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Enhancing Adaptive Team Performance: Impact of team functional factors in teams operating in dynamic environments

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Abstract
Adaptive team performance is essential in high-pressure, unpredictable environments. This study investigates the impact of team coordination and team communication on adaptive team performance. Data were collected from 230 team members using structured questionnaires and analyzed through Partial Least Squares (PLS). Results reveal significant and positive relationships between coordination and communication, and adaptive team performance. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening team functional processes to enhance responsiveness and resilience. The study provides practical insights for enhancing team effectiveness in dynamic operational environments, particularly where rapid decision-making and flexibility are essential for success in unpredictable and challenging conditions.

Keywords: adaptive team performance; team coordination; team communication; response teams.

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1.0 Introduction

In today's work environment, teamwork has become important across industries, recognized for its ability to merge diverse skills and perspectives to achieve common objectives (Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024; Rico et al., 2019). Teamwork involves collaborative efforts where individuals with varying expertise, backgrounds, and skills unite together to pursue shared goals. This approach highlights the importance of cooperation, collective accountability, and joint problem-solving, which can enhance creativity and productivity (Kaffka, 2024; Rico et al., 2019). Teams often comprise members with complementary abilities, allowing them to effectively manage complex and dynamic challenges. Effective teamwork relies on critical processes such as communication, coordination, and mutual support, enabling teams to adapt efficiently to evolving demands (Wiltshire et al., 2022).

Response teams are also included in practicing teamwork in their work environment. Teamwork plays a crucial role in crisis response teams, where the ability to adapt, coordinate, and respond swiftly is vital for meeting the demands of today's increasingly complex landscape. Response teams face numerous challenges, including limited budgets, high-pressure service expectations, complex operational settings, technological risks, and evolving regulatory standards (Kolbe et al., 2023). To enhance adaptability and creativity, teams can adopt initiatives such as improving communication by refining how they share information, provide and follow instructions,

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and exchange critical details. The ability of response teams to adapt swiftly and effectively to changing circumstances is important for maintaining public safety and responding to crises. Edmondson and Harvey et al. (2025) asserted that adaptive team performance is defined as a team's capability to modify behaviors, strategies, and processes in response to situational demands. In the context of response teams in Malaysia, this adaptability is essential due to the diverse and dynamic nature of operational tasks.

Previous research has highlighted several contributors to adaptive performance, team coordination and communication remaining two of the most influential factors (Steegh et al., 2025; Rosen et al., 2011). This paper aims to examine how team coordination and team communication drive adaptive team performance in Malaysian response teams and how these factors interact to enable teams to navigate complex operational scenarios.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The research framework is adopted and adapted from the study of Rosen et al. (2011), which focuses on the roles of team functional factors in achieving adaptive team performance. Team coordination refers to the activity of assigning tasks and resources within the teams to accomplish a specific mission. Team communication is one of the primary vehicles for interaction between team members. Communication data provide a rich record that assists with understanding cognition (Park & Park, 2021). Team communication is crucial in completing tasks because it leads to a high adaptive team performance. As a result, team coordination and team communication, influence the intensity and direction of adaptive team performance toward mission accomplishment.

2.1 Adaptive Team Performance in the Malaysian Response Teams

Malaysian response teams play a vital role in the public sector where adaptive teamwork is essential for mission success. These teams must remain flexible and well-prepared to handle a wide range of situations, often relying on advanced technologies and community-based policing strategies. Their ability to adapt quickly to unpredictable conditions is critical. Effective communication, coordination, and collaboration among team members and with other agencies are key to ensuring smooth operations and the achievement of objectives (Esmaeili et al., 2025).

The effectiveness of response teams largely depends on the skills and actions of their members. Team members must be able to accurately assess situations, make quick decisions, and adjust strategies as situations evolve (Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson, 2025). These teams are often the first to respond during emergencies such as terrorism, public unrest, cybercrime, environmental disasters, health crises, and major criminal incidents (O'Brien et al., 2020). Their performance has direct implications in critical situations where lives may be at stake. The speed of response, clarity of communication, teamwork, negotiation skills, and problem-solving capabilities are essential in determining their success in protecting public safety.

