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**Intercultural Communication and Conflict
Management in Luxury Hospitality: The Case of
Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts**

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Introduction

Effective communication is fundamental to guest experience and operational performance in luxury hospitality. International hotels operate across diverse cultural environments in which miscommunication can quickly escalate into service failures, diminish guest satisfaction, and weaken brand equity (Proksch, 2016). Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts, formed through the partnership between Bulgari and Marriott International, represents a distinctive combination of Italian luxury heritage, global operating standards, and a multilingual workforce (Bulgari Hotels, 2025). These characteristics create both opportunities and vulnerabilities, particularly when managing conflict and executing service recovery.

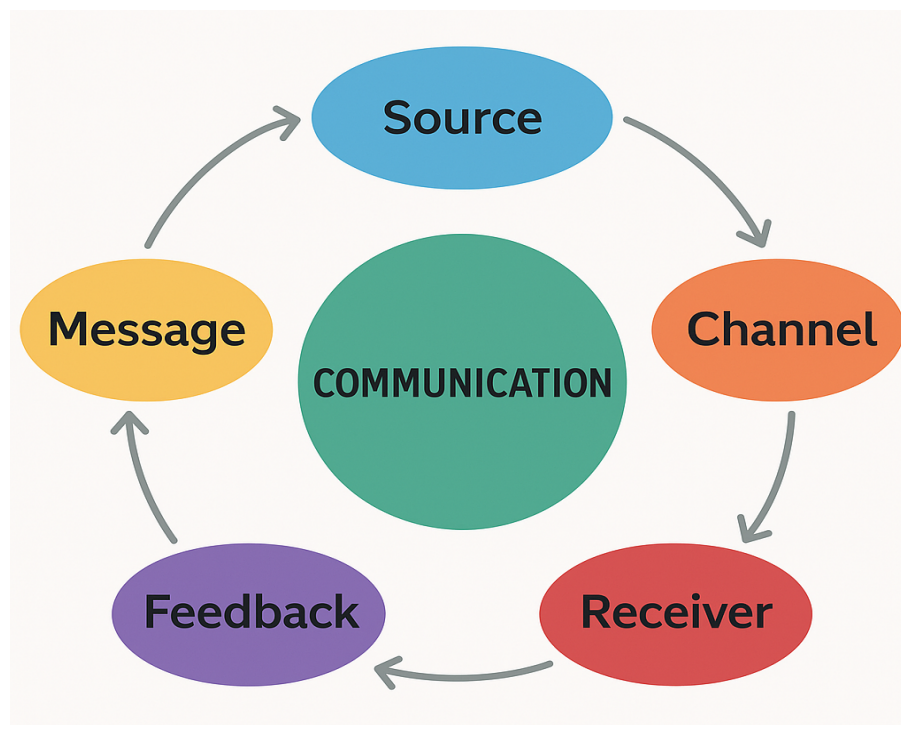


Figure 1: Cultural values shaping guest expectations during service recovery. (Source: Author's own work)

Figure 1 highlights how culturally embedded values influence guest expectations during service recovery interactions. This essay examines how cultural norms and linguistic practices influence communication during service failures within the operational context of Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts. It focuses on interactions across front-of-house and back-of-house teams, the alignment between brand and operator expectations, and guest engagement in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The analysis draws on several theoretical lenses: Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which explain patterned behavioural expectations in service interactions (Hofstede, 2021); Hall's high-context and low-context communication theory, which

highlights how meaning is conveyed either implicitly through context and relationships or explicitly through direct language—an especially relevant distinction in luxury service recovery across culturally diverse regions (Hall, 1976); Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), which supports clarity and coordination in multilingual teams (Capozza, 2023); Samovar and Porter’s intercultural competence model, which emphasises perception and nonverbal communication (Samovar and Porter, 2016); and Gimenez’s work on language policy and inter-unit collaboration (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014). Together, these frameworks guide an examination of typical communication challenges and inform strategies for delivering culturally sensitive and operationally consistent service recovery across global hotel operations. This perspective is especially relevant for Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts, where communication practices are shaped by the intersection of Marriott’s operational standards and LVMH’s luxury brand governance.

