FUELLING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY STRATEGY: DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION'S ROLE IN EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR IN DEVELOPING MARKETS

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Abstract

Organizations in the petroleum sector, particularly retail service stations, operate in a dynamic and customer-centric environment where employee behavior plays a pivotal role in shaping customer experiences and organizational performance (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Effective downward communication from management to front-line employees is crucial in aligning employee behavior with organizational goals and values (Baker et al., 2014). The study aimed to explore the impact of downward communication on employee behavior at South African petroleum retail service stations, to improve organizational performance. Data was collected from 740 retail service station employees using an individually administered closed-ended questionnaire. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 25 was used to analyze the data, which contains both inferential and descriptive statistics. The findings indicate a strong positive correlation between effective downward communication and desirable employee behavior. Moreover, timely feedback and performance evaluations provide employees with a roadmap for improvement and professional development, motivating them to exhibit behaviors that enhance customer satisfaction and organizational performance. In conclusion, this study underscores the vital role of downward communication in shaping employee behavior within petroleum retail service stations.

Keywords: Communication, Petroleum Retail Service Stations, Downward Communication, Employee Behavior, Organizational Performance

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the paper is to explore the crucial aspect of downward communication, evaluating how it fuels positive change within the organizational structure and eventually changes the behavior of those working in this unique industry in question. Based on the service theory, it is crucial for there to

be consistency in communication and consequently also for the stations. Petroleum retail service stations are an important pillar of the global economy, acting as vital touchpoints for those who require fuel, other automobile services, and necessities. Effective communication is critical in this context, not just for operational efficiency but also for cultivating a positive and engaging work environment.

Organizational communication is critical for influencing employee behavior and organizational outcomes in the present-day business context (Enyioko, 2021). Recognizing the manner in which downward communication occurs and how it influences employee behavior is critical for organizations seeking to increase productivity, motivation, and overall performance (Dasgupta et al., 2012). Employees feel appreciated and respected when their ideas and concerns are heard, resulting in a beneficial feedback cycle that leads to ongoing development. Effective downward communication from management to employees is crucial in the operating environment of petroleum retail stations (Naji et al., 2022). The petroleum sector is dynamic and highly competitive, needing excellent employees to maintain customer satisfaction, safety compliance, and operational efficiency. The procedure in which communication flows from upper management to employees on the front lines has a significant impact on the latter's behavior and subsequent job performance.

Among the most significant difficulties in this space is the possible disintegration of downward communication within petroleum retail service stations. Failure to properly communicate organization objectives, safety regulations, service standards, and changes to procedures can lead to employee misunderstandings, confusion, and, eventually, noncompliance. This contradiction can lead to a variety of issues, including reduced service quality, operational inefficiencies, customer dissatisfaction and even safety hazards. Furthermore, the diversified employees at petroleum retail service stations, which frequently include individuals from various ethnic, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, present a unique communication difficulty. It is critical to establish a cohesive and productive work environment by ensuring excellent downward communication that is understandable and relevant to all employees.

Recognizing the processes of downward communication and how it affects employee behavior is critical for petroleum retail service station owners and managers. It is a vital instrument for developing motivated and engaged employees, guaranteeing compliance with safety standards, improving service quality, and maximizing operational efficiency. Addressing this issue is critical for fostering an effective communication culture inside fuel stations, therefore enhancing employee behavior and, as a result, the overall performance and sustainability of petroleum retail service station operations.

That is why the objective of this paper is to assess the impact of downward communication on employee behavior at South African petroleum retail service stations. There is limited literature pertaining to communication and employee behavior in the petroleum industry. The purpose of investigating this occurrence in the context of a petroleum retail service station is to identify tactics and practices that foster positive employee behavior, focusing on the symbiotic relationship between effective communication and organizational success. The paper discusses the impact of downward communication and employee behavior, as well as how it may transform petroleum retail service stations for the benefit of both the organization and its employees. Findings indicate that downward communication has a significant influence on employee behavior. This implies that effective communication techniques eventually improve customer experiences and organizational performance.

The study was guided by the organizational information theory (OIT), systems theory, and social exchange theory (SET). To address the objective and hypothesis, a quantitative approach was chosen. The study employed the case study of petroleum services stations in South Africa.

