

Information and Communication with Business or Organization: A Thematic Case Study Analysis of Two Communication Challenges

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Abstract

In this research, the breakdown of communication in organizational contexts is examined, with attention to the structural, interpersonal, and contextual determinants of such failures. The work is intended to characterize the nature of two major communication challenges, determine their causes and effects, and generate implications for enhancing communication practice. This study employed a qualitative, multiple-case study design and investigated two actual communication issues: (1) project delay due to inter-team miscommunication, and (2) external conflict arising from unclear role expectations in client interactions. Data were gathered via 14 semi-structured interviews and documents (e.g., emails, meeting minutes), and analyzed through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings identify communication breakdowns to be rooted in ambiguous role ownership, absence of formal communication guidelines, and excessive use of informal or asynchronous means. Emotional effects involved frustration, blame-shifting, and broken trust, both intra- and extra-organization. Cross-case themes emphasized the systemic character of communications issues due to organizational culture and structure. This research makes an original contribution by combining Role Theory and Sensemaking Theory to describe how structural ambiguity and interpretive gaps create genuine communication breakdowns. The results provide practical implications for communication policy, leadership development, and system design in complex organizational settings.

Keywords

Organizational Communication, Communication Breakdown, Inter-team Miscommunication, Role Clarity, Sensemaking.

1. Introduction

In today's business environment, good information and communication processes are not just support processes but organizational mechanisms that drive strategic coordination, stakeholder relations, and operational performance. An organization's capacity to convey, interpret, and respond to information precisely and on time has a considerable influence on decision-making, productivity, and competitiveness (Knight *et al.*, 2025). Communication breakdowns both internal among project team members and external with customers have been universally cited as underlying causes of project failure, employee disengagement, and loss of reputation (Ford *et al.*, 2025). As a result of globalization, remote working, and digitalization transforming organizational forms, communication networks have grown more complex, dispersed, and multi-directional, further raising the stakes in guaranteeing clarity, consistency, and reliability in interactions (Yoshizawa, 2025).

Traditionally, organizational communication scholarship has considered various dimensions such as formal and informal networks, vertical and horizontal flows, interpersonal competencies, leadership communication, and the impact of



organizational culture on communicative behavior (**Baporikar**, 2025). Scholars have studied the structure of communication systems, the psychosocial basis of message interpretation, and technological systems mediating discourse between organizational levels (**Abbas; Miller**, 2025). Nonetheless, following decades of theoretical and practical inquiry, communication failures are among the most widely referenced operational issues within business environments (**Searle; Rice**, 2024). Specifically, in complex, matrixed, or dynamic organizational contexts, communication failures tend not to occur as a result of inadequate information, but more so as a consequence of its misalignment, misinterpretation, or late arrival (**Vakilzadeh; Raetze**, 2025). In addition, greater dependence on online spaces, including email, shared working tools, and virtual conferencing, has added new factors like platform fatigue, communication overload, and digital misrepresentation (**Anand et al.**, 2025). These changing dynamics call for a closer look at how communication challenges occur and are perceived by the people within organizational environments.

Increasing amounts of empirical scholarship have attempted to clarify the different dimensions and implications of organizational communication, usually through addressing both the structural and behavioral factors that influence the effectiveness of information exchange (**Pandolfo et al.**, 2025). One central research tradition places significant emphasis on the connection between communication clarity and role performance. Research conducted by **Barbera et al.** (2025) discovered that openly communicated expectations diminish ambiguity and enhance task performance, especially in interdependent team settings. Miscommunication has, however, been discovered to result in role conflict, reduced accountability, and lower job satisfaction (**Pubodhya; Rajapakshe**, 2025). These results underpin the argument that communication issues are not standalone mistakes but inherent in organizational structures and behaviors. Communication among teams, especially within project-based organizations, has also been a specific area of empirical study (**Ahmad et al.**, 2024). **Kumar et al.** (2024) carried out research into cross-functional teams and concluded that misalignment and delays were frequently caused by poor delegation, prioritization conflicts, and inadequate real-time sharing of information. Likewise, internal cohesion and communication were found by **Sudha** (2024) to be powerful predictors of organizational adaptability and innovation. Communication in their analysis was more than a transfer of information; it was a process of constructing shared understanding and alignment. The failure of this alignment leads to not only operational delays but also interpersonal conflict and decreased cohesion (**Holt; Wiedner**, 2024).

Besides internal communication, there are various studies on external communication issues, especially between organizations and their clients, suppliers, or partners (**Lucas-Healey et al.**, 2024). For example, **Jeyasingham and Devlin** (2024) pointed out that the absence of communication guidelines and unclear lines of authority usually cause inconsistencies in client communication, leading to lost trust and damage to reputation. Customer-confronting staff, particularly in service sectors, have been found to be working under unclear parameters, frequently dealing with complicated client needs without apparent guidance or escalation protocols (**Shahriar et al.**, 2024). In these situations, mistakes are not isolated individual-level errors but an indication of system-level failures in communication governance. Technology-facilitated communication has further accentuated this dynamic. Empirical research by **Van Zoonen et al.** (2024) showed that while electronic platforms increase reach and speed, they tend to diminish contextual cues required for effective interpretation of messages. Likewise, recent research highlighted issues of communication overload, whereby the sheer number of messages degrades cognitive processing and task performance (**Salih**, 2024). In such environments, the likelihood of miscommunication increases, especially in fast-paced or multi-tasking work cultures.

