 10 division heads through cross-departmental working groups to improve collaboration and address task-related tensions. –

**Organization-level communication:** Establishing bidirectional channels, such as anonymous suggestion boxes or open forums, to encourage bottom-up flows. This would meet the expectations of the 333 PATS (93%) who value dialogue and increase trust in institutional mechanisms (130 PATS). - **\*\*Inter-organizational communication\*\***: Sharing best practices with other UCAD departments or African universities to enhance conflict management strategies. Men (2014) emphasizes that structured communication channels, such as internal bulletins or regular meetings, reduce misunderstandings. At UCAD, monthly sessions involving division heads and PATS could clarify expectations and mitigate perceptions of injustice.

3.2. Training in Conflict Management Training in conflict management, as supported by Le Moëne (2008) and Rahim (2002), could address the aspirations of the 333 PATS who value dialogue. Programs focusing on negotiation, active listening, and collaborative resolution (Thomas-Kilmann, 1974) should be tailored to the 220 women and 40 bac+5 graduates, considering gender dynamics (Tannen, 1990). Monthly workshops with simulations of real conflicts (e.g., unequal task distribution) would enhance the skills of PATS and division heads at UCAD.

3.3. Establishing a Neutral Mediation Committee A neutral mediation committee, aligned with Le Moigne's (1977) systemic approach, could facilitate inclusive dialogues (Cooren, 2000) to restore shared organizational narratives at UCAD. The low trust in current mechanisms (130 PATS, 36%) underscores the need for an impartial structure. Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2017) demonstrate that neutral mediation committees are effective in public organizations, providing a safe space for expressing grievances. At UCAD, this committee could include PATS representatives and external facilitators trained in mediation.

3.4. Integrating Digital Tools Digital tools, such as intranet platforms or complaint management applications, could modernize communication practices at UCAD. Men (2014) shows that digital tools enhance transparency and accessibility, reducing misunderstandings. An anonymous reporting platform could address the resignation of the 306 PATS who overlooked an injustice. Training would be necessary to ensure adoption, particularly for employees less familiar with technology in UCAD's context.

3.5. Preventive Measures A proactive approach, inspired by Le Moigne (1977), involves anticipating conflicts by improving the organizational climate at UCAD: -

Employee recognition: Increased recognition of efforts, especially for the 220 women and 40 bac+5 graduates, could reduce perceptions of injustice (240 PATS). Monthly awards or public acknowledgments enhance motivation (Men, 2014). –

**Equitable task distribution:** Clear role definitions and regular evaluations would address PATS' concerns about unfair workloads. –

**Collaborative culture:** Team-building activities or cross-departmental projects would strengthen ties between PATS and division heads, aligning with the 333 PATS who value dialogue.

### **Conclusion**

This article demonstrates that organizational communication, through its internal dimensions, is a critical lever for preventing and managing interpersonal conflicts among PATS at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD). The quantitative data (240 reporting injustices, 306 overlooking injustices, 333 valuing dialogue, 130 trusting institutional mechanisms) reveal systemic issues related to communication, equity, and trust. Drawing on Le Moigne (1977), Le Moëne (2008), Cooren (2000), and the dimensions of internal communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007), we propose solutions: enhancing information flows, providing conflict management training, establishing a neutral mediation committee, integrating digital tools, and adopting preventive measures. These strategies aim to foster organizational harmony and improve UCAD's performance. Future research could explore the impact of digital tools on internal communication at UCAD, considering technological constraints. Analyzing gender dynamics, given the high representation of women (220 out of 356), would further enrich conflict understanding. Comparative studies with other African universities could identify transferable best practices.

### **References**

- Amponsah-Tawiah, K., & Dartey-Baah, K. (2011). Occupational health and safety: Key issues and concerns in Ghana. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(14), 119–126.
- Cheney, G. (1991). *Rhetoric in an organizational society: Managing multiple identities*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Cooren, F. (2000). *The organizing property of communication*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- De Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). Task versus relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(4), 741–749. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.741>
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business School Press.

- Folger, J. P., Poole, M. S., & Stutman, R. K. (2017). *Working through conflict: Strategies for relationships, groups, and organizations* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Le Moigne, J.-L. (1977). *La théorie du système général : Théorie de la modélisation*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Le Moëgne, C. (2008). *Les organisations communicantes*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Men, L. R. (2014). Strategic internal communication: Transformational leadership, communication channels, and employee satisfaction. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 28(2), 264–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318914524536>
- Putnam, L. L., & Poole, M. S. (1987). Conflict and negotiation. In F. M. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, K. H. Roberts, & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational communication: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 549–599). Sage Publications.
- Rahim, M. A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(3), 206–235. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022874>
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. Ballantine Books.
- Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1974). Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument. Xicom.
- Welch, M., & Jackson, P. R. (2007). Rethinking internal communication: A stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 12(2), 177–198. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280710744847>