Theoretical Frameworks for Intercultural Communication in Luxury Hospitality

Intercultural Communication and Service Recovery in High-End Hotel Operations

Intercultural communication involves the exchange of messages between individuals from different cultural backgrounds and encompasses shared meanings, values, and linguistic practices within organisational environments. In hospitality, communication shapes both the emotional and functional dimensions of the guest experience, influencing perceived professionalism, relational warmth, and service consistency (Neuliep, 2018). Conflict management—defined as the organisational strategy for addressing service breaches—is essential for preventing escalation in diverse service contexts (Proksch, 2016). Service recovery, the process of restoring trust following a service failure, is particularly delicate within luxury hospitality due to heightened expectations of exclusivity, artistry, and symbolic value (Koerber, 2017). Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts operates through a hybrid brand identity that fuses Italian luxury heritage with Marriott’s global operational systems (Bulgari Hotels, 2025). This dual structure creates a multicultural environment where miscommunication can affect guest satisfaction, workforce cohesion, and owner relations. Within this setting, frameworks such as Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, Hall’s high- and low-context communication, Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), Samovar and Porter’s intercultural competence model,

and Gimenez’s organisational language policy research provide essential tools for understanding communication dynamics and supporting effective recovery practices.

Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions and Guest Expectations

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory describes how national cultures differ across measurable value-based dimensions, shaping how people perceive authority, communication, uncertainty, and social relationships (Hofstede, 2021). These dimensions are central to understanding patterned behavioural expectations during service interactions. Power distance affects how authority and hierarchy are interpreted. Guests from high power distance cultures may expect visible managerial presence during service disruptions as a sign of respect, seriousness, and reassurance (House et al., 2024). In contrast, low power distance guests prefer transparent, collaborative communication with empowered frontline staff and may perceive hierarchical gestures as excessive. Individualism and collectivism influence preferences for direct or indirect communication. Individualistic guests generally value explicit explanations, clarity, and autonomy in selecting recovery options. Conversely, collectivist guests tend to favour indirect communication, subtlety, and face-saving measures that avoid embarrassment. Uncertainty avoidance shapes comfort levels during disruptions: high uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer precise timelines, structured processes, and predictable communication (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014). Long-term orientation affects the emotional tone of recovery, with long-term oriented guests appreciating follow-up gestures and relational continuity. Collectively, these dimensions inform managerial decisions and help employees anticipate friction points, enabling communication strategies that align with culturally grounded expectations (Hofstede, 2021).

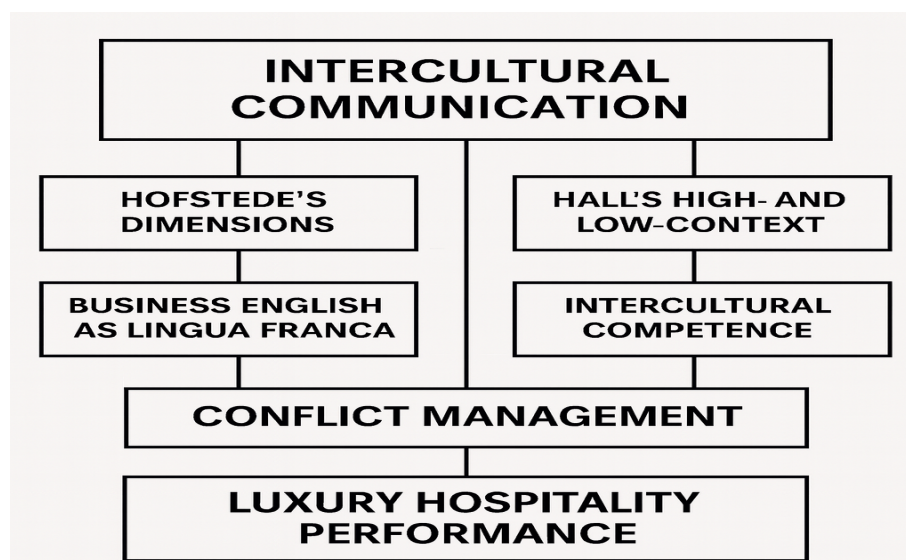


Figure 2: Interaction of cultural, linguistic, interpersonal, and organisational frameworks in service recovery (Source: Author’s own work)