In addition, a number of empirical studies have identified the emotional and psychological effects of communication failure. **Rikantasari** (2024) underscored the importance of psychological safety to communication openness, with working environments in which employees are afraid of judgment or retaliation being likely to repress critical feedback and clarification. This normally leads to "communication silence," with errors remaining unaddressed and assumptions running rampant (**Manocha**, 2023). Empirical research thus supports the fact that communication issues are seldom surface-level problems (**Desta; Chamiso**, 2023). They are intensely embedded within organizational culture, structure, leadership, and technology. What persists with all studies is the acknowledgment that the clarity, consistency, and structure of communication are at the heart of organizational effectiveness (**Rahman; Akter**, 2023). Even with such acknowledgment, though, there still persists a stubborn gap in knowledge about the lived experience of communication failure, especially as it happens in real time within organizations (**Awoyemi et al.**, 2023). This lays the groundwork for subsequent research that not only identifies communication problems but also discovers the contextually patterned and dynamic processes that generate them.

Although previous research has contributed significantly to the study of organizational communication breakdowns, there still exists a perceived gap in the contextual and experiential knowledge of how these problems arise and are understood by individuals within particular work contexts (**Putro**, 2023). Most empirical studies have either been quantitative, investigating communication outcomes using surveys and measurements, or conceptual, covering high-level structures but not anchoring them in particular organisational occurrences (**Sulastri**, 2023). This has generated a methodological imbalance, wherein the quantifiable dimensions of communication (e.g., frequency, mode, volume) are prioritized at the expense of the interpretive and contextual dimensions (e.g., perceived clarity, situational constraints, tone). Missing in particular are investigations that closely analyze real cases of communication failure, how parties view

and react to them, and the socio-organizational environments that structure these reactions (**Bahrain et al.**, 2023). In addition, most of the literature currently available (**Sineke et al.**, 2023) treats communication breakdowns as symptoms of broader organizational dysfunctions, rather than as phenomena to be examined on their own. As a consequence, little is known about the micro-level interaction, decisions, and meanings contributing to these failures. These gaps are indicative of the requirement for intense case-based studies capturing the richness and subtlety of communicative issues from the actors' viewpoint.

It is founded on organizational communication theory and is based on two dominant conceptual theories: Role Theory and Sensemaking Theory, both of which offer strong conceptual lenses for understanding the phenomena being researched. Role Theory indicates that mutual understanding of expectations, boundaries, and responsibilities is critical in facilitating effective communication and task performance (**Kakkar et al.**, 2023). When roles are mixed or conflicting, people feel stressed, decrease information sharing, and commit interpretation errors, particularly under stress (**Said et al.**, 2023). This theoretical view assists the first and second research aims of this study to account for communication issues and to determine factors that contribute to them by providing an explanation of how and why miscommunication occurs in organizational systems with uncertain structures.

Supplementing this, Sensemaking Theory argues that communication is a ongoing process of making meaning in situations of uncertainty (**Jenkins et al.**, 2023). Under this theory, people interpret unclear or disjointed information by engaging in conversation, narratives, and social signals and tend to fill-in gaps with assumptions or past experience. This is particularly pertinent in high-pressure or high-speed work environments, where official communication is likely to be delayed or nonexistent. Sensemaking provides an explanation not only for individual reactions to miscommunication but also for the ways in which organizational members make sense of and reconstruct events following communication failure. This supports the second and third research aims consequence identification and cross-case theme extraction through offering a tool to examine the ways in which communication issues are felt, told, and justified by the parties involved. These theoretical antecedents vindicate the application of a qualitative, case-study research design. Role Theory underlines the value of insight into structural and positional influences, which are best elicited by means of open-ended interviews and documentation analysis. Sensemaking Theory, by contrast, demands access to the narratives of participants, who can be interviewed through reflective questioning on past experience of communication. Combined, these theories not only justify the design of the study but also guarantee that its conclusions are analytically robust and practically useful. Utilizing these lenses, the research hopes to contribute both to scholarly knowledge of communication breakdowns and to applied design of communication plans that maximize role clarity, optimize information flow, and minimize misinterpretation in complex work environments.

2. Literature Review

Information and communication are the central forces behind how organizations and businesses function, interact, and transform in today's age (**Knight et al.**, 2025). With the evolution of digital technologies, information flow has accelerated, become more transparent, and become increasingly important for decision-making (**Yoshizawa**, 2025). Internal and external effective channels of communication play a role in organizational goal alignment, improve worker engagement, and aid in strategic planning (**Abbas; Miller**, 2025). Studies have indicated that organizations with their communication systems integrated have greater levels of responsiveness and flexibility, particularly in unstable markets. Intranets, team software, and customer relationship management systems are some of the digital platforms that have changed how data is distributed and responded to (**Vakilzadeh and Raetze** (2025). Additionally, the immediate accessibility of information allows for faster reaction to customer requirements and market fluctuations, deepening relationships and improving brand loyalty.

Organizational performance is also directly related to the quality of information and communication system effectiveness (**Pandolfo et al.**, 2025). Miscommunication leads to misunderstandings, redundant effort, and low morale, which can slow innovation and productivity. Instead, open and timely communication fosters a trust culture and ongoing improvement (**Pubodhya; Rajapakshe**, 2025). In the inter-organizational environment, proper communication streamlines supply chain processes, strategic partnerships, and stakeholder interaction. Research has underscored the importance of crystalline communication protocols, knowledge management practices, and information governance frameworks to assure organizational data accuracy, security, and utility (**Kumar et al.**, 2024). Merging communication technologies, including AI-powered analytics and cloud-based communication tools, continues to redefine conventional business models and develop more responsive, agile, and data-driven organizations.