The structure of the paper commences with an introduction which provides the aim and gives a reason why the study was conducted. Section 2 reviews the sources on communication, downward communication, and employee behavior, describes theories utilised for the study, and the conceptual framework. Section 3 outlines the methodology that was utilised to conduct the study, and summarizes and evaluates the selected sources, so as to address the study's objective. Section 4 explains and discusses the results. Section 5 presents the recommendations and conclusion of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

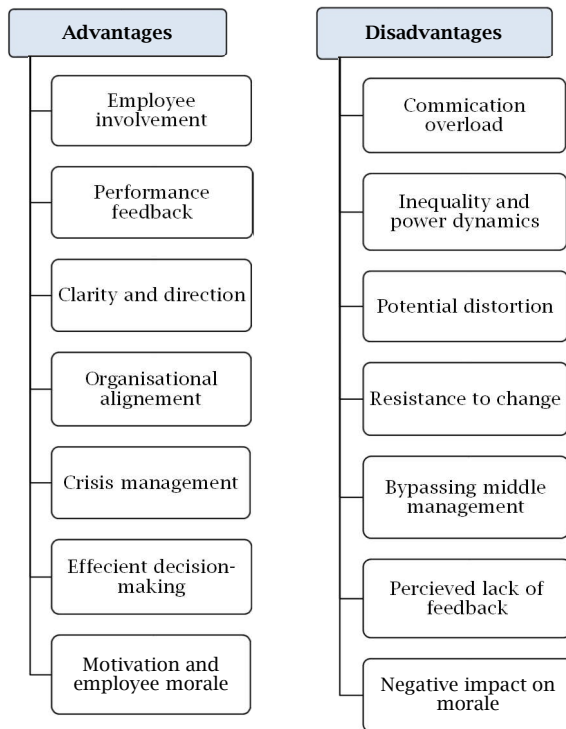### 2.1. Communication and employee behavior

The below section discusses literature pertaining to communication and employee behavior in organizations.

2.1.1. Downward communication

Communication is the interchange of verbal and non-verbal signals between the sender and receiver to elicit behavioral transformation (Tining Kusumandari et al., 2018). Communication enables individuals to coordinate activities with others to achieve common goals. From the standpoint of organizations, we can define the term communication as the systematic procedure of disseminating information and fostering shared comprehension among individuals concerning matters related to work (Verghese, 2017). Downward communication then, as defined by Tubbs and Moss (2008), pertains to the transmission of information from higher-ranking employees to those in lower positions within the organizational hierarchy. It originates from the upper management of the organization and cascades down through the chain of command. Lunenburg (2010) describes downward communication as the flow of messages from superiors to subordinates, wherein information travels from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy. The purpose of downward communication is to ensure that employees possess a clear comprehension of the organization's objectives and to enhance overall productivity. Effective downward

communication fulfils employees' need for organizational communication by furnishing them with ample and accurate information regarding the organization and their respective roles, as well as offering feedback on their performance (Benharzallah, 2021). There are various advantages and disadvantages when it comes to downward communication.

Figure 1. Advantages of downward communication in an organization

Advantages	Disadvantages
Employee involvement	Commication overload
Performance feedback	Inequality and power dynamics
Clarity and direction	Potential distortion
Organisational alignement	Resistance to change
Crisis management	Bypassing middle management
Effecient decision-making	Percieved lack of feedback
Motivation and employee morale	Negative impact on morale

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The advantages associated with downward communication that will be discussed include employee involvement, performance feedback, clarity and direction, organizational alignment, crisis management, efficient decision-making, motivation and employee morale. Disadvantages associated with downward communication that will be discussed include communication overload, inequality and power dynamics, potential distortion, resistance to change, bypassing middle management, perceived lack of feedback, and negative impact on morale.

2.1.2. Advantages of downward communication

Downward communication has the considerable advantage of motivating and emboldening employees to share their problems, recommendations, and innovative ideas, hence building a participatory and engaging atmosphere in the workplace (Akinwale, 2019). This dialogue fosters a culture of cooperation and inclusion inside the organization, resulting in improved problem-solving and a stronger sense of ownership among employees. Furthermore, this type of communication provides an organized approach for performing detailed evaluations and providing meaningful feedback, allowing employees to understand their particular strengths and areas in need of improvement (Goldberg & Gustafson, 2023).

These ideas help to focus development efforts and, as a result, improve overall organizational performance.

