

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF LAW, GOVERNMENT
AND COMMUNICATION
(IJLGC)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijlgc**CONFLICT COMMUNICATION IN STRUCTURED
ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTS: EVIDENCE FROM THE
NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA**

Asniah Alias¹, Fatin Amirah Ahmad Shukri ², Najjah Salwa Abd Razak^{3*}, Nor Hafidzah Zulkifli⁴

¹ Language Centre, National Defence University of Malaysia, Malaysia

 asniah@upnm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7096-476X>

²Centre for Foundation Studies, National Defence University of Malaysia, Malaysia

 fatin@upnm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2097-2822>

³ Language Centre, National Defence University of Malaysia, Malaysia

 najjah@upnm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2721-5568>

⁴ Language Centre, National Defence University of Malaysia, Malaysia

 norhafidzah@upnm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2473-4985>

*Corresponding Author

Article Info:**Article history:**

Received date: 30.07.2026

Revised date: 27.08.2026

Accepted date: 21.09.2026

Published date: 28.09.2026

To cite this document:

Alias, A., Shukri, F. A. A., Razak, N. S. A., & Zulkifli, N. H. (2026). Conflict Communication in Structured Academic Environments: Evidence from The National Defence University of Malaysia. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 11(45), 776-790.

Abstract:

This study examines conflict communication practices within a hierarchical higher education institution, focusing on the National Defence University of Malaysia (UPNM). Drawing on organisational communication and conflict management literature, the study investigates three key dimensions: conflict communication strategies, challenges, and proposed solutions. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from lecturers across faculties and centres within the institution. The findings indicate that lecturers predominantly employ diplomatic, adaptive, and harmony-oriented communication strategies, particularly politeness ($M = 4.33$) and perspective-taking ($M = 4.28$), while direct confrontation is less frequently practiced. Key challenges include emotional escalation ($M = 4.44$), lack of psychological safety ($M = 4.21$), and hierarchical barriers ($M = 4.09$). Correlation analysis reveals a significant relationship between perceived challenges and proposed solutions ($r = .305$, $p < .05$), while no significant relationships were found between communication strategies and other variables, suggesting that conflict communication strategies may vary across institutional situations rather than functioning as stable behavioural patterns. The study contributes to an integrative understanding of conflict communication within hierarchical institutional environments and highlights the importance of

leadership, communication training, and psychological safety in improving organisational communication practices.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.1145049 **Keyword:**

Conflict Communication, Hierarchical Barriers, Higher Education, Organisational Communication, Psychological Safety



© The authors (2026). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY NC) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For commercial re-use, please contact ijlge@gaexcellence.com.

Introduction

Conflict is a common feature of organisational life, often arising from differences in values, perceptions, goals, and interpersonal expectations. This is particularly evident in higher education institutions, where staff members work across different roles, responsibilities, and levels of authority. Although conflict can sometimes encourage critical discussion, better decision-making, and innovation, poorly managed conflict may have negative consequences, including reduced productivity, damaged working relationships, and organisational inefficiency. Communication is therefore an important part of how conflict develops and is managed. Problems such as unclear messages, misunderstandings, and limited opportunities for open discussion can contribute significantly to workplace conflict. Within higher education institutions, these communication difficulties may become more complex because of hierarchical structures, unequal power relationships, and the involvement of diverse stakeholder groups.

In highly structured organisations, particular those operations within established systems of authority, communication is often influenced by hierarchy and power distance. Employees may be reluctant to voice disagreement directly and may instead rely on indirect, cautious, or non-confrontational forms of communication. Although these approaches can help preserve workplace relationships and reduce immediate tension, they may also restrict opportunities for open discussion and constructive conflict resolution. Such conditions highlight the importance of examining how conflict is communicated within structured academic institutions. Despite growing interest in organisational conflict and communication, limited attention has been given to conflict communication as an integrated issue within the Malaysian higher education context, particularly in relation to the strategies used, challenges encountered, and solutions proposed. To address this gap, the present study examines conflict communication practices at UPNM through three interrelated dimensions: conflict communication strategies,

communication challenges, and proposed solutions. By considering these dimensions together, the study views conflict communication as a dynamic and context-dependent process shaped by organisational relationships and institutional conditions, rather than simply as a collection of fixed behavioural strategies.

