Exploring Employee's Perceptions towards Leadership Communication in Public Sector Organizations in UAE: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract
Background: Effective leadership communication is critical in public organizations, yet little qualitative research exists on how UAE public-sector employees perceive it. This study explores employees' views on clarity, trust, and transparency in their leaders' communication. **Methods:** A qualitative survey of UAE public-sector employees was conducted, with responses to open-ended and scaled questions coded and analyzed manually via Excel (2013) for themes. **Results:** Thematic analysis revealed that while leadership communication was often seen as formal and respectful, it was also perceived as inconsistent and sometimes unclear. Employees preferred direct channels such as face-to-face meetings and emails over impersonal updates. Transparent and empathetic communication was strongly associated with higher levels of trust and engagement. Timely briefings and recognition had a positive impact, whereas delays, conflicting messages, and excessive jargon hindered clarity. Key themes identified included clarity, trust, two-way communication, and the need for regular feedback. **Conclusions:** UAE public employees value leadership communication that is direct, empathetic, and reciprocal, confirming global theories of authentic leadership. To build trust and support organizational change, leaders should increase clarity (reducing jargon), use multiple channels, and actively engage staff. Future work should test interventions (e.g. communication training, feedback systems) to enhance these qualities.

Introduction

Effective leadership communication forms the culture of an organization, improving its performance and guaranteeing solid governance, especially in public organizations. Due to the fast development, ambitious national plans and diverse workforce in the UAE, there are unique issues and possibilities for leaders when communicating with others. As government organizations try to match the UAE's priorities, it is important for leaders to communicate well with their workers to increase engagement, trust and openness to change (Ahmed & Al Amiri, 2022; Saifan, 2025). Leaders in public organizations focus on sending information as well as encouraging unity, building trust and looking after the happiness and transformation of employees (Wijaya et al., 2022). In order to lead with openness and trust, knowledge workers, whether they work in person or remotely, need an authentic leader whose beliefs match the company's objective. Unconditional respect and trust are fostered when leaders engage with members in an honest and open manner (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

Salman et al. (2023) argue that using internal communication, leaders can make sure everyone understands the goals, performs better and follows organizational practices. According to their findings, how leaders transform their organizations has a direct impact on good communication inside the company which influences the way employees view their workplace (Salman et al., 2023). This is mainly important in the UAE, as the government has worked hard to ensure that its communication between federal groups is effective, clear and responsive. Support for organizational change is said to be influenced by leadership communication. Leaders' communication affects how much trust staff members feel in the organization. Employee welfare and employer trust in an organization are assumed to be related, and employee well-being has an impact on organizational change support. Employee trust influences organizational change support, employee trust mediates leadership communication and organizational change support, and employee trust mediates employment trusts and organizational change support (Nurhayati, 2024).

UAE's government communication system follows international standards, sharing the country's achievements and building a strong bond between the government and society. Developing specific media strategies and launching the "*Government Communication Experts*" program highlight the government's aim to boost human resources and continue national growth through effective communication. Such efforts improve the UAE's image and aid in sustainable development by bringing communities closer and allowing leaders to exchange important information with employees (Alya Hassan Al Yassi, 2023; Prelims", 2021). The general public's expectations of government actions are influenced by its capacity to successfully raise the standard of living for its constituents. Governments must make sure that its laws, rules, and procedures support citizen engagement and meet the demands of better service delivery. To satisfy citizens' demands for improved social security and quality of life, the service delivery lifecycle must be revamped and reengineered (Al-Khouri, 2012).

The way employees see their leaders' communication plays an important role in judging leadership effectiveness. According to studies, leaders who are open, honest and responsive see a rise in employees' trust, engagement and support for any changes in the company

(Paliszkiewicz et al., 2023). In a setting that is unstable and unpredictable, leadership is crucial. Building trustworthy relationships with partners is essential for both political success and business companies' employee engagement and productivity. Building trust among stakeholders is the goal of communication, which is especially crucial in the company's open innovation model (Paliszkiewicz & Cusumano, 2023).

In order to cultivate motivation, creativity, inspiration, dynamism, mutual respect, support, and responsibility, all of which may be fostered through communication; a leader must be able to establish relationships with others. The organization's attempts to accomplish its objectives depend on effective communication. Ineffective communication issues frequently cause organizations to require assistance in reaching their objectives. Strong leadership in this situation necessitates strong communication abilities. As a reciprocal connection, communication activities inside an organization are necessary to overcome a variety of barriers. Effective communication to others and acting as a socio-psychological glue are two functions of communication, particularly in an organization that aims for cooperative synergy (Marbun et al., 2023).

The UAE's public sector is characterized by cultural variety and hierarchy, therefore it's critical to look at how employees perceive leadership communication in order to identify areas for improvement and identify strengths. Although leadership communication is acknowledged to be crucial, little research has been done on how employees in the public sector in the UAE perceive it. Fewer studies examine government organizations qualitatively because the majority of study concentrates on statistics or leadership communication in private companies (Hijazi, 2017; McAdam et al., 2013; Thomas, 2011). There have previously been quantitative studies on leadership philosophies and how they impact performance and creativity in the public sector of the United Arab Emirates. (Alnuaimi, 2013; Alshehhi et al., 2019; Karam & Kitana, 2020). However, there is a lack of qualitative studies which are useful, since they can help develop particular guidelines and routines to improve how organizations operate.

