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THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN MANAGEMENT AN INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract: Communication is a core managerial process through which goals are interpreted, knowledge is shared, decisions are coordinated, and working relationships are maintained. These functions become more complex in multinational organisations, where employees may differ in language proficiency, cultural expectations, professional norms, time zones, and access to communication technologies. This conceptual article develops an integrative framework that explains how these contextual conditions interact with managerial communication practices to shape team outcomes. Drawing on organisational sensemaking, intercultural communication, media richness theory, social exchange and organisational trust, psychological safety, and leadership communication, the article argues that communication effectiveness is not a direct consequence of cultural similarity or technology choice alone. Rather, it emerges when messages are understandable, channels fit the task and the participants, leaders invite contribution, and team members can clarify meaning without fear of interpersonal penalty. Trust, psychological safety, and shared sensemaking are proposed as related but distinct mechanisms linking communication practices to coordination, knowledge sharing, learning, and performance. The article also identifies limits in national-culture frameworks and fixed media hierarchies, and draws on recent research on global virtual teams and digital communication. Six propositions are presented for future empirical testing. Because the manuscript is a conceptual synthesis rather than a systematic review or an empirical study, it does not claim exhaustive coverage or report original data. Its contribution is a clearly bounded, testable framework for international management research and practice.

Keywords: managerial communication; multinational organisations; intercultural communication; global virtual teams; trust; psychological safety; media choice; leadership

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Communication is more than the transmission of information from one organisational member to another. It is also how people interpret priorities, negotiate responsibilities, build shared understandings, and judge whether it is safe to raise concerns. Barnard (1938)[1] treated communication as a central function of executive coordination, while Weick (1979)[2] emphasised that organising depends on continuing processes of interpretation and sensemaking. On this view, the quality of communication affects not only whether information is received but also whether people give it sufficiently compatible meanings to act together.

These issues carry particular weight in multinational enterprises, where cross-border teams often coordinate work across languages, time zones, professional systems, and cultural expectations. A manager's concise message may strike one employee as efficient and another as abrupt, and silence may signal agreement, deference, uncertainty, or disagreement depending on the situation. Digital channels add further choices. A written message creates a record and gives recipients time to formulate a response, whereas a live meeting may allow faster clarification but can disadvantage participants who are less fluent in the working language or who have limited opportunities to speak.

Research on global virtual teams has consistently identified communication, trust, leadership, culture, and technology as interconnected themes rather than isolated variables. Lynden's (2024)[3] meta-review of 35 reviews describes a shift toward viewing virtuality as a continuum and points to the continuing relevance of trust, leadership, culture, and communication technology. A communication-focused review by Liu (2025),[4] based on 51 empirical studies, similarly examines the interplay between communication, culture, tools, and human factors in global virtual teams. Empirical work also suggests that the alignment of communication channels within a team can matter for sociability and coordination, and not merely whether a team works virtually (Wong et al., 2024).[5]

Despite this accumulated knowledge, a practical and theoretical challenge remains. Cultural frameworks, channel-selection theories, leadership research, trust models, and psychological-safety research often operate at different levels of analysis, and they can

1. [1] Barnard, C. I. (1938). The functions of the executive. Harvard University Press.
2. [2] Weick, K. E. (1979). The social psychology of organizing (2nd ed.). Addison-Wesley.
3. [3] Lynden, K. D. (2024). A meta-review of global virtual team research: Thematic insights and future directions. Cross Cultural & Strategic Management, 31(2), 205–242. https://doi.org/10.1108/CCSM-11-2022-0196
4. [4] Liu, X. (2025). Bridging cultures in virtual workplaces: A communication-focused review of global virtual teams. Business and Professional Communication Quarterly. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/23294906251327747
5. [5] Wong, S. I., Zhang, L., Černe, M., & Moe, N. B. (2024). Influence of digital communication configuration in virtual teams: A faultline perspective. Journal of Management Information Systems, 41(4), 1111–1141. https://doi.org/10.1080/07421222.2024.2415776

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be combined too loosely, as if national culture, an individual's language skill, a team's psychological safety, and an organisation's technology policy were interchangeable explanations. This article addresses the problem by specifying how the constructs relate and by distinguishing contextual conditions from communication practices, mechanisms, and outcomes.