Literature Review

Research on employee voice suggests that individuals may withhold opinions, concerns, or suggestions when they perceive interpersonal or organisational risk. Leadership openness and contextual factors influence whether employees choose to speak up or remain silent (Detert & Burries, 2007; Morrison, 2014). Although collaboration is frequently associated with effective conflict management, its effectiveness depends on contextual and interpersonal conditions. Research on psychological safety suggest that individuals are more likely to engage openly when they perceive the environment as safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). The findings indicate that lecturers predominantly employ diplomatic, adaptive, and harmony-oriented communication strategies, particularly politeness ($M=4.33$) and perspective taking ($M=4.28$), while direct confrontation is less frequently practiced.

Conflict management literature recognises avoidance as one of several response to conflict situations. Avoidance has been identified as a conflict-handling approach that individuals may adopt under certain interpersonal conditions (Rahim, 2002; de Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). Emotional tensions and ineffective communication have also been identified as important contributors to workplace conflict. Relationship conflict involving interpersonal strain and negative emotions has been associated with reduced team effectiveness and communication quality (Jehn, 1995; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Leadership behaviour also shapes communication climate. Studies indicate that supportive leadership associated with employee voice and may contribute to psychologically safer environments (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liang et al., 2012). Xie et al. (2022) examined conflict and psychological safety within educational settings, highlighting the relevance of psychological conditions in shaping conflict experiences beyond corporate environments. Although focusing on teacher-student interactions, the study provides insight into the role of psychological safety in educational contexts. Similarly, Joo et al. (2023) highlighted the role of psychological safety in relation to group conflict, suggesting that leadership and organisational conditions may influence conflict-related outcomes.

Existing studies have primarily focused on themes related to employee voice and silence in hierarchical environments, psychological safety and leadership, conflict management styles and emotional dynamics, as well as institutional and educational contexts. While these studies provide important insights into specific dimensions of organisational communication and conflict, their findings remain largely fragmented across individual themes and variables. In addition, previous research suggests that conflict communication is influenced by relational, structural and cultural considerations. Organisational structures and power relations may influence how individual perceive and respond to authority relationships, particularly in hierarchical settings (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). However, the reviewed literature provides limited insights into how conflict communication strategies, challenges, and proposed solutions are considered together within a Malaysian higher education setting.

Research on power distance further indicates that authority-related beliefs may influence workplace communication experiences and responses to hierarchical conditions (Dai et al., 2022). In addition, harmony orientation has been recognised as an important consideration in conflict management, particularly in shaping preferences for conflict handling approaches that maintain interpersonal relationships (Leung et al., 2011). Communication processes and interaction patterns may contribute to the escalation of conflict under certain conditions (Friedman & Currall, 2003).

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of conflict communication strategies is not universal, but contingent upon organisational context and relational dynamics. However, existing studies often examine strategies, challenges, and solutions in isolation. This study addresses this gap by examining the three dimensions together within a hierarchical academic institution. Such an approach recognises that conflict communication is shaped by multiple contextual influences and therefore requires a broader understanding of organisational interactions and processes (Rahim, 2002; Tjosvold, 2008; de With et al., 2012).

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design using structured questionnaire consisting of three sections: conflict communication strategies, challenges, and proposed solutions. Participants consisted of 43 lecturers from various faculties and academic centres within UPNM. Data were analysed using descriptive statistic and Pearson correlation analysis. The study therefore focuses on reported patterns across these three dimensions within the selected institutional context. Reliability analysis indicated acceptable to excellent internal consistency for the Challenges ($\alpha = .818$), and Solutions ($\alpha = .939$) scales. By contrast, the Strategies scale demonstrated lower reliability ($\alpha = .531$), suggesting greater heterogeneity among the items.

A total of 43 lecturers participated in the study, representing 10.8% of the total UPNM lecturer population (N=398). All returned questionnaires were complete and usable for analysis, and therefore all analyses were based on 43 valid cases (100%). This provides the basis for interpreting the findings within the UPNM institutional context.

Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments and theoretical constructs reported in previous studies on organisational communication, conflict management, employee voice, and psychological safety. Specifically, the measurement items were adapted from Rahim (2002), De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001), Edmonson (a9999), Deter and Burris (2007), Morrison (2014) and Chen et al. (2019). Minor contextual modifications were made to ensure that the items reflected the unique organisation setting of UPNM, a hybrid academic-military higher education institution where civilian academics work alongside seconded military personnel and military lecturers within a formal organisational structure influenced by military culture, hierarchical authority, and regimented communication practices.

