

Trustworthy Change Communication During Technology Modernization

Dr. Giuseppe Soda

Professor, Bocconi University, Italy

Abstract

Technology modernization can improve organizational capability while simultaneously generating uncertainty concerning roles, skills, workflows, performance expectations, decision authority, and employment continuity. Under such conditions, communication is not merely a mechanism for announcing implementation schedules; it becomes a principal process through which employees evaluate whether organizational leaders are credible, whether the change process is fair, and whether they possess sufficient capability to operate within the emerging technological environment. This study conceptualizes trustworthy change communication as communication characterized by informational accuracy, transparency about known and unknown consequences, consistency between words and managerial actions, procedural fairness, and genuine opportunities for employee questions and feedback. The framework integrates organizational-change communication, readiness for change, organizational trust, procedural justice, sensemaking, and technology-acceptance research. Because no primary employee dataset was supplied, a transparent simulation-based explanatory design was employed. A synthetic dataset of 360 hypothetical employee profiles was constructed using trustworthy change communication, perceived transparency, procedural fairness, change self-efficacy, and technology-modernization readiness as seven-point constructs.

The simulated analysis generated a strong positive association between trustworthy change communication and modernization readiness ($r = 0.728$). Transparency ($r = 0.640$), change self-efficacy ($r = 0.635$), and procedural fairness ($r = 0.614$) were also positively associated with readiness. A multivariate model containing the four predictors explained approximately 65.0% of the simulated variance in modernization readiness. Mean readiness increased from 3.45 among very-low-communication-maturity profiles to 5.75 among very-high-maturity profiles. These numerical findings are synthetic and should not be interpreted as observations from actual employees. The study argues that trustworthy modernization communication requires organizations to communicate not only the anticipated benefits of new technologies but also credible uncertainty, transition burdens, decision rationales, employee implications, and mechanisms through which concerns can influence implementation.

Keywords: trustworthy communication, technology modernization, organizational change, employee trust, transparency, procedural fairness, change readiness, technology acceptance



1. Introduction

Technology modernization frequently involves more than replacing legacy hardware or software. Enterprise platforms, automation technologies, data infrastructures, digital workflows, analytics systems, and other modernization initiatives can alter responsibilities, knowledge requirements, information visibility, coordination routines, and patterns of managerial control. Employees therefore encounter modernization simultaneously as a technological and organizational change. Organizational-change scholarship has long established that employee responses are shaped not only by the objective characteristics of a change but also by how employees interpret its content, process, context, and anticipated consequences. Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis' review of quantitative change research identified a broad range of antecedents and reactions associated with organizational change, demonstrating that change recipients should not be treated as passive implementation targets.

Communication occupies a critical position in this interpretive process. Lewis' research on implementation communication showed that employee experiences of change communication were associated with perceptions of implementation success and resistance. Communication during modernization therefore performs several functions simultaneously: explaining why current technologies or processes are insufficient, clarifying what will change, interpreting what the change means for individual work, reducing avoidable uncertainty, and providing employees with information necessary to prepare for implementation. The practical difficulty is that modernization programs often unfold under incomplete information. Implementation dates shift, system capabilities evolve, job impacts become clearer over time, and leaders themselves may not possess definitive answers to every employee concern.

This uncertainty creates a trust problem. Trustworthy communication cannot reasonably mean communicating with absolute certainty when certainty does not exist. Instead, credibility may depend on distinguishing verified information from provisional expectations and explicitly acknowledging unresolved issues. Empirical evidence from Yue, Men, and Ferguson indicates that transparent organizational communication during change was positively associated with organizational trust, which in turn was associated with employee openness to change. Men, Yue, and Liu similarly found that leadership communication emphasizing vision, passion, and care was related to employee trust and supportive responses during organizational change. These findings suggest that communication credibility depends not merely on information volume but on how organizational intentions, evidence, and employee consequences are communicated.

Technology modernization also raises questions of capability and fairness. Employees may understand the strategic rationale for a new system yet remain concerned about whether sufficient training, transition time, technical support, and opportunities for participation will be provided. Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder's readiness framework emphasized the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions that precede employee responses to change, while Weiner's organizational-readiness theory emphasizes both commitment to change and perceived capability to implement it. Organizational-justice research further indicates that procedural fairness is consequential for employee attitudes and organizational evaluations. Colquitt and colleagues' meta-analysis of 25 years of organizational-justice research established substantive relationships between justice perceptions and important organizational outcomes.



