



“From Culture to Capability: How Organisational Behaviour and Communication Drive Leadership Effectiveness and Performance in Hospitality.”



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DISCLAIMER: This study is my own research based on my observations and notes from placement. It was also guided by the literature research I’ve done as well.

I acknowledge the use of grammarly for corecting the syntax, and grammars errors or to improve readability at times.

Abstract

This research explores the critical yet often underexamined intersection of organisational behaviour, communication, and leadership within the multicultural context of the hospitality industry. In an increasing workforce diversity and post-pandemic operational volatility, the ability of hospitality organisations to transform cultural complexity into capability is emerging as a strategic requirement. Anchored in the case of The Harlow Hotel by AccorHotels, this study investigates how communication practices and cultural dynamics shape organisational behaviour—and how these, in turn, impact leadership effectiveness, employee motivation, and organisational performance.

Drawing on a rich theoretical foundation, the research synthesises Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, Earley and Ang's Cultural Intelligence (CQ) framework, Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership model, and foundational motivational theories from Maslow and Herzberg. These lenses are not applied in isolation but woven together to construct a multidimensional framework for understanding behavioural dynamics in service-centred, multicultural environments. The study adopts a qualitative, case study methodology grounded in reflective logs and secondary research, enabling a deep contextual understanding of behavioural realities at the departmental level.

Findings reveal a paradox: diversity offers a powerful source of innovation, yet unmanaged cultural misalignments often produce communication breakdowns, interpersonal tension, and disengagement. While departments led by high-CQ, transformational leaders displayed stronger cohesion, morale, and role clarity, others struggled with ambiguity, inconsistent messaging, and weak alignment between employee motivation and organisational goals. Critically, the study finds that existing HR structures within mid-tier hospitality settings often fail to operationalise behavioural and motivational theory, resulting in underdeveloped talent channels, fragmented learning, and stagnant performance cultures.

The research addresses two substantial gaps in the literature. First, it highlights the lack of practical frameworks for medium-sized hospitality organisations to address communication and cultural misalignment systematically. Second, it exposes the limited application of organisational behaviour and motivation theory within strategic HR development. To bridge these gaps, the study proposes a behavioural capability model. In this model, communication, cultural fluency, and inclusive leadership act as budding strategic assets.

The implications are both practical and profound. The proposal recommends embedding CQ assessments into leadership development, integrating AI-driven tools for adaptive communication training, and shifting from static job-role design to dynamic, motivationally-aligned people strategies. This approach applies beyond the immediate operational aspect, supporting a structural and psychological reconfiguration of leadership and HR practices in hospitality. Such transformation is not only beneficial; it is necessary.

Eventually, the research rethinks the organisational behaviour from a reactive, operational concern to a proactive strategic advantage lever. In a sector where human interaction is both the outcome, and the process, cultivating behavioural capability is no longer optional, it is the foundation for resilience, innovation, and sustainable growth. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of CQ-based leadership development, neurocognitive models of behavioural engagement, and the ethical implications of AI-facilitated communication in culturally diverse teams in hospitality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

In a competitive and dynamic landscape like the hospitality industry, organisational behaviour, communication practices, and leadership approach impact substantially employee performance and service quality. The hospitality sector, known as a field with high employee turnover, intense service demands, and a multicultural workforce, requires a strategic approach to human resource management to change the existing trend (Bratton and Gold, 2017). At the heart of this approach should be a profound understanding of how organisational culture and internal communication systems influence leadership practices and impact operational performance.

This research explores the link between organisational behaviour, communication, culture, and leadership in hospitality. It offers a multi-level investigation into how these elements influence not only the individual employee performance but also the broader organisational effectiveness. Drawing from behavioural, motivational, and strategic HR theories, the research is grounded in the context of a real-world case study—The Harlow Hotel by AccorHotels a mid-sized hotel in Harlow, UK, which served as the site for the author's work placement. The hotel provided a rich environment to observe firsthand the challenges and opportunities linked to communication breakdowns, cultural misalignment, and inconsistent leadership practices. Issues like high staff turnover, inefficiencies in communication across departments, and operational bottlenecks were current and had a visible impact on service delivery, guest satisfaction, as well as staff morale.

1.2 Relevance of Study

The significance of this research is threefold. Firstly, it addresses an urgent need for hospitality organisations to bridge the gap between culture, communication, and leadership to build agile and high-performing teams (Mullins, 2019; Buchanan and Huczynski, 2019). Secondly, it offers practical insights for HR and operations managers by applying robust theoretical frameworks to real-world challenges in multicultural service contexts. As Slack, Lewis and Sharma (2020) emphasise, strategy and operational excellence must be rooted in coherent internal practices that reflect shared values and clear leadership. Thirdly, it generates actionable strategies for hospitality leaders to align behavioural dynamics with training, motivation, and long-term talent development.

The research during placement has identified three main areas of concerns: a lack of structured communication channels, misalignment between employee expectations and managerial actions, and insufficient investment in leadership training and motivation. These issues echo broader patterns in the industry, as noted by Bailey et al. (2021), who argue that strategic HRM must move beyond compliance to become a core driver of innovation and capability development.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

This study aims to explore how organisational behaviour, shaped through communication and cultural dynamics characteristic to the organisation, influences performance and to identify strategic HR and leadership approaches to enhance training, motivation, and talent development in hospitality.

Research Objectives:

1. To evaluate the role of communication and culture in shaping organisational behaviour; and to critically examine the relationship between organisational behaviour, performance, and leadership in hospitality.
2. To identify and analyse strategic management approaches that connect organisational behaviour, culture, and communication with performance outcomes and human capital development.
3. To apply and integrate relevant organisational and motivational theories in assessing behavioural drivers of performance in multicultural hospitality environments. To assess the role of HR training, motivation strategies and talent development initiatives in shaping organisational behaviour.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do communication practices and cultural dynamics influence organisational behaviour, and how does this behaviour affect both employee and organisational performance and leadership in the hospitality sector?

