

Evaluating the Influence of Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies on Communication Effectiveness at Kansanshi Mining Plc in Zambia

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African Journal of Commercial Studies, 2026, 7(2)98-108

DOI Link: <https://doi.org/10.59413/ajocs/v7.i2.10>

Abstract

Globalization has increased cross-cultural interaction within organizations operating in Zambia's mining sector. Kansanshi Mining PLC, located in Solwezi, operates within a culturally diverse workforce comprising Zambian nationals and expatriate employees working in an internationally-owned mining environment. The mine is majority owned by First Quantum Minerals, which holds an 80% stake, contributing to the multicultural composition of the workforce. While such diversity brings technical expertise and global experience, it also creates communication challenges related to language, cultural values, and workplace expectations. This study evaluated the influence of cross-cultural communication strategies on communication effectiveness at Kansanshi Mining PLC. Guided by a pragmatic paradigm, the study adopted a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant organizational experience, resulting in 310 employees participating in the quantitative phase through structured questionnaires, while 76 participants were engaged through semi-structured interviews to provide qualitative insights. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS through descriptive statistics (median and mode) and inferential tests, including the Chi-square test of independence and the Mann-Whitney U test, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that cross-cultural communication exposure at Kansanshi Mining PLC is largely embedded within general organizational processes such as induction programmes and safety briefings, rather than structured cross-cultural communication programmes. Descriptive results indicated generally positive perceptions of communication clarity during induction (median = 4.00; mode = 4.00), although variations across departments were observed. Inferential analysis showed statistically significant differences between employment categories and communication challenges experienced, with language barriers emerging as the most prominent challenge. The Mann-Whitney U test further indicated significant differences in comfort levels when seeking clarification across cultural lines, with local employees reporting higher comfort levels than expatriate employees. The study concludes that although cross-cultural communication practices exist within routine organizational processes, the absence of structured communication strategies may limit communication effectiveness. It therefore recommends the introduction of formal cross-cultural communication training programmes, leadership orientation initiatives for expatriate staff, and language-support mechanisms to enhance communication effectiveness in culturally diverse mining environments. The findings contribute to improving communication practices in culturally diverse mining organisations and provide insights applicable to similar operational contexts.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, communication effectiveness, multicultural workplace, mining sector, Kansanshi Mining PLC

1. Introduction

Effective communication becomes increasingly critical in culturally diverse organizational environments. Organizations operating across national and cultural boundaries require employees and management to interact despite differences in language, values, norms, and communication styles. When such differences are not adequately managed, misunderstandings may arise, potentially hindering teamwork, coordination, and overall organizational performance. As a result, cross-cultural communication strategies

have become indispensable for organizations seeking to enhance communication effectiveness within multicultural work environments (Hofstede, 1980; Zambia Institute of Human Resource Management [ZIHRM], 2021). In Zambia, the mining sector provides a particularly relevant context for examining cross-cultural communication dynamics. The sector is one of the country's key economic pillars, contributing significantly to export earnings and employment. According to the Zambia Chamber of Mines (2021), mining companies operating in Zambia employ culturally diverse workforces composed of both Zambian nationals and expatriates in order to meet complex operational demands. Mining operations require high levels of coordination, strict safety compliance, and continuous interaction between management and employees, making effective communication especially critical in this sector (Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development, 2021). Zambia's North-Western Province, where Kansanshi Mining PLC is located, presents a unique cultural and social context. Solwezi, the provincial capital, is predominantly inhabited by the Kaonde people, who constitute the largest indigenous ethnic group in the area. The province is also home to other ethnic groups such as the Lunda (including Ishindi-Lunda and Kanongesha-Lunda) and the Luvale, among others (Central Statistical Office [CSO], 2022; Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2021). These communities possess distinct cultural values, languages, and communication norms that shape social interaction within the region. Cultural values in the area often emphasize communal relations, respect for authority, and indirect communication styles, which influence expectations around communication both within organizations and between companies and surrounding host communities (Hall, 1976; Chanda & Zulu, 2022). Kansanshi Mining PLC, located in Solwezi in Zambia's North-Western Province, is Africa's largest copper producer and a major employer in the region. The mine is jointly owned by First Quantum Minerals Ltd (80%) and ZCCM Investments Holdings (20%), reflecting its international ownership structure (First Quantum Minerals, 2022). As part of First Quantum Minerals' global operations, Kansanshi Mining PLC operates within a culturally diverse environment that includes a workforce composed of a substantial number of Zambian employees alongside expatriate staff drawn from countries such as Canada, Australia, and South Africa (Zambia Chamber of Mines, 2021). The interaction between expatriate and local employees at Kansanshi Mining PLC introduces diverse communication styles shaped by differing cultural backgrounds. Zambian employees, particularly those from local cultural groups such as the Kaonde and Lunda, may exhibit high-context communication patterns that emphasize relationships, shared understanding, and respect for hierarchy. In contrast, expatriate employees may prefer low-context communication styles characterized by directness and explicit messaging (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980). These differing communication approaches influence how messages are interpreted, how feedback is provided, and how workplace relationships are maintained, thereby affecting overall communication effectiveness within the organization (ZIHRM, 2021). Empirical studies conducted within the Zambian context further highlight these cross-cultural communication challenges in multicultural workplaces. For instance, Katongo and Hamusokwe (2022) found that interactions between expatriate and local employees were frequently affected by language barriers, differing communication expectations, and hierarchical power distance, leading to misunderstandings and reduced communication effectiveness in daily organizational operations. These findings suggest that cross-cultural communication challenges are not unique to Kansanshi Mining PLC but are characteristic of many organizations operating in culturally diverse environments in Zambia.