A distinctive contribution to the body of literature is the limited number of qualitative survey-based studies on how employees view leadership communication in the public sector of the UAE. Qualitative research on the effects of communication tactics on employee trust, engagement, and change comprehension is few. Using a qualitative survey approach, this study will explore this gap by learning how employees in public sector businesses in the UAE perceive leadership communication. The study looks at how communication affects employees' trust, involvement, and alignment with the company. It also aims to demonstrate which components of communication people feel essential and the challenges they face. The goal of the study is to leverage employee experience to provide ways to improve communication in the public sector of the UAE.

This study will offer certain strategies for improving leadership communication, which can improve a business's performance and employee satisfaction based on employees' experiences in the public sectors in UAE. Therefore, by providing qualitative data from a location that is rarely included in studies on global map, it advances the field of leadership communication. In order to identify significant elements that either support or impede good

communication in the, it seeks to examine how employees view perceive communication and what obstacles they face.

Literature Review
Leadership communication plays a critical role in shaping organizational culture, employee engagement, and institutional trust, especially within public sector entities (Barrett, 2006; Paliszkiewicz & Cusumano, 2023). As organizations in the UAE continue evolving to meet ambitious national goals, effective communication between leaders and employees has become increasingly important (Ahmed & Al Amiri, 2022; Alya Hassan Al Yassi, 2023). This literature review explores current research on employee perceptions of leadership communication, with a focus on public sector organizations in the UAE.

Understanding Employee Perceptions of Leadership Communication
Effective leadership communication is widely regarded as foundational to organizational culture, employee motivation, and performance (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Studies emphasize that leaders who build trust and motivation through transparent, authentic communication see higher employee engagement (Anno; Aulia et al., 2025; Kelmendi et al., 2024). In knowledge-based work, employees require an authentic leader whose values align with the mission to lead with transparency and trust (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Leadership communication is the core of fostering motivation, innovation, creativity, inspiration, dynamism, mutual respect, support, and responsibility (Marbun et al., 2023). Ineffective communication, by contrast, can impede organizational goals: poor information flow or mixed messages often leave employees disengaged or confused (Abalogu et al., 2024). In modern organizations, communication is seen as a socio-psychological adhesive that binds teams together (Relja & Bandalović, 2008). By acting as an equal two-way partnership, strong internal communication helps employees feel informed and valued (Spurlock & O'Neil, 2009). In the UAE context, these general principles interact with a unique national culture and fast-paced reform agenda. The UAE's public sector is highly diverse comprising multiple nationalities, languages and hierarchical norms and leaders often must adapt communication style across cultural lines. Cross-cultural research in the UAE shows that cultural dynamics strongly influence leadership: in one study of a UAE bank, Bhargavi and Omar (2016) found that culture became one of the most important factors that affect an organization's performance, leading leaders to tweak their leadership strategies and behaviors for a multiethnic workforce (Bhargavi & Omar, 2016). Western leadership models may be too strictly delineate for Gulf organizations; UAE leaders often blend styles in ways that Western frameworks do not capture (Nickerson & Goby, 2017). This suggests that employees' perceptions of communication effectiveness in the UAE may reflect both global best practices and local norms.

National priorities also shape the backdrop for leadership communication. The UAE government has invested in formal communication strategies and e-government platforms to align public servants with ambitious national goals (Al-Khouri, 2012). Public messaging emphasizes the importance of human capital and transparency, and federal entities have launched programs to professionalize internal communication. Such efforts highlight that UAE public organizations view communication as strategic, intended to foster unity between leadership and staff and to build trust across the bureaucracy (Raza et al., 2023). Both global leadership communication literature and UAE-specific studies underscore that effective

leadership communication must be clear, consistent and aligned with organizational values; employees judge leaders on clarity of vision, honesty, and opportunities for feedback. Cultivating that trustful environment is seen as especially critical in the UAE's public sector, where employees' support of change initiatives and commitment to reform hinge on how leadership messages are delivered and received (Nurhayati et al., 2024; Walumbwa et al., 2011).

Leadership Communication in UAE's Public Sector
In the UAE's public sector, leadership communication has unique contours shaped by organizational structure and cultural context. Research indicates that internal communication in UAE public organizations tends to be top-down but is increasingly recognized as collaborative. Salman et al. (2023) found that in a sample of federal educational bodies, internal communication and verbal rewards have a relationship that is consistent with both transformational leadership and transactional leadership. In other words, UAE leaders leverage formal channels to share vision and provide feedback, yet they also use motivating language and incentives. Salman et al. also note that the effectiveness of this communication is influenced by the nature of the relationship and the leader's symbolism and attitudes toward employees (Salman et al., 2023). This implies that public-sector employees in the UAE assess leadership communication not just by the content but by relational cues – whether leaders show personal interest, respect, and consistency.

