

# SUSTAINING EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION THROUGH STRATEGIC INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN MALAYSIA'S SERVICE SECTOR

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**Abstract.** This qualitative study examines the role of strategic communication management in sustaining employee job satisfaction during internal organizational crises within Malaysia's service sector. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight customer service officers, the study explores how internal communication practices influence employees' emotional well-being and job satisfaction during periods of organizational uncertainty. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti, generating four core themes: clarity and transparency, leadership communication, two-way communication and feedback, and employee emotional well-being and job contentment. Findings indicate that timely, transparent, and consistent communication, supportive leadership messaging, and effective bidirectional feedback mechanisms reduce employee stress, anxiety, confusion, and dissatisfaction while strengthening morale and workplace stability. The study proposes a Communication Management Strategies Model that emphasizes employee-centric crisis communication as a strategic mechanism for protecting employee well-being, sustaining job satisfaction, strengthening organizational resilience, and supporting service excellence during internal organizational crises, particularly among frontline service employees.

**Keywords:** *communication management strategies, internal communication crisis, employee job satisfaction, crisis communication*

## Introduction

This qualitative inquiry critically examines the nexus between communication management strategies and employee outcomes, specifically focusing on the preservation of job satisfaction amidst internal communication crises within Malaysia's service sector. Organizational stability is fundamentally predicated on effective internal communication; however, crises within this domain characterized by ambiguity, delay, or inconsistency in information dissemination have a demonstrable negative impact on the workforce (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Tourish, 2019; Men and Bowen, 2017). This study employed in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight customer service officers to explore their lived experiences during such crises. The data, rigorously analyzed via thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti software, yielded four core themes, with the preservation of employee emotional well-being and resultant job satisfaction emerging as a central concern. Findings indicate that clear and transparent communication, supportive and consistent leadership messaging, and robust bidirectional feedback mechanisms are instrumental in mitigating employee stress, anxiety, and diminished morale. The proposed Communication Management Strategies Model provides pragmatic, evidence-based guidance for service sector organizations committed to enhancing internal crisis resilience and sustaining high levels of employee satisfaction and commitment.

## ***Literature review***

While the extensive literature has covered external crisis communication including reputation management, media relations, a significant gap persists in the empirical investigation of internal communication crises, particularly their pronounced effects on frontline personnel (Tourish, 2019; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). Crucially, the detrimental psychological and professional consequences of communication failures including heightened stress, decreased morale, and increased turnover intentions are centrally mediated by their impact on employee job satisfaction (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014). This study addresses the lacuna in research by specifically focusing on how communication management strategies function to sustain or erode the job satisfaction of customer service officers in the distinct cultural and organizational context of Malaysia. By adopting a qualitative methodology, this research provides an essential, nuanced understanding of the causal link between internal communication proficiency during crises and the maintenance of a satisfied and resilient workforce. The imperative is to shift the focus from merely managing information flow to strategically safeguarding employee well-being as a precursor to organizational stability and sustained service excellence (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015).

## ***Internal crisis communication and organizational stability***

Crisis communication research has traditionally emphasized the management of external stakeholders, particularly focusing on reputation protection, media relations, and organizational legitimacy during disruptive events (Tourish, 2019; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). However, recent studies suggest that internal communication during crises plays an equally critical role in maintaining organizational stability and operational effectiveness (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). Effective internal crisis communication ensures that employees receive timely, accurate, and transparent information, enabling them to respond appropriately to crisis situations (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017). Recent empirical research demonstrates that structured internal crisis communication practices significantly improve employees' communication satisfaction and work outcomes. For instance, a study by Al Katheeri et al. (2024) found that internal crisis communication practices positively influence employee job satisfaction, engagement, and organizational commitment among frontline employees in public service organizations. Their findings highlight that organizations that prioritize effective internal communication during crises are better able to maintain employee performance and organizational resilience. In contemporary organizational environments characterized by uncertainty and rapid change, internal communication is increasingly recognized as a strategic management function rather than merely an administrative process (Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). Effective communication structures facilitate coordination, reduce ambiguity, and strengthen employee trust in management decisions during periods of crisis (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017).