Although Kansanshi Mining PLC has implemented initiatives such as intercultural training programs, staff development workshops, and orientation sessions to address cultural diversity, these efforts are not always guided by a formalized and comprehensive cross-cultural communication strategy. As a result, communication practices may be applied inconsistently across departments, potentially contributing to misinterpretations, communication inefficiencies, and strained interactions within the organization (Zambia Chamber of Mines, 2021). Globally, organizations operating across cultural boundaries have increasingly adopted structured cross-cultural communication strategies, including cultural awareness training and inclusive leadership models, to enhance communication effectiveness across diverse teams (Schauber, 2016; ZIHRM, 2021). Evaluating the influence of such strategies within the context of Kansanshi Mining PLC therefore provides insights that are both locally grounded in the Zambian and Solwezi context and globally relevant to cross-cultural communication in multinational organizational environments.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Effective communication is essential for organizational performance, particularly in culturally diverse and high-risk environments such as mining operations. In organizations operating across cultural boundaries, employees and managers must communicate despite differences in language, cultural norms, and communication styles. When these differences are not effectively managed, misunderstandings may occur, potentially affecting teamwork, operational efficiency, and workplace safety. Kansanshi Mining PLC, Zambia's largest copper mining operation and part of First Quantum Minerals' global operations, employs a culturally diverse workforce comprising both Zambian nationals and expatriates. Within such environments, communication plays a critical role in ensuring that technical instructions are clearly transmitted, safety procedures are understood, and operational coordination occurs efficiently. However, differences in cultural expectations, communication styles, and language may complicate workplace interactions between expatriate and local employees. These challenges are particularly significant in the mining sector, where operational activities involve complex technical processes and strict safety requirements. Misinterpretation of instructions, delays in communication, or ineffective feedback mechanisms can affect productivity, safety compliance, and teamwork. Cultural differences in communication styles, such as direct versus indirect communication or differing attitudes toward hierarchy, may further influence how messages are interpreted and acted upon in the workplace (Hofstede, 1980; Adler & Gundersen, 2008). Although Kansanshi Mining PLC has implemented initiatives such as induction programmes, intercultural workshops, and mentorship arrangements to

facilitate interaction between expatriate and local employees, the effectiveness of these communication practices has not been systematically evaluated. It therefore remains unclear whether existing cross-cultural communication strategies adequately support effective communication within the organization. Existing studies on Zambia's mining sector have largely focused on the economic contributions of mining companies, with limited attention given to how cross-cultural communication practices influence communication effectiveness within multicultural workplaces. This creates a gap in understanding how communication strategies influence interaction between expatriate and local employees in mining environments. This study therefore evaluates the influence of cross-cultural communication strategies on communication effectiveness at Kansanshi Mining PLC in Zambia, with the aim of determining whether existing strategies support effective communication in a culturally diverse organizational setting.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