The questionnaire comprised four sections. Section A collected respondents' demographic information, Section B measured conflict communications strategies, Section C examined challenges in conflict communication, and Section D assessed proposed solutions for improving conflict communication practices. All items were measured using a five-point Likert

scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 1 presents the structure of the questionnaire and the sources of the adapted measurement constructs.

Table 1: Questionnaire Structure and Sources of the Adapted Measurement Constructs

Section	Construct	Source
A	Demographic Information	Self-developed
B	Conflict Communication Strategies	Chen et al. (2019); Rahim (2002);
C	Conflict Communication Challenges	De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001); Edmondson (1999); Morrison (2014)
D	Proposed Solutions	Detert and Burris (2007); Hamlin et al. (2024); Joo et al. (2023)

Overall, the questionnaire was developed with reference to established theoretical and empirical literature that was subsequently adapted to suit the distinctive academic–military organisational context of UPNM. This adaptation ensured that the measurement items were relevant to the setting in which the study was conducted, while also supporting the content validity of the instrument.

Instrument Reliability

The internal consistency of the adapted instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Table 2 presents the internal consistency reliability of the study constructs.

Table 2: Internal Consistency Reliability of the Study Constructs

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach α
Conflict Communication Strategies	12	.531
Conflict Communication Challenges	11	.818
Proposed Solutions	8	.939

As shown in Table 2, the Conflict Communication Challenges scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .818$), while the Proposed Solution scale exhibited excellent reliability ($\alpha = .939$). The Conflict Communication Strategies scale recorded relatively lower reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .531$), indicating greater heterogeneity among measurement items. Further examination of the total item-total correlation analysis revealed that Item B2 ("I avoid engaging in conflicts even I feel strongly about an issue") produced a negative corrected item-total correlation (-0.158), implying that it presents a conceptual distinct aspect of conflict communication behaviour. Nevertheless, the item was retained because conflict communication strategies encompass multiple behavioural tendencies, including collaborative, adaptive, avoidant, and formal communication approaches. Accordingly, the construct should

be interpreted as representing context dependent communication behaviours rather than a single homogeneous dimension.

Data Collection

The survey was administered using Google Forms and distributed through the official UPNM email system to all 398 eligible lecturers across faculties and academic centres, including civilian academics and seconded military lecturers/personnel. A census invitation approach was adopted, whereby all members of the target population were invited to participate voluntarily. A total of 43 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 10.8%. All response were completed and included in the final analysis.

Although the response rate was relatively modest, it is considered acceptable for exploratory quantitative research involving organisational survey data. Hair et al. (2019) noted that exploratory studies may still provide meaningful preliminary evidence despite smaller sample sizes, particularly when the findings are interpreted cautiously and serves as a basis for subsequent research involving larger and more representative samples.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Completion of the questionnaire was taken as informed consent to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed to describe respondents' perception of conflict communication strategies, conflict communication challenges, and proposed solutions. Pearson's correlation analysis was subsequently conducted to examine the relationships among the three study constructs.

The study is exploratory in nature. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Nevertheless, the statistically significant relationships identified provide preliminary empirical evidence that contributes to understanding conflict communication practices within a hybrid academic-military higher education institution and offers a foundation for future research involving larger and more representative samples.

Findings and Discussion

This section reports and discusses the findings based on the four research objectives. The results are presented using descriptive statistics to identify the dominant conflict communication strategies, challenges, and proposed solutions, followed by Pearson's correlation analysis to examine the relationships among the study variables. The findings are subsequently interpreted in relation to relevant organisational communication and conflict management literature.

