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Human Resources Communication Quality in Organizational Context: A Qualitative Study Using Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Introduction/Main Objectives: This study aims to explore HR communication quality and identify key factors influencing it within organizations. **Background Problems:** Effective communication within Human Resource (HR) departments plays a crucial role in ensuring organizational performance and employee engagement. In many developing organizational contexts, communication processes are often shaped by hierarchical structures and cultural norms, which may reduce efficiency and transparency. **Research Methods:** A qualitative case study approach was employed, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six employees. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). **Finding/Results:** The findings revealed six key themes: (1) accessibility and communication flow, (2) transparency of HR information, (3) trust in HR information, (4) impact on work performance, (5) communication barriers, and (6) information confidentiality. **Conclusion:** HR communication is generally perceived positively, hierarchical communication patterns, technical system barriers, and limited transparency remain challenges that organizations need to address. This study contributes practical insights for designing more inclusive, transparent, and trustworthy HR communication strategies

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1. INTRODUCTION



HR communication quality research has developed from focusing on direct manager–employee interactions toward digital and technology-mediated communication systems. Earlier work mainly examined how managers' communication behaviors influence employee performance and psychological empowerment (Kunie et al., 2024), while newer studies emphasize communication transparency through enterprise social media and AI-supported HR systems that shape employee agility, recognition, and work–life balance (Pitafi et al., 2023; Turčinović et al., 2025). At the same time, the literature highlights several persistent challenges: the absence of a standardized scale for measuring HR communication quality, communication barriers across multicultural workforces, limited

transparency in digital platforms, and employee concerns about fairness when communication is automated by AI systems (Lyu et al., 2023; Turčinović et al., 2025). These findings suggest that although HR communication research is becoming more technologically advanced, its main problem remains ensuring that communication stays clear, human-centered, and trustworthy in increasingly digital workplaces.

Recent studies have shown that workplace communication influences important employee outcomes, including psychological empowerment, engagement, and agility; however, the existing literature still treats communication mainly as a supporting variable rather than examining HR communication quality as an independent construct. For example, research has explored how managers' communication behaviors improve nurses' performance (Kunie et al., 2024), how caring communication strengthens employee engagement during organizational crises (Bešić et al., 2024), and how digital communication platforms facilitate knowledge transfer and employee agility (Pitafi et al., 2023). Despite these contributions, there is still limited research that specifically investigates how employees' perceptions of HR communication quality such as message clarity, transparency, responsiveness, and consistency shape employee trust, satisfaction, and retention across different industries. This suggests a clear research gap for future studies to develop a more focused model of HR communication quality and test its direct organizational impact in both traditional and digital workplaces. This study aims to analyze HR communication quality and identify key barriers affecting it within an organizational context. Additionally, it seeks to provide practical recommendations for improving HR communication practices in organizations.

The landscape of HR communication research has undergone significant transformation from 2022 to 2026, shifting from traditional hierarchical models to technology-enabled, human-centered approaches. Early frameworks focused on basic information dissemination, but contemporary research emphasizes the strategic role of HR communication in organizational agility and employee wellbeing. According to recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews conducted in 2024–2025, HR communication quality has emerged as a critical predictor of organizational performance, surpassing previous assumptions that treated it merely as an administrative support function.

HR communication refers to the process of sharing information between HR departments and employees. According to Welch and Jackson (2007), effective internal communication enhances employee engagement and organizational trust. Similarly, Wenger (1998) highlights the importance of communication in communities of practice, where knowledge sharing supports organizational learning. Men (2014) further argues that strategic internal communication particularly when it is transparent and consistent — directly influences employee satisfaction and retention.

Communication barriers can arise from unclear messaging, lack of feedback, language differences, and organizational hierarchy. Shannon and Weaver (1949) introduced the concept of "noise," which disrupts the transmission of information. DeVito (2016) further explains that psychological and cultural factors can distort communication, leading to misunderstandings. Communication barriers are broadly categorized into four types:

Semantic Barriers, Semantic barriers are concerned with problems in the process of encoding and decoding messages into words or impressions. The same words or sentences may be understood differently by different individuals, causing confusion and misunderstanding. These include badly expressed messages, words with multiple meanings, faulty translations, unclarified assumptions, inconsistent body language, and the use of technical jargon that is unfamiliar to the receiver (DeVito, 2016).