The present study develops trustworthy change communication as a multidimensional capability for technology modernization. It proposes that employees are more likely to develop modernization readiness when communication is accurate, appropriately transparent, procedurally fair, responsive to concerns, and connected with resources that strengthen change self-efficacy. The study does not assume that trustworthy communication eliminates legitimate disagreement or guarantees technology acceptance. Rather, it argues that communication quality affects whether employees possess a credible informational and relational basis for evaluating the proposed modernization. Because no primary organizational dataset was supplied, the numerical component is explicitly simulation based. The objective is to develop a theoretically defensible and empirically testable framework without representing constructed outcomes as evidence from real employees.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To Conceptualize Trustworthy Communication During Technology Modernization

The first objective is to distinguish trustworthy change communication from conventional top-down change messaging. Trustworthy communication is conceptualized as an organizational communication capability that combines factual accuracy, explanation of strategic rationale, transparency concerning uncertainty, consistency across leadership levels, acknowledgment of employee consequences, and opportunities for meaningful response. This definition rejects the assumption that communication quality can be judged solely by frequency or message reach.

Trustworthiness also requires consistency between communicated commitments and observable implementation practices. Employees are unlikely to interpret communication as transparent when leaders invite feedback but major decisions are already irreversible, promise extensive training but provide insufficient learning time, or present job impacts as settled when restructuring remains under consideration. Trustworthy communication therefore encompasses both message quality and the credibility of the organizational process surrounding those messages.

2.2 To Examine Communication, Transparency, and Modernization Readiness

The second objective is to examine the proposed association between trustworthy communication and employee readiness for technology modernization. Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder conceptualized readiness as involving organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions concerning the need and capacity for change. Rafferty, Jimmieson, and Armenakis later emphasized the need to conceptualize change readiness at multiple levels and to recognize both cognitive and affective components.

Within technology modernization, readiness requires more than favorable attitudes toward technology. Employees need to understand why modernization is required, whether the proposed approach appears appropriate, what support will be available, and whether they possess or can develop the capabilities required for transition. Trustworthy communication is expected to strengthen readiness because it improves the informational conditions under which these judgments are formed.

2.3 To Assess Procedural Fairness and Change Self-Efficacy as Complementary Mechanisms

The third objective is to assess procedural fairness and change self-efficacy as complementary explanatory mechanisms. Procedural fairness concerns whether employees perceive the modernization



process as consistent, respectful, adequately explained, and appropriately open to relevant input. Modernization decisions will not always be participative, but employees can still assess whether implementation procedures and allocation decisions are legitimate.

Change self-efficacy concerns employees' perceived ability to perform successfully under changed technological conditions. Weiner's theory of organizational readiness explicitly incorporates change efficacy as a central component of readiness. Communication can contribute to efficacy when it clarifies new expectations, training arrangements, transition milestones, available assistance, and realistic pathways for learning rather than merely emphasizing organizational ambition.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Change Communication, Transparency, and Organizational Trust

Organizational change creates an intensive need for sensemaking because employees must interpret what is changing, why it is changing, and what the emerging situation means for their own work. Communication becomes central because formal messages, leadership explanations, peer conversations, rumors, and observed managerial actions all contribute to interpretations of change. Lewis' study of implementation communication found that employee communication experiences predicted perceptions concerning implementation success and resistance, reinforcing the importance of communication processes rather than communication volume alone.

Transparency strengthens this communication process when it allows employees to obtain substantively relevant, balanced, and understandable information. Yue, Men, and Ferguson examined 439 employees in the United States during an organizational change event and found that transparent communication and transformational leadership were positively associated with organizational trust, which subsequently influenced openness to change. This evidence is especially important for modernization because employees often face ambiguity regarding technological consequences, making the credibility of information sources a fundamental component of change interpretation.

Trust should nevertheless not be understood as passive confidence that leaders are always correct. Trustworthy communication allows employees to distinguish between facts, forecasts, assumptions, and decisions still under review. Men, Yue, and Liu's 2020 research similarly linked executive communication during change with employee organizational trust and supportive change behavior. Together, this literature supports the proposition that credible communication can create relational conditions within which employees are more willing to consider change claims without requiring uncritical acceptance of them.