Empirical studies further highlight leadership style effects. A survey of UAE ministries found that transformational leadership is strongly linked to positive employee outcomes. Their analysis revealed that transformational leaders significantly increase employees' affective commitment and performance in UAE public organizations (Alshehhi et al., 2019). A study focusing on commitment and performance, it underscores that how leaders communicate – inspiring mission, setting a clear vision – has concrete effects in the UAE bureaucracy. It suggests that when leaders articulate meaningful goals and encourage staff, employees respond more positively. By contrast, communication perceived as purely transactional or confusing could limit engagement.

Employee feedback studies align with these findings. One qualitative survey of Emirati public employees reported that face-to-face interactions with leaders were especially valued. Interview of government-sector workers found that participants felt most engaged when leaders and peers used face-to-face communication (O'Neill et al., 2015). This indicates that UAE public employees often prefer direct, personal channels where they can ask questions and receive immediate responses. They also cited transparency and empathy as hallmarks of effective leadership discourse – suggesting that leaders who explain why decisions are made and show concern for employee well-being earn more trust. In practice, UAE public organizations have been adapting to these preferences: many ministries use mixed modes for announcements, but also prioritize leader walkthroughs, staff forums, and feedback sessions. However, challenges remain. The UAE public sector is still relatively hierarchical, so some employees report barriers like limited access to senior leaders or uneven information flow. When leadership communication is irregular, overly formal, or delivered by chain of command, employees can feel disconnected. By contrast, clear and frequent updates from top management tend to boost morale and trust. Nurhayati et al. (2024) emphasize this linkage: they show that communication from leaders has an impact on the level of trust

employees have within the company, and they identify employee trust as a key mediator between communication and support for organizational initiatives. This finding echoes global trends in public sector and private alike, consistent, two-way leadership communication is crucial to building the trust needed for effective governance (Nurhayati, 2024). The literature suggests that in UAE government entities, leadership communication is evolving from a traditional top-down model toward a more interactive paradigm, with skilled leaders using transparency, empathy, and multiple channels to align a diverse workforce with public-sector goals (Salman et al., 2023).

Gaps in Existing Research
Despite growing recognition of its importance, leadership communication in the UAE public sector remains under-researched, especially from the employees' perspective. Most existing studies focus on outcomes like performance or commitment rather than on perceptions of communication quality (Alshehhi et al., 2019). Quantitative surveys dominate, often measuring how transformational or transactional leadership correlates with organizational results (Sloan, 2009). Fewer studies explore how employees experience day-to-day communication from their leaders, or what meanings they attach to it (Kelemen et al., 2020; Lemon, 2019). This is a notable gap, since one UAE study notes that Western leadership models may not fully capture local nuances.

In particular, there is a lack of qualitative, employee-centered research in UAE government contexts. For example, O'Neill et al. (2015) interviewed just 16 Emirati government employees (O'Neill et al., 2015), indicating how little in-depth dialogue exists. Other work such as studies on leadership loyalty or wisdom largely focuses on general leadership traits, not specifically on communication behaviors (Awashreh & Mohamed, 2024a). Furthermore, much of the global literature on leadership communication comes from private-sector or Western public-sector settings; it is unclear how well those findings generalize to the culturally pluralistic, rapidly changing UAE environment. While scholars acknowledge that communication and trust go hand-in-hand, we lack a detailed map of what UAE public-sector employees themselves think about their leaders' communication (Nurhayati, 2024). This gap suggests the need for exploratory, context-rich research to uncover employees' lived experiences and identify barriers or enablers of effective leadership communication in UAE government organizations.

Guiding Research Questions
Drawing on these issues, the study will address the following research questions:
1. *How do employees in UAE public sector organizations describe the effectiveness of leadership communication? (RQ1)*
2. *What communication channels or styles do employees perceive as most effective for leadership messages? (RQ2)*
3. *What key challenges do employees report in trusting their leaders? (RQ3)*

Research Objectives
1. To examine and understand employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership communication in UAE public-sector organizations from a ground-level, practical perspective.

2. To identify the preferred leadership communication channels and styles as perceived by employees, and to assess their role in enhancing message clarity and organizational interaction.
3. To explore the key obstacles and challenges that affect the development of trust between employees and leaders, particularly those related to communication practices, content, and timing.
4. To provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership communication dynamics within UAE public-sector workplaces, thereby addressing the gaps identified in existing literature.

Accordingly, the following sections will address the research questions and achieve the study objectives by examining leadership communication from a ground-level perspective. Each question is designed to explore a specific dimension of leadership communication—namely overall communication effectiveness, preferred communication channels and styles, and barriers to trust—thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of communication dynamics within UAE public-sector workplaces. The subsequent sections systematically engage with the relevant literature to support the analysis and interpretation of these dimensions.