1.1. Aim and research questions

The aim is to develop a conceptually integrated framework of managerial communication effectiveness in multinational organisations, with particular attention to multicultural and global virtual teams. The article addresses three questions:

Through which mechanisms does managerial communication influence coordination, knowledge sharing, learning, and team performance?

How do cultural expectations, language, channel design, and leadership practices interact to shape communication effectiveness?

What testable propositions and practical implications follow when foundational theories are combined critically rather than treated as independent explanations?

1.2. Scope and contribution

The term “multinational organisations” refers here to multinational enterprises and their cross-border units and teams, not to intergovernmental bodies. The article is conceptual. It synthesises selected foundational theories and recent publications to propose relationships that can be tested in future research, and it does not claim to be a systematic review. Such a review would require a reproducible database search, explicit eligibility criteria, screening records, and a documented synthesis procedure; those steps have not been carried out for this draft.

The contribution is threefold. First, the article distinguishes the contextual conditions of communication from the practices that managers can influence. Second, it specifies trust, psychological safety, and shared sensemaking as related but non-identical mechanisms. Third, it proposes boundary conditions, including task ambiguity, language asymmetry, status differences, and the degree of virtuality, instead of assuming that any one communication style or channel is universally effective.

2. Conceptual foundations

2.1. Organisational communication and shared sensemaking

Organisational communication is constitutive of coordination: it helps establish goals, clarify roles, make decisions actionable, and maintain feedback loops. Weick's (1979)[6] sensemaking perspective is useful for international management because employees may receive the same message yet interpret it through different professional, linguistic, or situational frames. Communication effectiveness should

6. [6] Weick, K. E. (1979). The social psychology of organizing (2nd ed.). Addison-Wesley.

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therefore be judged partly by whether teams can surface and resolve divergent interpretations, and not only by the speed or volume of messages.

Shared sensemaking does not require identical viewpoints, only sufficient alignment about the task, the rationale for decisions, and the next actions. Managers can support it by stating assumptions explicitly, checking understanding, summarising decisions, and inviting team members to identify alternative readings. These practices matter most when a message concerns change, conflict, risk, or interdependent work.

2.2. Culture: useful context, not a fixed explanation

Hofstede's cultural-dimensions framework (Hofstede, 1980)[7] and Hall's distinction between high- and low-context communication (Hall, 1976)[8] remain influential starting points for thinking about differences in hierarchy, directness, uncertainty, and the use of contextual cues. For example, employees may differ in how comfortable they feel challenging a senior manager in a group meeting or how explicitly they expect a request to be worded. Such frameworks can help managers ask about expectations that might otherwise remain unspoken.

However, national categories should not be treated as reliable descriptions of every individual. McSweeney (2002)[9] challenged the assumptions and inferences used in applications of Hofstede's model, while later discussion of Hall's high-/low-context distinction has highlighted the need to examine how the concept is used and operationalised (Kittler et al., 2011).[10] Within-country differences, organisational cultures, occupational identities, generation, personality, migration experience, and the immediate situation can all shape communication. National-culture scores are aggregate-level indicators and should not be assigned to individual employees as if they were personal traits.

This framework therefore treats culture as a contextual moderator: it may influence how communication behaviours are interpreted, but it does not determine those interpretations. A manager should use cultural frameworks to develop hypotheses and ask respectful questions rather than to stereotype team members or predict their behaviour without evidence.

2.3. Language and communication accommodation

Language proficiency affects how easily employees can understand instructions, express uncertainty, interpret humour, and participate spontaneously. In multinational

7. [7] Hofstede, G. (1980). Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values. Sage.
8. [8] Hall, E. T. (1976). Beyond culture. Anchor Press/Doubleday.
9. [9] McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: A triumph of faith—a failure of analysis. Human Relations, 55(1), 89–118.
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firms, a shared corporate language can reduce some coordination costs but may also create unequal participation when employees differ in fluency. Communication Accommodation Theory proposes that speakers may adjust their communication toward or away from their interlocutors, with consequences for comprehension, identity, and relationships (Giles et al., 1991; Giles, 2016).[11]

In practice, accommodation can include avoiding unnecessary idioms, explaining acronyms, slowing speech without being patronising, checking comprehension, and offering more than one way to contribute. It should not, however, mean expecting only less-fluent employees to adapt: managers and fluent speakers also share responsibility for making communication accessible. Nor is convergence always beneficial, since over-simplification can feel disrespectful and imitation of an accent may undermine trust. The relevant goal is mutual intelligibility and inclusion, not uniformity.