According to Eisenberg and Witten (1987), downward communication functions as a channel for upper management to communicate clear guidelines, comprehensive instructions, and well-defined expectations to employees. This continuous information flow ensures that every employee of the organization is on the same page and working collaboratively toward shared organizational objectives, encouraging efficiency, unity, and the effective achievement of strategic goals. Furthermore, as Tremaine (2003) points out, downward communication is critical in building organizational structure. It fosters a strong sense of belonging and a distinct organizational identity among employees, hence increasing overall unity and cohesiveness within the workplace as a whole.

As Grunig (1993) points out, good downward communication is crucial in crisis management at crucial points in time. It gives critical direction to handle the issue by quickly communicating key information and clear instructions, enabling a coordinated reaction that can limit possible damage and steer the organization through difficult moments with speed and clarity. Furthermore, as Shannon (2018) points out, downward communication allows for rapid distribution of decisions and policies across the organization, assuring timely implementation and action in accordance with organizational goals. According to Schultz and Schultz (1998), downward communication efficiently communicates organizational goals and expectations. This clarity boosts employee motivation by fostering a strong feeling of purpose and accomplishment, resulting in improved individual and organizational performance. Downward communication has advantages as well as disadvantages.

2.1.3. Disadvantages of downward communication

According to Keyton (2017), downward communication can unwittingly increase the dynamics of power within an organization. Employees might regard themselves as subordinate, which may prevent them from providing critical feedback or voicing concerns, limiting the organization's capacity to solve issues and innovate successfully. Taylor et al. (2015) highlight the inherent threat of information modifications or distortion in the transfer of information within an organizational hierarchy. As information cascades through several levels, it may alter, potentially leading to misconceptions or misinterpretations, emphasizing the importance of accurate and open communication routes in mitigating these risks.

Employees may be resistant to organizational changes introduced through downward communication, as Lewis (2018) suggests. Fear, uncertainty, or a lack of understanding of the rationale for the changes may cause resistance and impede seamless implementation, demanding deliberate change management measures to enable effective transitions. Guffey et al. (2021) highlight that direct communication from upper management to employees on the front lines has the ability to bypass intermediate management. This bypass may disturb the hierarchical structure, causing

uncertainty about duties, responsibilities, and the established chain of command, accentuating the significance of a well-coordinated communication strategy for maintaining organizational clarity and effectiveness.

Employees may view downward communication to be unidirectional, with fewer chances to participate or express issues (Guffey et al., 2021). This view may impede collaborative and open organizational communication, necessitating deliberate actions to overcome such feelings. According to Aritz and Walker (2014), ineffective downward communication

can have a negative impact on employee morale, job satisfaction, and overall engagement within the organization. To prevent such negative consequences, it is critical to maintain a consistent and clear communication strategy. As Stacks (2016) points out, overloading employees with information has the potential to overwhelm their cognitive capacity. This flood of information impairs their capacity to absorb and interpret essential signals, hampering productivity and inhibiting efficient decision-making within the organizational setting.

Figure 2. Downward communication at petroleum retail service stations
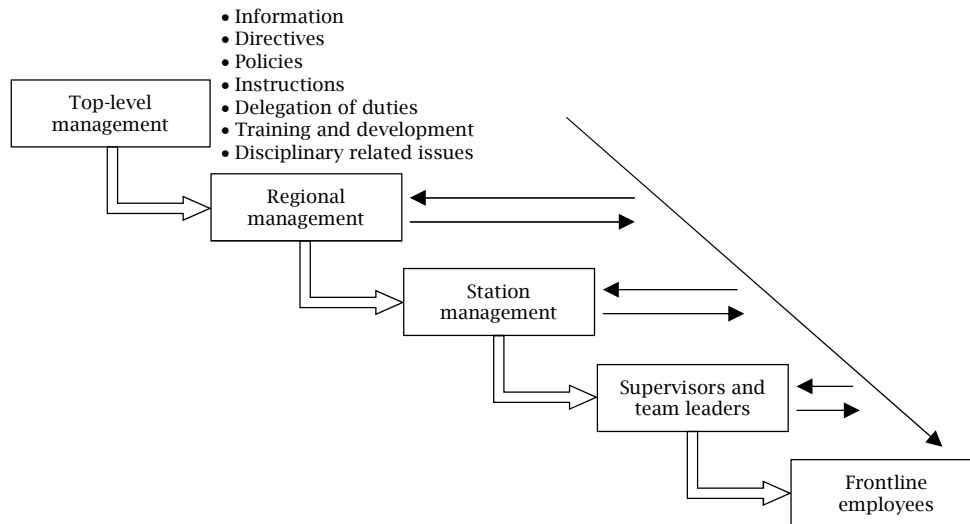
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Effective communication within the organizational structure may and should be a priority for seamless operations, safety, and efficiency. At petroleum retail service stations, information flows from top-level management to regional managers, station managers, supervisors and team leaders, and employees on the front lines. Directives from higher levels of the organization to lower-level employees at petroleum retail service stations often entail delivering critical information to guarantee smooth operations and adherence to organizational standards. The guidelines for petroleum retail service stations include discussing changes and updates, training programs, performance assessments and feedback, communication during emergency and urgent circumstances, and regular meetings with employees.