2. How can managerial and HR strategies grounded in organisational behaviour and motivation theory improve performance, training outcomes, and long-term talent development across hospitality organisations?

1.5 Structure of the Research

This research will proceed as follows:

- **Chapter 2: Literature Review** will synthesise relevant theories from organisational behaviour, HRM, psychology, and leadership literature.
- **Chapter 3: Methodology** will outline the case study approach, thematic analysis, and secondary data.
- **Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion** will present themes derived from placement experiences and discuss them in relation to the literature.
- **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations** will summarise key insights and propose practical strategies for performance improvement at The Harlow Hotel.

The study aims to provide an academically rigorous and practically valuable exploration of how culture and communication transform leadership and performance within a hospitality setting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explores foundational and contemporary perspectives from behavioural science, human resource management, leadership theory, and intercultural communication.

2.1 Organisational Behaviour in the Hospitality Sector

Organisational behaviour (OB) provides a lens through which we can understand the drivers of human performance, motivation, and interpersonal dynamics within organisations. OB represents a foundational element in understanding how employee attitudes, communication patterns, and leadership practices shape operational performance in the hospitality industry (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2019). In hospitality, OB dynamics such as trust, cohesion, and shared cultural values are particularly important in shaping employee satisfaction. Due to the

high service orientation and reliance on frontline staff for value delivery it also shapes the guest experience. Studies by Kandampully et al. (2018) argue that OB in hospitality is not merely a support function but is directly linked to guest satisfaction, innovation, and adaptability in service delivery.

To address the first question of this research the author dives into the complex terrain of cultural perception, behavioural patterns, and intercultural competence. The author uses Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (2001) and Earley & Ang's (2003) Cultural Intelligence (CQ) framework to provide a robust interpretive lens in exploring how culture shapes both communication practices and organisational behaviour within hospitality environments.

Hofstede has identified six key dimensions—Power Distance, Individualism vs Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity vs Femininity, Long-Term Orientation, and Indulgence vs Restraint. These dimensions explain how individuals from different national and cultural backgrounds perceive authority, hierarchy, time, and social interaction. For instance, high Power Distance cultures may expect top-down directives and deference to hierarchy, while low Power Distance cultures value flat structures and informal exchanges.

In The Harlow Hotel, such disparities manifested in employee interactions and leadership responses. Staff from high Power Distance cultures hesitated to provide upward feedback, leading to a silence that was often misinterpreted by Western-trained managers as disengagement. Simultaneously, high-context communication (common in collectivist cultures) clashed with the hotel's preference for direct, low-context messaging, creating confusion and friction.

Hofstede's model surfaces the underlying behavioural assumptions that disrupt team cohesion when unacknowledged. However, as insightful as Hofstede's work is, it tends to be static, prescriptive, and overly nation-centric. It assumes cultural consistency and does not account for intercultural adaptability or individual variance.

This is where Earley and Ang's Cultural Intelligence framework (CQ) provides a vital extension. CQ encompasses four interrelated capabilities—cognitive (knowledge of cultural norms), motivational (interest and drive to adapt), behavioural (ability to adjust actions), and metacognitive (strategic thinking about cultural interaction). CQ moves beyond descriptive

categorisation and offers a developmentally oriented model suited to globalised, multicultural teams.

In practice, managers with high CQ at The Harlow Hotel displayed a reflective awareness of cultural variance, asked clarifying questions, and adapted communication styles to suit their audience. These behaviours reduced conflict, improved morale, and encouraged inclusive participation. Rockstuhl et al. (2011) found that CQ was more predictive of leadership effectiveness in multicultural teams than either general intelligence (IQ) or emotional intelligence (EQ).

Combining Hofstede and CQ, the teams have both the problem and the solution. Hofstede shows the landscape of potential cultural clashes. CQ equips teams with a toolkit to navigate the terrain skilfully. When organisational behaviour frameworks are overlapped with these insights, the result is a dynamic understanding of how communication styles emerge, clash, and can ultimately be harmonised.

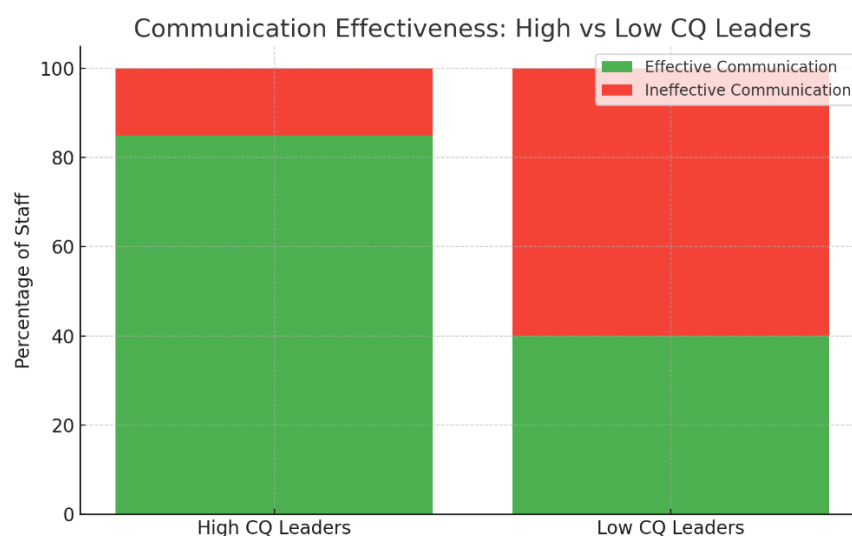


Figure 1.

