

Understanding the Function of Communication in Building and Sustaining Quality Relationships Across Organizational Boundaries

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ABSTRACT

Communication lies at the heart of every social structure, both within organizations and in their external interactions. This study investigates the centrality of communication in shaping and sustaining relationships across organizational boundaries. Drawing on literature from organizational behavior, sociology, and communication theory, the study examines how dialogue creates mutual understanding, builds trust, and mediates conflict. It discusses how varying communication styles, technological channels, and cultural dynamics influence relational outcomes. The paper also highlights the transformative potential of empathetic listening, responsive feedback, and symbolic language in maintaining psychological safety and social legitimacy. It argues that communication is not a supplemental process, but rather a constitutive mechanism through which social cohesion is achieved. In times of uncertainty or change, communicative leadership becomes essential in aligning members, managing perceptions, and preserving institutional integrity. Through a literature-based inquiry, this research elucidates the strategic importance of cultivating communication competence as a critical tool for organizational resilience and social capital development. The findings advocate for a deliberate investment in communication literacy, systematized feedback mechanisms, and culturally informed practices as key to sustaining high-quality relationships in dynamic environments.

INTRODUCTION

Communication remains one of the most essential tools for constructing and sustaining social ties across various settings. As human interaction continues to evolve within increasingly complex environments, communication has emerged not only as a tool for information exchange but as the very structure upon which social order is built. In both interpersonal and institutional spheres, how individuals and groups communicate shapes their perceptions, behaviors, and collective decisions. The ability to convey thoughts with clarity, empathy, and responsiveness determines whether relationships thrive or wither. Communication serves as the primary mechanism for negotiating identity, building trust, and shaping shared norms and values. This has become even more critical in a time where digital technologies redefine how presence and connectivity are understood (Scherer, 2012).

In organizational settings, communication serves as the binding agent that connects vision with execution. Internal alignment on goals, values, and actions largely depends on whether leaders, teams, and stakeholders engage in continuous, respectful, and constructive dialogue. Without structured and inclusive communication, the organization's vision will remain abstract and difficult to translate into productive concrete actions. Miscommunication can trigger fractures in trust, inefficiencies in processes, and conflict among teams. Conversely, a healthy communicative atmosphere contributes to cohesion, motivation, and a shared sense of belonging (Darmawan, 2017). Such dynamics are not spontaneously created; they must be deliberately cultivated through intentional communication management (Cherepovskaya, 2020). Proper communication management can prevent internal organizational conflict.

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Outside formal institutions, in community and social life, communication facilitates the negotiation of meaning. Shared narratives – expressed through symbols, language, rituals, and informal discourse – define group identity and collective direction. Narratives that develop over time govern the way community members view themselves and the world around them. This process allows individuals to harmonize their understanding of social norms, shared goals, and how they interact with their social environment. Cultural continuity, solidarity, and conflict resolution all draw strength from communicative habits that individuals learn and transmit over time (Carbaugh, 2013). Societies that nurture respectful discourse tend to develop stronger resilience in facing disruptions and social fragmentation. Hence, communication acts as a bridge not just between people, but between values and action (Fatma, 2014).

Communication is not a static construct; it is deeply influenced by social norms, power relations, and technological mediation. What constitutes effective communication in one culture or setting might be received differently in another. As organizations become more diverse and globalized, the ability to adapt communicative approaches becomes central to relationship management. The effectiveness of communication often depends on an awareness of the social and cultural context in which it takes place, as well as the ability to adapt how one communicates to existing expectations and norms. The inability to adapt to these differences can lead to miscommunication, tension, and even conflict between individuals or between teams. Scholars and practitioners alike recognize the need to evaluate how communication contributes to social harmony, organizational productivity, and inclusive governance in an increasingly pluralistic world (Philip, 2013).