Response teams are responsible for a wide variety of tasks to support community safety and uphold the law. These tasks include preventing and investigating crimes such as theft, assault, vandalism, and drug offenses. They conduct regular patrols and monitor public areas to deter illegal activities and respond swiftly to emergencies. In traffic management, they ensure road safety, manage traffic flow, and investigate accidents. As first responders, they provide critical support until specialized services arrive. They also collect evidence, conduct interviews, and locate suspects. Community engagement involves promoting safety awareness and addressing local issues (O'Brien et al., 2020).

For crime prevention, teams conduct surveillance, support watch programs, and collaborate with safety agencies. During large events or protests, they manage crowds and ensure public order. Internally, they maintain records, train new personnel, and manage resources.

2.2 Team functional factors

Team functional factors encompass the operational aspects of team dynamics that contribute to the team's ability to efficiently and effectively achieve its goals and objectives. These factors are focused on the practical execution of tasks, processes, and workflows within the team. In the context of this study, the team functional factors are team coordination and team communication. Effective adaptive team performance depends on how teams coordinate their activities to complete operations and maintain effective communication practices, where team members and leaders communicate freely and frequently to improve results (Liu et al., 2020). Additionally, the internal factor that affects team performance is team leadership, where the team leader plays a crucial role in influencing team members and providing direction to establish goals (Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson, 2025).

2.2.1 Team coordination

Team coordination refers to the ability of members to collaborate seamlessly toward shared goals (Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024). In policing, coordination extends beyond internal teamwork to include multi-agency partnerships. Complex operations such as missing person cases or murder investigations require diverse agencies, each with distinct procedures and technologies, to transition from independent functioning to interdependent networks (Qiao et al., 2023). For example, in a murder case, rapid teams, firefighters, emergency services, local authorities, and utility companies worked together to locate victims (Kosmo, 2024). Each agency pursued specific objectives including incident management, search and rescue, and public communication (Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024).

Robinson et al. (2023) describe team coordination as an adaptive process that emerges from interactions among members, where strategies evolve in response to situational demands and individual contributions. Coordination patterns are flexible and adjust to changing contexts and team dynamics (Qiao., 2023). Rosen et al. (2011) also emphasize that coordination quality depends on the clarity, frequency, and effectiveness of communication. In policing, strategies must remain fluid to address challenges such as crisis

negotiations or tactical responses under pressure. Effective coordination is built on shared experiences, established communication channels, and mutual trust among members.

Multi-agency coordination often faces challenges. Sert et al. (2024) identify communication breakdowns, role ambiguity, and procedural misalignments as common obstacles to effective collaboration. Clear communication and well-defined responsibilities help mitigate these challenges, enabling cohesive operations among tactical units, emergency services, and community organizations. Effective coordination improves operational outcomes and strengthens public trust. Adaptive strategies, marked by situational flexibility and responsiveness, are critical in managing high-stakes scenarios. Teams must also recognize how their actions affect partner agencies and the wider community to ensure sustainable effectiveness.

Rico et al. (2019) complements these perspectives by examining inter-agency coordination in crime prevention and investigation. They highlight bureaucratic barriers, communication silos, and conflicting priorities as persistent challenges. To address these issues, they propose unified operational protocols, joint training exercises, and advanced technological tools for real-time information sharing and exchange. Building stronger inter-agency relationships and clarifying roles are also essential for enhancing coordination.

The relationship between team coordination and adaptive team performance is well established. Studies consistently demonstrate a positive correlation between these constructs (Rico et al., 2019). Adaptive coordination ensures clarity in roles, tasks, and objectives, thereby minimizing confusion, reducing task redundancy, and facilitating rapid responses to situational changes. In crisis operations, effective coordination ensures that all team members are aligned with overarching goals, enabling agile responses to unpredictable events (Sert et al., 2024). Teams with strong coordination are better positioned to integrate new information, overcome challenges, and sustain operational coherence, thereby enhancing adaptive performance.