Communication has long been recognized as a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness; however, its role within culturally diverse and high-risk industrial environments such as mining continues to attract scholarly attention. In organizational settings, communication extends beyond a managerial function to become a strategic resource that influences coordination, safety, productivity, and employee relations (Thomas & Peterson, 2017). This importance is further amplified by globalization, which has transformed organizational communication by integrating culturally diverse workforces across national boundaries through increased labor mobility, technological advancement, and foreign direct investment (Giddens, 1990; UNCTAD, 2021). While globalization enhances knowledge transfer and innovation, it simultaneously introduces communication challenges arising from differences in language, communication styles, and cultural expectations, often resulting in misunderstandings and coordination difficulties in multicultural workplaces (Tenzer, Pudelko & Harzing, 2014). These challenges are particularly critical in the mining sector, where operations are complex and safety-sensitive, requiring precise communication, clear instructions, and timely coordination among employees working in hazardous environments. Existing research indicates that communication failures in such high-risk industries are frequently associated with accidents, operational disruptions, and reduced safety compliance (Flin, O'Connor & Crichton, 2008; Reason, 2016), thereby highlighting that communication effectiveness is not only a relational concern but also an operational and safety imperative. Furthermore, studies demonstrate that communication breakdowns in mining environments are not solely technical but are also shaped by organizational and cultural dynamics, including unclear instructions, inadequate feedback mechanisms, and misunderstandings across hierarchical levels (Zwetsloot et al., 2017). Within the Zambian context, emerging empirical evidence suggests that intercultural communication challenges are prevalent in organizations employing both expatriate and local employees, with language barriers, differences in communication styles, and hierarchical power distance significantly influencing workplace interaction and limiting open communication (Katongo & Hamusokwe, 2022). These findings are consistent with broader cultural communication theories, which indicate that employees from high-context cultures tend to rely on implicit and relational communication, while those from low-context cultures favor direct and explicit messaging, thereby shaping how instructions are interpreted and feedback is communicated (Hall, 1976). In response to these challenges, scholars have identified various cross-cultural communication strategies, including orientation programmes, intercultural training, standardized communication procedures, and supervisory mediation, all aimed at enhancing mutual understanding and reducing cultural misunderstandings (Thomas & Peterson, 2017; Hofstede et al., 2010). However, although these strategies are widely recognized, evidence suggests that organizations, particularly within Zambia, often implement them informally and inconsistently, relying on individual adaptation rather than structured organizational systems (ZiHRM, 2021). Moreover, much of the existing literature remains largely descriptive, focusing on identifying communication challenges and strategies without critically evaluating their effectiveness in improving communication outcomes. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence examining how cross-cultural communication strategies directly influence communication effectiveness, particularly within high-risk sectors such as mining. This gap is further reinforced by the growing relevance of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which highlights the importance of individuals' ability to adapt communication across cultural contexts (Ang et al., 2015), and by theoretical frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which demonstrate how cultural values influence communication patterns and workplace interactions (Hofstede et al., 2010). Despite these contributions, there remains insufficient context-specific research within Zambia's mining sector that evaluates the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication strategies in enhancing communication outcomes. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining how cross-cultural communication strategies influence communication effectiveness within a culturally diverse mining environment at Kansanshi Mining PLC.

2.2 Theoretical Framework – Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is central to understanding cultural diversity and its influence on communication and organizational behavior. The theory identifies six cultural dimensions, power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint, which explain how cultural values shape communication styles, attitudes toward authority,

and interpersonal relationships (Hofstede et al., 2010). Within Kansanshi Mining PLC, differences in power distance may affect how employees communicate with supervisors, while variations in uncertainty avoidance may influence preferences for structured or flexible communication. This theory therefore provides a valuable lens for analyzing cultural patterns that shape communication practices in the organization.

Shannon and Weaver’s Communication Model explain the mechanics of communication and highlights how messages may be disrupted by interference or “noise” during transmission (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). The model identifies key components of communication, including the sender, message, channel, receiver, noise, and feedback.

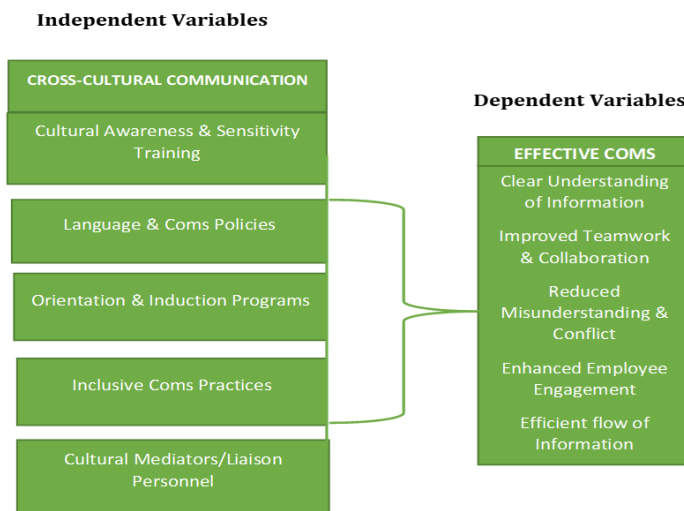
In a multicultural organization such as Kansanshi Mining PLC, cultural and language differences may function as sources of noise that distort message interpretation. Misunderstandings may occur when messages are encoded and decoded differently due to cultural assumptions. This model is therefore useful for analyzing communication breakdowns and emphasizing the importance of feedback in enhancing mutual understanding.

Trompenaars’ Seven Dimensions of Culture complement Hofstede’s framework by examining additional cultural orientations such as universalism versus particularism, achievement versus ascription, and neutral versus emotional communication styles (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

At Kansanshi Mining PLC, differences in achievement versus ascription may influence perceptions of authority and recognition, while universalism versus particularism may affect how organizational rules are interpreted and applied. Trompenaars’ model therefore provides further insight into the complexity of cultural differences affecting communication within multinational organizations.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below presents the conceptual framework for the study;



Conceptual Framework; Source: Author (2025)