2.1. Nature and Context of Communication Challenges

Business and organizational communication problems are multidimensional and likely deeply ingrained in the workplace's structural, cultural, and relational matrix (**Holt; Wiedner**, 2024). Empirical research has repeatedly shown that communication problems are not merely a function of information transmission breakdown, but influenced by contextual factors including organizational structure, cultural heterogeneity, and group processes (**Jeyasingham;**

Devlin, 2024). Miscommunication may stem from silent assumptions, power imbalances, or language and interpretive differences, especially in dynamic settings such as project-based or cross-functional teams (**Van Zoonen et al.**, 2024). **Rikantasari** (2024) pointed out that communication breakdowns are typically based on perceptual and interpretive differences among organizational players, particularly when roles and expectations are not explicitly established. In addition, the growing adoption of electronic communication tools has established new contexts for interaction that can mitigate or worsen misunderstandings based on user ability and the communication climate of an organization (**Desta; Chamiso**, 2023). Such discoveries highlight the importance of knowing the context where communication is taking place in order to diagnose and solve communication issues in organizations.

2.2. Contributing Factors and Consequences of Communication Problems

Organizational communication literature has widely researched the causes and implications of communication failure. Of interest in empirical research, lack of feedback mechanisms, unstable messages from leadership, poor communication channels, and incoherent information flow across departments have been identified as key contributing factors (**Awoyemi et al.**, 2023). Communication is usually hindered when organizations work in strict hierarchies or do not create an atmosphere of openness, thus causing critical information to be suppressed and tasks misinterpreted (**Sulastri**, 2023). The outcomes of such dysfunctions are also noteworthy; miscommunication has been associated with higher employee turnover, delayed projects, lower trust, and lower organizational performance (**Sineke et al.**, 2023). For example, **Said et al.** (2023) mentioned that unclear or ambiguous communication often results in role conflict and ambiguity, which may trigger interpersonal tensions and decrease task effectiveness. In addition, vague communication during organizational change or crises has proven to amplify uncertainty, lower morale, and impair decision-making (**Ford et al.**, 2025). These studies together indicate that both internal and external communication inefficiencies have wide-ranging and negative effects.

2.3. Cross-Case Themes and Implications for Communication Improvement

Scholarship has increasingly centered on integrating patterns across diverse communication issues to determine meta-themes that guide best practices (**Baporikar**, 2025). One of the most frequent themes in the literature is the primacy of role clarity and mutual understanding in avoiding communication failure (**Searle; Rice**, 2024). Research has indicated that explicitly defined expectations and roles act as structural supports that reduce interpretive conflict and ambiguity, particularly for interdependent tasks (**Anand et al.**, 2025). A further empirical finding of significance is the significance of psychological safety and feedback-rich contexts in stimulating workers to raise issues and resolve misunderstandings prior to escalation (**Barbera et al.**, 2025). Technology integration is also an emergent theme, with academics observing that communication platforms need to be carefully aligned with organizational aims, culture, and the task complexity (**Ahmad et al.**, 2024). Additionally, integrated communication approaches that embrace formal, informal, horizontal, and vertical channels are viewed as more robust and better placed to deal with both routine operations and disruptions (**Sudha**, 2024). These themes underscore the importance of a proactive, systems-oriented approach to communication, where structures, tools, and human interactions are designed and continuously refined to support clarity, cohesion, and collaboration.

3. Methodology

The research utilised a qualitative, multiple-case study approach in investigating and examining the communication dynamics in organizational environments. Through the use of two different real-world cases of communication issues, the study sought to encapsulate the richness and depth of information and communication difficulties in business settings. A case study design was chosen to enable a thorough, context-specific examination of each problem in order to identify contributing factors, consequences, and wider implications. The initial case involved project delivery delay due to communication between teams, whereas the second case focused on an issue that arose from ambiguous role expectations in communicating with an external client. These cases were specifically chosen for practical relevance, representativeness of typical organizational problems, and ease of contacting key informants and relevant documentation.

Data collection in both cases was done via semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Seven participants in each case were interviewed, including those directly engaged with or heavily impacted by the communication dilemma. Participants were project managers, team members, and client-facing staff to have a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. Interviews were conducted using a flexible interview protocol so that participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of what happened could be explored. Aside from interviews, pertinent supporting documents like emails, internal minutes of meetings, and project schedules were collected in order to supply contextual evidence and corroborate accounts. Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's six-stage thematic analysis approach involving familiarization with the data, coding, development of themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and the final write-up. Within each case and across the two cases, patterns were found to produce cross-case insights. Thematic analysis was used to shed light on the nature and effects of communication breakdowns, contributing factors, and implications for practical ways to improve communication practices in organizational settings.

3.1. Findings of the Research

Case 1: Delay in Project Delivery Due to Inter-Team Miscommunication

The Case 1 communication issue was marked by disjointed inter-team conversations, lack of clear delegation of authority, and absence of planned follow-up mechanisms. The two teams design and operations were interdependent and worked in silos with little real-time coordination. Though communication did take place, it was mostly asynchronous and casual, mostly through email and sporadic updates through messaging apps. These behaviors generated ambiguity over project timelines and task responsibilities. The lack of frequent alignment meetings, centralized project monitoring, or visible shared tasks tools resulted in redundant efforts, delayed milestones, and eventually a considerable delay in the delivery of the project. Members continuously expressed ambiguity regarding task status, unavailability of feedback mechanisms, and reactive communication culture instead of proactive. The organizational setting was characterized by a high-rate, task-oriented business environment where communication was taken for granted instead of being consciously addressed. This case illustrates how in even what appeared to be mundane procedures, there is no formal communication planning that can undermine performance and destroy coordination of teams.