RQ1: Employee Views on Communication Effectiveness

Literature on communication effectiveness emphasizes clarity, honesty, and consistency (Verma, 2022). Employees tend to judge leadership communication by how well it helps them understand goals and feel valued. Walumbwa et al. (2011) contend that transparent, authentic communication fosters trust among knowledge workers (Walumbwa et al., 2011); thus, if UAE public employees perceive their leaders as candid and mission-aligned, they are likely to rate communication as effective. Effective leaders build relationships through communication that fosters motivation, innovation, creativity and mutual respect (Majka, 2024; Marbun et al., 2023; Ned & Umesi, 2023). In practice, this means employees may expect leaders to not only convey directives but also inspire and support staff personally. Indeed, meaningful two-way dialogue is often valued: communication should feel like a partnership, giving employees a sense of empowerment rather than just issuing orders (Greasley et al., 2005).

Empirical studies reinforce these themes. A study found that leadership's use of meaning-making and empathetic language significantly boosts employee trust (Men et al., 2022). By extension, employees may view a leader's storytelling or rationale-sharing and expressions of empathy as markers of effective communication. Conversely, when messages are vague or purely transactional, employees may perceive them as ineffective. In the UAE public sector, where change initiatives and innovation are increasingly common, employees likely consider communication effective when it clearly explains why changes are happening and how employees fit into the vision. Thus, RQ1 will explore whether employees emphasize aspects like clarity, responsiveness, and relational tone when evaluating leadership communication, building on the global literature that links these qualities to positive employee perception (Men & Stacks, 2014).

RQ2: Preferred Communication Styles and Channels
Employees today have many channels to receive information like meetings, emails, video conferences, social media platforms, and many others (Ewing et al., 2019; Men, 2014b). Studies suggest that personal, face-to-face channels often resonate most strongly with employees, especially in cultures that value interpersonal relations (Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). In an Emirati context, O'Neill et al. (2015) found that public-sector employees reported highest engagement when leaders communicated in person; respondents felt most engaged when leaders and peers used face-to-face communication (O'Neill et al., 2015). This implies that even as digital tools become common, employees may prefer leaders who make themselves accessible through live interactions. The face-to-face mode allows for immediate feedback and emotional connection, which many employees find effective (Mashhadi et al., 2016).

Beyond face-to-face, employees also note the value of transparency and timely updates. For example, in a study of "new ways of working," researchers found that transparency of information and the effective use of multiple channels were key to engaging employees (Corso et al., 2023). In practice, UAE leaders often use a combination: formal circulars or emails for official notices, complemented by interactive channels like Q&A sessions or management newsletters. Open, two-way styles are generally preferred. As Marbun et al. emphasize, effective communication requires two-way communication and reflects an equal partnership between different sources (Marbun et al., 2023). Thus, for RQ2 we expect employees to favor channels that allow dialogue over one-way announcements. Cultural norms also play a role: respectful, calm tone and a personal touch are likely seen as effective styles, as suggested by leadership-communication research. In summary, the literature points toward interactive, direct channels and an empathetic style as most effective, and RQ2 will investigate whether UAE public employees echo these preferences.

RQ3: Barriers to Trust in Leadership
Employee trust in leadership is built on consistent, transparent communication and the perception that leaders have employee interests in mind. Global research shows that when leaders use opaque or inconsistent messages, trust suffers. Walumbwa et al. (2011) note that trust is sustained by transparent dealing, which helps knowledge workers function effectively (Walumbwa et al., 2011). By contrast, non-transparent communication erodes trust. Men et al. (2021) similarly found that leaders' use of meaningful and empathetic communication significantly increases employee trust implying that when such language is absent, employees are less likely to trust the message or messenger (Men et al., 2022).

In the UAE public sector, potential trust barriers include hierarchical barriers and lack of clarity. If communication flows only through strict chain-of-command without explanation, employees may doubt whether leaders truly listen to frontline concerns. Language can also be a barrier: with a multicultural workforce, overuse of jargon or unadapted styles can cause misunderstanding. Addressing these issues is crucial because trust is not just a feel-good factor; Nurhayati et al. (2024) show that employee trust mediates the effect of leadership communication on organizational change support (Nurhayati, 2024). In other words, when trust is low, employees are unlikely to back new policies or reforms. RQ3 will probe which specific communication shortcomings – such as infrequent updates, lack of follow-through on feedback, or perceived inequities in information access – undermine trust. The literature

suggests that leaders who fail to communicate openly and responsively create a "trust gap." By contrast, when leaders consistently follow through on their messages and demonstrate transparency, employees report higher trust and willingness to follow change. Hence this question will explore themes identified in research: transparency, empathy, and consistency as trust-builders, and their absence as key challenges (Men et al., 2022).

Balancing Global and UAE-Specific Communication Insights
Broad international findings provide a useful framework: theories of two-way communication, trust-building through authenticity, and the importance of empathetic language are well-established across many settings (Dumlao, 2023; Heinonen, 2023). These global insights suggest general best practices that likely apply in the UAE as well. Authentic leadership and transparency in generic knowledge economies, and their core message about trust is broadly relevant to any advanced public organization (AlKetbi, 2024; Areepattamannil, 2024; Awashreh & Mohamed, 2024b; Walumbwa et al., 2011).