Based on the aforementioned discussions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significantly positive relationship between team coordination and adaptive team performance.

2.2.1 Team communication

Team communication refers to the exchange of information, coordination of tasks, and mutual updates among members to achieve shared objectives (Müller et al., 2023). It encompasses both verbal and non-verbal interactions and plays a critical role in facilitating coordination, situational awareness, and adaptive performance. Frontline teams, such as response units, often rely on direct human-to-human communication, but under high stress this reliance can lead to delays and miscommunication (Müller et al., 2023).

Rico et al. (2019), similarly defined team communication as the exchange of verbal and non-verbal information, identifying three key elements: clarity of shared information, frequency and quality of interactions, and knowledge sharing. These factors together drive overall team performance. Bedwell (2019) emphasized communication as the process of sharing information, ideas, and feedback to promote mutual understanding and coordinated action. Communication supports three main functions: aligning members with goals and roles, synchronizing efforts in response to changes, and enabling strategic adjustments in the face of unexpected challenges.

Empirical evidence suggests that effective team communication is linked to adaptive performance. Ab Halim et al. (2021) and Müller et al. (2023) found that clear communication enhances synchronization, allowing teams to share critical updates about tasks, resources, and environmental changes. In dynamic settings such as violent crime response or public disturbances, concise communication enables quick responses, tactical shifts, and coordinated movement. Real-time updates via radio, hand signals, or other tools support situational awareness and effective adaptation.

Sert et al. (2024) noted that while response teams operate with predefined roles, dynamic operations often demand flexibility. Communication smooths the transition to non-routine tasks, such as when officers adapt roles during riot management. It also underpins error detection and management—open, timely exchanges allow early identification of mistakes, correction of errors, and mitigation of risks. Post-operation debriefings provide another communication channel, enabling teams to reflect, identify gaps, and refine future strategies.

Over time, experienced teams often evolve from relying on explicit communication (verbal instructions) to implicit coordination (non-verbal cues). Nevertheless, explicit communication remains vital when addressing complex, novel, or rapidly evolving situations. A study by Müller et al. (2023) demonstrates that both manual and automated communication have an impact on coordination and adaptation. In high-pressure operations where verbal communication is constrained, non-verbal signals such as gestures, eye contact, or body positioning become essential. Trust and familiarity further strengthen non-verbal exchanges, improving coordination and adaptive performance (Rico et al., 2019).

Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: There is a significantly positive relationship between team communication and adaptive team performance.

Based on the discussion mentioned above, this study proposed the conceptual model as depicted in Figure 1. This paper aims to investigate the relationship between team coordination and team communication in adaptive team performance within response teams.

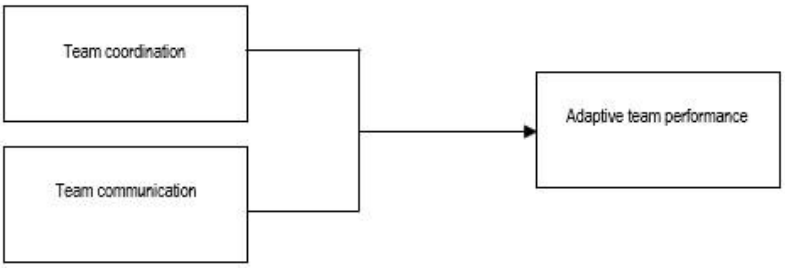

Fig. 1: Research Model
(Source: Researcher)

3.0 Methodology

This research aims to investigate the relationships between team coordination and team communication in relation to adaptive team performance. This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach. The response teams were chosen because they are the most active, elite, skilled, and equipped team in Malaysia, dealing with various of criminal cases and maintaining public safety. Data were initially collected at the individual level and later aggregated to the team level to reflect shared team perceptions. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 230 response team members in a non-fixed setting. The study comprised 230 response team members from the southern region of Malaysia, specifically Johor, Malacca, and Negeri Sembilan. The population of this study consisted of 1000 response team members. By referring to Hill (1998), the sample size could be above 10% of the population (100 team members).