## ***Communication failures and employee psychological outcomes***

Communication breakdowns within organizations can have substantial psychological and professional consequences for employees (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Mishra et al.,

2014). Frontline personnel, particularly customer service officers, are often the first to experience the operational impact of unclear or inconsistent organizational messages. When employees lack access to reliable information, they may experience role ambiguity, increased stress, and emotional exhaustion (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). Recent organizational research indicates that transparent communication and accessible feedback mechanisms significantly contribute to employee engagement and motivation (Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014). A comparative organizational communication study demonstrates that workplaces characterized by participatory communication models and clear managerial feedback report higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and operational efficiency (Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). Furthermore, poor internal communication can negatively affect employee morale and retention (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2014). Surveys conducted across organizations indicate that employees who are satisfied with internal communication are significantly more likely to report higher job satisfaction and remain with their organizations compared to employees who perceive communication as ineffective (Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). These findings underscore the importance of effective communication systems in preventing workplace stress and promoting a supportive organizational environment (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017).

### ***Job satisfaction as a mediating factor in communication crises***

Job satisfaction is widely recognized as a critical determinant of employee performance, organizational commitment, and retention (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014). In the context of communication crises, job satisfaction often functions as a mediating factor that determines how employees respond to organizational challenges (Al Katheeri et al., 2024). Empirical research has demonstrated that internal crisis communication satisfaction plays a mediating role between communication practices and employee work outcomes (Al Katheeri et al., 2024). In particular, frontline employees who perceive communication from management as clear, consistent, and transparent are more likely to maintain higher levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and affective organizational commitment (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). Moreover, contemporary workplace research highlights that ineffective communication can significantly reduce organizational productivity and employee engagement (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2014). Studies report that communication inefficiencies lead to substantial productivity losses and decreased employee focus on core responsibilities, emphasizing the need for structured communication management systems within organizations (Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014). Thus, organizations that strategically manage internal communication during crises can mitigate negative employee reactions and sustain job satisfaction even under stressful conditions (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Men, 2014).

### ***Communication management strategies in crisis contexts***

Communication management strategies refer to systematic organizational approaches used to coordinate information flow, manage employee expectations, and maintain operational alignment during crisis situations (Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). These strategies typically involve structured information

dissemination, transparent leadership messaging, and mechanisms that allow employees to seek clarification or provide feedback (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017). Modern organizational communication research emphasizes the importance of two-way communication structures in fostering employee trust and engagement (Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014). Studies show that organizations adopting participatory communication systems where employees can actively engage with management demonstrate higher levels of organizational transparency, collaboration, and employee motivation (Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). For frontline employees such as customer service officers, effective communication management strategies are particularly important because they serve as the primary interface between the organization and external stakeholders (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). Without clear internal guidance, these employees may struggle to manage customer expectations effectively during crises (Al Katheeri et al., 2024).

### ***Internal communication in contemporary organizational contexts***

In the modern workplace, internal communication has become increasingly complex due to digital transformation, hybrid work arrangements, and evolving organizational structures. These changes require organizations to adopt more strategic communication approaches that prioritize employee engagement and well-being (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017). Recent research on workplace management emphasizes that communication transparency, managerial accessibility, and feedback culture are essential components of effective internal communication systems (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). Organizations that actively cultivate this communication practices tend to experience higher levels of employee motivation, organizational commitment, and productivity (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014). Furthermore, contemporary workplace studies indicate that ineffective communication can contribute to employee disengagement and burnout (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2014). Transparent communication and supportive leadership are therefore essential in maintaining employee morale and preventing organizational instability during crisis situations (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015).