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3 Research Methodology

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design, which integrates qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural communication practices and their influence on communication effectiveness within organizations. The design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to combine qualitative insights from employee experiences with quantitative evidence measuring perceived communication effectiveness (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The qualitative component focused on understanding employees’ experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of communication across cultural boundaries within Kansanshi Mining PLC. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to explore how communication is enacted in practice, including how instructions are interpreted, how misunderstandings arise, and how cultural norms influence interaction between expatriate and local employees (Flick, 2018). The quantitative component complemented the qualitative findings by providing measurable evidence of employees’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication strategies. A structured questionnaire was administered to capture employees’ perceptions of communication clarity, understanding, cultural sensitivity, and coordination in daily work activities. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data enabled triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings. The study was conducted at Kansanshi Mining PLC in Solwezi, Zambia. With an approximate workforce of 13,000 employees, a sample size of 388 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for estimating sample sizes from a known population:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = 1 + N(e)^2N$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error

Substituting the study population of 13,000 employees and a margin of error of 0.05:

$$n = \frac{13,000}{1 + 13,000(0.05)^2} = \frac{13,000}{1 + 13,000(0.025)} = \frac{13,000}{33.5} \approx 388$$

$$n = \frac{13,000}{1 + 13,000(0.0025)} = \frac{13,000}{1 + 13,000(0.0025)} = \frac{13,000}{33.5} \approx 388$$

The quantitative survey therefore targeted 388 employees across departments and organizational levels to ensure adequate representation of the workforce. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience in cross-cultural communication within the organization. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers, supervisors, safety officers, human resource personnel, expatriate staff, and local operators. These participants were selected because their roles involved communication across cultural and hierarchical boundaries. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and followed an interview guide developed from the literature review and study objectives. Interview questions explored how communication occurs between expatriate and local employees, challenges experienced in cross-cultural interaction, and perceptions of the effectiveness of existing communication practices. To complement the qualitative data, a structured questionnaire was administered to employees across departments, cultural groups, and organizational levels. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication strategies identified through document review and interviews. It captured employees' perceptions of communication clarity, coordination, and cultural sensitivity in daily work activities. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods enabled the study to identify cross-cultural communication strategies employed within the organization and evaluate their influence on communication effectiveness.

4 Results

4.1 Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies Employed at Kansanshi Mining PLC

The study examined the cross-cultural communication strategies used at Kansanshi Mining PLC to facilitate interaction between expatriate and local employees. The findings indicate that exposure to cross-cultural communication practices within the organization occurs primarily through existing organizational processes rather than through dedicated cross-cultural communication programmes. Induction or orientation programmes were identified as the most commonly reported form of exposure, cited by 127 respondents (40.3%). These programmes serve as an initial introduction to organizational policies, workplace expectations, and basic communication practices. However, the findings suggest that induction programmes may provide only limited coverage of cross-cultural communication issues. Safety briefings involving culturally mixed teams were reported by 73 respondents (23.2%), reflecting the operational realities of mining where employees from different cultural backgrounds regularly collaborate in high-risk environments. These briefings provide practical opportunities for communication across cultural boundaries, particularly in relation to safety procedures and operational coordination. Other forms of exposure included communication or cultural awareness training (15.2%), supervisory support to clarify instructions (11.1%), and informal mentoring or peer support (10.2%). Overall, the findings indicate that cross-cultural communication exposure at Kansanshi Mining PLC is largely embedded within general organizational processes, particularly induction programmes and safety-related communication activities. While these mechanisms facilitate interaction between employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, they are not always designed as structured cross-cultural communication strategies. Consequently, communication practices may remain task-focused and may not explicitly address deeper cultural differences in communication styles, hierarchy, or feedback practices.

4.2 How does cross-cultural communication strategies influence the effectiveness of communication at Kansanshi Mining PLC?

The study found that most employees at Kansanshi Mining were able to understand communication clearly with descriptive statistics showing a mean score of 3.14, with a median of 3.00 and a mode of 4.00. These values indicate that, on average, respondents' perceptions lie slightly above the neutral point, leaning toward agreement that communication is clear and understandable. However, the results reveal a notably polarized and concerning pattern on the ease of understanding language used in meetings, trainings, and safety briefings. Although the descriptive statistics show a mean score of 3.22, with a median and mode of 4.00, suggesting an overall leaning toward satisfaction, the frequency distribution tells a very different and more critical story. The relatively high standard deviation (1.156) further confirms substantial variation in employees' experiences. These results show that the prominence of safety briefings involving culturally mixed teams reflects the operational realities of mining, where employees from different cultural backgrounds must regularly interact in high-risk environments. These briefings provide practical opportunities for cross-cultural communication, as safety messages must be clearly understood across linguistic and cultural boundaries. While this exposure is valuable, it is often task-focused and may not explicitly address underlying cultural differences in

communication styles, hierarchy, or feedback practices. Furthermore, the findings underscore the need to evaluate not only the presence but also the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication strategies. The limited exposure to formal training and mentoring suggests opportunities for improvement, particularly through the development of structured, continuous cross-cultural communication programmes that complement induction and safety initiatives.