This research used the purposive sampling technique. According to Sekaran (2016), purposive sampling involves obtaining information from a specific target group, rather than from those who are conveniently available. This sampling technique was selected because it only focused on the target group, i.e., response teams that carry out criminal cases in unpredictable environments. Therefore, only the response team in Malaysia was involved in this sampling technique. The unit of analysis was the team. Inclusion criteria for this study were response team members who were actively involved in frontline operational duties, had a minimum of six months of experience in their current team, and were stationed in the southern region of Malaysia. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria included administrative personnel, trainees or probationary officers, non-response unit members, and incomplete questionnaires.

3.1 Measurements

Adaptive team performance consists of eight dimensions such as (1) handling emergencies and crises (four items), (2) managing work stress (six items), (3) solving problems creatively (five items), (4) dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations (four items), (5) training and learning effort (five items), (6) interpersonal adaptability (five items), (7) cultural adaptability (four items) and (8) physical adaptability (three items). In total, there are 36 items for adaptive team performance (Charbonnier-Voirin & Roussel, 2012). Team coordination scale was adapted from Rico et al. (2019) and consisted of 13 items. Besides, team communication scale consisted of 12 items and was adapted from Zwijze-Koning & de Jong (2007). Adaptive team performance and team communication were measured via a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree (Ab Halim et al., 2021). Meanwhile team coordination were measured by using a five-point Likert Scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The reliability of each measurement is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability analysis of research instruments

Construct	Reliability	Source
Adaptive team performance	0.91	Charbonnier-Voirin & Roussel (2012)
Team coordination	0.80	Rico et al. (2019)
Team communication	0.93	Zwijze-Koning & de Jong (2008)

(Source: Researcher)

4.0 Data Analysis

Respondents' demographics and descriptive data such as percentages and frequencies were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29 software for Windows. For deeper analysis and hypothesis testing, data in this research was analyzed using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique using partial least square analysis by SmartPLS Version 4 (Ringle, 2022). The model's strength was also evaluated via R2 and Q2 statistics following Chin and Newsted (1999).

4.1 Demographic profile

A descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the demographic profile of the respondents. The majority of respondents were aged between 31 and 40 years (46.1%) and predominantly of Malay ethnicity (88.3%). The sample was largely male (85.7%), with females representing only 14.3% of the participants. In terms of educational attainment, nearly half of the respondents (48.3%) held the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) qualification. The most commonly held rank was Corporal (KPL), accounting for 28.3% of the sample.

Regarding service length, the highest proportion had between 1 and 10 years of experience (39.6%). Additionally, 67.4% of the respondents identified themselves as team members, while 32.6% held leadership positions.

4.2 Assessment of measurement model

Convergent validity was assessed to verify the measurement model by examining indicator loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Table 2, all construct loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.50, consistent with the criteria established by Hair et al. (2016). Additionally, each construct's AVE exceeded the recommended minimum value of 0.50, aligning with guidelines from Hair et al. (2016). The measures for team coordination, team communication, and adaptive team performance met the acceptable standards for convergent validity.

Table 2. Outer loading values, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of adaptive team performance, team coordination and team communication

Construct	CR	AVE
Adaptive team performance	0.974	0.558
Team coordination	0.953	0.648
Team communication	0.913	0.521

(Source: Researcher)

Following the assessment of convergent validity, discriminant validity was evaluated to confirm that each construct was distinct and measured a unique concept. This ensured that the variables accurately represented their intended dimensions. Discriminant validity was determined by analyzing the correlations among the constructs. The results showed that the correlations for each construct were lower than the square root of their respective AVEs. These values are displayed diagonally in Table 3. In addition, cross-loadings were examined to verify that each indicator loaded highest on its corresponding construct.