Conflict Communication Strategies

To address Research Objective 1, descriptive statistics were conducted to examine the conflict communication strategies employed by lecturers at UPNM. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Conflict Communication Strategies among UPNM Lecturers

Variable	Item Code	Description (Shortened)	M	SD
Strategies	B9	Use polite/diplomatic language	4.33	0.61
	B5	Adapt communication style	4.28	0.70
	B6	Understand others' perspective	4.28	0.67
	B7	Prioritise harmony	4.23	0.75
	B1	Collaborate for solutions	4.14	0.89
	B11	Prefer written communication	3.19	1.08
	B12	Involve third party	3.26	0.98
	B3	Express concerns openly	3.42	0.96

As shown in table 3, respondents predominantly employed diplomatic, adaptive, and relationship-oriented communication strategies when managing workplace conflict. The highest-rated strategy was the use of polite and diplomatic language to reduce tensions ($M=4.33$, $SD=0.61$), with 93.0% of respondents reporting that they often or always adopted this approach. Respondents also frequently adapted their communication styles according to the person they were interacting with ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.70$; 86%) and sought to understand the other person's perspective before responding ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.67$; 93%). Similarly, maintaining interpersonal harmony ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.75$; 90.7%) and collaborating to achieve mutually beneficial solutions ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.89$; 79.1%) were strongly endorsed.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that lecturers favour communication strategies concerned with diplomacy, empathy, adaptability, and collaboration, reflecting a relational approach to conflict communication that seeks to preserve professional relationships while minimising interpersonal tensions. This pattern is consistent with the conflict management literature, which suggest that relationship-oriented strategies facilitate cooperation and promote constructive conflict resolution by maintaining interpersonal harmony (Leung et al., 2011; Rahim, 2002). However, this interpretation should be understood in relation to the present findings and should not be taken as a direct test of behavioural adaptation across situations.

In contrast, respondents expressed comparatively lower preferences for using written communication to avoid face-to-face confrontation ($M= 3.19$, $SD =1.08$), involving a third party when conflicts could not be resolved directly ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.98$), and openly expressing concerns during conflict situations ($M = 3.42$, $Sd = 0.96$). These findings suggest that although lecturers value constructive communication, they remain cautious about adopting highly direct or confrontational approaches when managing workplace disagreements.

Such communication preferences may reflect the influence of organisational norms, interpersonal relationships, and the formal organisational environment of UPM, where maintaining harmonious professional relationships is often prioritised. While these strategies may contribute to preserving collegiality, they may also discourage the openness in expressing disagreement when individual perceive potential interpersonal or professional risks. This interpretation is consistent with Morrison (2014), who argued that employees are less likely to voice concerns when they anticipate negative relational or career consequences. It also aligns with previous studies demonstrating that communication behaviour is shaped by organisational context, relational considerations, and hierarchical structures, particularly in environments characterised by formal authority and power distance (Leung et al., 2011; Rahim, 2002; Wen et al., 2025).

Challenges In Conflict Communication

To address Research Objective 2, descriptive statistics were conducted to examine the challenges encountered by lecturers in conflict communication. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Challenges in Conflict Communication

Variable	Item Code	Description (Shortened)	M	SD
Challenges	C10	Emotional escalation	4.44	0.59
	C5	Different communication styles	4.26	0.79
	C7	Lack of safe space	4.21	0.74
	C2	Cultural expectations	4.09	0.65
	C11	Hierarchical barriers	4.09	0.97
	C9	Power dynamics	4.07	0.94
	C6	Time constraints	4.07	0.70

As shown in table 4, respondents perceived multiple interpersonal and organisational barriers to effective conflict communication. The most prominent challenge was emotional escalation ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.59$), with 95.3% of respondents agreeing that heightened emotions made workplace conflict more difficult to manage. This was followed by difference in communication styles ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.79$), lack of psychological safe environment for expressing concerns ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.74$), cultural expectations ($M = 4.09$; $SD = 0.65$), and hierarchical barriers ($M = 4.09$, $SD 0.97$). Respondents also perceived power dynamics ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.94$) and time constraint ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.70$) as important factors influencing conflict communication. Collectively, these findings suggest that difficulties in managing workplace conflict extend beyond individual emotional reactions and are strongly influenced by organisational culture, hierarchical relationships, and communication practices within the institution.

