https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/multidisciplinary
P - ISSN: 3048-2461
E - ISSN: 3048-1708

Communication as the Lifeblood of Islamic Educational Organizations: A Systems and Sensemaking Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background. Educational organizations increasingly operate within complex and dynamic environments that demand not only effectiveness but also long-term organizational sustainability. Despite this condition, communication in educational institutions is often treated instrumentally as a managerial tool, rather than as a constitutive process that sustains organizational coherence, learning, and ethical legitimacy. This limitation is particularly evident in Islamic educational organizations, where bureaucratic structures, cultural hierarchies, and normative values intersect.

Purpose. This article aims to reconceptualize communication as the lifeblood of Islamic educational organizations by integrating systems theory and sensemaking theory. It seeks to provide a theoretical framework that positions communication as a central sustainability mechanism enabling organizational integration, adaptive capacity, and meaning construction.

Method. This study employs a conceptual and theoretical analysis through critical synthesis of systems theory, organizational sensemaking theory, and Islamic communication ethics. Relevant literature from organizational communication, educational leadership, and Islamic education studies is systematically examined to develop an integrative conceptual framework.

Results. The analysis demonstrates that communication functions as the primary integrative flow connecting organizational subsystems, facilitating feedback loops, and enabling collective sensemaking. Within Islamic educational organizations, communicative principles such as shura (consultative deliberation), amanah (trust and responsibility), and an-naṣīḥah (ethical counsel) operate as ethical sensemaking practices that strengthen organizational coherence and sustainability.

Conclusion. The analysis shows that communication functions as a key integrative flow connecting organizational subsystems, facilitating feedback, and enabling collective sensemaking. In Islamic educational organizations, communicative principles such as *shura* (deliberation), *amanah* (trust and responsibility), and *an-naṣīḥah* (ethical advice) operate as ethical sensemaking practices that strengthen organizational coherence and sustainability.

KEYWORDS
Islamic Educational Organizations, Organizational Communication, Sensemaking, Sustainability, Systems Theory

Citation: Handoko, Y., Yamin, M., Widdah, M., E., & Huda, N. (2026). Communication as the Lifeblood of Islamic Educational Organizations: A Systems and Sensemaking Perspective. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Sustainability Asean*, *3*(1), 29-38.
https://doi.org/10.17323/humaniora.v3i1.3312

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Received: August 9, 2025

Accepted: January 25, 2026

Published: February 3, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Educational organizations today operate within increasingly complex and dynamic environments characterized by policy volatility, accountability pressures, digital transformation, and rising stakeholder expectations (Homer dkk., 2025). Within this context, sustainability has become a central concern, referring not merely to institutional survival but to the capacity of organizations to maintain coherence, continuous learning, and ethical legitimacy over time (Hargreaves & Fink, 2020; OECD, 2021). While structural reforms and leadership strategies are frequently emphasized in sustainability discourse, organizational communication remains an underexamined yet foundational dimension shaping the long-term viability of educational institutions.

In many educational settings, communication is still predominantly understood in instrumental terms as a managerial mechanism for transmitting information, coordinating tasks, or enforcing compliance (Engström dkk., 2025). Research has shown that such instrumental and hierarchical communication practices often contribute to fragmented decision-making, organizational silence, and symbolic participation, particularly within bureaucratic educational systems (Morrison, 2022). Although these organizations may appear structurally stable, they frequently experience latent dysfunctions that undermine professional engagement, trust, and organizational learning, thereby weakening sustainability (Men & Bowen, 2021).

Contemporary organizational scholarship increasingly challenges this instrumental view by repositioning communication as a constitutive process. The communication-as-constitutive-of-organization (CCO) perspective emphasizes that organizations are not merely supported by communication but are continuously produced and reproduced through communicative interactions (Winkler-Titus & Crafford, 2025). From this perspective, organizational structures, roles, and identities emerge through ongoing processes of interaction and meaning construction, making communication central to understanding how organizations function, adapt, and sustain themselves.

