

Towards an Airport Communication Wellness Framework (ACWF): Reframing Professional Communication in Human-Centred Airport Operations

^{*1}Mohd Norazali Nordin, ²Rohaizan Ahmad, ³Nor Aida Abdul Rahman, ⁴Faradina Ahmad

¹Transportation Department, Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia,

²English Department, Student Development & Campus Lifestyle, Universiti Kuala Lumpur – Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology, Malaysia,

³Aviation Management Section, Universiti Kuala Lumpur – Malaysian Institute of Aviation Technology, Malaysia

⁴Panel Law, Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

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ABSTRACT

Airports are communication-intensive workplaces in which operational safety, service continuity and human wellbeing depend on how information is produced, exchanged and understood. Nevertheless, airport communication is commonly evaluated via accuracy, efficiency, service quality or technology adoption, while its consequences for psychological safety, dignity, cognitive ease and relational trust remain fragmented across disciplines. This concept paper discussed on how professional and workplace communication, organisational well-being and human-centred airport research can be synthesised into an Airport Communication Wellness Framework (ACWF). Through an integrative, problem driven review, this paper proposes six interdependent dimensions: informational clarity and predictability; relational respect and empathy; dialogic voice and psychological safety; inclusive and intercultural accessibility; digital-human balance and trust; and coordinative and operational reliability. ACWF reframes communication as both an operational resource and a condition of wellness, providing a research agenda for safer, more inclusive and human-centred airport operations. The six dimensions are grounded in established bodies of literature on airport information and wayfinding, strategic and internal communication, psychological safety and dialogic communication, human-centred design and accessibility, digital communication, and aviation safety communication.

Keywords: airport communication wellness; professional communication; workplace communication; human-centred airports; digital communication

INTRODUCTION

Airports are complex, high reliability workplaces in which numerous actors must coordinate under time pressure, regulatory constraints and fluctuating demand. Airport employees, airlines, security agencies, immigration officers, ground handlers, concessionaires, technology providers and passengers continuously exchange operational instructions, service information, warnings, requests and reassurance. Communication therefore does more than transmit messages which it shapes situational awareness, trust, emotional tone and the capacity of

people to act confidently. In aviation maintenance, communication and trust are associated with the conditions surrounding safety occurrences, while psychological safety and employee voice influence safety-oriented practices among aviation personnel (Chatzi & Kourousis, 2024; Hu et al., 2024; Nordin, 2023). These findings position communication as part of the operational infrastructure of aviation rather than an auxiliary interpersonal skill.

Airport scholars have nevertheless approached communication unevenly. Information supply, signage, wayfinding, digital interfaces and service encounters have been studied in passenger research, frequently as predictors of satisfaction or processing efficiency (Choi et al., 2024; Kontogiannis, 2024; Wang & Wang, 2025). Meanwhile, workplace communication research shows that symmetrical communication, supportive peer interaction, organizational trust and appropriate channel selection affect employee satisfaction, empowerment, safety behaviours and psychological well-being (Lee, 2022; Qin & Men, 2023; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2025). Accessibility study also has shown that communication techniques that are efficient for the majority might create ambiguity or exclusion for autistic passengers and persons with hidden disabilities (Cerdan Chiscano & Darcy, 2024; Dos Santos et al., 2024). These literatures are valuable but seldom connected around the human effects of communication across the airport ecosystem.

This fragmentation is a conceptual concern. Existing constructs such as internal communication satisfaction, passenger experience, service quality and accessibility and aviation safety explain relationships, but none sufficiently explains whether an airport's overall communicative environment enables people to remain informed, respected, included, psychologically safe and operationally capable. The problem is not only the absence of a fresh label. Rather, there is a need in the literature for a meso-level construct that links communication traits and practices with human wellness but also reflects the safety-critical and interorganizational realities of airport operations. This combination is needed to specify the consequences of airport communication on uncertainty, cognitive load, dignity, employee voice and relational trust, which may otherwise be optimized for message delivery or technical efficiency.

The research topic for this study is: How can lessons from professional and workplace communication, organizational wellness and human-centred airport operations be synthesized into an Airport Communication Wellness Framework? This paper provides three contributions. First, it introduces and operationalizes the novel multidisciplinary construct of airport communication wellness. Second, it establishes six dimensions derived from theory and its relation to human and operational outcomes. Third, a research agenda is outlined for testing the framework in employee, passenger, partner and human-digital communication scenarios. It is a deliberate choice of words because communication wellness is not limited to passengers but to the entire airport ecosystem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional and Workplace Communications

Professional communication in organizations involves formal and informal exchanges through which work is coordinated, relationships are negotiated and organizational meaning is formed. The stakeholder approach to internal communication is based on the recognition of different employee groups and their respective communication needs, whereas later work defines internal communication as an interdisciplinary managerial function that includes information, relationships and organizational processes (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024; Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Therefore, the quality of communication is not only depending on sending the information but also on its accessibility, credibility, responsiveness, appropriateness of the channel and the possibility of participation. Men (2014) finds that leadership communication and interpersonal channels rich in information can improve symmetrical communication and employee happiness.