Guidelines from higher levels of the organizational hierarchy to lower-level employees at petroleum retail service stations often include a wide range of guidelines, rules, and regulations that control the operations and conduct at the fuel stations. These policies are critical for guaranteeing compliance, preserving safety, increasing efficiency, and providing a consistent quality of service. Instructions from the highest levels of the organizational hierarchy to lower-level personnel at petroleum retail service stations are explicit and unambiguous guidelines intended to direct staff in their daily responsibilities and contacts with consumers. These instructions promote uniformity, safety, efficiency, and adherence to organizational standards.

At petroleum retail service stations, delegation of duties from higher levels of the organizational structure to lower-level employees entails assigning particular tasks and obligations to individuals based on their positions and experience. Lower-level employees' training and development are critical to improving their skills, knowledge, and capacities, eventually leading to greater performance and customer satisfaction. Disciplinary issues and actions are required in petroleum retail service stations to ensure order, policy adherence, and a pleasant work environment. Handling disciplinary issues correctly helps to guarantee employee accountability, rule compliance, and overall smooth operations. The communication flow described above is critical for establishing a cohesive and efficient operational environment.

2.1.4. Employee behavior

Work behaviors encompass the patterns of actions and interactions carried out by individuals within an organization that directly and indirectly influence the organization's functioning and effectiveness (Chirumbolo, 2020). Ramzy et al. (2018) define employee behavior as the response of employees to specific circumstances or situations encountered in the workplace. Awasthi et al. (2020) further elaborate that employee behavior is influenced by various organizational policies. Among these policies, one important aspect is attracting and retaining employees. Awasthi et al. (2020) emphasize that

the behavior of highly motivated and recognized employees plays a crucial role in organizational effectiveness and customer satisfaction.

Employee conduct at petroleum retail service stations is critical to maintaining effective and satisfying service delivery, safety adherence, and customer satisfaction in the industry's dynamic and competitive environment. Employees at petroleum retail service stations serve as the organization's frontline representatives, immediately interacting with customers and so having a substantial influence on the establishment's overall image and achievement.

Employee behavior, which includes respect, attention to detail, and responsiveness, has a direct impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Pleasant communications, helpful assistance, and a positive approach create a welcoming environment that encourages customers to return to the station for future needs. Employee behavior has an impact on the quality and efficiency of services delivered. Employees who have been properly taught and motivated are more likely to do tasks accurately and quickly, contributing to seamless operations reduced waiting times, and enhanced service quality.

The behavior of employees is critical to maintaining safety measures and regulatory compliance in petroleum retail stations. Adherence to safety requirements while handling fuel, maintaining equipment, and controlling possible dangers is critical in preventing accidents and ensuring a safe workplace for employees and customers. Employee behavior influences the brand image and reputation of a petroleum retail service station. Polite and professional behavior provides a favorable picture of the firm, generating additional customers and establishing a solid market reputation.

Acknowledging the fundamental significance of employee behavior at petroleum retail service stations is critical when creating procedures to foster a culture that prioritizes customer-centricity, safety, efficiency, and good interpersonal interactions. Investing in training employees, continuing growth, and providing a conducive work environment are critical elements to ensuring employees show behaviors that correspond with organizational goals and improve the overall performance and sustainability of petrol station operations.

2.2. Theoretical framework

The study adopted OIT, systems theory, and SET. Theories are constructed to predict, explain, and comprehend phenomena (Pithan, 2021).

2.2.1. Organizational information theory

According to Brent (1984), this theory asserts that communication within an organization shapes the organizational environment, influencing employee behavior and productivity. Dębowski and Bentz (2020) state that the primary goal of the theory is to reduce uncertainty by focusing on crucial information. Foley (2020) adds that organizational communication should aim to enhance individuals' understanding of the organization's objectives and goals. The theory further outlines an approach for data collection, utilization, and management (Avgerou, 2003).