4.3 What challenges affect the implementation of cross-cultural communication strategies at Kansanshi Mining PLC?

The study shows the challenges in cross-cultural communication at Kansanshi Mining PLC, which has highlighted several key barriers affecting employee interactions, these include; Language barriers were the most frequently reported challenge, with 190 respondents (60.3%) indicating difficulty. Cultural misunderstandings were reported by 89 respondents (28.3%), reflecting those differences in cultural norms, values, or communication styles lead to misinterpretations or conflict. Hierarchical barriers were less common, with 36 respondents (11.4%) experiencing difficulties due to organizational structures or power dynamics that may limit open communication. The results on mutual trust during communication between local and expatriate employees at Kansanshi Mining PLC show (3= Neutral). The findings suggest that while some trust exists, there is a significant gap that needs to be addressed, which generally indicate that mutual trust in cross-cultural communication at Kansanshi Mining PLC is moderate but fragile, and strengthening trust could substantially enhance communication effectiveness, teamwork, and operational efficiency in a multicultural workforce. Furthermore, the results have indicated that language barriers are clearly the primary obstacle, indicating a need for enhanced language support, simplified communication methods, or multilingual resources. Cultural misunderstandings on the other hand point to a requirement for cultural awareness training and ongoing exposure to diverse workgroups to foster empathy and understanding. Although hierarchical barriers are less common, they suggest some employees may still feel constrained in expressing concerns or sharing ideas in mixed teams. The study revealed that most employees encounter occasional cultural misunderstandings, signaling a need for ongoing cultural awareness initiatives to minimize these incidents, additionally the smaller but significant group experiencing frequent misunderstandings may benefit from targeted mentoring, peer support, or clearer communication protocols in culturally mixed teams.

4.4 What strategies can be adopted to improve cross-cultural communication practices at Kansanshi Mining PLC?

The study found the majority, 160 respondents (50.8%), emphasized the need for standardized and clearer guidelines. This suggests that ambiguity in how information is shared contributes significantly to misunderstandings. More regular communication training: 79 respondents (25.1%) indicated that ongoing training would help employees navigate cultural differences more effectively. Regular training could build skills in language use, cultural awareness, and conflict resolution. More inclusive meetings: 46 respondents (14.6%) recommended ensuring that meetings accommodate all cultural backgrounds, promoting participation and engagement from all employees. Stronger supervisory support: 30 respondents (9.5%) noted that better support from supervisors could improve clarity, reinforce guidelines, and provide immediate clarification when misunderstandings occur. This highlights the need for enhanced communication accuracy through clearer documentation, standardized messaging, and reinforced cross-cultural communication training, particularly for supervisors and team leaders who act as key information conduits. Strengthening these areas would improve not only operational efficiency but also safety and employee confidence in organizational communication systems. The median and mode of Timeliness of Work and Safety-Related Information (4.00= Agree), but, with a standard deviation which reflects noticeable differences in employee perceptions, suggesting inconsistencies in communication timeliness, implying that while the communication system is largely functional, there are gaps that may compromise operational and safety outcomes, especially in scenarios requiring immediate or coordinated action, which shows that while Kansanshi Mining PLC ensures that important work and safety-related information reaches a majority of employees on time, the notable minority who experience delays or uncertainty points to a need for enhanced communication protocols.

4.5 Inferential Statistics

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between employment category and challenges experienced in cross-cultural communication. The results were statistically significant, indicating that cross-cultural communication challenges are experienced differently by local and expatriate employees. Specifically, language barriers emerged as the most dominant challenge affecting both groups, confirming its central role in communication difficulties within the organization. Cultural misunderstandings were found to be more pronounced among local employees, likely due to interactions with expatriates who utilize different communication styles. In contrast, hierarchical barriers were significantly more prominent among expatriate employees, suggesting challenges related to authority structures, reporting dynamics, and power distance within the organization. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions such as leadership and hierarchy-orientation training, particularly for expatriate staff.

Table 1: Cross Cultural Communication Challenges

Employment category * Challenges have you experienced in cross-cultural communication Crosstabulation

Count

		Challenges have you experienced in cross-cultural communication				Total
		Language barriers	Language barriers	Cultural misunderstandings	Hierarchical barriers	
Employment category	Local (Zambian) employee	89	45	75	13	222
	Expatriate / international employee	31	25	14	23	93
Total		120	70	89	36	315

Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	Employment category	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Comfortability in asking for clarification from colleagues or supervisors of a different culture.	Local (Zambian) employee	222	173.46	38507.50
	Expatriate / international employee	93	121.10	11262.50
	Total	315		

A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to examine differences in comfortability in asking for clarification across cultural lines between local and expatriate employees. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Local employees reported higher levels of comfort in seeking clarification from colleagues or supervisors of a different cultural background, while expatriate employees demonstrated lower levels of comfort. This difference may be attributed to perceived hierarchical distance, cultural norms surrounding authority and questioning, and concerns about misinterpretation or social discomfort. These findings are consistent with earlier results indicating that hierarchical barriers are more prevalent among expatriate employees and may hinder open communication across cultural lines.