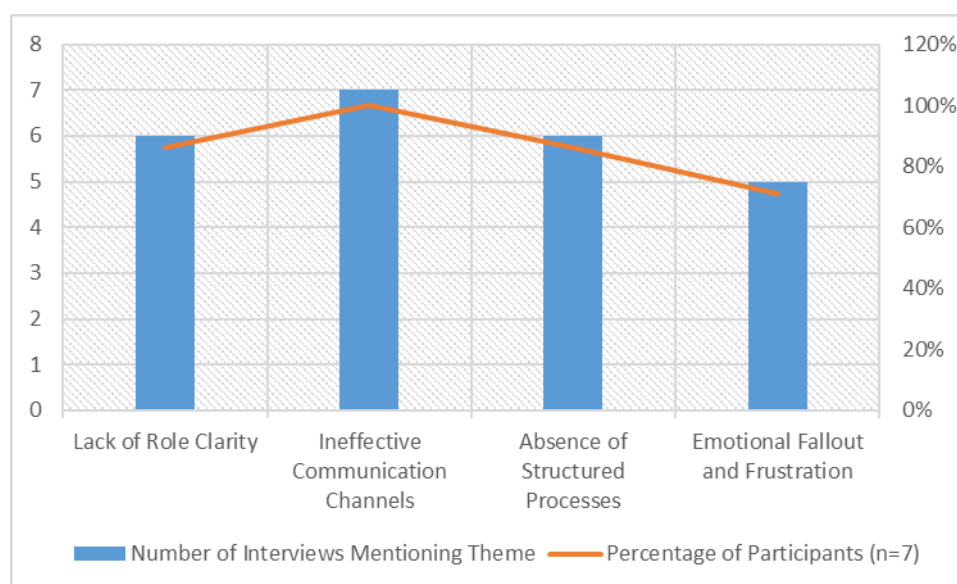


Figure 1: Frequency of Theme Occurrence Across Interviews - Case 1.

Table 1: Delay in Project Delivery Due to Inter-Team Miscommunication - Case 1.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Codes	Sample Quotes	Interpretation
Lack of Role Clarity	Unclear task ownership Overlapping roles	"Who's doing what?" "Assumed others were handling it"	"There was no point person coordinating between teams. Everyone thought someone else was handling the next step." (Interviewee 1)	Role ambiguity led to duplicated or abandoned tasks, indicating weak coordination and unclear accountability structures.
Ineffective Communication Channels	Overreliance on email Lack of real-time dialogue	"Email threads were confusing" "No live updates"	"We relied on email threads that were hard to track—by the time someone responded, the deadline had already passed." (Interviewee 5)	Asynchronous communication tools, while used frequently, failed to support time-sensitive, interdependent tasks.
Absence of Structured Processes	No follow-up mechanisms Informal updates	"Nothing was tracked" "Meetings often canceled"	"There was no structured way to check who had done what. It was all verbal or informal." (Interviewee 4)	Lack of structured communication practices (e.g., shared dashboards, minutes) led to misalignment in task progress and status expectations.
Emotional Fallout and Frustration	Blame-shifting Reduced team trust	"We stopped trusting their updates" "Tired of fixing errors"	"We started doubting everything from their side, and that slowed things down even more." (Interviewee 6)	Emotional responses like distrust and blame made it harder to resolve issues collaboratively and further weakened inter-team coordination.

The narratives of the participants brought into focus systemic weaknesses in approaching communication. One of the respondents informed, *"There was no point person coordinating between teams. Everyone thought someone else was doing the next step"* (Interviewee 1). Another respondent noted, *"We depended on email discussions that were difficult to follow before someone could get back, the deadline would already have expired"* (Interviewee 5). These quotes highlight immediate contributing factors like lack of role clarity, too much dependence on non-synchronous communication, and poor project ownership. Misaligned schedules and lack of escalation channels provided a context where errors were only realized after their impacts manifested. The interviews also uncovered emotional effects, including frustration and blame-shifting among teams that lowered team cohesion and trust further. That aligns with

the goal of discovering both the origins of communication failures and their ripple effects on collaboration, efficiency, and morale (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

Findings here mirror a number of recurring themes from the organizational communication literature. As an example, **Lucas-Healey et al.** (2024) explained that strategic ambiguity in communication, although sometimes beneficial, can be dysfunctional when there is no definition of accountability and deliverables. Likewise, **Shahriar et al.** (2024) underscored the necessity for shared understanding in cross-functional teams, highlighting that ill-defined roles and inadequate systems of communication may cause complex projects to be significantly delayed. This instance also resonates with the findings of **Salih** (2024), who observed that time misalignment between virtual or hybrid communication tends to lead to workflow inefficiencies. The effects overdue deadlines, team tension, and diluted output show how gaps in communication can turn into operational inefficiencies, underpinning why cross-case themes regarding role clarity, platform appropriateness, and communication frequency need to be extracted, as indicated in the third research goal.

Supporting documentation, including internal emails, Gantt charts, and meeting logs, offered corroborative evidence for the interview findings. In several project threads, key directives contained no clear assignment of responsibility or deadlines, creating confusion regarding who was responsible. Calendar entries demonstrated that joint team meetings were ad hoc and frequently canceled, undermining synchronization opportunities. A key finding from document triangulation was that while certain communication did take place, it was not structured in an intentional way there were no agendas, task management tools were not applied, and communication plans were not incorporated into project processes. Such patterns reinforce the strength of findings and again substantiate the thematic findings with methodologically consistent data triangulation. The lack of structured communication governance becomes a central issue that requires solutions at the organizational level.

Case 2: Conflict Arising from Unclear Role Expectations in External Client Communication

Case 2 is focused on a communication failure between internal teams and an outside client, fueled by role authority confusion and mixed messaging. The problem arose when several staff members, under the guise that they could share decisions with the client, conveyed conflicting promises about project deadlines and delivery. Internal communication was ad-hoc, and there was no standard procedure for sharing client updates or approving decisions. This lack of form introduced room for misunderstanding and unauthorized releases, which peaked in the client's acting upon hasty information. The experience strained the business relationship, elicited a reputation backlash, and resulted in service disruptions. Contextually, the organization had experienced a burst of expansion, and while technical operations expanded, communication governance was behind. This setting created a culture in which informal power and word-of-mouth agreement substituted for official procedure, thus heightening the potential for contradiction and disagreement when communicating externally (see Figure 2).