On the other hand, the UAE's public sector has distinctive features that warrant special emphasis. Cultural diversity, for instance, means that communication strategies must account for different backgrounds. In UAE banking, leaders mainly tweak their leadership strategies and behaviors to fit a diverse workforce (Bhargavi & Omar, 2016). Gulf leaders blend styles in ways that may not fit Western models (Nickerson & Goby, 2017). These findings imply that employee expectations of communication in the UAE may diverge from global norms (Goby et al., 2015). This shows that the greater value on personal respect, collectivist appeals or deference to seniority. Therefore, the review should give weight to UAE-specific studies and context, even if it means adapting global concepts.

Where global literature identifies universal needs, researchers should verify how those manifest in UAE agencies (Majka, 2024). Where regional studies highlight particular obstacles, research must give them due attention. By blending both perspectives, the review can offer insights that are both grounded in proven theory and tailored to UAE realities. Marbun et al.'s discussion of communication resolving cultural differences is a global insight, but its application in the UAE demands understanding local cultural norms (Marbun et al., 2023). The literature review should remain cognizant of overarching leadership-communication best practices, yet emphasize UAE-specific evidence and interpretations, ensuring that conclusions are culturally and organizationally relevant (Gantasala & Omar, 2016; Nickerson & Goby, 2017).

Methodology
Research Design
A qualitative survey-based, exploratory design using open-ended questionnaire was employed in the study to explore the employee's perceptions towards leadership communication in public sector organizations in UAE.

Sampling Strategy
A purposive sampling was done, focusing on employees from various UAE public sector organizations, such as ministries and municipalities, ensuring diverse roles (e.g., administrative, technical, managerial). 50 responses from UAE government employees were included in the study.

Data Collection
Data was collected via online Google Forms survey which was distributed via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. These platforms were chosen due to their widespread use and accessibility among UAE public sector employees.

Ethical Considerations
The study collected informed consent of the employee through survey questionnaire to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. Personal identifiers will be anonymized, ensuring voluntary participation and privacy.

Data Analysis
Analysis was done via following steps:
 a.   Familiarity
 A few responses from the selected ones will be reviewed initially to get an understanding of the recurring themes and patterns. This will help refine the framework for coding.
 b.   Coding
 Manual coding via Excel was done. Each post will be coded under one or more themes. Both deductive coding (based on the pre-determined themes) and inductive coding (identifying new, emergent themes from the posts) were utilized.
 c.   Thematic Analysis
 The collected data were coded under the themes like clarity, responsiveness, transparency, emotional tone, access to leadership, frequency of communication.
 d.   Descriptive analysis
 Thematic analysis will be followed by descriptive analysis. Frequencies and percentages of the repeated themes were counted and mentioned explicitly stated for concluding the results.

Validity and Reliability
The reliability and validity of the study was determined by inter-coding, as two independent researchers will be involved in coding the data. A pilot coding phase will help refine the manual coding in excel, and the final coding will be compared for consistency. Moreover, different social media platforms were used as sources of data to ensure a comprehensive understanding and data collection of the topic.

Results
The results will be evaluated after data analysis. However, hypothetical results evaluated have been described below:

Descriptive Analysis of the demographic variables
Demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in

Table 1. These provides a demographic overview of the 50 respondents in the study, showing diversity across job roles, levels, and sectors in UAE public organizations.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 50).

Demographics	Variables	n	%
Job Title	Administrative	8	16%
	Finance Officer	5	10%
	HR Specialist	4	8%
	IT Specialist	9	18%
	Legal Advisor	3	6%
	Manager / Department Head	10	20%
	Project Manager	3	6%
	Public Relations	5	10%
	Technical Specialist	3	6%
	Organization Type	N	%
Organization Type	Federal Ministry	19	38%
	Government Authority / Company	10	20%
	Local Government (Emirate Level)	21	42%
Education Level	Bachelor's	14	28%
	Doctorate/PhD	15	30%
	High School	9	18%
	Master's	12	24%
Job Position	Entry-Level	6	12%
	Mid-Level	17	34%
	Senior-Level	18	36%
	Top Management	9	18%
Organizational Size	Small (1–50 employees)	13	26%
	Medium (51–200 employees)	22	44%
	Large (201+ employees)	15	30%
Years of Experience	Less than 1 year	14	28%
	1–5 years	8	16%
	6–10 years	12	24%
	11–15 years	7	14%
	16+ years	9	18%
Age Group	Under 25	9	900%
	25–34	9	900%
	35–44	12	1200%
	45–54	11	1100%
	55+	9	900%
Gender	Female	24	48%
	Male	26	52%

Thematic Analysis of the Assessed Variables
Detailed perceptions of leadership communication is present in ***Table 2***. Themes include style, clarity, channels, frequency, approachability, and the perceived impact (positive and negative) of leadership communication in UAE public sector organizations.

Table 2
Perceptions of Leadership Communication.