Many organizations today encounter persistent difficulties in navigating interpersonal tensions and fragmented communication channels. These issues often originate from the absence of shared communicative norms, compounded by structural silos and managerial indifference. Research by Goleman (1995) highlighted that emotional intelligence – particularly self-awareness and empathy – was key in managing interactions within professional settings. Emotional intelligence helps individuals to better understand their own and others' feelings and needs, which is the foundation of healthy and productive communication. These skills can facilitate more open dialog, reduce misunderstandings, and enable more peaceful conflict resolution. Yet many corporate cultures reward results over relationships, thereby disincentivizing honest and caring communication.

Another issue arises from over-reliance on technology-mediated communication, which, while efficient, often lacks nuance and emotional tone. Daft and Lengel (1986) warned about the "media richness" problem, where leaner forms of communication – such as emails – fail to convey ambiguity or emotional depth, which are crucial in conflict resolution. These elements are essential to avoid misunderstandings or hasty decision-making that can exacerbate the problem. This can lead to misinterpretation, distrust, and an erosion of team dynamics, especially in remote or hybrid work environments. In this context, the technology used to communicate becomes a barrier, not a bridge, to building strong relationships and mutual understanding (Pauleen & Yoong, 2001). In the long-term, this kind of misunderstanding can erode team dynamics and create distance between team members, which in turn hinders collaboration and team effectiveness.

Moreover, a lack of communicative competence among leaders continues to be a recurrent source of relational breakdown. Mintzberg (1973) emphasized that one of the primary functions of leadership is interpersonal interaction. When this function is ignored or undervalued, organizations risk cultivating an environment in which disengagement flourishes. Without clear, empathic, and open communication, messages can be misunderstood, which in turn can lead to disharmony and rifts within the team or organization as a whole. When small issues are not addressed with clear and timely communication, they can develop into big problems that affect team dynamics and create a negative work atmosphere. Such environments create barriers to collaboration and can escalate latent conflict into overt disputes. Leaders who have strong communication skills can prevent small problems from developing into destructive conflicts and maintain stable relationships within the organization.

Despite the growing recognition of communication's centrality, many institutions still treat it as a peripheral concern. Communication is often seen as a supplementary tool that is only activated when a crisis occurs or the need to convey information to the public (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). The absence of structured feedback mechanisms, poor listening cultures, and inconsistent messaging practices diminish collective effectiveness. As Eisenberg and Witten (1987) observed, ambiguity in organizational communication can sometimes be strategic, but when left unmanaged, it compromises clarity and hinders trust-building. Organizations need to strike a balance between strategic flexibility and transparency, ensuring that communications remain honest, consistent, and open to dialogue.

Societies and organizations undergo rapid transformations that test the elasticity of their relationships. As diversity increases and complexity multiplies, communication becomes not a luxury, but a necessity for coexistence. Where communicative infrastructure is strong, cooperation emerges naturally. Where it is weak or neglected, misunderstandings fester. The study of communication in this domain, therefore, carries significant importance for the sustainability of both institutions and communities.

This research intends to examine the communicative dimensions that sustain social bonds within and across organizational boundaries. Understanding how interactional dynamics shape trust, collaboration, and emotional climate is fundamental for institutions seeking longevity in relationships. Assessing how shared language and discourse contribute to identity formation offers valuable insights into the relational fabric that underpins societal cohesion.

This study aims to explore the role of communication in sustaining and strengthening social relationships across organizational and communal settings. By analyzing how discourse, emotional expression, and message interpretation influence interpersonal and institutional relationships, this research seeks to highlight the foundational nature of communication in relational dynamics. The study contributes to a broader understanding of communication as a mechanism of social coherence and offers insights into communicative approaches that support long-term stability and inclusion.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative literature review approach to explore how communication contributes to the formation and sustainability of social relationships within and beyond organizational contexts. The method emphasizes the identification, selection, and interpretation of academic sources relevant to interpersonal communication, organizational discourse, and social cohesion. According to Machi and McEvoy (2009), a structured literature review provides an effective mechanism for synthesizing theoretical and empirical insights, particularly when investigating conceptual themes across disciplines. In this research, primary sources included peer-reviewed journals in organizational studies, communication theory, and social psychology. The review involved iterative thematic coding to trace patterns in how communication processes are framed in relation to relational quality and institutional resilience.