3.2 Change Readiness, Self-Efficacy, and Technology Acceptance

Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder distinguished readiness from resistance and conceptualized readiness around employee beliefs, attitudes, and intentions toward change. This distinction remains valuable because reluctance during modernization may reflect unresolved informational or capability concerns rather than generalized resistance. For example, an employee can recognize the need for a new technology while reasonably doubting the quality of training or the compatibility of implementation timelines with operational requirements.

Weiner subsequently theorized organizational readiness as a shared psychological state involving change commitment and change efficacy. His model argues that implementation capability is influenced by judgments regarding task demands, available resources, and situational conditions. Rafferty, Jimmieson, and Armenakis further extended readiness research by emphasizing multilevel considerations and both cognitive and affective elements. These perspectives suggest that trustworthy modernization communication should address not merely willingness but also employees' assessment of whether implementation is realistically achievable.

Technology-acceptance research adds a more technology-specific dimension. Davis' Technology Acceptance Model established perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as important determinants of users' acceptance of information technology, while later unified models broadened the range of beliefs affecting behavioral intention and use. These theories indicate that modernization communication cannot focus only on organizational necessity. Employees must also develop credible expectations regarding how technologies will affect their work and whether they can use them successfully. Trustworthy change communication therefore complements rather than replaces technology-acceptance mechanisms.

3.3 Procedural Justice, Employee Voice, and Credibility During Modernization

Procedural justice becomes important when modernization redistributes opportunities, burdens, responsibilities, or decision authority. Colquitt and colleagues' meta-analytic review demonstrated the importance of justice perceptions across a substantial body of organizational research. During modernization, employees can assess fairness through decisions concerning training access, transition workloads, implementation sequencing, consultation, monitoring practices, and the treatment of employees whose roles are significantly altered.

Procedural fairness does not imply that every employee receives decision authority over technological strategy. Strategic and technical constraints may require centralized decisions. Fairness instead concerns whether relevant perspectives are heard where appropriate, decision criteria are explained, procedures are consistently applied, and employees are treated respectfully during transition. Communication is the mechanism through which many of these procedural qualities become visible.

A resulting gap emerges between general organizational-change communication research and technology-modernization practice. Existing literature explains readiness, transparency, trust, justice, and technology acceptance individually, yet modernization communication often requires these dimensions to operate simultaneously. The proposed model addresses this gap by treating trustworthy communication as the connective capability through which employees develop informed judgments concerning both the legitimacy and feasibility of modernization.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Simulation Rationale

The study adopted a quantitative simulation-based explanatory design because no primary survey responses, implementation records, or employee behavioral data were supplied. Simulation was used to illustrate how the proposed theoretical relationships might behave under a defined analytical model. No synthetic coefficient is presented as an estimate derived from a real organizational population.

A total of 360 hypothetical employee profiles was generated. The profiles represent conceptual employees undergoing a technology-modernization initiative and do not correspond to identifiable individuals, organizations, countries, or industries. Five constructs were represented using seven-point analytical scales.

Table 1: Operationalization of the Simulation Framework

Construct	Scale	Conceptual Operationalization	Analytical Role
Trustworthy Change Communication	1–7	Accuracy, consistency, acknowledgment of uncertainty, credible explanation, and two-way responsiveness during modernization	Primary predictor
Perceived Transparency	1–7	Degree to which employees perceive relevant modernization information, rationales, constraints, and uncertainties as openly communicated	Explanatory mechanism
Procedural Fairness	1–7	Perceived fairness, consistency, voice opportunity, and respectful treatment throughout modernization	Explanatory mechanism
Change Self-Efficacy	1–7	Confidence in the ability to learn, adapt, and perform effectively under the modernized technological environment	Explanatory mechanism
Technology-Modernization Readiness	1–7	Cognitive and motivational readiness to engage constructively with implementation	Dependent variable

Note: All numerical observations are synthetic and generated exclusively for methodological demonstration.

4.2 Synthetic Data Construction

Trustworthy change communication was generated as the central explanatory variable. Perceived transparency was modeled as positively but imperfectly related to trustworthy communication because communication may be frequent and accurate while employees still perceive important information as unavailable. Procedural fairness was also modeled as positively related to communication credibility while retaining substantial independent variation.