Section B			
Perceptions of Leadership Communication	**Variables**	**n**	**%**
Overall communication style	Clear and friendly	10	20%
	Directive but respectful	10	20%
	Formal and structured	11	22%
	Mostly effective	9	18%
	Sometimes ambiguous	10	20%
Message clarity	Depends on the situation	11	22%
	Mostly clear	10	20%
	Often unclear	9	18%
	Sometimes vague	9	18%
	Very clear	11	22%
Frequency of updates	Daily	12	24%
	Monthly	7	14%
	Only during major updates	15	30%
	Rarely	6	12%
	Weekly	10	20%
Communication channels	Combination of email and meetings	10	20%
	Email - most effective for updates	4	8%
	Internal portal - structured	15	30%
	Meetings - good for discussion	9	18%
	Social media - not effective	12	24%
Leader approachability	Depends on the leader	6	12%
	Difficult to reach	13	26%
	Rarely listen	15	30%
	Somewhat responsive	7	14%
	Very approachable	9	18%
Positive communication impact	A motivational speech boosted morale	7	14%
	Feedback encouraged performance	8	16%
	Positive interaction increased trust	9	18%
	Recognition in a meeting	14	28%
	Timely update helped with planning	12	24%
Negative communication impact	Conflicting instructions	11	22%
	Lack of follow-up	11	22%
	Miscommunication led to stress	7	14%
	Missed deadline due to lack of clarity	10	20%

	Uninformed about a policy change	11	22%

The **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.** summarizes data from Section C of the Excel file, including employees' trust levels, challenges faced, and suggestions to improve leadership communication in UAE public sector entities.

Table 3

Challenges and Impact of Leadership Communication.

Section C			
Impact and Challenges	**Variables**	**n**	**%**
Trust in leadership information	Depends on the leader	11	22%
	High trust due to transparency	6	12%
	Low trust - inconsistent messages	6	12%
	Moderate trust - sometimes vague	12	24%
	Trust built over time	15	30%
Impact on engagement	Boosts commitment significantly	6	12%
	Makes me feel engaged	8	16%
	Neutral effect	10	20%
	Reduces clarity	13	26%
	Sometimes disengaging	13	26%
Challenges in understanding messages	Delayed updates	11	22%
	Lack of feedback	9	18%
	Overly formal language	11	22%
	Too much jargon	10	20%
	Vague instructions	9	18%
Support for change	Communicated late	8	16%
	Creates uncertainty	7	14%
	Lacks consistency	12	24%
	Mixed support	10	20%
	Supports change effectively	13	26%
Suggestions for improvement	Be more transparent	9	18%
	Improve frequency	12	24%
	Involve employees	13	26%
	More feedback opportunities	7	14%
	Use simpler language	9	18%

Frequencies of key unsolicited suggestions from the "Additional Comments" are displayed in

***Table* 4**. These reinforce core themes and present employee-driven strategies for leadership improvement.

Table 4

Summary of Key Themes from Additional Comments.

Section C			
Impact and Challenges	**Variables**	**n**	**%**

Additional Comments	Appreciate more engagement	9	18%
	Better training for leaders	8	16%
	Improve communication culture	10	20%
	Need consistent messages	12	24%
	Two-way communication is key	11	22%

Major themes derived through thematic analysis of structured variables in Sections B and C are shown in

Table 5. The themes reflect employee perceptions, preferences, and communication challenges in UAE public-sector organizations.

Table 5

Emergent Themes from Additional Comments.

#	Theme	Associated Categories from Excel (Section B & C)	Interpretation
1	**Clarity of Communication**	Very clear, Mostly clear, Vague instructions, Message clarity, Too much jargon, Missed deadline due to lack of clarity	Communication clarity varies widely; inconsistent and jargon-heavy messages reduce understanding
2	**Frequency & Timeliness**	Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Rarely, Delayed updates, Only during major updates	Frequent and timely updates are valued; delays lead to confusion and disengagement
3	**Leader Accessibility & Tone**	Very approachable, Rarely listen, Difficult to reach, Somewhat responsive, Depends on leader, Formal language	Perceptions of leader openness vary; overly formal tone can distance leadership from staff
4	**Trust & Transparency**	High trust, Low trust, Moderate trust, Trust built over time, Be more transparent	Trust is fragile and built on transparency and message consistency
5	**Engagement & Morale Impact**	Positive interaction, Recognition in meeting, Motivational speech, Feedback encouraged performance, Disengagement, Reduces clarity, Boosts commitment	Leadership communication significantly affects morale—both positively and negatively
6	**Channels of Communication**	Email, Meetings, Internal portals, Social media	Mixed-use channels preferred; email and meetings seen as more reliable than social media
7	**Employee Suggestions**	Involve employees, Improve frequency, Simpler language, More feedback opportunities, Better training for leaders, Two-way communication is key	Employees seek inclusive, conversational communication and leadership development