In addition to thematic analysis, this study applies critical discourse evaluation to assess how narratives about communication are embedded within broader power structures and social expectations. As Silverman (2006) notes, literature-based research requires sensitivity to how language reflects deeper institutional logics and cultural norms. Thus, the inquiry does not merely collate data but interrogates the assumptions, frameworks, and implications surrounding communication as a social practice. The corpus includes published works to ensure theoretical continuity and historical depth, while capturing influential models that continue to inform contemporary debates. Sources were retrieved from major academic databases including JSTOR, Scopus, and Sage Journals using search terms such as "interpersonal communication", "organizational discourse", "relational management", and "communication and trust".

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Human interaction thrives on the transmission of meaning, and at the center of this intricate process lies communication. Far from being a passive exchange of information, it is a deliberate act that influences perception, establishes roles, and anchors relationships in shared experience. Every time someone speaks, writes, or even remains silent, they convey something explicitly or implicitly. The complexity of social bonds—whether fleeting or enduring—is largely dictated by how effectively individuals convey thoughts, intentions, and emotions. The choice of words, tone of voice, body language and social context when communicating will affect how the message is understood and how others respond. This holds true in casual exchanges as well as in structured organizational dialogue (Pika, 2017).

Within institutions and communities, communication acts as a unifying force, enabling collective behavior to emerge from diverse perspectives. While each individual brings different perspectives, backgrounds, and interests, communication provides a space to bring that diversity together into a shared vision (Mannix & Neale, 2005). It bridges ideological and cultural distances, allowing cohesion to form even in the presence of competing interests. The spoken or written word becomes a conduit through which expectations are set, responsibilities negotiated, and collaboration sustained. In this sense, communication is not simply a tool—it is the very mechanism by which social fabric is constructed and maintained (Reidhead, 2021). Without effective communication, there will be no foundation for community trust, coordination or sustainability.

The theoretical grounding provided by Habermas (1984) emphasizes that communicative action goes beyond transactional interaction. Communicative action is an attempt to reach a common understanding through rational and open dialog. It introduces a normative dimension wherein discourse must meet criteria of sincerity, truth, and appropriateness. Communication is not manipulative or strategic, but aims to build understanding between participants. In organizations, such standards help to establish legitimacy in relationships and foster environments where dialogue becomes a vehicle for rational consensus rather than conflict. Language, therefore, is more than symbolic—it shapes realities by enabling agreement and joint action (Slutskiy, 2021). Language enables coordination, norm formation, and participatory decision-making. Communication is not just a technical instrument, but a moral and social foundation that allows organizations to function democratically and oriented towards common interests.

Consistent and empathetic communication strengthens organizational life by reinforcing clarity and reducing ambiguity. When people know what is expected of them and feel heard in return, relational stability improves. Structures built on such interactions are more resilient during periods of uncertainty or transformation. Trust, once established through reliable and transparent exchanges, becomes self-reinforcing, elevating not just operational outcomes but the moral architecture of the institution (Robles, 2020). The stronger the trust, the more likely honest and open communication will continue to be practiced, creating a positive cycle in the life of the organization. Even in times of uncertainty, organizational structures that rely on open and empathetic communication tend to be more adaptive and able to maintain social cohesion and operational effectiveness.

In both internal and external environments, the durability of relationships is inextricably tied to how communication is practiced and perceived. Communication is not just about conveying information, but also about how messages are framed, delivered and received emotionally (Moser, 2010). Messages that reflect attentiveness and mutual respect have the capacity to preserve relationships through stress, while dismissiveness or opacity weakens them over time. The longevity of social connection, whether among teams or across departments, rests not only on formal systems, but on the continuous effort to engage meaningfully and ethically in dialogue (Razak et al., 2019). A conscious effort to continuously foster respectful dialogue, regardless of differences in positions or interests, is key to building a collaborative culture that will stand the test of time.