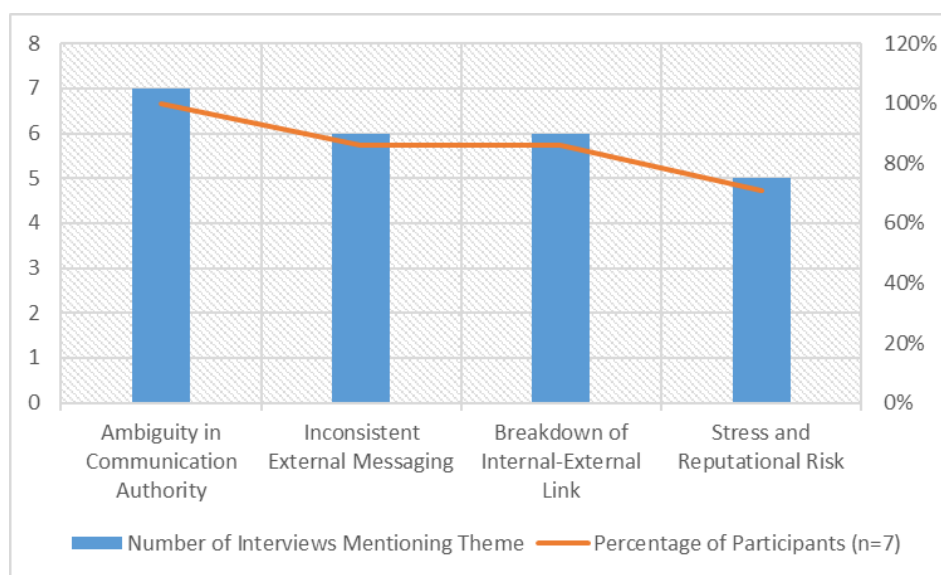


Figure 2: Frequency of Theme Occurrence Across Interviews - Case 2.

An employee explained, "We're never informed who has the final say with the client—we just parrot what we hear from in-house" (Interviewee 3). Another said, "I thought I was being open by sharing, but I didn't realize that choice wasn't finalized yet" (Interviewee 7). These answers highlight the key place of informal norms of communication and the absence of clearly delineated roles in communications directed outwards. The repercussions of these failures were draconian: not just did they erode client trust, but they led to internal discord, as managers and client teams had to

retreat and contain the damage. These stories are consistent with the aim of exploring how certain organizational conditions, like weak protocols and informal hierarchies, contribute to failures in external communication and relationship mismanagement (see Table 2).

Table 2: Conflict Arising from Unclear Role Expectations in External Client Communication – Case 2.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Codes	Sample Quotes	Interpretation
Ambiguity in Communication Authority	Unclear decision rights Multiple voices	"Who owns the message?" "Different people said different things"	"We're never told who owns the final word with the client—we just repeat what we hear internally." (Interviewee 3)	Role confusion led to unauthorized or inconsistent messaging to the client, undermining organizational reliability.
Inconsistent External Messaging	Conflicting promises Premature commitments	"We told the client too early" "No centralized script"	"I thought I was helping by being transparent, but I didn't know that decision wasn't official yet." (Interviewee 7)	Without approval processes or communication standards, employees shared unofficial or evolving plans, resulting in client dissatisfaction and service breakdowns.
Breakdown of Internal-External Link	No escalation path Lack of briefing tools	"We just forwarded emails" "No coordinated updates"	"Sometimes we had to invent responses just to keep the client satisfied." (Interviewee 2)	The failure to build internal alignment before engaging clients caused disjointed communication, harming both internal relations and external credibility.
Stress and Reputational Risk	Fear of making errors Client frustration	"We lost trust" "Felt exposed"	"We looked completely unprofessional. The client even mentioned it in their complaint." (Interviewee 5)	The communication failure became a public-facing issue, resulting in damaged reputation, employee stress, and strained client relationships.

The findings of Case 2 are corroborated by previous research highlighting the role of role clarity and communication authority in boundary-spanning interactions. **Manocha** (2023) focused on hierarchical communication flow and the dangers of decentralization in high-stakes external communication. Similarly, **Rahman and Akter** (2023) explained that without psychological safety and role clarity, workers tend to "fill in the gaps," making choices for which they lack authority, and this is precisely what happened in this case. **Putro** (2023) further emphasized the strategic potential of controlled messaging in stakeholder expectation management. The evidence in this instance validates that in the absence of official lines of communication and clearly assigned corporate spokespersons, organizations are likely to face incoherent external communications, lowered credibility, and increased conflict.

Supporting documents, such as client and internal teams' email threads, indicated that there were no review or approval processes. Client communication was managed by various people who did not have a common history or sequence of messaging. Notes of meetings established that escalation frameworks for client inquiries were discussed but never executed. In addition, the lack of client communication protocol meant that junior personnel were engaged in technical discussions outside their area of expertise, and this raised the prospect of overpromising. Document triangulation added to the efficacy of these results by connecting textual proof to interview data, strongly emphasizing the requirement for formal guidelines on communication. This supports the methodological robustness of the study as well as providing practical recommendations for responding to external communication reliability in organizations that are experiencing growth or restructuring.

Cross-Case Observations (*Objective 3: Extract cross-case themes and develop implications*)

In both examples, three overarching themes are present: the imperative for role definition, the challenges of ad hoc communication processes, and the lack of formal feedback and verification mechanisms. Both intranational and extranational communication failures were based on assumptions, defensive communication behavior, and a lack of formalized communication processes. These findings drive the imperative toward a comprehensive and policy-based approach to communication in business environments. Whether client engagement or internal coordination, the results indicate that organizations need to invest in communication governance structures that include escalation procedures, technology fit, and role definition. These themes have useful implications for both practice and theory, connecting the real-world challenges with empirical literature, and highlighting the systemic significance of purposeful, structured communication practices (see Table 3).