2.4. Choosing and configuring communication channels

Media Richness Theory argues that communication media differ in their capacity to convey cues, provide rapid feedback, and support clarification; richer media may be useful when a task is ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations (Daft & Lengel, 1986).[12] This offers a starting point for deciding whether a manager should use a live conversation, video meeting, email, or collaborative document. Sensitive feedback or conflict may call for dialogue and immediate clarification, whereas a routine update or formal decision may be better served by concise written documentation.

Even so, no channel is universally best. Live video can provide facial and vocal cues but can increase fatigue, expose differences in bandwidth, and make turn-taking difficult. Asynchronous text gives participants time to reflect and supports traceability, but it can delay clarification and strip away tone. Research on virtual-team communication indicates that the alignment of communication configurations among members can shape team sociability and coordination (Wong et al., 2024).[13] The relevant design question is therefore not simply whether a medium is rich, but whether the team uses it consistently and appropriately for the task, the language needs of participants, and the desired record of the decision.

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Recent reviews stress the need to consider technology together with relational and organisational factors. Swart et al. (2022) [14] identify trust, cultural diversity, collaboration tools, leadership, psychological safety, communication guidelines, and resource planning among recurring themes in virtual project teams. This suggests that technology policy belongs to the team's communication system and is not a stand-alone technical decision.

2.5. Trust as a relational mechanism

Trust is the willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about another party. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995)[15] distinguish perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity as important bases of trustworthiness. Social exchange theory also emphasises reciprocity and the development of relationships through repeated interactions (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).[16] In managerial communication, trust may be strengthened when leaders explain decisions, follow through on commitments, acknowledge uncertainty honestly, and respond consistently to questions.

Trust should not be collapsed into communication quality itself. Communication is a set of practices and interactions; trust is a relational expectation that may be shaped by those interactions, prior experience, formal systems, and the wider institutional context. Trust may also influence later communication, since employees who trust a manager may be more willing to share incomplete information or raise a problem early. The relationship is therefore likely to be reciprocal over time rather than a simple one-way causal chain. Recent reviews continue to treat trust as an evolving research domain with multiple explanatory approaches (Dirks & de Jong, 2022).[17]

2.6. Psychological safety and speaking up

Psychological safety is a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, such as asking a question, admitting an error, or disagreeing with a proposed course of action (Edmondson, 1999).[18] It is not the same as comfort, agreement, or trust in a single individual. A team may have positive interpersonal relationships yet still

14. [14] Swart, K., Bond-Barnard, T., & Chugh, R. (2022). Challenges and critical success factors of digital communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing in project management virtual teams: A review. International Journal of Information Systems and Project Management, 10(4), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.12821/ijispm100404
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discourage dissent, or an employee may trust a manager's competence but fear being embarrassed in front of colleagues.

Managerial communication can support psychological safety when leaders invite dissent, respond to mistakes with curiosity before blame, explain how feedback will be used, and distribute speaking opportunities. In multinational teams, these behaviours matter where language asymmetry or status differences make speaking up costly. Evidence from global virtual teams also links early relational communication to the emergence of a psychologically safe communication climate and team performance (Glikson & Erez, 2020).[19]

Psychological safety does not mean lowering standards or avoiding accountability. Its value lies in enabling people to disclose relevant information early enough for the team to learn and correct course. Managers should pair openness with clear responsibilities, evidence-based decisions, and follow-through.

2.7. Leadership communication as an integrating practice

Transformational leadership emphasises articulating a meaningful direction, encouraging new ways of thinking, and attending to individual development (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).[20] These ideas are relevant to cross-border management because a shared purpose can help employees coordinate despite differences in local routines. However, inspirational language alone is not enough: leaders also need to translate broad goals into clear priorities, explain the reasons for decisions, invite questions, and make sure that their commitments match their actions.