Physical Barriers, Physical barriers include noise any disturbance that reduces the clarity and effectiveness of communication as well as improper timing and geographical distance between sender and receiver. These barriers are particularly relevant in digital HR communication systems, where technical failures and asynchronous communication can impede information flow (Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

Organizational Barriers, Organizational barriers arise from rigid rules and regulations, the absence of regular staff meetings, and the wrong choice of communication channel. In hierarchical organizations, important messages may be omitted or manipulated as they pass through different levels of management, and employees may feel discouraged from conveying creative ideas (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Psychological Barriers, Psychological barriers arise from selective perception, premature evaluation, different comprehension of reality, distrust between sender and receiver, and poor retention

of information. Distrust can cause individuals to withhold information or interpret messages with suspicion, fundamentally undermining the effectiveness of communication (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Organizational Culture and Context, Organizational culture significantly influences communication practices. Hofstede et al. (2010) suggest that in high power-distance cultures, communication tends to be more hierarchical and less open. In such environments, employees may feel uncomfortable expressing opinions, which limits feedback and reduces communication effectiveness. This cultural dimension is particularly relevant in the organizational context of this study, where several respondents reported hesitation in communicating directly with HR.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative basic approach (Yin, 2018) to gain in-depth insights into HR communication quality within an organizational setting. This design is appropriate for exploratory research that seeks to understand how and why phenomena occur within specific contexts, rather than testing hypotheses or measuring variables.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants. The study involved six participants who were active employees with experience ranging from less than one year to three years in HR-related activities. All respondents were in the 18–25 age group. The participant profile is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Profile

No.	Initial Name	Gender	Age	Work Experience in HR
1	M.D. (Meliboyeva Dilrabo)	Female	18–25	1–3 years
2	A.A. (Abrorjon Abdullaev)	Male	18–25	1–3 years
3	H.B. (Hazratov Behzodjon)	Male	18–25	1–3 years
4	S.M. (Shavkat Mirziyoyev)	Male	18–25	1–3 years
5	A.Q. (Abdulla Qodirov)	Male	18–25	1–3 years
6	T.S. (Toshtemirov Suxrob)	Male	18–25	< 1 year

Note: Full names are displayed with consent. Initials are used in the findings section to maintain analytical focus.

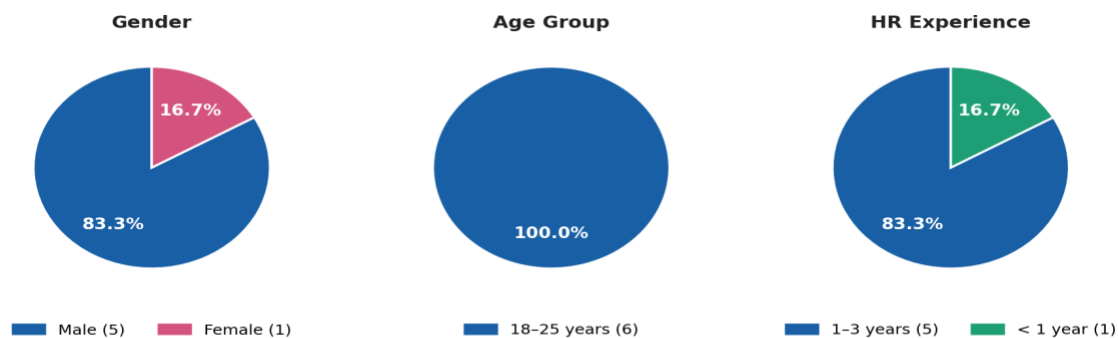


Figure 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 6). Source: Primary data, 2026.

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Data Collection, To gather rich, first-hand accounts from participants, data were obtained through a series of open-ended questions administered via Google Form. Unlike fixed-choice surveys, this approach invited participants to respond freely in their own words, sharing genuine reflections on their day-to-day experiences with HR communication. The sixteen questions that made up the instrument were not chosen arbitrarily each one was deliberately anchored to a recognized theoretical construct drawn from the organizational communication and human resource management literature, following the *theory-driven interview guide* framework outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018). The questions were sequenced intentionally: starting from broad, contextual inquiries about the respondents' backgrounds, they gradually moved toward more targeted reflections on communication clarity, structural barriers, and the sensitive matter of information privacy.