Today, digital disruption complicates these interactions in the workplace. A systematic review by Tkalac Verčič et al., (2024) revealed that digital internal communication concerns with interconnected technological, organizational and relational challenges. Digital platforms can increase reach, speed and continuity, but can also lead to overload, less social presence and unequal participation. Diary research suggested that face to face engagement continues to be particularly important for effective corporate communication even when employees utilize digital media regularly (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2025). Therefore, the key question in an airport communication is whether communication should be human or digital; and how combinations of communication channels should be utilized for message criticality, urgency, user competence and emotional need.

Communication, Psychological Safety and Well-Being

Communication can function as either a resource or a demand in the workplace. In early organizational studies, engagement, social support, and communication adequacy were related to stress and burnout. The communicative environment was found to affect employees' interpretation and coping with stresses at work (Miller et al., 1990). Psychological safety also provides an interpersonal explanation: people are more likely to ask inquiries, admit mistakes, and express concerns when they perceive that doing so will not result in punishment or embarrassment (Edmondson, 1999). This is especially true in airport operations when silence, ambiguity or delayed escalation can affect both human welfare and operational safety.

Recent studies have shown the direct connection between internal communication and wellbeing. Qin & Men, (2023) discovered that supportive peer communication was favourably related to the employee's mental wellness and organizational trust mitigated the impacts of corporate and peer communication. Dialogic internal communication can also improve safety behaviour by enhancing employee confidence in organizational connections and communication procedures (Lee, 2022).

These findings suggested that workplace wellbeing cannot be separated from employees' access to credible information, their ability to seek clarification, get polite criticism and voice concerns. Well-being is therefore not considered a clinical endpoint for ACWF. It is the sustained human capacity to understand, participate and perform without needless communicative strain.

Communication of Airport Operations and Passenger Journeys

Airport communication is part of a linked journey, not a single organizational border. Related information may be provided by an airline application, airport display, public announcement, security officer, immigration official and boarding agent. Operational databases, radio or telephone interactions, shift briefings and inter-agency escalation are all relied upon by employees. Research on airport experience has long established that passenger experience airport via a network of service, process, environment and interaction cues (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2017). The targeted timely information can minimize wasteful search and enhance passenger's decision-making, whereas inconsistent or poorly timed information can shift operational uncertainty straight to the user (Kontogiannis, 2024).

The human implications are most evident in navigation and disruption. Wang & Wang, (2025) showed that signage density and coding type increase passenger's cognitive load and decision confidence under time pressure. Reliability, personalization and user relevance are essential design factors in smart airport information services, which are also evaluated differently depending to their functional and experience aspects (Choi et al., 2024). Thus, communication wellness is more than just accurate messages. Information should be timely, interpretable, consistent across channels and actionable for the individuals in receiving it. These standards link cognitive wellness to operational coordination: when people know what is going on, and what they should do next, uncertainty and avoidable workload are diminished.

Human-Centred, Inclusive and Digital Communication

Human-centred design considers users, their tasks and the contexts in which systems are used, and aims at objectives like usability, accessibility, satisfaction and human welfare (International Organization for Standardization., 2019). When applied to the airport this idea means that communication technologies need to cater to the variation of languages, age, sensory processing, digital confidence and support needs.

Cerdan Chiscano & Darcy, (2024) discovered several trends among autistic passengers including those who preferred conventional processes, automation with assistance and mainly digital contact. Similarly, Dos Santos et al., (2024) claimed that passengers with hidden disabilities experience anxiety and communication and accessibility challenges that cannot be identified by conventional service models.

Human-centred communication should therefore not be identified with universal automation. It requires a range of communication routes, formats that are usable, dignified help and the capacity to switch between online and off-line support. Recent ASEAN evidence also highlighted empathy-driven leadership, staff preparedness and inclusive service design for elder passengers (Abdul Rahman et al., 2025).