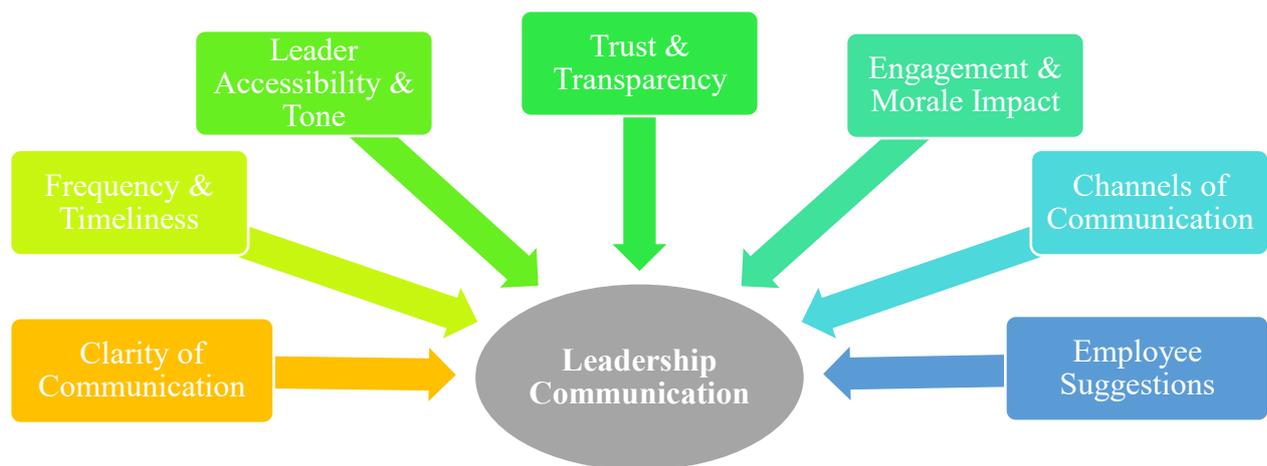Visual conceptual framework that shows how major themes interact is shown in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1. Thematic Map illustrating how Clarity, Transparency, Emotional Tone, and Access to Leadership influence Employee Trust and Communication Effectiveness in UAE Public Sector.

Discussion

The current study reveals that UAE public-sector employees place a premium on clarity, transparency, and consistency in leadership communication. The thematic analysis of the study reveals that UAE public-sector employees hold nuanced views of leadership communication, acknowledging both strengths and shortcomings in their leaders' messaging. Some respondents noted that leadership communication was clear, structured, and respectful, while others found it ambiguous or jargon-heavy. This mixed picture underscores that employees perceive both assets and gaps in current communication.

Communication frequency and preferred channels were also key concerns. Approximately half of participants reported receiving updates only at broad intervals (monthly or less), whereas fewer than half received weekly or daily briefings. Many explicitly called for more frequent touch points. The preferred channels were formal and direct: internal portals, official emails, and in-person meetings were often cited as most effective, whereas social-media announcements and one-way bulletins were viewed as less useful. This is in concordance with the published literature that UAE public-sector employees felt most engaged when leaders used face-to-face communication. This keeps them engaged and they are retained for the longer period of time thus reducing turnover (Abalkhail, 2022; Alnaqbi, 2011; Men, 2014a; O'Neill et al., 2015).

The tone and content of communication had a clear impact on employee trust and morale. Respondents repeatedly linked transparent, empathetic language to higher trust in management. This is supported by the recent research which states that *"the facilitation of effective internal communication cultivates employee engagement, fortifies morale, and aligns organizational objectives, consequently leading to enhanced productivity"* (Okunade, 2025). Such patterns align with communication theory in which LaRue (2023) highlights that leaders' use of empathetic, meaning-making language significantly boosts employee trust ($\beta \approx 0.53$) (LaRue, 2023). Our respondents' comments support this interpretation aligning with recent literature as well (Coffey, 2021; Rukshani & Senthilnathan, 2015).

Employees also identified concrete outcomes tied to leadership communication. Many cited tangible benefits from effective messaging that are timely updates enabled better planning,

and recognition of good work or motivational messages visibly increased engagement aligning with the published literature (Burnett & Lisk, 2021; Mone et al., 2018). These observations mirror recent findings in the UAE context, where effective leadership communication was shown to significantly enhance employee commitment and performance (Raeesi & Samsudin, 2024).

Regarding trust, most employees reported moderate or conditional trust in their leaders rather than unqualified faith or skepticism. Many responses indicated that trust *"depends on the leader"* and can grow over time if communication is steady and open. This suggests employees do not automatically trust senior management by rank; instead, they accumulate trust through experience and consistency which is consistent with the published research (Atkinson, 2004; Mone et al., 2018; Pate et al., 2012; Smollan, 2013).

The challenges identified by respondents point to specific areas for improvement. Overly formal or impersonal language, excessive jargon, and irregular updates were repeatedly mentioned as barriers. Such feedback suggests that even accurate information can fail if it lacks context or accessibility. These are consistent with the literature (Kukulska-Hulme, 1993). Several participants recounted feeling lost when communications jumped abruptly between complex topics without explanation, or when important details were omitted or delayed aligning with the previous literature as well (Sutcliffe et al., 2004). Others noted that without regular access to leaders or feedback channels, even well-intended updates failed to reassure staff aligning with the work that manager blinded by the employees ends up in leadership crises (Blythe, 2014).