Inclusive leadership communication links the other elements of the framework. It can improve channel selection by asking which format works for the task, support accommodation by making language expectations explicit, strengthen trust through consistency, and promote psychological safety by legitimising questions and disagreement. Leadership is thus treated here not as a separate personality trait that automatically produces good communication, but as a set of observable practices that shape the communication environment.

3. An integrative framework

The proposed framework contains four analytically distinct layers. The first is the context in which communication takes place: cultural and professional expectations, language proficiency, time-zone distribution, task ambiguity, status relations, and the degree of virtuality. Managerial communication practices form the second layer, namely clarity, timely feedback, channel–task fit, explicit checking of understanding,

19. [19] Glikson, E., & Erez, M. (2020). The emergence of a communication climate in global virtual teams. Journal of World Business, 55(6), Article 101001. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2019.101001
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accommodation, transparency, and inclusive participation. The third layer consists of the mechanisms through which communication may influence team behaviour: shared sensemaking, trust, and psychological safety. The fourth is the outcome layer, which covers coordination, knowledge sharing, learning, error detection, and team performance.

Layer	Core elements	Function in the framework
Context	Culture; language; status; task ambiguity; time zones; degree of virtuality	Shapes how messages are produced, received, and interpreted
Communication practices	Clarity; feedback; channel fit; accommodation; transparency; inclusive turn-taking	Managerially influenceable behaviours
Mechanisms	Shared sensemaking; trust; psychological safety	Explain how communication can affect willingness and ability to coordinate
Outcomes	Coordination; knowledge sharing; learning; error detection; performance	Near-term and downstream consequences

The framework does not assume that each context factor has an independent, additive effect. For example, language asymmetry may be especially consequential when a high-stakes task is discussed in a fast-moving video meeting without written follow-up. By contrast, an asynchronous document with clear definitions and a structured comment period may give less-fluent participants more time to formulate questions. Similarly, a manager's invitation to speak may not create psychological safety if earlier contributions were punished. Context, practice, and history therefore interact.

The three mechanisms must also remain distinct. Shared sensemaking is about whether team members develop sufficiently compatible interpretations of tasks and decisions. Trust involves expectations about another party's competence, intentions, and reliability, while psychological safety concerns whether interpersonal risk-taking is perceived as safe in the team. The mechanisms may reinforce one another, but none can serve as a proxy for the others.

4. Propositions for future research

Proposition 1 – Communication and sensemaking. Greater message clarity, explicit confirmation of understanding, and timely feedback will be positively associated with

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shared sensemaking in multinational teams, particularly when tasks are ambiguous or interdependent.

Proposition 2 - Channel–task–participant fit. The relationship between communication-channel choice and team coordination will depend on the fit among task ambiguity, channel affordances, language needs, and team members' shared communication norms; no single channel will be optimal across all tasks.

Proposition 3 - Trust as a mechanism. Transparent, consistent, and responsive managerial communication will be positively associated with team coordination and knowledge sharing partly through its association with trust.

Proposition 4 - Psychological safety and voice. Inclusive leader communication will be positively associated with employee voice and error reporting partly through psychological safety; this relationship will be weaker where status penalties for speaking up remain high.

Proposition 5 – Contextual moderation. The effects of communication practices on sensemaking, trust, and psychological safety will vary with language asymmetry, cultural expectations, time-zone dispersion, and degree of virtuality, but these factors will not deterministically predict individual behaviour.

Proposition 6 – Alignment in digital communication. Teams with shared and explicit norms for selecting, using, and documenting digital channels will demonstrate better coordination than otherwise comparable teams whose channel practices are fragmented or inconsistent.

These propositions are conceptual deductions, not findings from new data. They can be tested through multi-level survey designs, longitudinal studies of team formation, experiments on channel configuration, or mixed-method research that combines communication logs with interviews and team outcomes. Research should avoid inferring individual behaviour directly from national averages and should distinguish individual, dyadic, team, and organisational levels of analysis.

5. Implications for international management

5.1. Make meaning explicit without over-standardising

Managers should state the purpose of a message, the action required, the responsible person, the deadline, and any uncertainty that remains. After consequential meetings, a concise written summary can record decisions and unresolved questions. These practices reduce avoidable ambiguity while leaving room for local teams to adapt implementation to their context.