This theoretical framework is increasingly relevant not only within hospitality but across service sectors globally. The ability to bridge cultural gaps is becoming a defining leadership competency in the 21st-century workplace (Livermore, 2015). Communication failures are not merely transactional mistakes but missed opportunities to foster trust, alignment, and strategic clarity. From this perspective, organisational performance in hospitality depends on leaders' ability to diagnose cultural tensions and act with contextual agility. Investing in CQ

development, embedding cultural diagnostics in team assessments, and reframing intercultural interaction as a core leadership skill can transform communication breakdowns into sources of learning and innovation.

Contemporary research underscores the multidimensional nature of OB—highlighting emotional intelligence, team climate, and role clarity as central to performance (Albrecht et al., 2015). Yet, despite these insights, OB practices in many mid-scale hotels remain reactive and fragmented, particularly in communication, training, and empowerment, as seen during the Harlow Hotel placement.

Mullins (2019) highlights that effective OB in hospitality must account for both structural factors (e.g. management systems, job design) and cultural variables (e.g. values, norms, and expectations). The behavioural patterns observed during placement at The Harlow Hotel with communication breakdowns and low staff morale indicates misaligned OB practices and fragmented organisational culture.

2.2 Contemporary Research Trends: Communication and Culture

The research has indicated in particular, communication and cultural misalignment as critically disruptive factors. When communication breaks down, whether due to unclear protocols, language barriers, or hierarchical failures, service delivery can be severely impaired. Taylor and Woodhams (2016) argue that the fragmented communication infrastructures, common in hospitality, hinder coordination, weaken accountability, and reduce staff morale. This is compounded by cultural diversity, which, though potentially a strength, often leads to misunderstanding and conflict when not proactively managed (Barak, 2016).

Recent studies have highlighted the need to invest in intercultural competence and inclusive communication strategies in the service sector. Gudykunst (2004) and Hofstede (2001) provide foundational frameworks on cultural dimensions—such as power distance and collectivism—that influence staff expectations and managerial effectiveness. Empirical work by Mattila, Guchait, and Cheng (2016) confirms that misalignment in these areas contributes to emotional exhaustion, turnover, and diminished service recovery.

Despite this, hospitality, especially mid-sized and independently operated hotels, often lack formal training on intercultural communication. Research by Giousmpasoglou et al. (2021)

emphasises that communication challenges remain systemic, with little evidence of integrative or participatory leadership structures to address them.

Communication, both formal and informal, plays a pivotal role in the coordination of service delivery. Taylor and Woodhams (2016) shows that communication failures can lead to breakdown in teamwork and service consistency, which are critical in guest-facing environments. In multicultural teams, where different norms and communication styles coexist, the absence of intercultural training exacerbates misunderstandings and reduces cohesion (Bohlander and Snell, 2017).

Communication failures are frequently indicated as the root cause of operational underperformance in the service sector. In hospitality, poor internal communication leads to service inconsistencies, role confusion, and guest dissatisfaction (Kim and Lee, 2012). While Taylor and Woodhams (2016) highlight the importance of integrated communication frameworks, few studies explore how multicultural diversity affects communication flows at the operational level.

The placement experience revealed the detrimental impact of poor communication on staff engagement and performance. Situations involving inconsistent task delegation and reactive rather than proactive problem-solving reflects a lack of structured communication channels. Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of culture provide a useful framework for understanding how national cultural traits, such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance, influence communication patterns and leadership perceptions.

Intercultural communication issues become especially pronounced in multinational chains, where symbolic interactions and power distance affect perceived trust and voice (Hofstede, 2001; Gudykunst, 2004). Thematic reviews such as those by Barak (2016) recommend inclusive communication training, yet implementation is limited in most UK-based hotels. The placement exposed the absence of cross-cultural training, a gap that resulted in lower staff morale and disengagement.

2.3 Organisational Behaviour, Communication, and Culture

Synthesising the literature across OB, communication, and culture in hospitality sector it reveals three major themes:

1. **Structural Communication Deficits.** The absence of standardised communication protocols and feedback mechanisms reduce cohesion (Taylor and Woodhams, 2016).
2. **Cultural Friction and Emotional Labour.** Misaligned cultural assumptions increase emotional strain and reduce performance (Mattila et al., 2016).
3. **Leadership Blind Spots.** Managers often lack the tools and sensitivity required to lead across cultures, weakening team identity and psychological safety (Barak, 2016).

The Harlow Hotel is a case study for these themes. Staff often felt ambiguity around roles and expectations. Training practices were inconsistent, and cultural tensions were common. These insights confirms Northouse (2021) findings, who highlights the importance of adaptive leadership particularly in culturally complex environments.

2.3 Leadership and Motivation Theories

According to Thompson (2020) leadership is the corner stone of organisational change and performance enhancement. Leadership within hospitality must be both transformational and adaptive. Transformational leadership, which inspires employees through vision, empathy, and personal example, is cited in the literature to be effective in high-contact service environments.

Leadership is widely recognised as a determinant of organisational climate and employee performance. Transformational leadership, emphasised by Bass and Avolio (1994), remains the preferred model in service organisations due to its emotional and relational orientation. However, recent critiques point to the need for a contextualised leadership that adapts to workforce demography and psychographic profiles (Northouse, 2021).

Transformational leadership, (Bass & Avolio, 1994), provides a robust framework for understanding how leadership influences both individual and organisational performance. Within the context of this research transformational leadership not only contextualises how leaders drive change, but also how they shape employee perceptions, motivations, and interactions in complex, multicultural environments.

Transformational leaders are characterised by four dimensions: Idealised Influence (charisma), Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualised Consideration. These aspects allow leaders to go beyond transactional exchanges and inspire deeper commitment by

aligning team goals with personal values (Bass, 1985). In the hospitality sector, such a style becomes particularly significant due to the service-driven, people-centric nature of the industry.