The opening two questions served complementary purposes. The first acted as an eligibility check, ensuring that each participant had sufficient hands-on involvement in HR-related activities to speak meaningfully to the research questions consistent with the logic of purposive sampling as described by Yin (2018). The second question invited participants to recall a specific moment when they received or failed to receive information from HR. This storytelling approach draws on the *critical incident technique* developed by Flanagan (1954), which has long been valued for its ability to surface concrete, experience-based evidence rather than abstract opinions. The third and fourth questions then shifted attention to two constructs that repeatedly emerge as central in the HR communication literature: message clarity and transparency. Question 3 was designed to probe instances where communication had felt incomplete or confusing, building on Shannon and Weaver's (1949) foundational notion that *noise* in both its literal and metaphorical forms can fundamentally disrupt how messages are received and understood. Question 4, meanwhile, drew on Men's (2014) work on strategic internal communication, treating transparency not simply as a virtue, but as a practical mechanism through which employees come to feel psychologically secure in their organization (Edmondson, 1999).

The next cluster of questions five through seven was designed to explore how accessible HR really is in everyday organizational life. Questions 5 and 6 examined the structural pathways through which communication flows: does information travel directly between HR and employees, or does it pass through layers of management before reaching its destination? This line of inquiry draws on Katz and Kahn's (1978) concept of *gatekeeping*, which highlights how hierarchical structures can filter, delay, or distort information, as well as on Welch and Jackson's (2007) stakeholder-oriented model of internal communication. Question 7 moved from structure to psychology, asking whether employees feel genuinely comfortable voicing their thoughts and concerns to HR. The concept of *psychological safety* (Edmondson, 1999) guided this question, while Hofstede et al.'s (2010) work on cultural dimensions offered a lens for understanding why employees from certain cultural backgrounds may feel more reluctant to speak up. Questions 8 and 9 then turned to the matter of trust a construct that sits at the heart of any meaningful HR relationship. Rather than treating trust as a single, undifferentiated concept, the instrument followed Mayer et al.'s (1995) integrative trust model, which draws a meaningful distinction between an employee's confidence in the *institution* itself (Question 8) and their confidence in the *reliability of specific information* provided by HR (Question 9). Both dimensions, as Welch and Jackson (2007) have observed, are shaped by the consistency and predictability of communication over time.

The tenth, eleventh, and twelfth questions were grouped around a shared concern: the real-world consequences of HR communication on how employees work. Question 10 explored whether HR interactions left employees feeling recognized and motivated, reflecting the relational dimension of communication emphasized by Mayfield and Mayfield (2017) in their *motivating language theory*. Questions 11 and 12 went further, asking whether the quality of HR communication had tangibly affected participants' ability to perform their jobs and, more pointedly, whether poor communication had ever led to actual mistakes or setbacks at work. These questions treat communication not as a background variable, but as a *behavioral antecedent* with measurable consequences for performance. Question 13 cast a wider net, inviting participants to reflect on the various obstacles cultural, systemic, or technological that stand in the way of effective HR communication. This question drew simultaneously on Hofstede et al.'s (2010) framework for understanding culturally rooted communication differences, Lyu et al.'s (2023) insights into multicultural workplace barriers, and Bondarouk and Ruël's (2009) critical examination of how e-HRM systems, when poorly implemented, can create new frictions rather than resolve old ones. Questions 14 and 15 introduced a more constructive angle, asking participants to reflect on what effective HR communication looks like in practice and how digital tools such as email, messaging platforms, and HR applications contribute to or detract from that effectiveness (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Pitafi et al., 2023; Turčinović et al., 2025).

The final question addressed what the most personally sensitive dimension of HR communication is arguably: confidentiality. Drawing on Petronio's (2002) *Communication Privacy Management* (CPM) theory, this question explored whether employees feel assured that personal information shared with HR will remain protected. CPM theory posits that people regulate the boundaries of their own private information carefully and that they will only lower those boundaries when they genuinely trust that others will honor them. In the HR context, this translates to a straightforward but often overlooked insight: employees are unlikely to communicate openly with HR if they fear that doing so could expose them to unintended consequences. By including this dimension explicitly, the instrument addresses a

gap that most existing HR communication studies have left largely unexplored. A full mapping of all sixteen questions showing which theoretical construct each one targets and how they connect to the six themes identified through the analysis is provided in the Appendix (Table 3 and Table 4).