Table 3: Cross-Case Themes Summary.

Cross-Case Theme	Manifestation in Case 1	Manifestation in Case 2	Interpretation
Unclear Role Responsibilities	Task ownership across teams was ambiguous	Authority to communicate externally was not designated	Communication problems rooted in structural role ambiguity across internal and external functions.
Ineffective Communication Methods	Overreliance on unstructured email threads	Use of informal, non-approved messages to clients	Asynchronous and informal methods exacerbated miscommunication and introduced inconsistencies.
Lack of Structured Communication Process	No defined coordination or tracking tools	Absence of client communication protocols	Weak or absent systems for message management and follow-up increased the risk of breakdowns.
Emotional and Relational Consequences	Inter-team distrust and frustration developed	Client trust eroded; employee anxiety heightened	Communication issues extended beyond operations to affect psychological and relational dynamics within the workplace.

The Cross-Case Themes Summary Table provides a comparative perspective to seeing how communication breakdowns in two different organizational environments have similar underlying structural and behavioral patterns. As varied as the nature of the situations is with one being an internal coordination problem and the other a matter of external client

communication both incidents show common recurring flaws like ill-defined role responsibilities, poor communication practices, and a lack of defined communication protocols. These common threads suggest that communication issues are not necessarily contextual quirks but are instead systemic vulnerabilities based on organizational design and culture. Both cases also highlight the emotional and relational costs of ineffective communication, demonstrating how operational errors convert into interpersonal distrust, anxiety, and reputational damage. The analysis verifies that enhancing communication in organizations takes more than technical remedies; it calls for a strategic redesign of role clarification, message ownership, and process standardization. Such cross-case thematic convergence robustly substantiates the study's goal of finding common contributing factors and deriving generalized implications to guide future communication practices (see Figure 3).

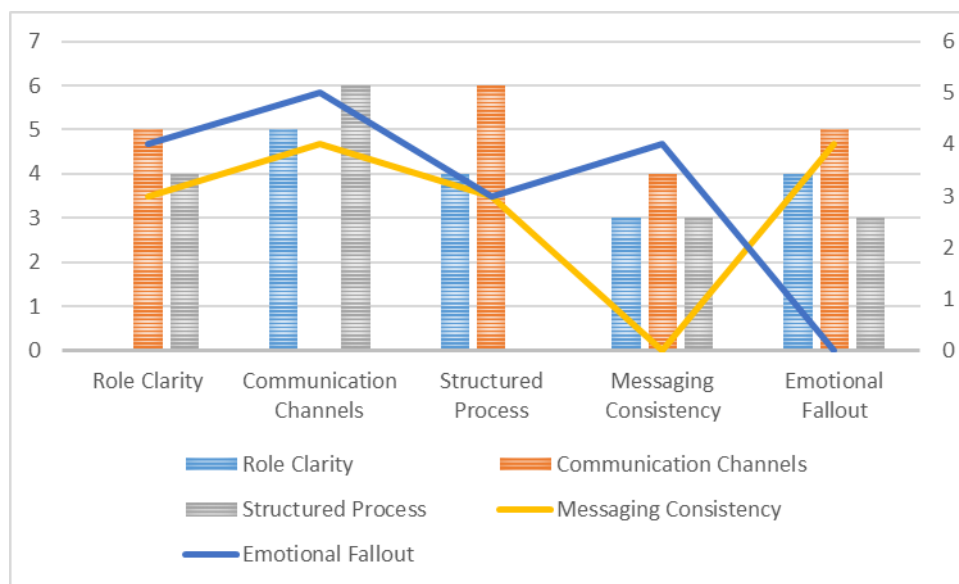


Figure 3: Theme Co-occurrence Matrix (Both Cases Combined).

4. Discussion

Organizational communication is widely seen as the operational efficiency's lifeblood, decision-making, and interpersonal harmony. However, in spite of its primacy, it's one of the most misconstrued and mismanaged practices. This research aimed to investigate real-world expressions of communication breakdowns in business settings, not through theoretical generalizations or idealized models, but by immersing in two real, high-risk organizational cases. Each case one internal, the other external unfolded with its own intricacies, actors, and consequences, reflecting the messy reality of how communication breaks down. In analyzing these cases, this discussion offers a theoretically grounded interpretation of the findings, identifies broader themes, and situates the insights within the existing body of organizational communication literature. The succeeding sections describe how these failures were not singular events, but structural mirrors of deeper structural, cultural, and behavioral deficits reminding us that communication failures tend to reflect an organization's internal logic.

The results of Case 1 show how the lack of formalized communication frameworks among teams can lead to cascading delays and internal resistance. In spite of being able to access digital tools and planned workflows, the communication was mostly fragmented, informal, and assumption-driven rather than verification-driven. These findings are buttressed by the theory of structural holes in communication networks, according to **Bahrain et al.** (2023), where absent connections among collaborating groups lower the flow of essential information. Project delivery was delayed by a lack of communicative alignment rather than a lack of effort. Workers were working in "parallel realities," where each team made assumptions on the basis of incomplete or misinterpreted updates. The ensuing timing and deliverable mismatch can be understood in terms of Role Theory (**Kakkar et al.**, 2023), in that without explicitly defined and communicated roles, responsibility gets diffused and coordination breaks down. This supports earlier research by **Jenkins et al.** (2023), which established the same communication gaps in cross-functional teams as a leading indicator of inefficiencies in projects.