The need of arranging and organizing information to promote successful communication is emphasized by OIT. In petrol stations, downward communication should guarantee that information is arranged in a concise, understandable, and readily comprehensible manner, meeting the individual demands and duties of employees at various levels within the station. The relevance of chains of feedback in communication processes is also emphasized by OIT. Employees should be encouraged to submit comments, ask questions, and seek explanations in petrol stations through downward communication. This two-way communication develops a culture of continuous development by allowing employees to modify their behavior in response to feedback. Again, the quality and clarity of downward communication have a huge impact on employee behavior, influencing how they do their responsibilities, follow safety requirements, and deal with customers. Understanding OIT concepts in the context of petrol stations enables the optimization of downward communication tactics. This alignment may increase information processing, boost employee understanding, foster an open communication culture, and ultimately favorably affect employee behavior.

2.2.2. Systems theory

Systems theory not only describes natural scientific systems, but it also aids in the understanding of other systems, such as organizations and their employees (Heil, n.d.). It is also important in communication theories since it assists in the development of strategies for efficient employee communication (Heil, n.d.). It is worth mentioning that the systems theory regards communication as an essential system binder, making it a relevant theory in organizational communication (Almaney, 1974). Because the research focused on internal communication, the systems theory assisted in highlighting the relevance of internal communication for employee engagement and, ultimately, the stations' performance.

According to systems theory, all aspects of an organization are interrelated. Downward communication at petrol stations is essential for connecting management with employees. This communication's efficacy is critical for aligning employees with organizational objectives, rules, and procedures, guaranteeing a cohesive and coordinated operational approach. Communication is also viewed as the flow of information throughout an organization by systems theory. Downward communication in petrol stations includes the conveyance of critical information such as duties, safety measures, customer service standards, and managerial expectations. This communication's clarity and correctness have a substantial influence on employee behavior and, as a result, overall station performance. The idea highlights the role of feedback loops in organizational adaptation once more.

2.2.3. Social exchange theory

The primary premise of the SET is that people offer something in the prospect of obtaining something valuable in return Cook and Rice (2006). According to this idea, social development and stability are

outcomes of negotiated exchanges between parties (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The idea is built on three components: cost-benefit analysis, comparison level, and commitment level comparison. In terms of context, SET helps explain the interactions between employees. Employees will attempt to weigh the costs and advantages of communicating with colleagues and management.

The majority of employee behavior may be described by the attitudes they have, their communication, the organizational culture, and the leadership management methods utilized by them. Employees who believe they are receiving greater rewards tend to devote more time and effort to their organizations, resulting in positive behavior, and vice versa. According to SET, people tend to engage in activities that are viewed as positive.

Effective and open downward communication that provides employees with appropriate and timely information can be considered as an excellent relationship in the context of petrol stations. Employees are more likely to reciprocate by displaying

behaviors that are consistent with organizational standards, resulting in enhanced operational performance and customer service. Downward communication may help employees feel appreciated and informed by providing emotional and practical support. According to SET, when employees experience organizational support through good downward communication, they are more inclined to respond with positive behavior, commitment, and loyalty.

2.3. Conceptual framework

In assessing downward communication, some of the variables that were evaluated clear communication of performance expectations, explanation of the organization's plans, communication of changes in company policies, and recognition from superiors were evaluated. In assessing employee behavior, some of the variables that were evaluated were behavior expectations, decision-making ability, acknowledgement of employees on hard work, and checking up on employees was evaluated.

Figure 3. The conceptual framework for the study indicates the relationship between downward communication and employee behavior