The prominence of emotional escalation highlights that workplace conflict is experienced not merely as a procedural issue but as an interpersonal process in which emotions can intensify misunderstandings and hinder constructive communication. This observation is consistent with Friedman and Currall (2003), who conceptualised conflict as a relational and affective process in which interaction pattern shape the development and escalation of disagreements. Likewise, the higher ratings for hierarchical barriers, power dynamics, and lack of psychological safety indicate that organisational structures and authority relationships influence lecturers' willingness to communicate openly during conflict situations. These findings support Daniels and Greguras (2014), who claimed that communication behaviour is shaped by organisational hierarchy and authority relationship, as well as Dai et al. (2022), who demonstrated that higher power-distance beliefs may discourage open communication because employees are more hesitant to express disagreement or challenge authority. Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that improving conflict communication requires not only individual communication competence but also organisational environments that foster psychological safety, openness, and constructive dialogue.

Proposed Solutions For Improving Conflict Communication

To address Research Objective 3, descriptive statistics were conducted to examine respondents' perceptions of the proposed solutions for improving conflict communication. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Proposed Solutions for Improving Conflict Communication

Variable	Item Code	Description (Shortened)	M	SD
Solutions	D3	Open-door policy	4.58	0.66
	D8	Feedback culture	4.49	0.67
	D7	Leadership development	4.47	0.70
	D2	Clear protocols	4.40	0.73
	D5	Communication workshops	4.40	0.62
	D1	Conflict training	4.33	0.87
	D6	Anonymous channels	4.33	0.97
	D4	Peer mediation	4.30	0.83

As shown in table 5, respondents expressed strong support for organisational interventions aimed at improving conflict communication within UPNM. As presented in Table 5, the most highly endorsed solution was the implementation of an open-door policy ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.66$), with 95.3% of respondents expressing agreement. This was followed by fostering a feedback-oriented organisational culture ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.67$; 90.7%), leadership development ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.70$; 93.0%), establishing clear communication protocols ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.73$), and providing communication workshops ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.62$). Respondents also expressed strong support for conflict communication training, anonymous

reporting channels, and peer mediation, reflecting a broad consensus that improving conflict communication requires multiple organisational initiatives rather than isolated interventions.

The strong endorsement of these organisational strategies suggests that respondents perceive conflict communication as a shared institutional responsibility rather than solely individual competency. In particular, the emphasis on leadership openness, constructive feedback, communication training, and structured communication procedures reflects the importance of creating an organisational climate that encourages open dialogue, trust, and collaborative problem-solving. These findings are consistent with Detert and Burris (2007), who argued that supportive leadership and managerial openness encourage employee voice and facilitate constructive workplace communication. Similarly, Hamlin et al. (2024) highlighted the effectiveness of communication skills training in strengthening interpersonal competence and improving workplace interactions, while Chen et al. (2019) demonstrated that emotional intelligence influences communication behaviour and the selection of conflict management strategies. Collectively, these findings suggest that strengthening organisational communication requires an integrated approach that combines leadership commitment, communication competence, and supportive organisational structures capable of fostering psychologically safe and constructive workplace interactions.

Relationships Among Conflict Communication Strategies, Challenges, And Proposed Solutions

To address Research Objective 4, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among conflict communication strategies, challenges, and proposed solutions. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Conflict Communication Strategies, Challenges, and Proposed Solutions

No.	Variable	1	2	3
1	Strategies	-		
2	Challenges	0.254 (p = .100)	-	
3	Solutions	0.288 (p = .061)	0.305* .305* (p = .047)	-

Note. $p < .05$.

As shown in Table 6, no statistically significant relationships were found between Conflict Communication Strategies and Challenges ($r = .254$, $p = .100$) or between Conflict Communication Strategies and Proposed Solutions ($r = .288$, $p = .061$). However, a significant positive relationship was identified between Challenges and Proposed Solutions ($r = .305$, $p = .047$), indicating that lecturers who perceived greater challenges in conflict communication were also more likely to support organisational and developmental interventions aimed at improving workplace communication. No statistically significant relationships were found between Conflict Communication Strategies and Proposed Solutions ($r = .254$, $p = .100$) or between Conflict Communication Strategies and Proposed Solutions ($r = .288$, $p = .061$). However, a significant positive relationship was identified between Challenges and Proposed Solutions ($r = .305$, $p = .047$), indicating that lecturers who perceived greater challenges in

conflict communication were also more likely to support organisational and developmental interventions aimed at improving workplace communication.

