

## **ABSTRACT**

As Sri Lanka is a post-colonial transitional society, it is a challenging task to transform the order that prevails to one that is inspired by democratic governance at the local level to suit modern practices. The colonially inherited organizational structures even after seven decades continue with a master-servant relationship leading to a subservient culture which has a negative impact on organizational communication culture with a participatory approach, consultative decision-making process and a service-delivery mechanism at the local level. To overcome these challenges, from time to time governments have appointed committees, prescribed benchmarks to institutionalized best practices, implemented administrative management tools to local authorities to enhance service-delivery systems, but have failed to bring about a significant change to the local administration. This dissertation explores the challenges faced at local authority level to establish a vibrant pro-people organizational communication culture. It also seeks to examine the sustainability of establishing a culture which contributes towards a democratic way of life for the citizenry.

This study employs a mix approach with qualitative and quantitative methods and for the purpose of this study concurrent triangulation design of the mix method is adopted. The study covers twenty seven (27) local government authorities across all nine (09) provinces of Sri Lanka. Key stakeholders connected with the prevailing order at the local level, namely the elected members, public officials and the local communities represents the sample. The elected members selected for the study were interviewed through ethnographic accounts, and a survey was conducted among the public officials and focus group discussions among the local communities to ascertain the ground realities.

The findings have revealed there are manifold constraints contributing towards establishing a vibrant organizational communication culture at the local level. Firstly, a dynamic organizational communicational culture at the local level is not firmly established. Secondly, the mechanisms set-up for decision making process is not properly installed. Thirdly, there is no robust legal mechanisms and procedures that facilitate public participation across local authorities.

Fourthly, the gap between the ruler and the ruled at local level is widened due to the present electoral system and the territorial divisions in categorizing local authorities. Fifthly, the state has failed to institutionalize best practices at the local level as well as in training key stakeholders to fit in to the modern democratic system. Finally, checks and balances placed for service-delivery processes at the local level are not properly installed leading to dysfunctional practices, lack of social capital, and trust between the elected members and the public officials with the local community.

These findings indicate that in order to establish a dynamic organizational communication culture at the local level, systems need to be introduced in a systematic manner than in an adhoc manner. Based on these findings, this research has recommended a new model to overcome the uncovered barriers to install a vibrant culture at the local level which enables a dynamic participatory approach, democratic decision-making process, supported by institutionalized best practices. On one hand vibrant organizational communication culture enables key stakeholders to be equal partners, while on the other hand, efficient service delivery at the local level enhances the capacities of all key stakeholders. Thus this new model is equipped to overcome colonially inherited mentality and the bureaucratic culture at the local level to establish an organizational communication culture that is democratic.