### ***Additional literature supporting strategic internal communication***

Strategic internal communication extends beyond the dissemination of organizational information because it also shapes employees' perceptions of leadership, organizational support, and their position within the organization. Communication channels that allow employees to receive clear information and interact directly with organizational leaders can strengthen employee satisfaction and contribute to more positive employee–organization relationships (Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). This perspective emphasizes the strategic value of internal communication in creating an organizational environment where employees feel informed, acknowledged, and supported. Leadership communication is particularly important during organizational crises because employees frequently depend on managers and organizational leaders for direction, clarification, and reassurance. The effectiveness of leadership communication can therefore influence how employees interpret organizational uncertainty and respond to changing workplace conditions (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). Consistent and

transparent leadership messaging can reduce uncertainty while reinforcing employees' confidence in organizational decisions and their willingness to remain engaged with organizational objectives.

Two-way communication also provides an important mechanism through which employees can participate in organizational communication processes. Rather than functioning solely as recipients of management information, employees should have opportunities to ask questions, provide feedback, and communicate concerns during periods of uncertainty (Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014). Such communication practices can strengthen employee engagement by creating a more participatory communication environment and reducing the distance between organizational management and frontline employees. Internal crisis communication should therefore be understood as both an informational and relational organizational process. While timely information helps employees understand changing organizational circumstances, relational communication characterized by openness, responsiveness, and managerial support can contribute to employee confidence and organizational commitment (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). This is especially relevant to frontline service employees because they must simultaneously respond to organizational uncertainty and maintain effective interactions with customers.

The relationship between strategic communication and employee outcomes consequently provides an important foundation for examining organizational resilience during crises. Organizations that establish clear communication structures before and during crises may be better positioned to manage uncertainty, maintain employee engagement, and support organizational continuity (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Tourish, 2019; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). From this perspective, sustaining employee job satisfaction is not independent from crisis communication management but forms part of a broader organizational strategy for maintaining workforce stability and service effectiveness.

### ***Research gap***

Despite extensive research on crisis communication, most studies focus primarily on external stakeholder management, such as media relations, reputation repair, and public perception (Tourish, 2019; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the internal communication experiences of frontline employees during crises (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). Additionally, empirical research examining the relationship between communication management strategies and employee satisfaction remains limited, particularly within the context of customer service environments. Existing studies have largely been conducted in Western or Middle Eastern organizational contexts, leaving a significant gap in understanding how internal crisis communication functions within Southeast Asian organizations, including Malaysia. The literature suggests that effective internal crisis communication is a crucial factor in maintaining employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational stability during crisis situations (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014). Communication failures can lead to increased stress, role ambiguity, and decreased morale among employees, particularly among frontline staff who directly interact with external stakeholders (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). By examining how communication management strategies influence the job satisfaction of

customer service officers in Malaysia, this study aims to address an important gap in the existing literature. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into how organizations can strategically manage internal communication during crises to protect employee well-being and sustain service excellence.

## Materials and Methods

Thematic analysis, a technique frequently used to find, examine, and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets, was used to the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Researchers can thoroughly examine individuals' experiences and perspectives by using thematic analysis, which offers a methodical yet adaptable approach. The six-phase structure that is frequently used in qualitative research was followed in this study's analysis: familiarizing the data, creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and creating the final report. According to Braun and Clarke (2021) and Nowell et al. (2017), this methodical approach enables researchers to arrange vast amounts of textual material and find significant patterns pertinent to the research goals. In order to verify the accuracy of the participants' answers, all interview tapes were verbatim transcribed before the analysis started. In order to have a thorough grasp of the participants' experiences with communication crises at work, the researcher attentively read and reread the transcripts. In order to document early ideas and any patterns arising from the data, reflective notes and preliminary observations were made at this phase. In qualitative analysis, familiarization with the dataset is crucial because it enables the researcher to fully connect with the narratives and contextual meanings of the participants prior to coding (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