Change self-efficacy was generated partly from communication and transparency. The conceptual logic is that employees become more confident when they receive sufficiently clear information concerning future work requirements, training, implementation schedules, available resources, and support. Modernization readiness was then generated from trustworthy communication, transparency, procedural fairness, change self-efficacy, and a stochastic residual component.



Random variation was intentionally included because actual modernization readiness would also depend on prior technology experience, job characteristics, perceived usefulness of the system, leadership history, employment security, age and career stage, training quality, workload, technology usability, organizational culture, and external labor-market conditions.

4.3 Statistical Analysis and Analytical Boundaries

The analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, maturity-group comparisons, and ordinary least squares multiple regression. Technology-modernization readiness was used as the dependent variable, while trustworthy communication, perceived transparency, procedural fairness, and change self-efficacy were entered simultaneously as predictors.

For comparative interpretation, the 360 synthetic observations were divided into five equal communication-maturity categories: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high, with 72 profiles in each category. Mean construct scores were calculated for each group. The synthetic analysis is reproducible as a model demonstration but is not generalizable to any organizational population without empirical validation.

5. Analysis

5.1 Relationships Between Communication and Modernization Readiness

The synthetic dataset generated an average trustworthy-communication score of 4.13, perceived transparency of 3.90, procedural fairness of 3.87, change self-efficacy of 3.58, and modernization readiness of 4.51.

Trustworthy change communication demonstrated the strongest bivariate relationship with modernization readiness, producing a simulated Pearson coefficient of $r = 0.728$. Transparency was positively associated with readiness at $r = 0.640$, change self-efficacy at $r = 0.635$, and procedural fairness at $r = 0.614$.

The pattern supports the theoretical proposition that modernization readiness combines informational, relational, and capability judgments. Employees must not merely know that a change is occurring. They must be able to evaluate whether available information is credible, whether implementation procedures are legitimate, and whether they can successfully operate within the changed environment.

5.2 Communication Maturity and Employee Readiness

The maturity analysis displays a progressive relationship between trustworthy change communication and technology-modernization readiness.

Table 2: Simulated Outcomes Across Trustworthy Communication Maturity

Communication Maturity	Synthetic Profiles (n)	Mean Trustworthy Communication	Mean Transparency	Mean Procedural Fairness	Mean Change Self-Efficacy	Mean Modernization Readiness
Very Low	72	2.53	2.91	2.90	2.73	3.45
Low	72	3.53	3.55	3.50	3.25	4.00
Moderate	72	4.14	3.89	3.88	3.47	4.34
High	72	4.73	4.37	4.29	3.94	5.03
Very High	72	5.75	4.80	4.78	4.49	5.75

Mean modernization readiness increased from 3.45 among the very-low-communication group to 5.75 among the very-high group, producing an illustrative difference of 2.30 points on the seven-point scale. Transparency, fairness, and self-efficacy also increased across communication-maturity categories.

The increase between moderate and high communication maturity is particularly important conceptually. Basic communication may establish awareness, but stronger readiness may require communication to become sufficiently credible and responsive that employees can use it to reduce uncertainty and prepare behaviorally for implementation.