Finally, respondents offered constructive suggestions that align with recognized best practices. The most common recommendations included increasing communication frequency, enhancing transparency, and creating more two-way forums for dialogue. This align with studies in UAE and other parts of the world too (Badran, 2017; Darwish, 2017; Maiwada, 2025; Materassi et al., 2021). Many advocated for structured feedback opportunities – such as regular Q&A sessions or collaborative workshops – to involve employees more directly. These ideals dovetail with the evolving communication paradigm. In fact, recent UAE studies emphasize a shift from one-way announcements to interactive, transparent engagement (Alzarooni et al., 2024).

The current research illustrates that UAE public-sector employees seek leadership communication that is clear, consistent, and empathic. Many of the themes uncovered mirror findings in other global contexts (LaRue, 2023; Raeesi & Samsudin, 2024). However, local cultural and organizational factors shape how these ideals manifest. The UAE's bureaucratic environment values formal structure and respect, yet our findings show that even within such a framework, employees greatly value openness and inclusive engagement in communication.

Limitations
Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. Future research should address these limitations with larger, more representative samples, mixed methods, and longitudinal designs.
- Small sample size (N=50).

- Self-reported Responses, potentially introducing bias.
- The study examined only the UAE public sector.

Conclusion

This study explored public-sector employees' perceptions of leadership communication in the UAE's public sector, revealing a complex interplay of strengths and challenges. Although many respondents appreciated aspects of clarity and respect in their leaders' messaging, significant concerns emerged about inconsistency, lack of feedback, and excessive formality. The findings underscore that while effective communication can enhance planning, engagement, and trust, shortcomings in how messages are delivered can impede employee understanding and morale. By capturing the employees' own perceptions and then evaluating themes, this research contributes a granular understanding of communication dynamics in UAE public organizations. It complements existing leadership research by highlighting the critical role of day-to-day and face-to face communication practices, beyond abstract leadership style. The results suggest that attention to communication content (clarity, relevance) and process (frequency, interactivity) is essential for public-sector leaders. The context of the UAE's public sector is important for interpreting these results. Leadership communication that balances respect for structure with genuine engagement can be particularly impactful. Our research indicates that when leaders are transparent about changes and invite feedback whether positive or negative, employees report higher trust and willingness to follow new initiatives. These insights practically can inform communication policies and training in the UAE public sector. Organizations may consider leadership development programs focusing on clear language, active listening, and inclusive engagement. Establishing regular briefings, workshops, training sessions could address the demand for frequency and two-way interaction. Therefore, the study illuminates the expectations and frustrations of UAE public-sector employees regarding leadership communication. Achieving the country's strategic goals from digital government to enhanced public services will require leaders who not only define clear visions but also communicate them effectively in practice. These findings underscore that leadership communication is not simply about transmitting information, but about building relationships and trust. By addressing the gaps revealed here, UAE public organizations can strengthen the psychological contract with employees and further the nation's organizational performance.

Theoretical and Contextual Contribution of the Study

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in enriching the field of leadership communication by providing an in-depth qualitative examination of employees' perceptions of leadership communication practices within public-sector organizations. This dimension has remained relatively underexplored in the literature, which has been predominantly dominated by quantitative approaches and outcome-oriented analyses of leadership styles, with limited attention to the lived communication experiences of employees. The study advances existing knowledge by deepening the theoretical understanding of the relationship between leadership communication and organizational trust, employee engagement, and support for change, highlighting nuanced elements such as message clarity, communicative tone, and opportunities for feedback as core determinants of leadership effectiveness rather than ancillary managerial practices.

From a contextual perspective, the study plays a significant role in situating global leadership communication theories within the specific setting of the United Arab Emirates public sector, which is characterized by cultural diversity, hierarchical organizational structures, and accelerated government transformation initiatives. By capturing employees' voices within this context, the study offers empirically grounded insights that bridge the gap between formal communication frameworks and everyday organizational realities. Consequently, it contributes context-sensitive knowledge that is directly relevant to public-sector leaders and policymakers, illuminating how leadership communication practices can be adapted to align with the UAE's institutional environment, strengthen organizational trust, and support the successful implementation of strategic public-sector reforms and sustainable institutional development.

Future Perspective
The themes identified in this study suggest several avenues for future research, policy, and practice in UAE public-sector communication.
- **Broader quantitative studies** should build on these findings.
- **Qualitative follow-up** is also recommended.
- **Comparative research** (Public vs. Private) would further enrich understanding.
- Cross-national comparisons (UAE vs. other Gulf countries) with other Gulf Countries.

The path forward involves both deepening academic understanding and translating it into practice. Policymakers and leaders should, in turn, use these insights to design communication policies that better meet employee needs. By doing so, they can strengthen organizational trust, adapt to technological change, and improve public-sector performance in the UAE and beyond.

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