Downward communication	Employee behavior
• Clear communication of performance expectations • Explanation of organisation's plans • Communication of changes • Recognision from superiors	• Behavior expectations • Decision-making ability • Acknowledgment of employees on hard work • Checking up on employees • Decision-making ability
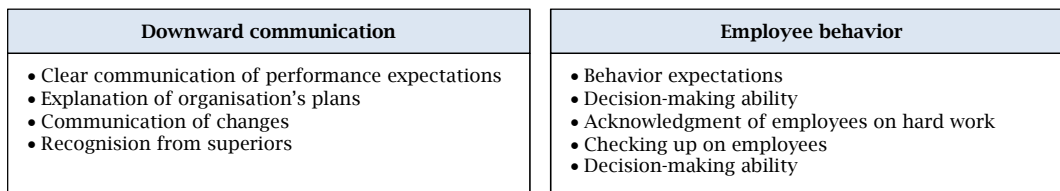
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Based on the previously reviewed literature, the hypothesis can be formulated:
H1: Downward communication has a significant influence on employee behavior is accepted.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative research approach gathering data through the questionnaire. The researchers chose this approach as it is the most suitable method to test the hypothesis. The method also allowed for sampling a larger population. The study employed the case study of petroleum services stations in South Africa. The study involved gathering information about and enabled the researchers to analyze data within the South African petroleum retail service stations. This study has selected an exploratory research design because it aims to investigate a specific phenomenon. The study further adopted survey research. The survey that was utilised for the study was closed-ended questionnaires. A five-point Likert scale was utilised to measure the questionnaire. The Likert scale provided a suitable framework for addressing sensitive topics without pressuring respondents to take a specific stance.

After the exploratory research study is completed, a description of the relationship between the two variables is provided. The study's target population is drawn from various retail service station locations around South Africa. The intended audience consists of all general employees who are at the forefront from service stations, where

managers are so excluded. In this study, the questionnaires were personally administered to the respondents.

The information was collected at 23 South African petroleum retail service stations. Non-probability sampling was used for this study where convenient sampling was the utilised method. Despite the fact that the study used convenience sampling, the participants were actual representations of the population. This is due to the similarity of South African petroleum retail service stations.

Primary data sources in the form of questionnaires were employed in this study. The questionnaires were structured. The researchers developed a questionnaire for the study based on the literature reviewed and the study goals. After completing all surveys, the researchers double-checked them for accuracy and completeness. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 25 was used to analyze the data. Data analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistics. Alternative studies can adopt qualitative studies, utilising interviews to obtain an in-depth understanding of the respondent's perspectives.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the 23 petroleum retail service stations can be generalisable to the other petroleum retail service stations in South Africa. A total of 740 participants answered the questionnaire, and those were the questionnaires that were used for data analysis.

Table 1. Employees biographical information

Variables	Percentage (%)	Frequency
Age		
20–29 years old	27.0	200
30–39 years old	51.9	384
40–49 years old	14.1	104
50-59 years old	4.6	34
60 years old and over	2.4	18
Race		
Black	96.2	711
Colored	0.7	5
White	1.8	13
Indian	1.4	10
Other	0.1	1
Gender		
Male	490	66.2
Female	247	33.3
Others	0.4	3
Tenure		
Below 1 year	14.7	109
1–5 years	46.6	345
6–10 years	20.3	150
11–15 years	13.2	98
15 years and above	5.1	38
Education		
Below grade 12	16.6	123
Grade 12	65.8	487
Higher certificate	8.4	62
Diploma	4.9	36
Post-graduate	0.9	7

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 1 indicates that 27% of the participants were within the age range of 20 years old to 29 years old, 51.9% were between 30 years old to 39 years old, 14.1% were between 40 years old to 49 years old, and 4.6% were in the range of 50 years old to 59 years old, while 2.4% were above 60 years old of age. The table further indicates that the majority 96.1% of the respondents were black, 0.7% were colored, 1.8% were white, 1.4% were Indians, and 0.1% of the respondents indicated other types of race. The gender of the participants included 66.6% males, 33.4% females, and 0.4% others. The participants had less than 1 year of experience with the organization. The majority 46.6% had between 1 to 5 years, 20.3% had 6 to 10 years, 13.2% had between 11 to 15 years, while the least participants 5.1% had 15 and above years of experience within the organization. The categories of the level of education of the participants are about 16.6% of the respondents below grade 12 level, the majority 65.8% were at grade 12 level, 8.4% had

a higher certificate, 4.9% had a diploma, and 3.4% had a degree, while least 0.9% of them had a post-graduate degree.

4.1. Downward communication

The results indicated that the petroleum retail service station employees display higher levels of *downward communication* (mean = 3.10). In asking the participants about management communicating performance expectations, the majority 40% agreed and 22.2% strongly agreed that management clearly communicates performance expectations. However, 10.5% strongly disagreed, and 17.7% also disagreed that management clearly communicates performance expectations. Expectations serve as an employee's point of focus, helping them know what to do and where to go. They also provide direction on how each person can meet the desired outcomes of their role (Blackman et al., 2019). Communicating expectations in the workplace helps employees understand what managers or leaders want them to achieve so that they can do a better job in their positions and reach goals.