Table 2: Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation

Correlations

		Length of service at Kansanshi Mining PLC	Mutual trust between local and expatriate employees during communication
Spearman's rho	Length of service at Kansanshi Mining PLC	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	315
			315
	Mutual trust between local and expatriate employees during communication	Correlation Coefficient	-.434**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	315
			315

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between length of service and mutual trust between local and expatriate employees. The results revealed a moderate negative relationship between the two variables, indicating that as length of service increases, the level of perceived mutual trust between local and expatriate employees tends to decrease. This suggests that longer-serving employees may become more aware of underlying communication challenges or cultural differences that affect trust over time. Conversely, employees with shorter tenure tend to report higher levels of trust, possibly due to initial organizational integration processes or limited exposure to cross-cultural communication challenges. These findings highlight the importance of continuous relationship-building and trust-enhancing strategies within culturally diverse workplaces.

4.6 Qualitative Discussion

According to thematic analysis, the following themes were detected;

HR Policies and Cross-cultural Orientation

HR representatives indicated that cross-cultural communication principles are embedded within organizational policies and on-boarding manuals. Local adaptation of First Quantum Minerals' diversity guidelines supports employee integration, respect, and intercultural collaboration. Both local and expatriate participants affirmed that the policy intentions are clear and generally well communicated, although implementation was reported to vary across departments. These findings align with First Quantum Minerals' 2024 ESG framework, which emphasizes diversity, inclusion, and local participation as integral to organizational culture (FQM ESG Report, 2024). However, evidence from participants suggests that the practical reinforcement of cultural training at Kansanshi is less continuous than implied by corporate guidelines,

indicating a policy–practice implementation gap.

A recurring finding was that the cross-cultural induction process is effective at entry but lacks structured reinforcement beyond the initial phase. Many expatriate participants reported that orientation sessions were valuable, particularly in explaining norms related to greetings, titles, tone, and deference, which are significant aspects of workplace interaction within the Zambian context. This observation aligns with Hofstede’s characterization of Zambia as a high power-distance and collectivist society, where communication norms emphasize respect, consensus, and interpersonal warmth (Hofstede, 1980).

However, both local and expatriate participants noted that intercultural learning would be more effective if delivered on a continuous basis rather than as a one-time intervention. This finding is consistent with cross-cultural research in mining contexts, which indicates that front-loaded orientation programmes lose effectiveness unless reinforced through structured and ongoing learning cycles (Jafari, 2017). Overall, while HR policy intent appears strong, its sustained operationalization within daily practice remains developmental.

From an organizational performance perspective, participants suggested that inconsistent reinforcement of cross-cultural training may have indirect efficiency and cost implications.

Supervisory Mediation and Cultural Adaptation

One of the most consistent themes emerging from the interviews and focus group discussions is the central role played by supervisors as mediators and interpreters of communication across cultures. Supervisors at Kansanshi are expected not only to communicate technical instructions and operational decisions, but also to navigate cultural nuances that influence how employees interpret information, interact with authority, and respond to feedback. This dual responsibility positions supervisors as the practical “bridges” between communication intention and communication meaning.

Many local participants explained that expatriates’ instructions often became clearer only after a supervisor or senior local colleague provided explanation in simplified language, contextualized the message, or used visual demonstrations. This type of cultural mediation was particularly important in engineering and maintenance units, where operational tasks demand precision and misinterpretation carry safety consequences. As one Zambian operator stated:

“When we get instructions from expatriates, sometimes we do not fully understand the tone or the exact meaning. But when the supervisor breaks it down or explains step by step, everything becomes smooth.”

This experience is mirrored by expatriates, who acknowledged that supervisors often helped them translate their communication style into something “culturally comfortable” for local colleagues. Several expatriates confessed that they initially struggled with indirect communication, polite disagreement norms, and the importance of respectful greetings within Zambian communication culture, and that supervisors played a mentoring role in helping them adapt. One expatriate supervisor noted:

“I learned very quickly that tone matters here. You can tell someone what to do, but how you say it affects trust. My Zambian colleagues helped me understand that.”

Such findings reflect Ting-Toomey’s (2015) Identity Negotiation Theory, which argues that effective cross-cultural communication depends not only on message clarity but on relational sensitivity and cultural mindfulness. In practice, Kansanshi’s supervisors operationalize these principles through real conversations, not formal theoretical knowledge.

The study also revealed that supervisors do not merely translate language; they translate intent. When misunderstandings arise, supervisors cushion emotional impact, contextualize tone, and frame decisions in a culturally acceptable manner. Many participants spoke of encounters where direct criticism from expatriates caused discomfort until supervisors reframed the message in a way that preserved dignity while retaining clarity. This aligns with Coombs’ (2014) conflict mediation model that emphasizes contextualization of meaning to avoid escalation.

Additionally, supervisors provide emotional mediation. Expatriates unfamiliar with indirect communication, or locals uncomfortable raising questions in hierarchical contexts, often rely on supervisors as safe intermediaries. This phenomenon reflects Hofstede’s (1980) concept of high power-distance cultures, where employees hesitate to question authority, making supervisors vital in facilitating upward communication.