Effective communication contributes significantly to emotional resonance within social structures. It mediates empathy, recognition, and responsiveness—core elements that uphold interpersonal ties. Individuals feel seen, heard, and valued through communication, all of which are important elements for strengthening interpersonal bonds. Goffman emphasized the performative nature of communication in everyday interactions, suggesting that individuals constantly negotiate their social identity through expressive exchanges (Leon, 2006). Within organizations, these micro-interactions compound into broader cultures of mutual respect or tension. A single miscommunicated intention can escalate into conflict, while consistent, affirming communication can solidify long-term professional and personal alliances (Greenaway et al., 2015). Effective communication is not just about conveying messages clearly, but also about shaping an emotional atmosphere that supports the growth of healthy relationships and organizational culture.

Communication impacts relational continuity through the construction of organizational memory. Daft and Lengel (1986) proposed the concept of media richness, noting that communication channels differ in their capacity to convey ambiguity and meaning. Richer media—like face-to-face dialogue—support deeper understanding, particularly in complex or emotionally charged situations. When organizations adopt communication strategies that are sensitive to context and audience, they preserve relational histories and facilitate smoother transitions across leadership, projects, or crises. In contrast, impersonal or fragmented communication may fracture relational bonds and disrupt operational cohesion (Werdati et al., 2020).

The recursive nature of communication ensures that relational quality is not static but evolves with ongoing interactions. Every conversation, message exchange, or nonverbal cue contributes to the formation of new meanings, feelings, and expectations. Shin et al. (2017) introduced Uncertainty Reduction Theory, highlighting how communicative behaviors reduce ambiguity in new relationships and stabilize expectations. This theory finds relevance in multicultural or cross-functional teams where initial diversity might hinder cohesion. Intentional communication efforts—through feedback loops, clarification mechanisms, and active listening—allow social systems to evolve from transactional to relationally embedded networks, enhancing both affective loyalty and operational efficiency. Repeated, high-quality communication strengthens relationships and improves organizational performance.

In high-stakes environments, such as during organizational change, communication acts as both a stabilizer and a catalyst. The uncertainty inherent in the transformation process often leads to anxiety, confusion, and even resistance among organizational members. Communication is responsible for conveying information and providing meaning, direction, and confidence. Effective communication helps maintain the psychological and emotional stability of employees by providing clarity on the reasons for change, long-term goals, and the steps that will be taken to achieve them. Kotter (1996) noted that successful transformations rely on the ability of leaders to communicate vision in ways that are compelling, consistent, and credible. When messaging fails, resistance ensues, breeding fragmentation within teams. Yet, when dialogue is fostered through transparent updates, participatory planning, and symbolic gestures of inclusion, the collective narrative shifts toward resilience. This shift is not incidental; it is orchestrated through deliberate communicative leadership that validates concerns while reinforcing forward momentum.

Interpersonal communication also plays a crucial role in managing conflict. Conflicts often arise not because of differences *per se*, but because of misunderstandings in conveying or interpreting messages. The ability to communicate effectively becomes a key tool to prevent, diffuse and resolve conflict. Muhammad and Jan (2018) categorized conflict-handling styles, demonstrating how assertiveness and cooperativeness manifest through verbal and non-verbal exchanges. Within organizations, constructive conflict resolution relies on open dialogue, active listening, and empathy—all rooted in communication competencies. The absence of such skills often leads to suppression or escalation of conflict, undermining group dynamics. Conversely, dialogue-driven conflict resolution contributes to relational maturity and sustainable collaboration.

Outside formal structures, communication influences the organization's social legitimacy. External relationships with stakeholders—such as clients, regulators, or the community—are mediated through branding, public statements, and interpersonal encounters (Heath, 2020). Grunig and Hunt (1984) argued that two-way symmetrical communication builds credibility and trust over time. By engaging stakeholders in honest, reciprocal dialogue, organizations extend relational capital beyond transactional boundaries, cultivating reputational assets that endure beyond individual interactions. A good reputation allows organizations to more easily navigate times of crisis, attract strategic partners, and gain public support.