Data Analysis, The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This method allowed for the systematic identification of patterns and key themes within the data, resulting in six major themes as presented in the findings section. All transcripts were reviewed iteratively to ensure analytical rigor and consistency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The thematic analysis of interview data from six respondents yielded six major themes that represent significant patterns in employees' experiences with HR communication. A summary of all themes, their key findings, and frequency of emergence is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Themes, Key Findings, and Frequency of Emergence

Code	Theme	Key Findings	Frequency*
T1	Accessibility & Communication Flow	Tiered majority communication through managers; Face-to-face is rare	5/6 responden
T2	HR Information Transparency	Openness is considered important; Incomplete information has ever caused anxiety	4/6 responden
T3	Trust in HR Information	High relative confidence based on the consistency of previous information	5/6 responden
T4	Impact on Work Performance	Miscommunication has led to delays and work errors	3/6 responden
T5	HR Communication Barriers	Technical (systemic), psychological (doubt), and cultural barriers identified	4/6 responden
T6	Confidentiality of Information	Confidentiality is considered a prerequisite for trust; almost all respondents emphasized it	6/6 responden

**Frequency indicates the number of respondents who explicitly raised each theme during the interview.*

Accessibility and Communication Flow

What became clear early in the analysis was that reaching HR is rarely a straightforward matter for most employees. Among the six participants, five shared the experience of not being able to communicate with HR on their own terms instead, their messages and inquiries had to pass through a line manager before getting anywhere near the HR department. Only one participant, T.S., described a different reality: for him, talking directly to HR and doing so face-to-face felt natural and uncomplicated. This layered dynamic surfaced in what two respondents said, almost in the same breath:

"Sometimes I communicate through my manager." (A.A. and S.M.)

But for A.Q., the situation went a step further. He noted that even wanting to contact HR directly was not entirely up to him he would first need to get his manager's blessing before making that move. This speaks to something deeper than just organizational protocol; it reflects how much an employee's sense of agency in HR matters can be shaped and constrained by where they sit in the hierarchy. H.B. offered yet another perspective: his contact with HR happened entirely through digital channels, which he found workable and sufficient for the kinds of routine queries that came up day to day.

Transparency of HR Information

When participants were asked about the openness of information coming from HR, four of the six spoke about it as something that genuinely mattered to them. For A.A. and A.Q., the link between transparency and personal wellbeing at work was direct and personal: *"Transparency helps employees feel secure."* (A.A. and A.Q.)

S.M. gave this idea more shape. In his view, when HR takes the trouble to explain the reasoning behind decisions not just what is changing, but why it cuts down on the kind of background anxiety that tends to breed in information vacuums. People stop guessing, and that itself is a form of relief. Interestingly, the two respondents who appeared less exercised by the transparency question M.D. and T.S. were also the ones with the least time under their belts in the organization. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that when you are new and have not yet been caught off guard by an unexplained policy shift, the stakes of transparency simply feel lower.

Trust in HR Information

Trust in HR information was, overall, something most participants had though not unconditionally. Five of the six expressed a general confidence in what HR tells them, even if that confidence was not uniform in strength or consistency. Three respondents, when reflecting on the accuracy of HR communications, landed on a similar conclusion: "Most of the information is reliable." (A.A., S.M., and A.Q.)

What underpinned that trust, more than anything, was a track record of consistency. A.Q. added that when HR makes a habit of keeping people informed through regular updates, it does more than just pass on information it contributes to a sense of stability and engagement that employees carry into their work. Yet not everyone shared this settled confidence. M.D. admitted that there were moments when she found herself second-guessing what she had heard from HR, wondering whether it was entirely accurate or complete. Her experience is a reminder that trust in institutions is rarely all-or-nothing it tends to grow, or erode, depending on the quality and reliability of each interaction over time.