The supervisory mediation model used at Kansanshi resembles documented best practice within global mining operations, where supervisors act both as cultural interpreters and safety communicators (Surujlal & Dhurup, 2019). However, while expatriates recognized this supervisory role as beneficial, they also admitted that they relied on supervisors “more than expected,” highlighting that organizational training on cross-cultural communication remains insufficient, placing additional burden on individuals who develop interpersonal mediation skills informally.

The findings reveal that supervisors are the pivot through which cross-cultural communication becomes workable. Their roles are not merely administrative, but relational, contextual and interpretive. They sustain communication effectiveness not through authority but through cultural intelligence, emotional awareness, and ethical leadership.

Communication Challenges: Language, Tone and Interpretation

The study found that challenges in communication did not stem from resistance or unwillingness to collaborate but from cultural interpretations of language, tone, humor, and assumptions. The most prominent challenges centered around linguistic divergence and cultural meaning frameworks.

Language challenges did not arise from inability to speak English, as most participants across roles spoke English proficiently, but rather from differences in conversational pacing, inferential meaning, and tone. Local Zambian

employees tended to interpret direct expressions as emotionally charged or disrespectful, while expatriates interpreted indirect speech as evasive or unclear. As one expatriate engineer explained:

“Sometimes when someone says something politely, I assume they are only making a suggestion, not stating a concern. And later, I find out it was a serious point.”

Conversely, a Zambian participant explained:

“When expatriates talk, sometimes they sound too direct, as though they are angry, yet they are just being straightforward. So, you need to understand who is talking before reacting.”

Such misunderstandings demonstrate the cultural coding of tone described in Lewis’ (2006) communication model, where different cultures place varying emphasis on directness and contextual politeness. At Kansanshi, tone becomes a site where intercultural meaning is negotiated. Participants indicated that when such misunderstandings occurred during operational tasks, work was sometimes delayed while clarification was sought, or instructions were revisited to prevent error. Although these situations were usually resolved informally, participants acknowledged that repeated instances of misinterpretation could cumulatively affect task flow and productivity, particularly in time-sensitive operational environments.

Humor emerged as another challenge. Several locals reported that humor used by expatriates occasionally felt insensitive or sarcastic due to cultural differences. One participant described a situation where a joke made by an expatriate was interpreted as offensive, leading to tension and eventual mediation. This aligns with Meyer’s (2016) findings that humor is deeply cultural and easily misinterpreted.

Technical terminology also posed challenges. Although English was the working language, certain technical expressions lacked universal understanding. Focus groups revealed the importance of verbal paraphrasing, repetition, and demonstration. Several participants echoed the practice of “repeat-back confirmation,” which expatriates learned to use after experiencing miscommunication. This aligns with Stevenson (2018), who argued that shared meaning must be negotiated rather than assumed in multicultural industrial contexts.

Hierarchical barriers further complicated meaning-making. Local employees expressed discomfort correcting expatriates or questioning instructions due to cultural respect norms. This confirms Hofstede’s (1980) theory that power-distance affects communication openness. Meanwhile, expatriates acknowledged that they needed to “invite questions explicitly,” a behavior they did not originally anticipate.

These findings collectively indicate that communication challenges at Kansanshi are relational rather than linguistic, revealing deep intersections between culture, hierarchy, emotional norms and interactional expectations.

Safety Communication and Operational Clarity

Safety communication emerged from the findings as both the most sensitive and the most critically important communication context. Participants repeatedly emphasized that misunderstanding safety instructions does not merely cause operational inefficiency but can jeopardize life.

The criticality of toolbox and safety briefings observed at Kansanshi is also supported by global mining research. Sauer et al. (2020) demonstrate that multimodal safety communication reduces incident probability in multicultural mining environments. Kansanshi’s practical adaptation through multilingual, repeated briefings aligns closely with this evidence. Both interviews and focus groups underscored toolbox meetings, shift briefings, and worksite demonstrations as critical channels that help neutralize cultural barriers. In these sessions, supervisors often combine verbal instruction, gestures, diagrams, local language summarization, and field demonstrations. Participants described safety communication as “not just information” but “life protection,” which elevates its interpretive stakes.

Local operators noted that using multiple languages (including English, Bemba, Lunda, and Kaonde) during toolbox meetings significantly improved clarity. Expatriates praised this multilingual approach and emphasized that they learned the importance of slowing down explanations in safety-critical contexts. One expatriate admitted:

“In my country we assume technical clarity, but here I learned that explaining step by step prevents mistakes.”

This recognition reflects Sauer et al. (2020), who found that cross-cultural mining operations require multimodal communication to prevent safety incidents. Kansanshi demonstrates alignment with this global insight.