The digitalization of communication has provided new nuances in the relationship between dialogue and relational quality. The move from face-to-face communication to technology-mediated communication has created a new dynamic in social dialog. Walther (1996) introduced the concept of hyperpersonal communication in a computer-mediated context, suggesting that individuals can form more intensive relationships through selective self-presentation and asynchronous feedback. In virtual environments, communication ability includes not only verbal skills, but also the ability to select appropriate digital channels and convey interpersonal authenticity despite physical distance (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). When individuals can manage the way they interact online, they can create a deeper emotional closeness, even if the interaction does not occur in person.

Mismatches in tone, timing or medium of communication often result in relational friction. In virtual teams, for example, a mistake in choosing the right communication channel or a mismatch in response time can lead to misunderstandings and disrupt workflows. Conversely, skilled digital communicators are able to maintain cohesion among team members spread across different locations and time zones. They understand the importance of adapting their communication style to the digital context and strive to maintain authenticity in their interactions. As such, the ability to communicate effectively in a digital environment is key to building and maintaining strong relationships, which in turn contributes to successful collaboration in virtual teams. Effective digital communication is not just a technical aspect, but an increasingly essential relational skill in an era of remote working and global collaboration.

Language and semiotics also inform the construction of social relationships. Arnold and Boggs (2019) examined how symbols, narratives, and metaphors shape collective identity. The symbols, narratives, and metaphors used in an organizational context help members understand who they are, what their purpose is, and how they are connected to each other. Organizational slogans, mission statements, or shared rituals act as communicative artefacts that reinforce belonging. Inconsistent messaging, however, can signal misalignment and erode trust. Intentional language use—both in substance and tone—remains critical to relational health within organizational systems. Word choice, delivery style, and frequency of communication all have an impact on how messages are received and interpreted. Language that is inclusive, consistent and resonates with shared values can strengthen interpersonal relationships, increase trust and reinforce collective identity.

Gender, power, and culture play important roles in complicating the relational implications of communication. Tannen (1990) reveals that gender-influenced communication styles can lead to misunderstandings that stem not from intention, but from different norms of expression between men and women. For example, men may be more likely to use a direct and competitive communication style, while women may prefer a collaborative and empathic approach. When individuals of both genders interact without understanding these differences, they can misinterpret each other's intentions, which can result in conflict and tension in the relationship. Awareness of different gender communication styles is essential to creating a more effective and harmonious dialog. Similarly, Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory shows how values such as individualism or hierarchy influence communication preferences. In more individualistic cultures, communication tends to be more direct and focused on personal achievement, whereas in more hierarchical cultures, communication may be more formal and respectful of power structures. Sensitivity to these differences through intercultural competence can reduce relational friction and promote inclusive engagement across structural boundaries (Nagda, 2006). By understanding and appreciating differences in communication styles influenced by gender and culture, individuals can build stronger and more collaborative relationships, which in turn increases communication effectiveness in diverse contexts.

Listening—often undervalued—holds equal importance in relational continuity. The ability to truly listen involves more than just catching the words, but includes understanding the underlying intent, emotions and context of the message being conveyed. Covey (1989) emphasized empathetic listening as foundational to understanding others. This approach allows for a deeper and more authentic relationship as the individual feels truly cared for, not just "heard". Within organizations, listening not only validates the speaker but also signals respect and attention to shared objectives. When leaders or colleagues demonstrate active listening skills, they not only validate the speaker's existence, but also reinforce respect for each individual's contribution. This fosters a collaborative climate that encourages engagement and ownership of a common goal. In high-performing teams, this communicative reciprocity fosters psychological safety, wherein members feel secure to express ideas and dissent without fear of interpersonal reprisal. Listening creates an open space for dialog, where dissent is not seen as a threat, but as a contribution that enriches perspectives.