After then, preliminary coding was carried out to find significant textual passages that were pertinent to the study's goals. Because the coding procedure was done inductively, codes were not planned but rather emerged immediately from the responses of the participants. Descriptive codes that reflected the underlying meaning of the data were assigned to each noteworthy statement or phrase in the transcripts. Experiences of stress during crisis communication, opinions of manager support, organizational message clarity, and shifts in employee motivation are a few examples of first codes. In order to do additional analysis, the researcher was able to methodically arrange the data into smaller units of meaning at this step (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017). Following the creation of the initial codes, the researcher looked for themes by analyzing the connections between the coded data. To create more comprehensive categories that reflected recurrent trends in the dataset, similar codes were grouped together. After that, these categories were examined to find overarching themes that encapsulated the participants' common experiences and viewpoints. This approach led to the emergence of patterns that connected employees' emotional reactions and attitudes toward their workplace with the efficacy of crisis communication (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

In order to make sure the themes appropriately reflected the dataset, the following stage required examining and improving them. To make sure that every theme represented a logical and significant pattern, the researcher went back over the original transcripts and coded excerpts. To increase clarity and analytical coherence, any overlapping or unclear topics were clarified, combined, or rearranged. This iterative procedure made sure that the themes were in line with the research goals of the study

and were well-supported by the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017). In the last phases of the analysis, the topics were named and described precisely to convey their main idea. Employee Emotional Well-Being and Job Contentment was one of the major themes that developed as a result of the organization's crisis communication quality. In contrast to inadequate communication, which raised annoyance and unhappiness, participants consistently noted how management's prompt, transparent, and helpful communication reduced stress and uncertainty. For the results to offer significant insights into how communication management techniques affect worker well-being and job satisfaction during communication crises, the last step included incorporating these themes into a cohesive narrative backed by chosen participant quotations (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

## Results and Discussion

This finding critically substantiates the theoretical link between organizational communication processes and key effective and behavioral employee outcomes, namely job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014) (*Figure 1*). Impact of Communication Deficits: Participants consistently reported that the ambiguity and irregularity of organizational communication during a crisis induced significant emotional strain, manifested as increased stress, confusion, and feelings of dissatisfaction (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). This emotional duress directly impeded motivation and performance efficacy (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Mishra et al., 2014). For instance, Participant 4 noted, “When communication was unclear, it caused a lot of stress because we didn’t know what to expect.” Mitigation via Strategic Communication: Conversely, the presence of proficient communication management practices specifically transparency and consistency were shown to be a critical buffer against negative emotional responses (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). Management's proactive efforts to offer reassurance and uphold supportive communication practices fostered a sense of security and clarity among employees (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014). Participant 8’s reflection is illustrative: “Good communication from management helped reduce our anxiety during difficult situations.”



**Figure 1.** *Communication management strategies and employee job satisfaction.*

The Communication-Satisfaction Mechanism: This theme underscores that communication management is not merely an administrative function but a psychological mechanism for retaining employee stability (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). By minimizing uncertainty (Clarity and Transparency) and providing a stable, empathetic frame (Leadership Communication), organizations successfully reduce the psychological costs of a crisis, thereby maintaining the structural components that underpin employee job satisfaction and reduce turnover intentions (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014). The findings further demonstrate that clarity and transparency function as essential components of effective internal communication during organizational crises. Participants' experiences indicate that uncertainty becomes particularly problematic when organizational information is delayed, inconsistent, or insufficiently explained. Clear communication can therefore provide employees with a stronger understanding of organizational circumstances and reduce uncertainty surrounding their responsibilities. This finding corresponds with previous research emphasizing the importance of effective internal crisis communication in supporting communication satisfaction and employee work outcomes (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). Leadership communication also emerged as an important element in shaping employees' emotional responses during internal organizational crises. The participants' accounts suggest that employees require more than factual information from management; they also value reassurance, consistency, accessibility, and support. Communication from organizational leaders can consequently influence how employees interpret uncertain situations and whether they perceive management as responsive to their concerns. This observation is consistent with the strategic internal communication perspective, which recognizes leadership communication as an important contributor to employee satisfaction and organizational relationships (Men and Bowen, 2017; Men, 2014).