In further questioning the respondents about superiors explaining how future plans of the organization affect them, about 29.2% were in agreement and 25.9% of the respondents disagreed that their superior explains how the organization's future plans affect them. There is a very low number of employees in the petroleum retail service stations that confirmed that they get an explanation of how the future plans of the organization affect them. When employees do not understand why changes are happening, it can result in resistance or pushback.

When it comes to the results for superiors clearly communicating changes, 30.5% agreed, and 13.8% strongly agreed that their superiors clearly communicated changes in company policies or benefits. However, 16.4% strongly disagreed, and 28.6% also disagreed that their superiors clearly communicated changes in company policies or benefits. According to Peterson (2024), keeping employees involved, informed and empowered throughout the change process makes a big difference in both the employee experience and the outcome of the change. The employees need to be aware that the change is both good for them and the company overall.

Table 2. Results of the survey participants' questionnaire

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Downward communication					
Management clearly communicates performance expectations.	10.5%	17.7%	9.3%	40.0%	22.2%
My superior explains how the organisation's future plans affect me.	16.4%	25.9%	12.7%	29.2%	15.1%
My superior clearly communicates changes in company policies or benefits.	16.4%	28.6%	10.7%	30.5%	13.8%
Employee behavior					
The organisation is clear on the behavior they expect from the employees.	9.9%	11.9%	8.4%	46.6%	23.2%

4.2. Employee behavior

In the study, it was found that the petroleum retail service station employees display higher levels of *employee behavior* (mean = 3.12). In asking the participants if management in the petroleum

retail service stations is clear on the behavior that is expected from them, the results from the study the majority 46.6% agreed, and 23.2% strongly agreed that the organization is clear on the behavior they expect from them. However, 9.9% strongly disagreed, and 11.9% also disagreed that

the management is clear on the behavior they expect from them. Based on Bucăţa and Rizescu (2017), organizations must communicate behaviors that they desire. Employees in an organization tend to be happy if not for the guidelines themselves, but simply the fact that the organization is upfront and clear about them. Performance expectations serve as a foundation for communicating performance expectancy.

When it comes to the results of managers occasionally sitting down with employees, about 15.8% strongly disagreed, while 25% were in agreement. About 30.1% disagreed and 13.8% strongly agreed that their manager occasionally sits down with them to check how they are doing. Ryba (2021) mentions that a check-in meeting helps managers get updates on current challenges, reinforce team objectives, and uncover potential engagement issues as they arise. Daily, weekly, or monthly check-ins are an important tool for managers to connect with their team members, identify potential issues early, and adapt to changes or updates accordingly. Employees can confidently perform their work and get relevant feedback as they go.

In questioning the respondents with regards to involvement in decision making, about 31.1% agreed and 12.4% strongly agreed, while 29.5% of the respondents disagreed and 13.6% strongly disagreed that their manager sometimes allowed them to make decisions in the tasks they did at the stations. According to Mambula et al. (2021), involvement in decision-making is the degree to which employers allow employees to be involved in organizational decision-making and encourage them to make contributions. Employee involvement in the decision-making process allows each employee to contribute their opinions and also share their knowledge with colleagues. According to Anderson (2020), participation in the decision-making process allows each employee to voice their opinions, and to share their knowledge with others.

Table 3. The influence of *downward communication* on *employee behavior*

Variables	Mean	Std. dev.	1	2
Downward communication	3.10	1.11	0.661**	1
Employee behavior	3.12	1.03	0.588**	0.846**

*Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
Source: Authors' elaboration.

As illustrated in Table 3 above, *downward communication* has significant and positive effects on *employee behavior* ($r = 0.846$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that an increase in *downward communication* will yield an equal increase in *employee behavior*.

Table 4. *Downward communication* as predictors of *employee behavior*

Variables	B	Beta	T	p-value	R²
Downward communication	0.552	0.593	15.868	< 0.05	0.749

Note: Predictor: Upward communication. Dependent variable: Effective communication.
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Table 4 above shows the result of the regression model in which the model was able to predict 73.7% of the variation in the dependent variable with the value R² as 0.749. The model shows that upward communication $\beta = 0.593$, t (701) = 15.868, $p < 0.05$ have a significant association with *employee behavior*. This implies that *downward communication* has a significant impact on *employee behavior*. Therefore, the hypothesis *H1* is accepted.