Sensemaking theory further strengthens this argument by highlighting how organizational members interpret ambiguity, construct shared meanings, and enact organizational realities through communication (Maitlis & Christianson, 2019). In educational organizations, policies, reforms, and institutional goals do not operate as objective or self-executing mechanisms; rather, they are continuously interpreted and negotiated by leaders, teachers, and staff within specific cultural and power contexts (Savolainen dkk., 2026). Sustainable organizational practices therefore depend on communicative processes that enable collective sensemaking, reflexivity, and coordinated action.

Systems theory provides an additional lens for understanding sustainability in educational organizations (Ashby-King dkk., 2025). As open systems, educational institutions consist of interdependent subsystems leadership, teaching and learning, administration, and community relations that must remain integrated and responsive to environmental changes (Von Bertalanffy, 2019; Stacey, 2022). Within this framework, communication functions as the primary integrative flow connecting inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback loops (Sharma dkk., 2024). When communication is dialogic and reflexive, systems enhance their balance and adaptive capacity; when communication is constrained by rigid hierarchies or symbolic participation, systems risk stagnation and loss of coherence.

Despite the relevance of these theoretical developments, their application to Islamic educational organizations remains limited in international scholarship (Flood & Carson, 2021). Islamic schools and madrasahs represent faith-based educational institutions that integrate academic objectives with moral and spiritual missions, positioning them at the intersection of professional education, bureaucratic governance, and religious values (Halstead, 2020; Sahin, 2021). Operating within cultural contexts shaped by norms of respect for authority and hierarchical relations, these

organizations face distinctive communicative challenges (Hofstede et al., 2022; Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2023). While such norms may support harmony and institutional stability, they can also reinforce high power distance and restrict dialogic communication if not critically engaged.

Existing studies on Islamic educational organizations have predominantly focused on leadership styles, instructional quality, or normative dimensions of Islamic values, often treating communication as a secondary or technical concern (Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2023). Moreover, Islamic values such as shura, amanah, and an-naṣīḥah are frequently presented prescriptively, without being examined as communicative practices embedded within contemporary organizational systems (Lee, 2023). This reveals a conceptual gap between sustainability-oriented organizational theory and research on Islamic education.

Addressing this gap, the present article reconceptualizes communication as the lifeblood of Islamic educational organizations by integrating systems theory and sensemaking theory within an ethical-communicative framework grounded in Islamic values (Yu dkk., 2026). Communication is positioned as a sustainability mechanism that animates organizational systems, enables meaning construction, and sustains ethical legitimacy (Alzeiby dkk., 2026). In this integrated framework, educational organizations are understood as open systems whose sustainability depends on the quality of communicative flows that bind subsystems into a coherent whole.

Within this framework, communication performs three interrelated functions (Mahadevan, 2024). First, as an integrative system flow, communication synchronizes interdependent subsystems leadership, teaching, administration, and community relations through continuous information exchange and feedback (Stacey, 2022). Second, as a sensemaking process, communication enables organizational members to enact, select, and retain shared interpretations that guide collective action (Kennedy dkk., 2024). Third, as an ethical practice, communication in Islamic educational organizations is shaped by values that regulate how dialogue, feedback, and trust are enacted.

Islamic communicative values function as embedded sensemaking practices within the organizational system (Schippers dkk., 2025). Shura (consultative deliberation) facilitates dialogic participation and collective interpretation, strengthening shared understanding and ownership of organizational goals (Halstead, 2020). Amanah (trust and responsibility) safeguards information integrity and accountability, reinforcing reliable communication flows across subsystems (Sahin, 2021). An-naṣīḥah (ethical counsel) operates as a constructive feedback mechanism that supports learning, correction, and moral alignment within the organization.