In multicultural environments like The Harlow Hotel, transformational leadership helps mitigate communication breakdowns by creating psychological safety and promoting shared vision. For example, Individualised Consideration encourages leaders to acknowledge the cultural differences in communication styles and adapt their feedback mechanisms accordingly. Research by Eisenbeiss, van Knippenberg, and Boerner (2008) demonstrates that transformational leadership significantly improves team creativity and cohesion in culturally diverse teams.

Moreover, transformational leadership aligns with Cultural Intelligence (CQ) in that both require adaptive awareness. Where CQ provides the cultural toolkit, transformational leadership sets the motivational climate. Leaders high in CQ and transformational capabilities are uniquely positioned to unite culturally diverse employees under a common vision (Ng, Van Dyne & Ang, 2009).

Critically, transformational leadership has been empirically linked to higher levels of employee engagement and job satisfaction and retention (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Breevaart et al., 2014). These effects are essential as they address key concerns in hospitality: high turnover, training inefficiencies, and disengagement. A meta-analysis by Judge and Piccolo (2004) confirmed that transformational leadership correlates positively with performance across sectors, with pronounced effects in high-contact service industries.

While transactional leadership, focused on contingent rewards, can temporarily address hygiene factors (as per Herzberg), it does little to sustain engagement. By contrast, transformational leaders align with Maslow's paradigm of higher-order needs (esteem and self-actualisation), offering pathways for professional growth and development. The integration of motivation theory into leadership strategy is crucial for creating work environments that support long-term talent development.

Importantly, the application of transformational leadership extends beyond the individual leaders; and it can be established through HR strategy. For instance, training programs, leadership channels, and peer-coaching models can cultivate transformational behaviours throughout the wider organisation. Embedding leadership principles enables a cultural shift

where communication, trust, and shared purpose are firmly rooted in the organisational behaviour.

Bass and Avolio's model acts not only as a leadership paradigm but also as a catalyst for aligning organisational behaviour with communication and cultural responsiveness. When integrated with CQ and motivational theories, transformational leadership emerges as the hub for high-functioning, resilient hospitality organisations.

Motivation theories in hospitality are often rooted in Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory, though research by Gagné and Deci (2005) in Self-Determination Theory adds nuance by differentiating between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational climates. In The Harlow Hotel, absence of recognition, inconsistent feedback mechanisms, and limited developmental opportunities indicated a motivational environment skewed towards hygiene over growth. According to findings from Karatepe (2013), poor supervisory support lead to burnout and turnover in hospitality.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) further advises on motivation strategies in hospitality. His distinction between hygiene factors (e.g. salary, working conditions) and motivators (e.g. recognition, career progression) offers a basis to design compelling HR policies that promote retention and engagement. Placement observations at The Harlow Hotel indicates a deficiency in motivational drivers, contributing to high staff turnover and disengagement.

2.4 Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)

SHRM integrates people management with long-term strategic objectives. Bailey et al. (2021) argue that hospitality organisations must align HRM policies with capability development and service innovation. However, empirical reviews by Jiang et al. (2012) reveal that only a minority of hospitality businesses employ coherent SHRM systems. Beardwell and Thompson (2017) emphasise the importance of training, development, and performance appraisal systems that reinforce strategic objectives.

At Harlow Hotel, staff recruitment, appraisal, and training were managed transactionally rather than strategically, the lack of coherent HR systems was evident in the inconsistent onboarding and training processes. Bratton and Gold's (2017) has critiqued the organisational HR systems that fails to provide strategic advantage to business outcomes. By contrast, organisations that

embed HRM into their broader strategic planning can better respond to environmental volatility and labour market shifts (Baxter, 2020). Research by Wright and Nishii (2013) has stressed the importance of HR processes to align with employee perceptions to enabling strategy implementation. The lack of feedback mechanisms and cross-functional HR practices at Harlow Hotel reflects a persistent gap between HRM design and employee experience.

How could managerial and HR strategies that are grounded in organisational behaviour and motivation theory to improve performance? There were proposed two motivation theories, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. They offer compelling analytical lenses to examine behavioural strategies in hospitality settings. While distinct in framework, both theories reveal interdependent dimensions of human aspiration, satisfaction, and productivity which directly shape talent development and operational success.

Maslow (1954) proposes a hierarchy beginning with physiological needs and culminating in self-actualisation. In hospitality, front-line roles frequently satisfy only the lower tiers - food, shelter (via wages), and some level of safety through job security. However, research by Kim and Jogaratnam (2010) demonstrates that neglecting higher-order needs such as esteem and self-actualisation often results in plateau in employee engagement and high turnover, particularly among millennial and Gen Z cohorts. Consequently, if HR strategies focus solely on monetary incentives they are insufficient to foster enduring motivation. Progressive hospitality employers are now incorporating personal development plans, mentoring schemes, and internal mobility pathways to address these aspirational dimensions (Baum, 2015).

Herzberg's (1966) theory splits motivation into hygiene factors (e.g. salary, working conditions) and intrinsic motivators (e.g. recognition, achievement). In the case of The Harlow Hotel, staff reflected more dissatisfaction not only with pay but with the unclear progression, lack of feedback, and minimal recognition. The motivators mentioned in Herzberg's framework are fundamental in shaping behavioural commitment. This is also confirmed by Lundberg, Gudmundson, and Andersson (2009) findings, who found that intrinsic factors have a stronger correlation with job retention in service-intensive environments.

The key take away from these theories is: meeting hygiene factors prevents dissatisfaction, but only intrinsic motivators foster engagement. This explains why some well-compensated hospitality staff remain disengaged. It is not a failure of compensation but a deficit of meaning, challenge, and recognition, conditions necessary for behavioural investment.