Impact on Work Performance

Perhaps one of the more striking revelations from this study was how concretely some participants connected the quality of HR communication to their ability to do their jobs well. Three respondents described specific moments where something had gone wrong on that front: "Incorrect information affected work performance." (A.A. and A.Q.)

S.M. gave the most detailed account. He recalled instances where unclear or late communication from HR had set off a chain of delays tasks stalled, plans had to be reworked, and the ripple effects were felt across his team. At the same time, he was equally emphatic about the flip side: when HR communicated clearly and on time, it lifted some of the pressure off people. H.B. and T.S., by contrast, had not experienced the same friction though this may say more about the nature of their roles and how often their work intersects with HR processes than about the overall quality of communication in their organization.

Barriers to HR Communication

Across the interviews, it became evident that getting through to HR or feeling genuinely heard by HR is not always easy, and not always for the same reasons. Four respondents identified at least one type of obstacle, and those obstacles fell into three broad categories: technical, psychological, and cultural.

The frustration with technology came up most often. S.M. and A.Q. put their finger on something many employees quietly feel: "Online systems are not always easy to use." (S.M. and A.Q.)

Then there was the quieter, more internal kind of barrier the hesitation that some employees feel before bringing something up with HR. A.A. and S.M. both acknowledged this, even while describing themselves as generally comfortable in HR interactions. There is something telling in that tension: being comfortable in principle does not always translate into speaking up in practice. A.A. also raised something that the other respondents did not quite name but perhaps felt the way that cultural differences in communication styles and expectations can lead to subtle misreadings, where something said with one intention lands quite differently with the person on the other side. And running underneath, all of this was the structural barrier already noted: when employees need a manager's go-ahead before they can even initiate contact with HR, something spontaneous and direct in that relationship is inevitably lost.

Confidentiality of Information

If there was one thing every single participant agreed on, it was this: what you share with HR needs to stay with HR. All six respondents, regardless of their other differences in experience or perspective, came back to confidentiality as something non-negotiable. A.A. and S.M. were direct about it: "Employees should trust HR with private information." (A.A. and S.M.)

A.Q. went further, calling confidentiality "extremely important" a phrase that carries more weight than a polite acknowledgment. T.S. and H.B. echoed the sentiment in broader terms, while M.D., though she did not go into detail, was clear that it was something HR needed to take seriously. What this convergence of views suggests is that employees are not simply asking HR to follow the rules around privacy they are asking for something more fundamental: the assurance that opening will not come back to hurt them. Without that, honest communication becomes a risk most people are not willing to take.

Discussion

Taken together, the six themes that emerged from this study paint a picture of HR communication as something far more consequential than the transmission of administrative updates. What participants described were real experiences of feeling cut off from HR by layers of hierarchy, of wondering whether information they received was complete, of noticing how a poorly worded or poorly timed message from HR had thrown a wrench into their work. These are not peripheral concerns. They sit at the intersection of trust, motivation, and the everyday experience of being part of an organization.

Hierarchical Communication Patterns and Their Implications

The pattern that showed up most consistently communication routed through managers rather than flowing directly to and from HR is one that organizational theorists have long flagged as a source of risk. Katz and Kahn (1978) described the dynamics of gatekeeping in organizational hierarchies, and the problem is essentially structural: each layer a message passes through introduces the possibility of delay, distortion, or selective omission. What respondents described in this study is a live version of that dynamic. Robbins and Judge (2018) make a related point that when organizations are built around rigid chains of command, the informal, spontaneous conversations that often carry the most meaning tend to get squeezed out. The implication for practice is not radical, but it is important: HR needs channels that employees can use without having to go through a gatekeeper first, whether that takes the form of a self-service portal, an open-door policy, or scheduled informal touchpoints.

Transparency as the Foundation of Trust

What respondents said about transparency pointed toward something Edmondson (1999) has written about at length: the relationship between openness and psychological safety. When people feel that information is being withheld from them or worse, that they will only find out about a change after it has already happened it breeds a low-level anxiety that is hard to shake. Men (2014) positions transparency as a strategic, not merely ethical, concern: HR communications that are open about the reasoning behind decisions do more than inform; they give employees the context they need to trust that the organization is not hiding something from them. The finding that newer employees seemed less attuned to the transparency question fits neatly with Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) account of organizational socialization newcomers are still learning the rules of the game, and it often takes a bruising experience with poor transparency to understand why it matters.