Further exploring the psychological effects, the interview data revealed the psychological consequences of ambiguous communication responsibilities exhibited as blame-shifting, defensiveness, and inter-team trust breakdown. Participants reported a pervasive frustration with feelings of lack of ownership of communication tasks. This indicates not just a procedural deficit, but an emotional and cultural one as well. As **Desta and Chamiso** (2023) states, psychological safety is critical to effective and open communication; without it, people are less likely to ask for clarification, acknowledge confusion, or actively participate. The outcome of this case resonates with that idea workers felt powerless to ask for updates or complain about the same, lest they come across as incompetent or confrontational. The cultural propensity to "make do" instead of explain speaks to larger organizational norms tolerating ambiguity and

avoiding dialogue. This aligns with **Van Zoonen et al.** (2024) claim that silence in organizations is systemically reinforced and culturally sustained.

Document analysis also shed light on the structural vulnerabilities that exacerbated the miscommunication. Meeting notes did not have formal agendas and action items, whereas email exchanges indicated diffuse threads with nontransparent task assignments. The artifacts in these instances reveal a consistent lack of process discipline, in which communication is reactive instead of intentional. The case is also a good example of the risks of asynchronous dependence in environments demanding interdependent coordination. According to **Sudha** (2024), asynchronous instruments like email can lower information richness and cause misunderstandings when urgency and complexity are high. The general implication here is that communication tools should be chosen and regulated according to task characteristics—not convenience. In a practical sense, this case lends support to the use of formalized communication protocols, periodic alignment meetings, and role-based task dashboards for curbing miscommunication. This serves to bolster the study's aim to determine contributing factors and draw implications in order to refine organizational communication practices.

In Case 2, the outcomes indicated another but equally important pattern where role-bound ambiguity and authority in client communication resulted in damaged trust, misaligned expectations, and reputational loss. Contrary to the intra-organizational character of Case 1, this situation spilled over into the organization's external arena, influencing stakeholder relationships. The issue was not necessarily the absence of communication, but inconsistent communicative authority delegation. Workers sent mixed messages to the client because they did not have a clear understanding of who was authorized to represent the organization and what decisions were subject to final approval. This is in line with **Shahriar et al.** (2024) communication responsibility model of organization, which posits that without codified role possessions, organizations have more likelihood of being misrepresented in public and strategic misalignment. It also relates to the notion of boundary spanning roles presented by **Rikantasari** (2024), wherein persons working between organizational and external environments need formal communication mandates to prevent conflict and error.

The psychological and operational effect of this breakdown was equally profound. The staff members reported reluctance and apprehension during client interactions, both fearing internal reprimand and external embarrassment. This is supported by **Pandolfo et al.** (2025), who established that when employees do not have clarity in authority and feedback mechanisms, they will settle for either silence or risk-taking both of which are detrimental in high-stakes environments. The client's action of halting services temporarily because of irregular updates illustrates the actual-world effect of what **Abbas and Miller** (2025) termed as communicative dissonance—where outside audiences are given mixed signals that break down organizational credibility. From an organizational identity standpoint, communication discrepancies also threaten brand and professional reputation cohesion. Here, casual hallway conversations, second-hand information, and lack of formal briefing procedures enabled disjointed internal comprehension to be made visible externally, causing business interruption.

Document analysis validated these problems since internal diaries showed fractured streams of communication, missing escalation protocols, and absence of version-controlled client documentation. This is conceptually in line with Sensemaking Theory where individuals make sense and respond to uncertainty based on cues to hand but where they are incomplete or incorrect, sensemaking may be defective and indeed harmful (**Kumar et al.**, 2024). Employees "filled in the blanks" with anecdotes instead of confirmed facts, and a self-reinforcing cycle of assumption and miscommunication existed. The findings also indicate how breakdowns in communication in client settings are not merely relational errors but strategic blunders with tangible business consequences. Practically, this means unambiguous client communication protocols, authorized messaging scripts, and escalation frameworks that align communication flow with organizational position. Such systems are important not just for correctness, but in order to ensure professional integrity in outward dealings directly returning to the research objective of identifying outcomes and providing sustainable implications for improving communication systems.

The comparative analysis of both these communication breakdowns both one project-centric and internal, and the other relational and external puts the focus on the intricacies of organizational communication breakdowns. While the settings vary, the issues meet at a few fundamental points: the lack of adequate role definition, the failure to plan for communication, excessive reliance on asynchronous or informal channels, and the absence of formal verification and feedback mechanisms. These findings affirm theoretical and empirical research that communication is not just message exchange but about shared meaning, trust, and accountability (**Ahmad et al.**, 2024). Both examples illustrate that miscommunication is not random but patterned, and often systemic due to deep-seated organizational norms and structures that inadvertently facilitate ambiguity to thrive. The study's qualitative, multi-case design permitted rich, contextual investigation of such dynamics, yielding insights that are both rigorously scholarly and practice-relevant. In the future, organizations will have to see communication not as a soft skill but as a hard infrastructure that needs to be designed, monitored, and optimized. Only then can they aspire to reduce the risks, expenses, and annoyances that badly managed communication inexorably entails.

4.1. Implications

This research makes important theoretical contributions to organizational communication studies, namely in the derivation of the knowledge of how failure of communication is affected by structural ambiguity, role uncertainty, and informal interactional norms. Through Role Theory and Sensemaking Theory, this research reaffirms that communications issues are not simply aberrations of behavior but inherent components of systemic disorganization and cognitive structuring. The findings demonstrate how employees make sense of ambiguity in cases with informal tales and presumptions where boundaries of roles or official avenues of communication are ambiguous. This contributes to theory by demonstrating the dynamics of structural role confusion and subjective sensemaking in communication failure. Further, the two-case comparative method adds richness in theory by illustrating how similar communicative deficits manifest differently depending on whether they occur internally (e.g., inter-team misalignment) or externally (e.g., client-confronting role ambiguity). The study underscores the need for more integrative theories of theory that consider not only the structural but the interpretive and affective dimensions of workplace communication. Through recording of lived experiences in the moment and cross-case themes contrasted, this research enriches theoretical construction of organizational communication breakdowns as dynamic, multilayer processes.