Another important finding concerns the role of two-way communication and feedback. Participants' experiences indicate that communication becomes more effective when employees are provided with opportunities to seek clarification, communicate their concerns, and receive responses from management. Such interaction transforms internal communication from a one-directional process into a participatory organizational practice. Previous research similarly emphasizes that effective internal communication should facilitate employee voice and interaction rather than relying exclusively on top-down information dissemination (Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014). The findings also demonstrate the close relationship between communication quality and employee emotional well-being. Participants associated ineffective communication with stress, confusion, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, whereas transparent and supportive communication was associated with greater emotional stability. These patterns indicate that internal communication practices can have consequences extending beyond information exchange to employees' psychological experiences of organizational crises. This interpretation is supported by research demonstrating that internal crisis communication satisfaction can influence employee work outcomes and that effective internal communication contributes to employee engagement and organizational relationships (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014). Collectively, the findings suggest that clarity

and transparency, leadership communication, two-way communication and feedback, and employee emotional well-being and job contentment operate as interconnected rather than independent dimensions of communication management. Effective communication can reduce uncertainty, while supportive leadership provides reassurance and two-way communication creates opportunities for employee participation. Together, these processes can contribute to greater employee stability, satisfaction, and commitment during organizational crises (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014). These findings therefore reinforce the strategic importance of internal communication as an organizational mechanism for sustaining employee well-being and strengthening organizational resilience during periods of uncertainty.

## Conclusion

This investigation robustly affirms that the efficacy of communication management strategies during internal crises is fundamentally linked to the maintenance of employee job satisfaction (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014). The four critical themes are Clarity and Transparency, Leadership Communication, Two-Way Communication and Feedback, and Employee Emotional Well-Being and Job Contentment demonstrate a unified system where strategic communication serves as a protective layer for the workforce (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). The key implication for organizations is a mandate to integrate employee welfare directly into their crisis communication protocols (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017). Prioritizing timely, consistent, and empathetic communication is not merely an ethical consideration but a strategic imperative that directly correlates with reduced employee stress, stabilized morale, and the preservation of long-term job satisfaction and organizational resilience (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014). Future research should focus on quantifying the differential impact of these strategies on various job satisfaction dimensions, for example satisfaction with supervision, co-workers, and the work itself to offer a more granular understanding of the communication-satisfaction constructed in crisis scenarios.

The findings further emphasize that effective internal crisis communication should be regarded as a strategic organizational capability rather than merely an operational response to periods of uncertainty. Organizations that establish clear communication structures, maintain transparency, and provide employees with reliable information can strengthen employee confidence and facilitate organizational stability during challenging situations (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; 2014). In this regard, communication management serves both informational and relational functions by enabling organizations to reduce uncertainty while simultaneously strengthening relationships between management and employees. Furthermore, leadership communication and employee participation are essential components of an effective internal crisis communication system. Supportive leadership messaging can provide employees with reassurance and direction, while two-way communication mechanisms allow employees to express concerns, seek clarification, and participate more actively in organizational communication processes (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014). Consequently, organizations should develop communication practices that

move beyond one-way information dissemination and establish an environment characterized by openness, responsiveness, accessibility, and mutual communication between management and employees.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the understanding of strategic internal communication by demonstrating its relationship with employee emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational resilience during internal crises. The findings reinforce the importance of viewing employees as critical internal stakeholders whose communication needs should be incorporated into organizational crisis management strategies (Al Katheeri et al., 2024; Tourish, 2019; Men and Bowen, 2017; Heide and Simonsson, 2015; Mishra et al., 2014; Men, 2014; Welch and Jackson, 2007). For Malaysia's service sector, where frontline employees maintain direct interactions with customers, strengthening internal communication practices may therefore contribute not only to employee stability and satisfaction but also to the continuity and quality of service delivery during organizational uncertainty.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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