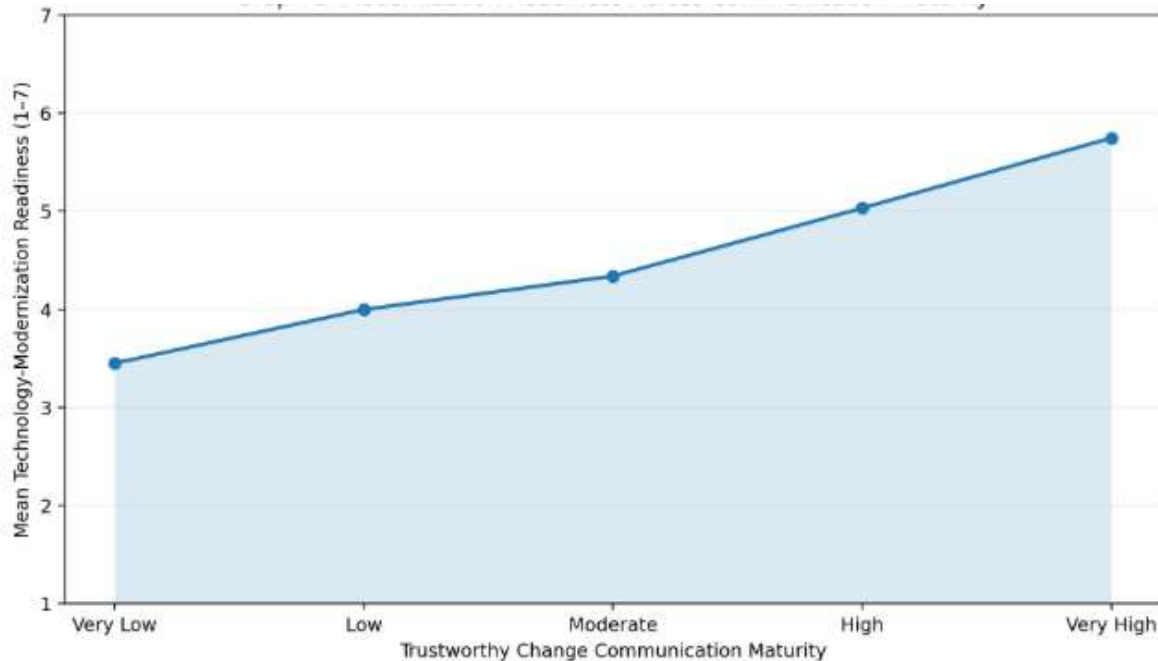
5.3 Multivariate Assessment of Modernization Readiness

Multiple regression was used to examine whether trustworthy communication remained analytically relevant when transparency, procedural fairness, and change self-efficacy were included simultaneously. The synthetic model produced an R^2 of 0.650 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.646, indicating that approximately 65.0% of simulated variation in modernization readiness was explained jointly by the four predictors.

Trustworthy communication produced an unstandardized coefficient of approximately 0.272, change self-efficacy approximately 0.249, transparency approximately 0.228, and procedural fairness approximately 0.223. All relationships were positive within the simulation.

These results illustrate an important theoretical distinction. Trustworthy communication has a direct relationship with readiness, but part of its organizational value may also operate by improving transparency, fairness judgments, and confidence in employees' ability to adapt. Communication therefore functions less as an isolated intervention than as an infrastructure through which other readiness conditions become credible.

Graph 1: Simulated Technology-Modernization Readiness Across Trustworthy Change Communication Maturity



Source: Author-generated synthetic dataset based on 360 hypothetical employee profiles.

Interpretation: The area graph demonstrates progressively stronger modernization readiness as trustworthy change-communication maturity rises. The increase becomes particularly pronounced between moderate and very-high maturity.

Key Finding: Within the simulation, employees exposed to more credible, transparent, fair, and capability-supportive communication display substantially greater readiness for technology modernization.

6. Discussion

6.1 Trustworthy Communication Requires Transparency About Uncertainty

One of the strongest implications of the framework is that trustworthy change communication should not be confused with certainty-oriented communication. Modernization projects frequently contain unresolved dependencies. Software configurations may change, integration risks may emerge, training requirements may prove larger than expected, and implementation sequences may need revision. Leaders who communicate uncertain forecasts as settled facts may obtain short-term reassurance while weakening future credibility when circumstances change.

Yue, Men, and Ferguson's findings are especially relevant because transparent communication was associated with trust and openness to organizational change. Men, Yue, and Liu likewise show that leadership communication during change can contribute to trust and supportive responses. These findings support a communication approach that separates what is known, what is probable, what remains undecided, and when employees can expect further information.

Transparency also means communicating potential burdens rather than discussing benefits exclusively. Employees can usually observe when a new technology introduces additional learning demands, workflow disruption, or temporary productivity decline. Communication that ignores these consequences can appear promotional rather than trustworthy. A stronger modernization narrative explains expected benefits while acknowledging implementation costs and the practical arrangements intended to manage them.