Independent of industry standards, the hospitality sector is now facing the imperative of rethinking its employment proposition to attract and engage staff. Rather than merely offering a job, hospitality businesses must offer a journey of growth, contribution, and self-discovery. This can only be achieved through integrated HR strategies that map job roles against motivational needs, supported by structured leadership development and reflective practice.

Such arguments intersect with broader fields of organisational psychology, identity theory, and adult learning. For example, Kolb's experiential learning cycle aligns with Maslow's self-actualisation goal, suggesting that learning-rich environments may double as motivational engines (Kolb, 1984). Similarly, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory affirms that autonomy, competence, and relatedness - not salary - predict sustained motivation and performance.

Applying Maslow and Herzberg in designing jobs in hospitality is not merely a theoretical exercise but a practical imperative. When HR strategies are crafted on these frameworks, the result is an organisational ecosystem where employees can thrive because they choose to. This mindset shift, from control to cultivation, represents the future of talent strategy in hospitality.

2.5 Organisational Behaviour, Leadership, and Strategy Integration

Theoretical integration across OB, leadership, and strategy is scarce but growing. Cole and Kelly (2020) call for OB to be treated as a strategic capability, enabling flexibility and responsiveness in volatile environments. Hill, Schilling and Jones (2017) reinforce this by placing behavioural adaptability at the centre of strategic execution.

Studies by Boxall and Purcell (2016) illustrate that strategic alignment of leadership and OB fosters positive climate and service innovation. This is particularly pertinent in hospitality, where rapid feedback loops and implicit knowledge transfer are crucial. The absence of leadership continuity and cross-training at Harlow Hotel meant that these mechanisms were underdeveloped, a theme that resonates with international evidence (Yoo and Arnold, 2016).

Organisational success in hospitality depends on the alignment of behaviour, leadership, and strategy. Cole and Kelly (2020) theorise that performance improvements require not only operational tools but behavioural change reinforced by leadership accountability. Hill,

Schilling and Jones (2017) similarly argue that strategic management must consider human variables such as motivation, culture, and engagement.

Slack, Lewis and Sharma (2020) reinforce this by showing that service operations require employee behaviours that reflect the brand promise. Hence, strategic HRM and OB are not peripheral concerns but central to achieving organisational objectives. The placement revealed that service inconsistencies and employee dissatisfaction were not purely operational failures but stemmed from leadership and behavioural misalignments.

2.4 Synthesis of Research

Both theory and empirical findings highlights that communication, cultural intelligence, and leadership style collectively determine behavioural outcomes in hospitality organisations. When managed effectively, multiculturalism has the potential to foster creativity, innovation, and enhanced customer satisfaction and overall performance.

Stahl et al. (2010) found that teams with diverse cultural backgrounds outperformed homogeneous teams in generating innovative solutions when inclusive communication frameworks were present. This finding is especially relevant in hospitality, where customer is central and service innovation and excellence are competitive differentiators.

However, multicultural advantage is not automatic. Gudykunst (2004) and Hofstede (2001) argue that most failures in the workplace stem from poor communication, as misinterpretation exponentially increases across cultures. Cultural norms referring to hierarchy, tone, directness, and non-verbal cues vary noticeably. For example, in the Western cultures explicit verbalisation and assertiveness is valued, while Eastern or Latin American staff rely more on context, politeness, and relational cues. Without intercultural awareness, such misalignments are misread as incompetence or indifference, creating a feedback loop of mistrust and disengagement.

Leadership should mediate these dynamics. Rockstuhl et al. (2011) show that leaders lacking intercultural competence are more likely to interpret behavioural differences as resistance or underperformance, contributing to role ambiguity and dissatisfaction. Conversely, leaders with high Cultural Intelligence (CQ) will act as cultural brokers, interpreting behaviours through a

contextual lens and encouraging inclusive team norms. These leaders play a dual role: aligning behaviour with organisational expectations while honouring individual and cultural variation.

What emerges is a multidimensional understanding: communication is not merely a tool but a behavioural expression of underlying values and identity. Organisational behaviour in multicultural environments must be reenvisioned as a dynamic negotiation rather than a linear process. The literature consistently supports the idea that the most effective hospitality organisations are not those that eliminate cultural differences, but those that harness them deliberately through adaptive leadership, structural inclusion, and ongoing interpersonal learning. Effective cross-cultural communication is increasingly a meta-competency, comparable to literacy in the digital age. This skill must be cultivated through training, recruitment strategies, and reflective leadership practice.

In summary, while multiculturalism presents undeniable challenges in communication and leadership, these can be reframed as strategic opportunities. When supported by CQ, inclusive leadership, and structural investment in communication systems, diverse teams evolve from fragmented units into high-performing collectives. This shift not only enhances operational efficiency but also reinforces a more ethical, human-centric model of organisational behaviour.

2.6 Research Gaps and Contribution of the research to literature

While the literature addresses OB and communication separately, there is limited research at the intersection of OB, communication, and cultural misalignment in hospitality. Most studies treat culture and communication as HR or training issues rather than as core behavioural drivers of organisational performance. Moreover, little research focuses on small to mid-sized hotel contexts, where resource constraints limit formal OB interventions.

Despite the expanding literature on organisational behaviour and leadership in multicultural contexts, notable gaps persist. Firstly, there is a lack of practical, scalable frameworks specifically tailored for medium-sized hospitality organisations to strategically address communication and cultural diversity. Much of the existing research focuses on large multinational corporations or general management settings, leaving a vacuum in middle-tier, service-intensive environments where resource constraints and operational demands require more adaptable, context-sensitive strategies (Baum, 2015; Ladkin, 2011).