5. CONCLUSION

The goal of downward communication is to transfer information from upper-level employees to lower-level employees in order to ensure the smooth running of the organization. Improving downward communication at petroleum retail service stations is critical for improving employee behavior, operational efficiency, and service quality overall. Communication should be clear and transparent in the sense that communication from management to employees should be plain, direct, and devoid of ambiguity. It should explain the organization's goals, expectations, safety regulations, and service standards in a clear and concise manner. Transparency fosters trust and comprehension, which leads to increased compliance and desirable actions. Employees should be able to voice their problems, comments, and feedback about the provided information through effective feedback mechanisms at the stations. Employers should actively listen to their employees, solve their problems, and utilize their input to improve communication tactics and resolve any misconceptions.

Employee participation in communication planning is also critical. Employees should be involved in the design and development of communication initiatives. Their feedback on how to enhance communication channels, format, and frequency should be sought, considering their preferences and needs for successful downward communication. Personalization of communication at petroleum retail service stations is required. It should be suited to the various personnel in petroleum retail service stations. Recognize that employees may come from a variety of backgrounds, languages, and communication styles. To accommodate these variances and assure comprehension, provide information in a variety of forms and languages.

Employee successes and efforts for the organization should also be recognized and celebrated by the stations. Recognize their efforts by communicating with them on a regular basis, congratulating them for their excellent conduct, and reinforcing the desirable values and behaviors in the workplace. By applying these ideas, petrol stations may foster an environment of effective downward communication, which leads to improved employee behavior, higher productivity, improved safety compliance, and improved service quality.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of downward communication in moulding employee behavior at petroleum retail service stations. Effective communication techniques that give clear directions, timely feedback, and professional development opportunities may inspire positive changes in attitudes and actions, eventually improving customer experiences and organizational performance. The findings of this study are important as they provide helpful information for petroleum retail service station operators looking to

improve their communication techniques in order to attain a more engaged and productive workforce. They provide strategies that assist the petroleum industry in their communication tactics. Consequently, this would support stations in operating efficiently. The following study can look at different types of employee communication, such as comparing upward and horizontal communication in connection to employee behavior. Future research can also utilise qualitative methods in the form of interviews to obtain data.

There was a literature review limitation since there were few empirical studies done in the area of communication and employee behavior in the petroleum industry in South Africa. This was a revelation to the field of communication in the industry, as there is more room for research to be conducted in this area to add more knowledge to the aspect of communication and employee behavior. The researchers then utilised books, journal articles, and Internet articles to obtain information on the two variables for the study.

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APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE

You are assured of full confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of all information supplied. The information will be used by the researchers for the purpose of the study. Your assistance in answering the questions reliably and promptly is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic data

Mark a cross (X) in the box that best describes you.

1. Age:

20–29 years old	
30–39 years old	
40–49 years old	
50–59 years old	
60 years old and over	

2. Race:

Black	
Coloured	
White	
Indian/Asian	
Black	

3. Gender:

Male	
Female	

4. Tenure:

Below 1 year	
1–5 years	
6–10 years	
11–15 years	
15 years and above	

5. Level of education

Below grade 12	
Grade 12	
Higher certificate	
Diploma	
Degree	
Post-graduate	

Section B: Downward communication at the petroleum retail service station

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by marking a cross (X) in the appropriate box using the scale: Strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neither agree nor disagree (N), Agree (A), Strongly agree (SA).

No.	Downward communication	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
1	Management clearly communicates performance expectations.					
2	Management effectively communicates the information I need to do my job.					
3	My superior actively listens to my viewpoints.					
4	Management explains the reasons behind the decisions made.					
5	My superior handles disagreements professionally.					
6	My superior explains how the organization's future plans affect me.					
7	My superior clearly communicates changes to company policies or benefits.					
8	I frequently receive recognition from my superior.					
9	The last time I completed a project, I received recognition.					

Section C: Employee behavior at the petroleum retail service station

No.	Employee behavior	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
1	The organization is clear on the behavior they expect from the employees.					
2	The organization acknowledges the employees for their hard work.					
3	When there are problems, the organization is able to pinpoint where the issue may be.					
4	My manager occasionally sits down with me to check how I am doing.					
5	The managers lead by example in the work that they do.					
6	My manager sometimes allows me to make decisions in the tasks I do.					
7	My manager does not interfere immensely with how I do my tasks.					
8	I am not overburdened by the tasks I have.					

Thank you for your participation. Have a productive day!