5.2. Establish channel norms

Teams should agree which channels are used for urgent issues, routine updates, sensitive feedback, brainstorming, and formal decisions. Norms should cover expected

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response times, meeting participation, documentation, and how to handle time-zone constraints. The aim is not to maximise synchronous meetings but to make channel choice understandable and consistent for all members.

5.3. Design for language inclusion

Use plain professional language, explain acronyms, share agendas in advance, and allow participants to contribute in writing before or after meetings. Leaders should monitor whether the same fluent or senior members dominate discussion. Written and asynchronous options can complement live discussion, especially when the issue is complex or participants need time to process information.

5.4. Build trust through reliability

Trust is more likely to develop when managers keep commitments, explain changes, acknowledge mistakes, and apply standards consistently. Where face-to-face contact is limited, predictable communication matters even more. Managers should avoid interpreting delayed responses automatically as disinterest; time zones, workload, access, and differing norms may provide alternative explanations.

5.5. Make speaking up safe and consequential

Leaders can invite dissent by asking what may be missing, requesting a risk review, and thanking employees who identify problems. They should also close the feedback loop by explaining what was changed, what was not changed, and why. An invitation to speak is not credible if contributions are ignored or punished.

5.6. Assess communication outcomes, not message volume

The number of emails, meetings, or messages is a poor proxy for communication effectiveness. Organisations can instead assess decision clarity, rework caused by misunderstanding, response reliability, participation balance, time taken to resolve ambiguity, knowledge-sharing behaviour, and employees' perceived ability to raise concerns. Measures should be adapted to the task and interpreted alongside qualitative evidence.

6. Limitations and future research

This article has several limitations. First, it is a conceptual synthesis of selected foundational and recent sources, not a systematic or exhaustive review. A formal review should search databases such as Scopus and Web of Science using a preregistered or otherwise documented protocol, specify date and language limits, screen records against eligibility criteria, and maintain a search log. The current draft must not be described as having followed such a procedure.

Second, the proposed framework has not been empirically validated. The propositions are intended to guide research, not to imply that causal effects have already been demonstrated. Much of the foundational work was developed in particular

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historical and national settings. New studies should examine whether the relationships hold across industries, regions, employment arrangements, and levels of organisational hierarchy.

Third, the constructs can overlap if they are not carefully operationalised. Communication clarity, shared sensemaking, trust, and psychological safety may be correlated, but each requires a distinct definition and measure. Researchers should test alternative models, consider reciprocal relationships over time, and account for possible confounds such as task interdependence, team tenure, power distribution, and prior performance.

Fourth, digital communication technologies continue to change. The relevant unit of analysis may not be a single medium but the team's configuration of synchronous and asynchronous tools, documentation practices, and expectations about availability. Recent work on virtuality as a continuum (Lynden, 2024)[21] and on communication configurations (Wong et al., 2024)[22] supports examining how channels are combined rather than ranking them in a fixed hierarchy.

Future research could use longitudinal, multi-level designs to examine how communication practices shape trust and psychological safety during team formation and change. Comparative research could test whether language asymmetry or status differences moderate the effects of inclusive leadership. Field experiments might compare different combinations of meeting discussion, written summaries, and asynchronous input. Such designs would provide a stronger basis for practical recommendations than broad assumptions about national communication styles.

7. Conclusion

Effective communication is a central managerial capability in multinational organisations because it enables people to interpret goals, coordinate interdependent work, share knowledge, and raise concerns. Yet communication effectiveness cannot be reduced to a single cultural dimension, a preferred leadership style, or the richness of a technology. It emerges from the fit between context, communication practices, and the mechanisms through which people make sense of one another and their work.

The framework developed here places shared sensemaking, trust, and psychological safety at the centre of the relationship between managerial communication and team outcomes. It treats culture and language as important conditions without using them as deterministic labels, and it views digital channels as configurations that must fit tasks

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and participants. The six propositions provide a basis for empirical testing and for a more specific discussion of communication practices in international management. Before journal submission, the co-authors should complete a documented literature search, verify every bibliographic record against publisher or DOI metadata, and adapt the manuscript to the target journal's scope and requirements.

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