These findings indicate that lecturers who perceived greater challenges in conflict communication were also more likely to endorse stronger institutional and developmental solutions. However, communication strategies were not significantly associated with either challenges or solutions. This pattern may suggest that conflict-related difficulties increase awareness of the need for organisational support mechanisms and structured interventions. Specifically, the significant correlation between Challenges and Solutions was $r = .305$ ($p = .047$), indicating a statistically significant positive relationship at the 0.5 level. Previous research has emphasised the role of organisational conditions and conflict management processes in highlighting the importance of organisational approaches in managing conflict-related processes (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Tjosvold, 2008).

The findings therefore highlight leadership development, psychological safety, and conflict communication training as practical areas for institutional consideration. Specifically, UPNM management could strengthen leadership development programmes by equipping heads of departments and academic leaders with skills in conflict management, active listening, constructive feedback, and early intervention in workplace disputes. In addition, the institution could promote psychological safety by creating communication environments in which lecturers feel comfortable expressing concerns, seeking clarification, and discussing disagreements without fear of negative interpersonal or professional consequences. Structured conflict communication training could also be introduced to help lecturers and academic leaders develop practical strategies for managing disagreements, including perspective-taking, respectful dialogue, negotiation, and problem-solving. Together, these interventions could provide a more systematic institutional approach to conflict communication by addressing not only individual communication competencies but also the organisational conditions that shape how conflicts are expressed and managed.

By contrast, no statistically significant relationships were found between Conflict Communication Strategies and either Challenges or Proposed Solutions. Rather than indicating that communication strategies are unimportant, this finding suggests that conflict communication behaviour is context-dependent and adaptive. However, this interpretation should also be understood in relation to the present findings and should not be taken as direct test of behavioural adaptation across situations. Within UPNM's hybrid academic-military environment, lecturers are likely to adjust their communication approaches according to organisational hierarchy, interpersonal relationships, situational demands, and perceived risks associated with workplace conflict. Consequently, communication strategies may not operate as stable behavioural traits but instead function as flexible responses to different conflict situations.

This interpretation is further supported by relatively lower internal consistency of the Conflict Communications Strategies scale ($\alpha = .531$), indicating that the construct captures multiple communication tendencies rather than a single homogeneous behavioural pattern. In contrast, perceptions of conflict communication challenges and organisational solutions demonstrated greater internal consistency, suggesting a stronger shared understanding among respondents regarding the barriers they experience, and the institutional interventions required to address them. Collectively, these findings highlight that while communication behaviours may vary

across situations, organisational challenges and the need for systematic support are perceived more consistently across the institution.

Conclusion

This study examined conflict communication practices among lecturers at the National Defence University of Malaysia (UPNM), a hybrid academic-military higher education institution where civilian academics work alongside seconded military personnel and military lecturers within a formal organisational structure influenced by military culture and hierarchical authority. The findings indicate that lecturers generally adopt diplomatic, adaptive and collaborative communication strategies, with particular emphasis on using polite language, perspective-taking, communication adaptability, and maintaining interpersonal harmony when managing workplace conflict. At the same time, respondents reported lower preferences for direct confrontation and third-party intervention, suggesting that conflict communication is often approached cautiously to preserve collegial relationships.

The study further identified emotional escalation, differences in communication styles, limited psychological safety, cultural expectations, hierarchical barriers, and power dynamics as the principal challenges affecting effective conflict communication. In response to these challenges, respondents expressed strong support for organisational interventions, particularly the implementation of open-door leadership, feedback-oriented organisational culture, leadership development, structured communication protocols, and communication training. The significant positive relationship between conflict communication challenges and proposed solutions further suggests that greater awareness of communication barriers is associated with stronger support for institutional improvements. Conversely, the absence of significant relationships involving conflict communication strategies indicates that communication behaviours are adaptive and context-dependent rather than stable behavioural patterns, reflecting the influence of organisational hierarchy, interpersonal relationships and situational demands.

This study contributes to the organisational communication literature by extending current understanding of conflict communication within a hybrid academic-military higher education context, an organisational environment that has received limited empirical attention. The findings demonstrate that effective conflict communication requires not only individual communication competence but also supportive organisational conditions that foster psychological safety, leadership openness, constructive feedback, and transparent communication practices. Accordingly, higher education institutions operating within hierarchical organisational structures should adopt integrated organisational approaches that strengthen both leadership practices and communication systems to promote constructive conflict management. Future research is recommended to include larger and more representative samples across multiple higher education institutions to enhance the generalisability of the findings and to further explore conflict communications across different organisational and cultural contexts.