However, data also revealed vulnerabilities. There were cases where expatriates assumed shared understanding without checking, and cases where locals hesitated to ask clarifying questions due to respect norms. Such reluctance, according to Jenkins (2013), increases risk in high power-distance cultures.

Thus, Kansanshi’s toolbox meetings serve as a corrective mechanism. They allow negotiation of meaning, encourage clarification, and balance linguistic and cultural variation. Importantly, they show how communication adapts under pressure, revealing the workplace as an environment of continuous interpretive adaptation.

Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Conflict resolution mechanisms at Kansanshi emerged as both formal and informal. The formal system is HR-driven, employing mediation, neutral assessment, empathy-based reframing, and documentation. Participants described HR interventions as constructive and non-punitive, reducing defensiveness and restoring interpersonal trust.

Several local employees emphasized that HR “protects respect,” meaning the process allows dignity to remain intact while misunderstandings are addressed. Expatriates described HR guidance as clarifying cultural expectations they had previously misinterpreted.

Participants also compared current practices to historical communication problems. In earlier years, English-only written

channels led to exclusion or misunderstanding among field workers. Over time, Kansanshi adapted by incorporating notice boards, payslip inserts, verbal briefings, and pictorial safety instructions. This evolution illustrates organizational learning consistent with Argyris and Schön's (1996) theory of double-loop learning.

Furthermore, the informal mediation role of supervisors complements HR processes. Instead of escalation to HR, many disputes were resolved at supervisory or peer level, especially when misunderstandings stemmed from tone rather than intention. Singh (2016) notes that culturally adaptive mediation increases psychological safety, a dynamic strongly visible in Kansanshi's communication ecosystem.

Thus, conflict resolution at Kansanshi is multi-layered, rooted in cultural contextualization, and reflective of a workplace where misunderstandings are treated as meaning-making problems rather than behavioral failures.

Informal Cultural Integration and Social Interaction

Participants consistently described social spaces, sporting events, charity engagements, departmental celebrations, community outreach activities, and family-oriented gatherings, as powerful vehicles of cross-cultural integration. These activities allow employees to encounter one another not as functional colleagues but as relational human beings, reducing stereotype assumptions and creating empathy-based trust.

Examples frequently mentioned included the Kansanshi Marathon, cycling events, the color fun run, fishing competitions, athletics trials, and family wellness days. Locals and expatriates alike emphasized that shared participation in non-work environments reduces tension, strengthens rapport, and builds cultural curiosity.

This insight aligns with Hinds et al. (2011), who found that "informal relationship-building increases intercultural communication willingness in formal contexts." Kansanshi's informal integration practices act as cultural oxygen, enabling smoother formal communication.

Informal spaces also broaden expatriates' understanding of local values and customs, helping them avoid culturally insensitive interactions. Locals feel recognized beyond their technical roles, reinforcing belonging and reducing interpretive insecurity.

Thus, informal interaction at Kansanshi is not mere entertainment; it serves as strategic social infrastructure supporting intercultural alignment.

Emerging Needs and Recommendations

While recognizing existing strengths, participants also expressed forward-looking suggestions grounded in their lived experience. Several proposed periodic intercultural workshops rather than one-off orientations. Others highlighted the need for multilingual technical glossaries, especially for safety-critical terms. Some requested regular focus groups dedicated to communication problem-solving, reflecting desire for proactive learning.

These requests mirror best-practice literature recommending structured reflection cycles in multicultural workplaces (Trompenaars & Hampden, Turner, 2012). The emphasis on visual materials for technical and safety instructions corresponds to findings by Sauer et al. (2020), who argue that visual redundancy significantly reduces miscommunication-induced risk.

Notably, participants did not frame communication breakdowns as personal failures but as organizational learning opportunities. This culture of constructive reflection is itself a marker of communication maturity.

5 Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

This study evaluated the influence of cross-cultural communication strategies on communication effectiveness at Kansanshi Mining PLC. The findings indicate that cross-cultural communication within the organization is largely embedded within existing organizational processes rather than being supported by structured and formalized communication programmes. Induction or orientation programmes were identified as the most common form of exposure to cross-cultural communication practices, while safety briefings involving culturally mixed teams also play a significant role in facilitating interaction among employees from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, the fact that fewer than half of respondents identified induction as their primary source of exposure suggests that current cross-cultural communication initiatives may be limited in scope, consistency, and depth. The study therefore concludes that although cross-cultural communication occurs in practice, it is not systematically guided by comprehensive organizational strategies. To enhance communication effectiveness within the culturally diverse workforce, the study recommends the development of structured cross-cultural communication training programmes, the establishment of clear and standardized communication guidelines, and the strengthening of supervisory support mechanisms to improve clarity, inclusivity, and interaction between expatriate and local employees. These findings highlight the importance of structured communication systems in enhancing operational efficiency, safety compliance, and workforce integration in culturally diverse mining environments.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they are not aware of any competing financial interests or personal relationships that may have influenced the work described in this document.

Funding

This research did not receive specific grants from any public, commercial, or non-profit sector funding bodies.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made a contribution to this research

Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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