Secondly, while motivational and behavioural theories, such as those by Maslow, Herzberg, and Deci & Ryan, are well-established in academic discourse, their integration into practical HR development within hospitality remains fragmented. Most talent development programmes focus on compliance, operational skills, or generic leadership modules, with little emphasis on how individual motivation aligns with behavioural expectations, cultural norms, or leadership style (Bailey et al., 2018). This disconnection represents a critical oversight in an industry where human interaction is both the product and the process.

Addressing these gaps requires a shift from episodic training to systemic behavioural development, where communication, culture, and motivation are not add-ons but core strategic levers. The present study contributes to closing this gap by providing a model that links organisational behaviour theory with HR and leadership strategies, explicitly designed for culturally diverse, medium-sized hospitality enterprises. Moreover, most research tends to generalise findings across industries without considering the high-contact, emotional, and relational nature of hospitality work.

While extensive research exists on HRM and OB, there is a scarcity of integrated studies that explicitly connect communication, culture, and leadership effectiveness in mid-tier hospitality operations. The study responds to this gap in the literature by offering a thematic analysis that bridges academic and applied perspectives to a case study that reflects common challenges in the sector. It synthesises OB and intercultural theory to offer a practical framework for diagnosing and addressing communication and cultural alignment issues at the operational level.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a case-based qualitative approach supported by reflective logs and organisational documentation. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns linked to the research objectives.

Yin (2018) emphasises that case study designs are effective for examining contemporary events within real-life contexts, especially where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its

context are not clearly evident. As this research focuses on organisational behaviour and communication in hospitality, a contextual and interpretive lens is appropriate.

3.2 Participants and Case Context

No direct participants were engaged due to the secondary nature of the research. The primary site of data generation was the researcher's placement experience at The Harlow Hotel in Harlow, UK. The analysis draws from reflective learning logs, operational observations, and institutional documents obtained during the placement. These reflections covered diverse operational domains: front desk, food & beverage, housekeeping, and events.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected via secondary sources. These included:

- Personal reflective learning logs produced during the placement.
- Existing academic literature (books and journals) on organisational behaviour, leadership, HRM, and communication.
- Institutional materials from The Harlow Hotel (e.g., internal protocols, guest feedback summaries).

By triangulating placement-based reflections with academic theory, the research ensures analytical depth and contextual relevance (Flick, 2014).

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis enables the identification, analysis, and reporting of recurring patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Key themes were derived inductively from the reflective data and mapped against theoretical constructs discussed in the literature review.

The steps followed included:

1. Familiarisation with the reflective logs and secondary sources.
2. Initial notes based on recurring issues (e.g., staff turnover, communication breakdowns).

3. Categorisation of notes into overarching themes (e.g., cultural misalignment, leadership inconsistency).
4. Interpretation of themes in relation to existing literature to draw new insights.

This method supports the researcher's aim to uncover latent organisational dynamics often overlooked by quantitative methods (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study complies with the UWTSD Research Ethics and Integrity Code. Ethical approval was granted by the supervising lecturer prior to data analysis. No primary data were collected. The names of individuals and any confidential documents from the placement were anonymised to protect organisational and personal privacy.

Reflections were based on the student's authentic workplace experience and do not involve manipulation, deception, or participant risk. The study therefore qualifies as low-risk research under UWTSD's ethical guidelines.

3.6 Limitations of the Methodology

The absence of primary data, such as interviews or focus groups, limits the generalisability of findings. However, the reflective data is rich in details and the methodological accuracy provide substantial validity in the context. The researcher acknowledges the bias as a potential limitation, and has tried to mitigate it through transparent reflexion and triangulation with academic sources.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Thematic Presentation of Findings

The chapter presents the author findings as he reflects on his notes and data collected during placement at Harlow Hotel. Three dominant themes have emerged: communication breakdowns, cultural misalignment, and leadership inconsistencies. Each theme is discussed in detail below and interpreted in light of the academic literature.

Theory-Driven Behavioural Drivers vs Observed Practice

Behavioural Driver	Expected Practice	Observed Practice in Placement
Recognition & Feedback (Herzberg)	Regular feedback cycles and public recognition	Irregular feedback, limited public recognition
Self-Actualisation Opportunities (Maslow)	Career development plans, stretch assignments	Limited development pathways or planning
Autonomy and Competence (Deci & Ryan)	Autonomy in task design, skill-based training	Tasks rigidly assigned, limited autonomy
Mentorship & CPD Structures	Structured CPD programs, mentoring schemes	No formal CPD, informal learning mostly
Role Clarity & Motivation Alignment	Clearly defined roles with motivational levers	Vague roles, limited attention to motivation

Theme 1: Communication Breakdown Across Departments

A recurrent issue at The Harlow Hotel was the fragmented communication between departments. Staff in food and beverage, front office, and housekeeping often received conflicting instructions. Changes to event schedules were not effectively communicated to the service team in a timely manner, resulting in double at times in overlapping bookings and guest dissatisfaction.

Taylor and Woodhams' (2016) critiqued the hierarchical communication in hospitality organisations, when vertical communication decreases lateral information sharing. Similarly, Giousmpasoglou et al. (2021) argue that outdated or reactive communication models undermine cross-functional teamwork. Despite the availability of digital tools, The Harlow Hotel lacked standardised communication protocols or centralised coordination hubs.

Theme 2: Cultural Misalignment and Interpersonal Conflict

The Harlow Hotel employs a diverse workforce, with employees coming from different cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds. However, the author was not aware of any formal training or orientation to address different cultural values or expectations. One frontline employee was confused when their direct supervisor interpreted her deference as a lack of confidence. This misreading has created tension and has negatively impacted the team dynamics.

Hofstede (2001) and Gudykunst (2004) explain how differences in power distance and uncertainty avoidance affect workplace interactions. Barak (2016) notes that without training in cultural intelligence, managers may reinforce division rather than inclusion. These misalignments at The Harlow Hotel mirror wider issues across the hospitality industry, as noted by Mattila, Guchait and Cheng (2016), who found that unresolved cultural tension directly correlates with emotional fatigue and reduced organisational behaviour ethics.