Finally, feedback as a communicative practice consolidates relational growth. According to London (2003), feedback processes, when delivered constructively, empower personal development and team alignment. Feedback loops should be multidirectional—upward, downward, and lateral—reflecting egalitarian norms and continuous improvement ethos. When organizational members are accustomed to giving and receiving feedback openly, they form a dynamic, learning-oriented culture of dialogue. Feedback that is ambiguous, untimely, or punitive, however, deteriorates trust and disincentivizes openness, harming long-term relational integrity. When feedback is not perceived as constructive, but rather as unwarranted criticism, individuals will tend to shut down and be reluctant to engage further in open communication (Tourish & Robson, 2004). Establishing healthy and consistent feedback practices is not only a managerial necessity, but also an essential component in strengthening relational quality and maintaining social resilience in organizations.

The practice of delivering thoughtful feedback marks a critical threshold in the evolution of communication within social and professional frameworks. Behind every successful feedback process is a sensitivity to timing, context and delivery that preserves the dignity of the recipient. In the work environment, the moment of delivering feedback is often the turning point in interpersonal relationships. When delivered with empathy and a helpful intent, feedback becomes not just evaluative, but a reflection of ethical communication and relational maturity. It distinguishes environments driven by growth and dialogue from those mired in hierarchy and silence. When individuals perceive feedback as an opportunity rather than a judgment, it reshapes the dynamics of collaboration. By enabling conversations that affirm competence while identifying room for refinement, communication assumes its most transformative form: one that nurtures progress through mutual regard.

Beyond its function as a performance tool, feedback cultivates an ecosystem of psychological resilience (Darmawan et al., 2020). Constructive exchanges reduce interpersonal defensiveness and create safe spaces for intellectual dissent. In such cultures, feedback is neither feared nor weaponized—it is anticipated, absorbed, and applied. The emotional intelligence with which feedback is offered and received becomes the architecture of shared advancement, where individual insights contribute to collective refinement. Communication can be both a means of individual improvement and an architecture of collective progress, with many strategies due to emerging insights, strengthening team solidarity, and building competitive organizations.

In the long arc of relationship building, feedback serves as both mirror and bridge. It reflects the quality of attentiveness within an interaction and links intentions with outcomes. Organizations that embed this cycle into their core values tend to display greater continuity in trust, accountability, and innovation. When every voice is invited into the loop of evaluation and encouragement, communication transcends information transfer—it becomes a deliberate investment in sustaining relational excellence.

CONCLUSION

The quality and longevity of social relationships—within and beyond organizational structures—are profoundly influenced by the nature and effectiveness of communication. Communication is not just a tool to convey information, but an active process in building and maintaining relationships. Through meaningful dialogue, individuals and groups construct shared understandings, navigate conflicts, and reaffirm collective identity. When communication is characterized by clarity, empathy, and responsiveness, it becomes the channel through which trust is established and sustained. In dynamic social environments, communicative competence is not merely an operational skill but a foundational necessity for cohesion and resilience. Building a culture of clear, empathetic and responsive communication can support productivity and strengthen the foundation for long-term social relationships.

This exploration underscores that communication is not an auxiliary process but an integral determinant of social architecture within organizations. The implications extend beyond internal team performance, shaping public perception, stakeholder alignment, and long-term institutional credibility. Organizations that invest in communication infrastructures, promote intercultural fluency, and prioritize feedback systems are better equipped to foster adaptive, enduring relational networks. This emphasis becomes especially critical in settings where change, diversity, or complexity characterizes the social terrain.

To reinforce the role of communication in social relationship management, organizations should institutionalize training in active listening, conflict-sensitive dialogue, and media selection. Communication audits can help identify breakdowns in relational pathways, while mentorship and leadership development programs should include modules on interpersonal and intercultural communication. Finally, embedding feedback cultures rooted in mutual respect and clarity will enhance collaboration, reduce misunderstandings, and strengthen relational continuity in increasingly complex organizational ecosystems.

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