By integrating systems theory, sensemaking theory, and Islamic communicative ethics, this article proposes a unified conceptual framework in which communication operates as the lifeblood of Islamic educational organizations (Zhao dkk., 2024). Effective communicative flows generate sustainability outcomes in the form of organizational coherence, adaptive capacity, and ethical legitimacy (Blackman, 2025). This integrated perspective positions communication not as a peripheral managerial function, but as the constitutive and ethical foundation of sustainable educational organizations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual research design grounded in theoretical synthesis. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the research is oriented toward developing an integrative conceptual framework that explains the role of communication as a sustainability mechanism in Islamic educational organizations (Dadem, 2025). This approach is appropriate given the study's objective to advance theory by reconceptualizing organizational communication through the integration of systems theory, sensemaking theory, and Islamic communicative ethics.

The research employs a conceptual and analytical methodology commonly used in multidisciplinary sustainability and organizational studies (Stoian dkk., 2024). Conceptual research is designed to clarify, integrate, and extend existing theories in order to generate new theoretical insights. In this study, the design enables a systematic examination of how communication operates as a constitutive, systemic, and ethical process within educational organizations, particularly those grounded in Islamic values.

The primary data sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and authoritative policy reports relevant to organizational communication, systems theory, sensemaking, sustainability, and Islamic education (Wardekker dkk., 2023). Priority was given to international publications from the last five years to ensure theoretical relevance and currency, while foundational theoretical works were included where necessary to establish conceptual continuity. These sources were selected based on their direct relevance to the core constructs of communication, organizational sustainability, and faith-based educational contexts.

The analysis followed a structured theoretical synthesis process (Winch & Hajikazemi, 2025). First, key concepts and propositions from systems theory, sensemaking theory, and organizational communication literature were identified and compared to uncover convergent themes related to sustainability and organizational coherence. Second, these themes were analytically linked with Islamic communicative values shura, amanah, and an-naṣīḥah to examine their function as ethical sensemaking practices within organizational systems. Third, insights from these theoretical domains were integrated to construct a unified conceptual framework positioning communication as the lifeblood of Islamic educational organizations.

To ensure conceptual rigor and trustworthiness, the study applied several strategies. Theoretical triangulation was employed by drawing on multiple, well-established theoretical traditions. Conceptual consistency was maintained by using clearly defined constructs and aligning them systematically across theories (Mousa dkk., 2023). In addition, the framework was developed through iterative comparison with existing sustainability and organizational communication literature to ensure coherence, plausibility, and analytical robustness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the proposed conceptual framework that positions communication as the lifeblood of Islamic educational organizations (Mousa dkk., 2025). As a conceptual study, the “results” of this research are expressed in the form of an integrative theoretical model that explains how communication functions as a sustainability mechanism through systems integration, collective sensemaking, and ethical communicative practices. The discussion situates this model within existing organizational and educational sustainability literature while highlighting its distinctive contribution.