High- and Low-Context Communication in Service Recovery

Figure 2 provides an integrated overview of the theoretical frameworks that collectively support effective service recovery in luxury hospitality. Hall's high- and low-context theory distinguishes cultures based on how much meaning is conveyed implicitly through context and nonverbal cues versus explicitly through direct verbal communication (Hall, 1976). This framework deepens understanding of communication dynamics during service recovery. High-context cultures—commonly associated with parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America—rely heavily on implicit cues, shared background knowledge, and relational sensitivity to interpret meaning (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). Communication is often indirect, with meaning conveyed through tone, silence, and context rather than explicit detail. In contrast, low-context cultures, such as the United States, Germany, and other Northern European countries, prioritise clarity, explicit verbal messages, and detailed explanations (Lamino and Diaz, 2024). In luxury hospitality settings, understanding these tendencies enables managers to tailor communication—for example, offering nuanced, relationship-focused messages to high-context guests and concise, information-rich updates to low-context guests. Such cultural literacy is vital in service recovery, where tone, delivery, and the balance between relational and informational content can significantly influence guest satisfaction. This is particularly important for brands such as Bvlgari, where service is positioned as refined, discreet, and emotionally resonant; knowing when to privilege subtlety over directness becomes a key operational competency.

Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) in Multicultural Hotel Teams

Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) refers to the use of English as a shared working language among speakers with different first languages, prioritising clarity, intelligibility, and practical communication over native-speaker norms (Capozza, 2023). This linguistic approach introduces an essential perspective for global hotel operations. In multicultural teams where English functions as the primary communication medium, BELF emphasises mutual intelligibility, clarity, and communicative efficiency over native-speaker proficiency. This involves using straightforward vocabulary, avoiding idiomatic expressions, and maintaining structured communication during handovers and briefings. BELF reduces ambiguity during time-sensitive interactions—particularly service recovery, where unclear communication can exacerbate tensions. It also strengthens communication between brand, operator, and owner

teams by encouraging standardised agendas, confirmation phrasing, and systematic documentation. For luxury brands such as Bvlgari, where consistency is integral to identity, BELF acts as a linguistic regulation mechanism that preserves operational clarity across departments and international properties. Additionally, BELF supports onboarding in multicultural teams, enabling new staff to learn procedures more rapidly and reducing early-stage performance gaps that often contribute to service inconsistencies.

Intercultural Competence and Nonverbal Communication in Luxury Hospitality

Samovar and Porter's intercultural competence model explains how effective communication across cultures depends on perception, context awareness, empathy, and sensitivity to nonverbal behaviour (Samovar and Porter, 2016). This model adds a crucial interpersonal dimension to the theoretical framework. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to interact effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds through empathy, openness, nonverbal sensitivity, and adaptability (Samovar and Porter, 2016). The model highlights how perception, context, and nonverbal behaviour shape interactions. Tone, pace, gesture, silence, and eye contact may be interpreted differently across cultures, requiring staff to adapt their communication styles in ways that honour cultural expectations. In high-end hospitality—where interactions are intimate, emotionally charged, and often symbolic—nonverbal awareness becomes a key differentiator of service quality. Staff must modulate formality, emotional expression, and physical presence while maintaining the brand's stylistic identity. Developing intercultural competence enables employees to interpret status cues, navigate culturally influenced emotional norms, and deliver apologies that protect guest dignity. Importantly, this competence supports frontline decision-making during unpredictable, high-pressure service failures in which scripted responses are insufficient.

Organisational Language Policy and Communication Consistency

Gimenez's research on organisational language policy examines how formal language rules, shared terminology, and standardised documentation support coordination and consistency in multilingual organisations (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014). This perspective offers an organisational-level approach to managing communication in linguistically diverse hotel operations. Within such environments, structured language policies—such as standardised

terminology, bilingual templates, and clear translation protocols—help reduce “unit drift,” where departments gradually diverge in vocabulary or interpretation (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014). These policies help maintain consistency in guest communication, operational documents, safety messaging, and recovery correspondence. In Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts, clear language policies ensure that Italian luxury codes coexist harmoniously with Marriott’s procedural frameworks. Bilingual recovery letters maintain brand tone, while shared vocabulary across departments fosters coordinated action and reduces service inconsistencies. In high-stakes environments where miscommunication can damage brand image, language policy provides stability and organisational coherence. This institutional structure becomes essential during peak seasons or staff shortages, when team members rely heavily on standardised communication tools to prevent operational deviation.