Theme 3: Leadership Inconsistencies and Employee Disengagement

Leadership at The Harlow Hotel varied significantly between departments. While some supervisors practiced inclusive and feedback-oriented leadership, others relied on autocratic methods. There was little consistency and transparency in how performance appraisals were conducted or how feedback was given. Employees frequently reported frustration with unclear expectations and a lack of recognition.

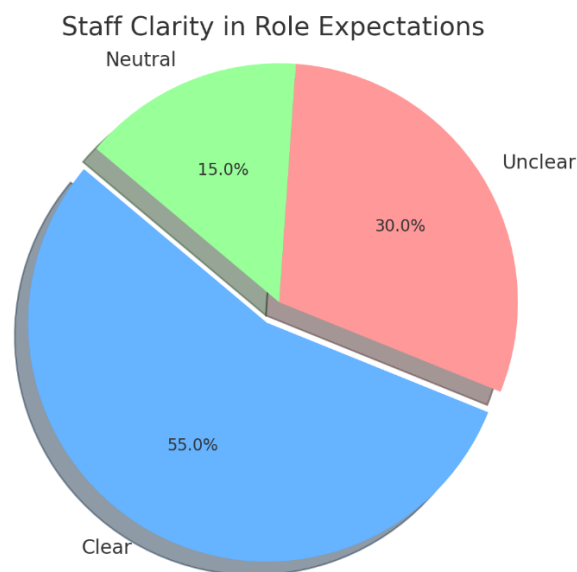


Figure 2.

Northouse (2021) and Thompson (2020) stress the importance of adaptive leadership, particularly when managing culturally diverse teams. The absence of a coherent leadership development programme had led to a fragmented employee experiences and disengagement. This is consistent with Lee and Kim (2021) findings, who argue that structured leadership training correlates with higher team cohesion and lower turnover in hospitality environments.

4.2 Critical Analysis of Findings

These outcomes agree with the literature findings on organisational behaviour and management, especially when referring to communication and cultural alignment. The issues observed at The Harlow Hotel exemplify how behavioural inefficiencies are not merely a HR concerns but strategic liabilities.

Communication: The literature supports the view that fragmented communication impairs operational efficiency. While digital solutions exist, their efficacy depends on human-centred protocols and leadership support (Taylor and Woodhams, 2016; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). Implementing structured communication systems - like start of the shift briefings or shared digital dashboards - could mitigate such breakdowns.

Cultural Misalignment: Research by Gudykunst (2004) and Hofstede (2001) provides a strong theoretical basis to understand cultural misinterpretations. The findings at Harlow Hotel has exposed that diversity without integration leads to division. A shift toward inclusive leadership, where cultural norms are explicitly acknowledged, is necessary.

Leadership: The inconsistency in leadership styles reflects a broader issue in the hospitality sector, the lack of strategic investment in managerial development. As Jones et al. (2019) argue, effective leadership is more predictive of employee retention than wage increases. Structured development pathways and peer coaching could address these disparities.

Communication in Multicultural Contexts.

Communication in multicultural hospitality environments is not merely a transactional process but a complex behavioural construct embedded in power relations, leadership dynamics, and identity negotiations. Research by Gudykunst (2004) and Hofstede (2001) highlights that cultural variables such as power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance, manifest in communication preferences. In collectivist cultures, for example, indirect and context-sensitive communication is valued, whereas western contexts favour directness and clarity.

This divergence becomes problematic in multicultural teams and when leaders are unaware of these variations. Miscommunication is not just a technical failure but a symptom of a deeper misalignments in values and identity (Barak, 2016). For example, at The Harlow Hotel, one manager's straightforward corrective feedback was interpreted as hostile by a junior staff from high-context cultures, leading to defensiveness and disengagement.

The literature advocates for a shift towards culturally intelligent leadership. Earley and Ang (2003) has introduced the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ), which includes cognitive, motivational, and behavioural dimensions. Leaders with high CQ can recognise and adapt to different communication styles, fostering trust and collaboration across cultural boundaries (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

However, multiculturalism presents both strengths and challenges. On the positive side, diverse teams contribute to innovation, adaptability, and a richer service experience (Stahl et al., 2010). On the downside, they are more prone to misinterpretation, role ambiguity, and relational conflict if multiculturalism is not properly managed (Ang et al., 2007).

Communication becomes a lubricant or a potential barrier to effective organisational functioning. The creative insight lies in viewing multicultural communication not as a barrier to be overcome but as an untapped strategic asset. Leadership, then, should be reconceptualised from authority-based to translation-based. In this model, leaders act as intercultural translators; making organisational values accessible to all, mediating meaning across cultural scripts, and constructing a shared organisational identity (Northouse, 2021; Livermore, 2015).

Such leadership demands more than language proficiency or general empathy; it requires a deliberate structure: inclusive onboarding processes, multi-channel communication policies, and regular feedback tailored to diverse cognitive styles. Implementing this in the hospitality sector, especially in smaller hotels like The Harlow Hotel, calls for micro-leadership initiatives, departmental training, team huddles, and peer coaching, to progressively build communication resilience.

This reinterpretation of communication dynamics as a core capability within organisational behaviour reframes multiculturalism from a compliance issue to a developmental opportunity. In so doing, it offers a new trajectory for leadership and HR development in the global hospitality context.

4.3 Implications for Practice

The study's findings suggest several practical interventions for hospitality organisations:

- Establish internal communication frameworks that prioritise clarity, transparency, and shared accountability.
- Embed intercultural competence training into onboarding and supervisory development.
- Design leadership development programmes based on adaptive and transformational models.
- Foster psychologically safe environments where feedback flows bidirectionally.