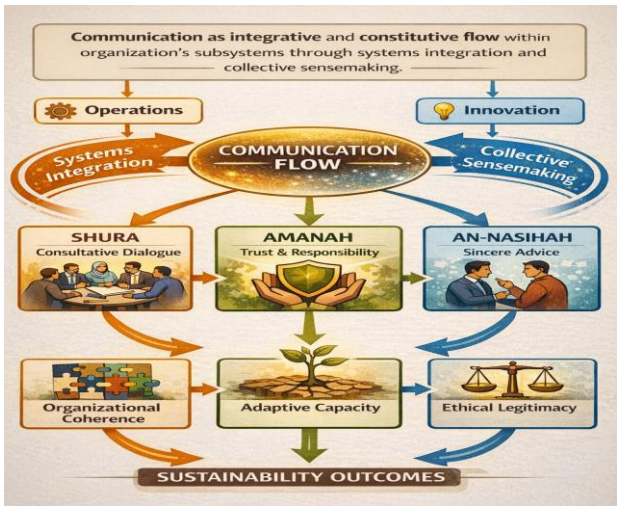

Figure 1. Communication as the Lifeblood of Islamic Educational Organizations

Figure 1 illustrates communication as a continuous, circular flow that connects the core subsystems of Islamic educational organizations leadership, teaching and learning, administration, and community relations. At the center of the model lies communication as an integrative process that enables coordination, meaning construction, and ethical alignment across subsystems. The model incorporates systems theory by emphasizing feedback loops and interdependence, while sensemaking theory explains how shared meanings are enacted, selected, and retained through communicative interactions (Price dkk., 2023). Islamic communicative values (shura, amanah, and an-naṣīḥah) function as ethical reinforcements that regulate the quality and direction of communication flows, ultimately producing sustainability outcomes in the form of organizational coherence, adaptive capacity, and ethical legitimacy.

Communication as an Integrative Systemic Flow

From a systems perspective, the model demonstrates that communication operates as the primary integrative mechanism linking organizational subsystems. Educational organizations function as open systems that depend on continuous information exchange and feedback to maintain balance and respond to environmental demands (Bertella, 2023). In Islamic educational organizations, leadership decisions, instructional practices, administrative processes, and community engagement are deeply interdependent. Communication synchronizes these elements by enabling coordination and alignment between organizational goals and daily practices.

When communication flows effectively across subsystems, feedback loops support organizational learning and adaptation. Conversely, when communication is constrained by rigid hierarchies or symbolic participation, feedback is weakened, resulting in fragmentation and reduced responsiveness (Clegg, 2024). This finding aligns with sustainability-oriented systems research, which emphasizes that ineffective communication undermines systemic coherence and long-term viability. The proposed model extends this insight by showing that communication is not merely a conduit within the system, but the dynamic force that animates the system itself.

Sensemaking and the Construction of Organizational Meaning

The framework further highlights communication as a sensemaking process through which organizational members interpret ambiguity and construct shared meanings. In educational organizations, policies, reforms, and institutional visions require interpretation before they can

guide action (Aleem dkk., 2023). Sensemaking occurs through everyday communicative practices such as meetings, deliberations, informal discussions, and feedback exchanges.

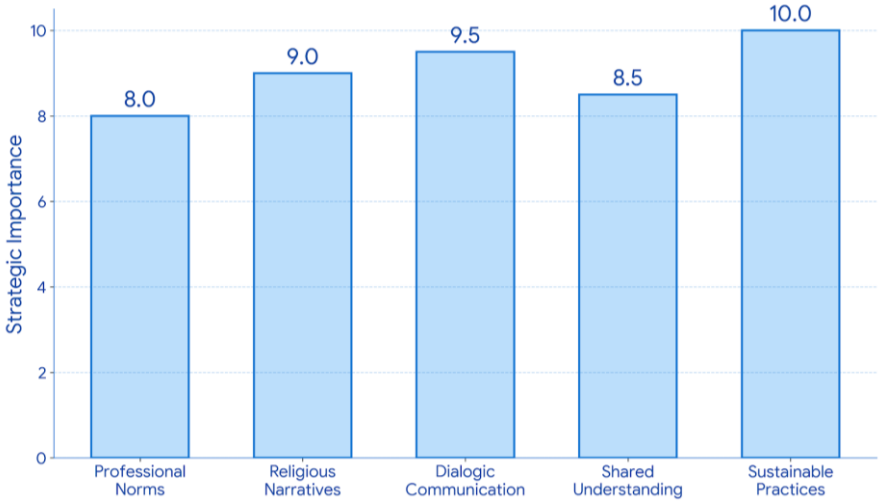

Figure 2. Sensemaking & sustainability model in islmaic organizations

Within Islamic educational organizations, sensemaking is shaped by both professional norms and religious narratives. Communication enables organizational members to enact their environment, negotiate interpretations, and stabilize shared understandings that inform collective action (Nabila dkk., 2024). Sustainable organizational practices emerge when sensemaking processes are dialogic and inclusive, allowing multiple perspectives to be expressed and integrated. The model thus reinforces the argument that sustainability depends not only on structural arrangements, but on communicative spaces that facilitate shared understanding and coordinated meaning-making.