Trust as a Cumulative Construct

What participants described about their trust in HR was not a simple yes-or-no it was layered, conditional, and built up (or worn down) over time. This resonates deeply with the framework Mayer et al. (1995) developed for understanding organizational trust: that it is not granted all at once, but accumulated through repeated experiences of consistency, integrity, and goodwill. What mattered most to participants was not any single communication, but the pattern whether HR could be relied upon to say the same things, provide the same information, and behave in the same way over time. As Welch and Jackson (2007) observe, this kind of communicative consistency is not a minor feature of good HR practice; it is foundational to it.

HR Communication and Work Performance

The accounts some respondents gave of HR miscommunication leading to real, tangible disruptions in their work delays, errors, rework provide grounded support for what Mayfield and Mayfield (2017) argue in their motivating language theory: that the way leaders and HR professionals communicate is not just a matter of style, but of organizational consequence. Poor communication costs something in time, in energy, and sometimes in quality of output. Mazzei (2018) makes an argument that follows naturally from this: employee communication should not be treated as an overhead function, but as a value-creating one. Every time HR communicates clearly and on time, it is investing in the conditions for better work. Every time it does not, it is — often unknowingly — eroding them.

Technical Barriers in the Era of HR Digitalization

The frustration participants expressed with HR digital systems clunky interfaces, processes that are hard to navigate is worth pausing on, especially at a moment when organizations are investing heavily in HR technology as a solution to communication problems. Bondarouk and Ruël (2009) observed this irony some years ago: e-HRM systems that are designed without sufficient attention to usability do not eliminate barriers, they create new ones. Employees who find a platform confusing or intimidating are likely to avoid it which defeats the purpose entirely. Turčinović et al. (2025) note similar tensions emerging in more recent AI-assisted HR environments, where employees' concerns about fairness and transparency in algorithmic systems compound the challenge. The lesson is not that technology is bad for HR communication, but that technology alone is never enough.

Confidentiality as a Prerequisite for Openness

The near-unanimous emphasis on confidentiality across all six respondents points to something that Petronio's (2002) Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory helps to explain. According to CPM, people manage information about themselves according to a set of personal rules and boundaries and they only lower those boundaries when they have good reason to believe the other party will honor them. In the HR context, this means that confidentiality is not a baseline courtesy; it is the enabling condition for any genuine openness between employees and HR. If employees fear that what they share will be passed on, misused, or used against them, they simply will not share and the HR function loses access to the very information it needs to do its job well. Bešić et al. (2024) make a similar point from the angle of employee engagement: authentic communication, they argue, requires relational safety, and confidentiality is a core component of that safety.

Limitations

It would be misleading to present these findings as more conclusive than they are. The study involved just six participants, all of them young, all early in their careers, and all drawn from the same institutional setting. Senior employees, those from different industries, and those navigating very different organizational cultures are entirely absent from this picture. The choice to collect data through Google Form, while practical, also meant that the kind of back-and-forth probing that characterizes a true in-depth interview was not possible some nuances were almost certainly missed as a result. These are not reasons to dismiss what was found, but they are reasons to hold the findings with appropriate humility and to treat them as a starting point for more expansive inquiry rather than a destination.

4. CONCLUSION

The study identifies six key themes that collectively describe the complexity of HR communication in an organizational context: accessibility and communication flows, information transparency, trust in HR, impact on work performance, communication barriers, and information confidentiality. Overall, these findings confirm that HR communication is an important determinant of employee trust and work productivity, and that a gap remains between employee expectations of HR and actual communication, especially in terms of direct accessibility and quality of the digital systems used. This study was limited by its small sample size, the homogeneity of the respondents' age and experience, and the data collection medium. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted in the context of the specific organization being studied and not generalized extensively without further corroborating research. Organizations should focus on improving HR communication clarity, expanding direct and accessible communication

channels for employees, adopting user-friendly, formal communication technologies, and proactively communicating confidentiality policies. Reducing hierarchical barriers to communication and providing cross-cultural communication training is also recommended. The next research agenda should explore the quality of HR communication across different organizations and incorporate a mixed-methods approach for richer insights.

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