In terms of practical implementation of such framework the hotel should consider:

A Short-Term implementation (0–3 months):

- Introduce intercultural onboarding and language support.
- Run cross-departmental team-building workshops.

Mid-Term (3–12 months):

- Develop modular leadership training focused on CQ and OB.
- Implement digital task boards to standardise communication.

Long-Term (12+ months):

- Create career ladders linking CPD, mentoring, and performance.
- Integrate OB and communication KPIs into leadership evaluations.

4.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While rich in context, the study's reliance on secondary data from a single placement site limits generalisability. The subjective nature of reflective logs also introduces potential bias. Future research should incorporate triangulated primary data (e.g. interviews, focus groups) across multiple hotels to validate findings and deepen industry-wide applicability.

A further limitation is the temporal scope. The research provides a snapshot rather than a longitudinal view, which restricts insights into how communication dynamics and leadership impact evolve over time, particularly in response to HR interventions or structural change.

Nonetheless, this study brings original insights by linking theoretical frameworks to real world organisational dynamics, offering a diagnostic model for communication and cultural alignment in hospitality.

In terms of future research directions, several directions emerge:

Cross-Comparative Case Studies. Research across multiple medium-sized hotels in varied cultural or geographic contexts would help build a typology of communication and leadership challenges in multicultural hospitality organisations.

AI-Driven Communication Tools. Future studies could explore the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing cultural training and mediating conflict. AI-driven platforms, multilingual communication assistants, or adaptive e-learning platforms could offer innovative ways to diagnose communication breakdowns and deliver personalised cultural training. Early experiments in other sectors have shown promise in using AI to reduce unconscious bias and improve intercultural communication fluency (Zhou et al., 2023).

Behavioural Analytics. The integration of behavioural data analytics into HRM practices could generate powerful insights into motivation patterns, communication gaps, and leadership effectiveness over time. Predictive analytics might also identify high-risk zones for disengagement or turnover, allowing for preventive interventions.

Intervention-Based Longitudinal Research. Implementing and evaluating specific interventions, such as CQ training programme or transformational leadership coaching; and tracking their impact over time would offer valuable empirical evidence and best-practice frameworks.

Neuroscientific Approaches to Organisational Behaviour. Emerging work in neuroleadership and cognitive behavioural insights can enhance understanding of how people from different cultures process communication, leadership cues, and motivational stimuli. Future hospitality OB research could integrate neuroscience-informed models to deepen behavioural understanding.

While the present research offers grounded insights and theoretical contributions, it also opens the door for multidisciplinary, methodologically diverse, and technologically advanced explorations into the behavioural fabric of multicultural hospitality organisations.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study has explored the impact of organisational behaviour, communication, and cultural alignment on employee engagement and operational performance in the hospitality sector, departing from a case study - the Harlow Hotel. The research has confirmed that communication and culture are critical in shaping organisational behaviour in hospitality. The absence of culturally intelligent leadership will exacerbate operational inefficiencies and talent loss. The findings have revealed that communication breakdowns, cultural misalignments, and inconsistent leadership styles significantly hindered workplace cohesion and service delivery. Despite employing a diverse workforce, the hotel lacks structured systems to address intercultural communication and pathways for leadership development, which has led to staff disengagement, communication misinterpretation, and inherently to operational inefficiencies.

The study reinforces existing literature that highlights the importance of culturally intelligent leadership (Earley and Ang, 2003; Rockstuhl et al., 2011), effective communication systems (Gudykunst, 2004), and inclusive organisational practices (Barak, 2016). It also contributes with new insights by reframing communication in multicultural settings as a developmental capability rather than a challenge to be overcome. The model of leaders as "intercultural translators" offers a novel approach for enhancing communication, reducing conflict, and fostering a shared organisational culture in culturally diverse environments. If businesses in hospitality would decide to apply these organisational behaviour and motivational theory insights they would have a structured pathway to develop resilient, inclusive, and high-performing workforce.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Establish a Comprehensive Communication Framework

- Implement structured communication protocols, such as daily pre-shift briefings, weekly team check-ins, and centralised digital dashboards for task coordination.
- Ensure message consistency through visual aids and multilingual signage to accommodate staff from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

2. Develop Cultural Intelligence Through Onboarding and Training

- Introduce intercultural competence modules as part of onboarding for all employees, especially line managers and supervisors.
- Deliver practical workshops using real-life case studies to highlight miscommunication risks and conflict resolution techniques.
- Encourage the use of cultural self-assessments and reflective logs to foster awareness of bias and communication style differences.

3. Reframe Leadership Roles as Intercultural Translation

- Train managers to act as facilitators of cultural understanding, bridging different norms and expectations through open dialogue.
- Adopt adaptive leadership models that prioritise empathy, psychological safety, and contextual communication.

4. Promote Peer Coaching and Micro-Leadership

- Launch peer-led discussion groups where team members share strategies to manage cultural differences and improve communication.
- Encourage each department to nominate a communication champion to monitor clarity, feedback, and morale.

5. Collaborate with Educational Institutions and Policy Bodies

- Partner with local colleges and universities to co-develop hospitality modules on intercultural teamwork, communication, and behaviour.
- Advocate for policy incentives that support diversity training and inclusive leadership programmes in hospitality SMEs.

6. Embed Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

- Introduce CPD frameworks that include language learning, cultural awareness certifications, and leadership coaching.
- Recognise and reward participation in development programmes to signal institutional commitment and motivate engagement.

These recommendations offer a roadmap for hospitality businesses to transform communication and leadership practices into strategic advantages. By building culturally intelligent and communicatively agile teams, organisations like The Harlow Hotel can improve service quality, reduce turnover, and create resilient, high-performing work environments that embrace the complexity and opportunity of multiculturalism.

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