Islamic Communicative Values as Ethical Sensemaking Practices

A distinctive contribution of this study lies in its treatment of Islamic values as communicative practices rather than abstract moral ideals. In the proposed model, shura (consultative deliberation) functions as a dialogic mechanism that enables participatory sensemaking and collective interpretation (Putra & Gatari, 2024). Through shura, communication becomes a shared process of inquiry rather than a unidirectional transmission of authority.

Amanah (trust and responsibility) reinforces the integrity of communication flows by emphasizing honesty, accountability, and reliability in information exchange. Trust-based communication strengthens organizational coherence by reducing uncertainty and fostering mutual commitment. Meanwhile, an-naṣīḥah (ethical counsel) operates as a constructive feedback mechanism that supports learning, correction, and moral alignment. Together, these values regulate communication quality and ensure that sensemaking processes remain ethically grounded.

By integrating these values into systems and sensemaking perspectives, the model demonstrates how Islamic educational organizations can sustain both organizational effectiveness and moral legitimacy. This approach moves beyond normative discussions of Islamic values by embedding them within contemporary organizational theory.

Sustainability Outcomes: Coherence, Adaptation, and Ethical Legitimacy

The final component of the model identifies three interrelated sustainability outcomes produced by effective communicative lifeblood. First, organizational coherence emerges when communication aligns goals, roles, and practices across subsystems (Adeyeye, 2024). Second,

adaptive capacity is strengthened through robust feedback loops that enable learning and responsiveness to change. Third, ethical legitimacy is sustained when communication practices reflect shared values and foster trust among organizational members and stakeholders.

These outcomes resonate with multidisciplinary sustainability scholarship, which emphasizes that sustainable organizations balance performance, adaptability, and ethical responsibility. The proposed framework contributes to this discourse by positioning communication as the central mechanism through which such balance is achieved in Islamic educational organizations.

Theoretical Implications

The findings presented in this conceptual model extend organizational communication theory by demonstrating how faith-based educational organizations provide analytically rich contexts for examining communication as a constitutive and ethical process (Komariah, 2024). Unlike prior studies that treat communication as a managerial variable, this framework positions communication as the foundational process sustaining organizational life. Furthermore, by integrating systems theory, sensemaking theory, and Islamic communicative ethics, the model offers a multidisciplinary approach to understanding sustainability in education.

The framework also provides practical implications for leadership and governance in Islamic educational organizations. Leaders are encouraged to cultivate dialogic communication spaces, strengthen ethical feedback mechanisms, and view communication as a strategic resource for sustainability rather than a technical function. Future empirical research can use this model as an analytical lens to examine communication practices, power relations, and sustainability outcomes in diverse educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This article reconceptualizes communication as the lifeblood of Islamic educational organizations by integrating systems theory, sensemaking theory, and Islamic communicative ethics within a sustainability-oriented framework. Moving beyond instrumental and normative approaches, the study positions communication as a constitutive process that animates organizational systems, enables collective meaning-making, and sustains ethical legitimacy. By embedding Islamic values such as shura, amanah, and an-naṣīḥah as communicative practices rather than abstract ideals, the proposed framework contributes a novel theoretical lens to multidisciplinary sustainability scholarship and extends organizational communication theory into faith-based educational contexts.

The framework offers important implications for leadership, governance, and sustainability in Islamic educational organizations. Leaders are encouraged to cultivate dialogic communication spaces, strengthen ethical feedback mechanisms, and view communication as a strategic resource for long-term organizational coherence and adaptability. While the study is conceptual in nature, it provides a foundation for future empirical research to examine how communication practices shape power relations, sensemaking processes, and sustainability outcomes across diverse educational settings. Ultimately, positioning communication as the ethical and systemic lifeblood of educational organizations opens new pathways for sustainable governance and institutional resilience in value-based education systems.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Perplexity AI solely to assist with text translation. After using these tools/services, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.
Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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