The practical contributions of the study include immense importance for managers, team leaders, and organizational designers. This research foremost emphasizes the requirement of formalizing communication processes, particularly within high-paced, high-stakes settings where assumptions and ad-hoc updates may result in serious delays or reputational harm. For intra-organizational communication, the study recommends that organizations adopt formal coordination mechanisms like project dashboards, task lists for roles, and routine inter-departmental meetings with explicit action points. Formalizing task assignment and maintaining alignment through communication checkpoints can reduce the likelihood of "parallel working" and dependency on asynchronous or discontinuous updates. The study also emphasizes the significance of psychological safety in influencing open communication and clarification-seeking behavior. Training management to create such an atmosphere through openness, receptivity to feedback, and non-punitive correction can result in enhanced employee communication behaviors and cooperative effectiveness.

In client-consumer contexts, the research here supports the need for role-based communication stewardship. Organizations should establish policies outlining who may communicate with outside stakeholders, what information may be disclosed, and through which channels. This involves utilizing communication scripts, version-controlled documents, and escalation procedures to ensure that all external messaging is consistent, approved, and aligned with internal decisions. Furthermore, employee onboarding and communication training must be used to focus not just on the "what" of messaging but the "who" and "how" making sure that employees are aware of the organizational importance of each client interaction. Lastly, the incorporation of communications policies into digital systems and workflow systems like project management software or CRM systems can institutionalize best practices and decrease the use of memory or ad-hoc verbal communication. These suggestions address directly the repeated breakdowns listed in both situations and offer implementable recommendations for companies wishing to increase clarity, responsibility, and professionalism in their internal communications.

4.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

In spite of its contribution, this research has limitations. Firstly, the qualitative nature of the study, as rich in context and depth as it is, restricts the generalizability of results across wider organizational populations. The fact that the research chose two particular cases within different organizational contexts provides useful insights, but they cannot be seen to cover the whole spectrum of communication issues experienced in other industries, culture, or organizational forms. This is a salient issue considering that communication norms and expectations can differ substantially depending on national culture, organizational maturity, or technological integration. Subsequent studies should seek to enlarge the empirical foundation by including a higher number of cases across several sectors to determine the transferability of discerned themes and confirm the patterns noted in this study. Second, the use of retrospective interviews and document analysis risks recall bias and interpretive distortion. Respondents might accidentally leave out information or provide accounts based on their role, memory, or affective position. Though document triangulation helped to counteract this, future research could increase methodological strength by utilizing longitudinal or ethnographic approaches that track communication processes in real time. For instance, observing workers during real-life communication activities or even examining live recordings of meetings could yield even finer-grained observations of interaction breakdowns and role negotiation procedures. This would enable researchers to see how communication is progressively realized dynamically, such as how misunderstandings are being resolved—or not—within real workflows.

Another limitation is the scope of theoretical framing. Whereas Role Theory and Sensemaking Theory were useful in explaining findings, other theories like Communication Accommodation Theory, Organizational Justice Theory, or Media Richness Theory can also be potentially useful in future research with explanatory power. Broadening the theoretical framework would allow researchers to investigate further levels of communication behavior, such as how employees modify their communication strategies according to perceived authority, justice, or media richness constraints. Future

studies could also investigate the influence of power dynamics, diversity issues, or leadership communication style in causing or lessening communication breakdowns. These aspects are under-explored in the present study but present fruitful areas for future studies. Finally, the study did not measure the long-term effects of the communication breakdowns presented explicitly. Whereas it measured short-term effects like delays, dispute, and image loss there was no follow-up study to see if these breakdowns caused structural reforms, policy changes, or changes in team relations over the long run. Future research might take a processual perspective, studying how organizations react to and recover from communication breakdowns, and if such incidents cause lasting organizational learning or merely lead to short-term solutions. Also, future research may examine the potential for technology interventions e.g., AI communication assistants or linked dashboards to mitigate ambiguity and facilitate real-time coordination. Through an examination of both human and technological aspects of organizational communication, future research can establish a more comprehensive understanding of how to avoid and handle communication breakdowns in complicated work settings.

5. Conclusion

This research investigated the anatomy of communication breakdowns in organizational contexts through the analysis of two real-life cases one involving inter-team coordination and the other involving client-facing role confusion. In a qualitative, multiple-case study design, the research shed light on how structural, relational, and interpretive failures in communication give rise to substantive operational and reputation-impeding consequences. The results established that communication failures are seldom chance or accidental but instead arise from habitual patterns of ambiguous roles, poor processes, and cultural inclinations to accept ambiguity. Using Role Theory and Sensemaking Theory, the research provided an integrated framework with which to examine not just the objective aspects of these issues but also their subjective, affective, and organizational meanings. These findings benefit theory as well as practice, linking scholarship with managerialism. Overall, this study confirms that communication is a systemic ability and not a spontaneous phenomenon. It needs to be designed, regulated, and cultivated with the same seriousness as other processes of operation. The comparative case structure facilitated extracting cross-cutting themes highlighting the necessity of clarity, consistency, and structure in all types of organizational interaction. Whether dealing with internal coordination or external representation, the message is explicit: effective communication demands deliberate systems, not assumptions. The research provides a platform for scholarly extension and organizational intervention, calling on future researchers to investigate communication as both a mirror and a force of organizational integrity and performance. In so doing, organizations can move toward building environments in which communication becomes a strategic strength instead of an ongoing liability.

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