6.2 Fair Process and Employee Voice Strengthen Communication Credibility

The second implication concerns procedural fairness. Modernization frequently produces unequal effects. Some employees acquire new opportunities, others experience significant reskilling demands, and some roles may undergo substantial redesign. Under these conditions, employees are likely to evaluate not only what decision was reached but how modernization decisions were made and implemented. Organizational-justice research provides a strong basis for treating these procedural perceptions as consequential.

Employee voice can increase procedural credibility when it is connected to decisions that remain genuinely open to influence. Consultation should therefore be specific. Employees might contribute to workflow configuration, transition sequencing, training design, exception handling, implementation risk identification, or interface requirements even when the strategic decision to modernize has already been made. This distinction is preferable to implying that all aspects of modernization are negotiable.

Communication becomes untrustworthy when organizations solicit employee input after consequential choices are effectively closed but present the process as participative. A credible approach explicitly communicates the decision boundary: what has already been decided, what remains adjustable, what evidence will influence those decisions, and who retains final authority. Such clarity can protect both managerial accountability and employee trust.

6.3 Communication Must Build Capability, Not Merely Acceptance

The third implication is that change communication should strengthen employees' perceived ability to perform under new technological conditions. Armenakis and colleagues' readiness perspective and Weiner's theory of readiness both place substantial importance on beliefs concerning capability and implementation feasibility. Employees who understand why modernization is strategically necessary can still resist or disengage if they reasonably believe that insufficient training, time, staffing, or technical support will make successful adaptation unlikely.

This means communication should address concrete capability questions. Employees need to know what competencies will change, when learning will occur, what support is available, how mistakes during transition will be handled, whether performance expectations will be adjusted during learning, and where assistance can be obtained. Communication therefore has to be integrated with training and implementation design rather than treated as a parallel corporate-communications activity.

Technology-acceptance considerations reinforce this point. Employees are more likely to develop favorable technology evaluations when they understand the expected usefulness of a system and experience it as sufficiently usable. Communication cannot compensate permanently for an unusable technology or a poorly designed workflow. Trustworthy communication should therefore create



mechanisms through which implementation teams receive credible usability concerns and distinguish genuine adoption barriers from simple unfamiliarity. In this sense, the purpose of trustworthy communication is not to persuade employees that modernization is unquestionably successful; it is to enable the organization to discover what must be corrected for modernization to become successful.

7. Conclusion

Trustworthy change communication is a critical organizational capability during technology modernization because technological transformation alters both systems and the employment experience surrounding those systems. Employees must interpret new strategic priorities, develop unfamiliar capabilities, reconsider established routines, and make judgments about whether organizational leaders are credible throughout the process. Communication consequently performs a deeper function than information dissemination: it shapes the relational and interpretive environment in which modernization is understood.

The simulation-based analysis provided a transparent methodological illustration of this argument. Trustworthy change communication demonstrated a strong positive simulated association with modernization readiness, while transparency, procedural fairness, and change self-efficacy were also positively related to readiness. Profiles characterized by very-high communication maturity displayed substantially stronger simulated readiness than those characterized by very-low maturity. These numerical relationships are constructed analytical results and should not be represented as evidence collected from actual organizations.

The study's principal contribution lies in integrating change communication, organizational trust, procedural justice, readiness for change, change self-efficacy, and technology-acceptance perspectives. This integration suggests that communication during modernization should be evaluated according to whether it enables employees to form informed and credible judgments. High-quality communication does not require management to reveal information that cannot ethically or legally be disclosed, nor does it require every employee preference to determine implementation. It requires leaders to communicate known facts accurately, identify genuine uncertainty, explain decisions, acknowledge consequences, provide meaningful opportunities for relevant input, and connect communication with the resources employees need to adapt.

Future empirical research should validate the proposed framework using longitudinal employee data collected before, during, and after technology implementation. Particularly valuable studies could distinguish trust in senior leadership from trust in project teams, compare modernization programs involving automation with those involving less disruptive digital systems, and examine whether transparent communication has different effects when employment insecurity is high. Research should also measure actual technology usage, training completion, implementation errors, and post-implementation performance rather than relying exclusively on employee intentions. Ultimately, trustworthy communication should not be judged by whether it removes all resistance. During complex modernization, disagreement can reveal legitimate risks. A more meaningful criterion is whether organizational communication creates sufficient credibility, fairness, understanding, and capability for employees and leaders to confront those risks constructively.



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