Communication Challenges and Integrated Service Recovery in Luxury Hospitality

Together, these frameworks explain why communication failures are common in exclusive hospitality sector. Service failures often originate from mismatched expectations: a guest expecting privacy may perceive personalised attention as intrusive, while a guest anticipating ritualised service may interpret efficiency as impersonal. Cross-departmental gaps also create friction—for example, when front office staff promise a late checkout but housekeeping is not informed (Radzi, 2015). Tensions emerge between brand expectations and operator priorities: the brand may favour elaborate emotional rituals, whereas the operator must maintain efficiency during peak periods. Owners add complexity by demanding strict cost control while retaining luxury positioning (Cai and Alani, 2018). Hofstede’s dimensions help clarify how guests from different cultures interpret these moments. High power distance guests may welcome managerial intervention, while low power distance guests may prefer empowered frontline staff. Individualists expect direct explanations, whereas collectivists appreciate discretion and relational subtlety. High uncertainty avoidance guests feel reassured by detailed timelines and structured recovery steps (Hofstede, 2021). Understanding these patterns enhances service recovery strategy.

Regional variations illustrate how these cultural scripts manifest in practice. In Tokyo, where uncertainty avoidance and power distance are both high, service delays without detailed explanations may cause considerable anxiety, and guests expect authoritative apologies and

clear responsibilities (Sharma, 2018). In Dubai, privacy and honour are central to social interaction, requiring discreet and non-intrusive recovery approaches. In London, direct communication and efficiency are valued, and elaborate emotional rituals may feel unnecessary or insincere. These examples demonstrate how cultural expectations influence complaint styles, communication preferences, and perceptions of professionalism. They also highlight the importance of adaptive leadership in luxury hospitality, as managers must shift rapidly between communication modes depending on guest profile, emotional sensitivity, and local cultural norms.

An integrated communication approach is therefore essential. BELF supports operational clarity through simple, structured language, accurate handovers, and shared documentation (Koerber, 2017). Intercultural competence ensures staff can interpret cues and adjust tone appropriately (Zemke and Bell, 2020). Language policies standardise terminology and documentation, preventing misinterpretation between linguistically diverse teams (Neuliep, 2018). Together, these frameworks form a cohesive communication system that aligns people, processes, and language.

Premium hospitality managers must coordinate these elements across the guest journey. Pre-arrival communication helps manage culturally grounded expectations. During the stay, staff can adjust address forms, pace, privacy levels, and update frequency to match cultural norms (House et al., 2024). Post-stay communication should reflect cultural orientation—for example, relational follow-up for collectivist guests versus concise closure for individualists (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014). Effective recovery protocols synthesise Hofstede’s cultural insights, BELF clarity, Samovar’s interpersonal competence, and Gimenez’s organisational stability. Ongoing training, reflective case studies, and periodic updates to scripts, glossaries, and recovery templates ensure that communication remains consistent, efficient, and culturally sensitive (Sharma, 2018). By addressing cross-functional gaps and strengthening communication competency at all levels, luxury hotels safeguard guest trust, brand equity, and the emotional value central to luxury service experiences.

Conclusion

Effective communication in high-end hospitality is shaped by cultural expectations, linguistic diversity, and organisational systems. This essay has demonstrated that service recovery in Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts relies on an understanding of how culture influences perceptions

of authority, time, self, and certainty. Hall's high-context and low-context communication theory further explains how meaning is negotiated implicitly through relationships, status, and situational cues or explicitly through direct verbal expression—an especially critical distinction in cross-cultural service recovery encounters (Hall, 1976). Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2021) help predict patterned guest reactions during service failures, while Business English as a Lingua Franca supports clarity and shared understanding across multilingual teams (Capozza, 2023). Samovar and Porter's intercultural competence model highlights the importance of empathy, nonverbal awareness, and contextual sensitivity in emotionally charged interactions (Samovar and Porter, 2016). At the organisational level, Gimenez's work on language policy shows how standardised terminology, bilingual templates, and clear documentation sustain coordination across brand and operator systems (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014).

Integrating these frameworks into daily practice enables luxury hotels to manage conflict in ways that are culturally responsive, operationally precise, and aligned with brand identity. Such integration reduces escalation, enhances collaboration across departments, and supports the symbolic and experiential value that defines luxury hospitality (Koerber, 2017; Cai and Alani, 2018). Ultimately, culturally informed communication strengthens service recovery, safeguards brand equity, and sustains guest trust—key outcomes for a brand operating across diverse markets and complex organisational partnerships such as Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts.

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