Table 3. Correlation values for adaptive team performance, team coordination and team communication

	Adaptive team performance	Team coordination	Team communication
Adaptive team performance	**0.755**		
Team coordination	0.747	**0.805**	
Team communication	0.748	0.722	**0.778**

(Source: Researcher)

Table 4. Path Coefficient for team coordination, team communication and adaptive team performance

	t-value	p-value	Decision
Team coordination → adaptive team performance	3.833	0.000	Supported
Team communication → adaptive team performance	3.666	0.000	Supported

(Source: Researcher)

4.3 Hypothesis testing

The relationships between the independent variables (exogenous variables) and the dependent variables (endogenous variables) were determined through hypothesis testing. Table 4 exhibits the path coefficient values between the independent variables and dependent variables. The nonparametric bootstrapping method was used to test the path coefficients for significance. In SmartPLS Version 4, t-values is generated alongside p-values, where $t \geq 1.645$ is equivalent to $p < 0.05$. Team coordination significantly affected adaptive team performance (t=3.833, p=0.000). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported. Team communication also has a significant positive relationship with adaptive team performance (t=3.666, p=0.000). Hence, hypothesis 2 was also supported.

5.0 Discussions

The findings from this study provide strong empirical support for the positive and significant relationships between team coordination, team communication, and adaptive team performance among response teams in Malaysia. These results are consistent with earlier research by Rosen et al. (2011) who emphasized that coordination and communication are vital to effective team adaptability in dynamic and high-pressure environments. The findings are further supported by recent evidence from Setiyadi et al. (2024) and Steegh et al. (2025).

The significant impact of team coordination on adaptive performance highlights the importance of structured task integration and resource alignment in crisis operations. In critical situations, such as crime response or disaster management, Malaysian response teams that exhibit synchronized actions and a clear distribution of responsibilities are better able to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. This reinforces the notion that coordination enables the team to function as a cohesive unit rather than as isolated individuals.

Similarly, the strong positive relationship between team communication and adaptive performance confirms that open, continuous, and purposeful communication is essential in improving shared situational awareness and informed decision-making. In the context of Malaysian response work, effective communication ensures that critical information flows smoothly across hierarchies and units, supporting the swift execution of complex tasks. These findings are in line with Wiltshire et al. (2022), who suggest that communication acts as a cognitive bridge that underpins team understanding and adaptability. This interpretation is further reinforced by recent studies emphasizing communication, sensemaking and adaptive performance in crisis and professional settings (Kaffka et al., 2025; Gigliotti & Alvarez-Robinson, 2025). Moreover, the results validate the proposed theoretical framework based on Rosen et al. (2011), which positions coordination and communication as key functional mechanisms that enhance adaptive performance. The context-specific

relevance of this model in Malaysian policing emphasizes the transferability of adaptive team performance theory into real-world, high-stakes public service settings (Setiyadi et al., 2024; Steegh et al., 2025).

Beyond validating the proposed framework, the findings extend adaptive team performance theory by confirming the importance of coordination and communication in a high-risk public sector context and highlight the practical need for structured coordination mechanisms and effective communication practices to enhance adaptability during complex and time-critical operations.

Despite these encouraging findings, it is worth noting that the study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce subjective bias. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Additionally, the sample is drawn exclusively from Peninsular Malaysia, potentially limiting the generalizability to response teams in East Malaysia or other regions with different operational dynamics.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that team coordination and communication are vital for improving adaptive team performance in Malaysian response teams. As law enforcement faces complex and unpredictable environments, strengthening these team functions is essential for effective and safe responses. Organizations should invest in training that enhances coordination and communication practices. Future research could examine other factors such as leadership, trust, and psychological safety to better understand adaptive performance. Using qualitative or observational methods may offer deeper insights into real-time teamwork. Overall, the findings support efforts to build more flexible and capable response teams for high-pressure and dynamic situations. Future research should examine additional factors such as interpersonal factors (team support, cognition and psychological safety) using qualitative approaches to gain deeper insights into real-time team interactions in crisis situations.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the field of organizational behavior and human resource development by providing empirical evidence on how strengthening team coordination and communication can enhance adaptive performance among public sector teams operating in dynamic and high-pressure environments.

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