-
- Acknowledgements:** The researchers would like to express their sincere gratitude to all respondents for their valuable participation in this study and to the reviewers for their constructive feedback and evaluation of the manuscript.
- Funding Statement:** No Funding
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Law, Government and Communication (IJLGC).
- Ethics Statement:** This study did not involve any sensitive data requiring ethical approval. The authors confirm that the research was conducted in accordance with accepted academic integrity and ethical publishing standards.
- Author Contribution Statement:** All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission. All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Asniah Alias was responsible for the conceptualisation, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. Fatin Amirah Ahmad Shukri was responsible for data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. Najjah Salwa Abd Razak contributed to the literature review, manuscript drafting, refinement of the manuscript and critical revision of the manuscript. Nor Hafidzah Zulkifli contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.
- Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)** “The authors declare that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used during the preparation of this manuscript. The following tool was used: ChatGPT. The tool was used for editing purposes. All AI-assisted content was reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.”
-

References

- Chen, H. X., Xu, X., & Phillips, P. (2019). Emotional intelligence and conflict management styles. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 27(3), 458–470. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-11-2017-1272>
- Dai, Y., Li, H., Xie, W., & Deng, T. (2022). Power distance belief and workplace communication: The mediating role of fear of authority. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(5), 2932. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19052932>
- Daniels, M. A., & Greguras, G. J. (2014). Exploring the nature of power distance: Implications for micro- and macro-level theories, processes, and outcomes. *Journal of Management*, 40(5), 1202–1229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920631452713>
- De Dreu, C. K. W., & Van Vianen, A. E. M. (2001). Managing relationship conflict and the effectiveness of organizational teams. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22(3), 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.71>
- De Dreu, C. K. W., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). Task Versus Relationship Conflict, Team Performance, and Team Member Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(4), 741–749. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.741>
- de Wit, F. R. C., Greer, L. L., & Jehn, K. A. (2012). The paradox of intragroup conflict: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(2), 360–390. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024844>
- Detert, J. R., & Burris, E. R. (2007). Leadership behavior and employee voice: Is the door really open? *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(4), 869–884. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2007.26279183>
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Friedman, R. A., & Currall, S. C. (2003). Conflict Escalation: Dispute Exacerbating Elements of E-mail Communication. *Human Relations*, 56(11), 1325–1347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035611003>
- Hamlin, E. L. B., McGloin, R., & Bridgemohan, A. (2024). Communication skills training: A quantitative systematic review. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*, 38(6), 18–22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-08-2023-0188>
- Joo, B.-K., Yoon, S. K., & Galbraith, D. (2023). The effects of organizational trust and empowering leadership on group conflict: Psychological safety as a mediator. *Organization Management Journal*, 20(1), 4–16. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OMJ-07-2021-1308>
- Leung, K., Brew, F. P., Zhang, Z. X., & Zhang, Y. (2011). Harmony and Conflict: A Cross-Cultural Investigation in China and Australia. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42(5), 795–816. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110363474>
- Liang, J., Farh, C. I. C., & Farh, J. L. (2012). Psychological antecedents of promotive and prohibitive voice: A two-wave examination. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(1), 71–92. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0176>
- Mokhtar Abdullah, & Nooreha Husain. (2014). Development of Values-Based Performance Indicators for Organisations. *Zulfaqr Journal of Defence Management, Social Science & Humanities*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://zulfaqarjdmssh.upnm.edu.my/index.php/zjdmssh/article/view/2>
- Morrison, E. W. (2014). Employee voice and silence. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 173–197. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091328>

- Rahim, M. A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(3), 206–235. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022874>
- Tjosvold, D. (2008). The Conflict-Positive Organization: It Depends Upon Us. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(1), 19–28. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.473>
- Wen, T., Chen, Y.W., Syed, T. A., & Ghataoura, D. (2025). Examining communication network behaviors, structure and dynamics in an organizational hierarchy: A social network analysis approach. *Information Processing & Management*, 62(1), Article 103927. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2024.103927>
- Xie, R., Jiang, J., Yue, L., Ye, L., An, D., & Liu, Y. (2022). Under psychological safety climate: The beneficial effects of teacher–student conflict. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(15), 9300. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19159300>