Although airport architecture and environmental practices can play a role on the subjective well-being of passengers, the social and informational contexts in which people interpret these surroundings are also of importance (Abdel-Gayed et al., 2023). ACWF advances human-centred design beyond interface usability by include dignity, trust and psychological safety as communication outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present work adopts a problem-driven integrative review. Compared to a systematic review, which aims to thoroughly aggregate works, an integrative method brings together theoretically relevant scholarship from previously different domains to create a new explanatory framework. A purposive synthesis was made of peer-reviewed material on professional and internal communication, organizational welfare, psychological safety, aviation safety communication, airport passenger experience, accessibility, wayfinding and digital information services.

More recent studies from 2022-2025 were preferred, although seminal works were included when they established the core ideas of internal communication, psychological safety or human-centred design. Sources were used where they clarified a communication condition, a human health impact, an airport operating process, or a boundary condition. The synthetic logic is summarized in Table 1.

To improve transparency, the review covered literature on professional and workplace communication, psychological safety and wellbeing, airport information and wayfinding, accessibility, digital communication, human-centred design and aviation safety communication. The search terms combined airport or aviation with communication, internal communication, psychological safety, wellbeing, wayfinding, accessibility, digital communication and human-centred design.

Sources were included when they contributed to a concept, mechanism, empirical finding or boundary condition relevant to communication and human or operational outcomes in airports. Purely technical studies without a communication or human-outcome component were disregarded from the development of the dimensions. The synthesis was carried out by extracting recurrent communication mechanisms, clustering them into candidate dimensions, and checking conceptual overlap and airport relevance before finalizing the six dimensions.

Table 1. Literature synthesis supporting the development of ACWF

Literature stream	Established insight	Unresolved issue	Role in ACWF
Professional and internal communication	Communication quality, leadership, channel choice and participation shape employee relationships and satisfaction.	Wellness consequences are seldom integrated with safety-critical airport coordination.	Relational, dialogic and channel dimensions.
Psychological safety and wellbeing	Trust, peer support and voice affect mental wellness, learning and safety behaviour.	Communication-related wellness is usually studied within a single employer.	Psychological safety and human outcomes.
Aviation safety communication	Communication and trust influence maintenance occurrences and mindful safety practices.	Safety communication is rarely connected with service and passenger-facing communication.	Coordinative and operational reliability.
Airport information and wayfinding	Timeliness, signage and information design affect cognitive load, confidence and experience.	Passengers are prioritised while employee and partner communication remains separate.	Informational clarity and cognitive ease.
Accessibility and digitalisation	People differ in language, ability, sensory processing and acceptance of automation.	Digital efficiency can conceal exclusion, loss of human support or distrust.	Inclusive accessibility and digital-human balance.

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis.

DISCUSSION

Defining Airport Communication Wellness

The synthesis supports the following definition: airport communication wellness is the condition in which communicative environments, practices and technologies enable airport stakeholders to access, understand, exchange and act on information while preserving psychological safety, dignity, inclusion, trust and operational coordination. The construct is both experiential and systemic. It is experiential because people encounter communication as clarity or ambiguity, respect or disregard, inclusion or exclusion, reassurance or anxiety. It is systemic because these experiences are produced through policies, leadership, professional norms, technologies and inter-organisational processes rather than through isolated messages.

This definition distinguishes communication wellness from communication effectiveness. An instruction may be accurate and still be delivered in a manner that discourages questions. A digital system may be fast but inaccessible to a passenger who requires assisted interaction. A public announcement may reach everyone yet provide insufficient guidance for people who are facing language, cognitive or sensory barriers. Communication effectiveness asks whether a message achieves its intended objectives whereas communication wellness additionally asks what human condition the communication creates while that objective is being achieved. ACWF consequently treats effectiveness, safety and wellness as mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives.

Within ACWF, wellness is used as a communication-specific construct rather than as a synonym for general wellbeing. Wellbeing refers to broader psychological and subjective functioning; psychological safety refers specifically to interpersonal safety to speak, question or report concerns; employee experience covers the wider set of workplace encounters; satisfaction focuses on an evaluative judgement related to a service or work experience; and occupational health concerns broader physical and psychological health risks at work. ACWF is narrower: it concerns the extent to which the communication environment supports understanding, participation, dignity, trust and manageable communicative strain.

Dimensions of the Airport Communication Wellness Framework

Six interdependent dimensions constitute ACWF. Informational clarity and predictability concern the accuracy, timeliness, consistency and actionability of information. This dimension reduces uncertainty by enabling people to understand what is occurring, why it matters and what action is required. They are particularly important during security screening, disruption, complaints and other encounters where power differences or emotional strain are pronounced.

Dialogic voice and psychological safety capture whether employees and other stakeholders can ask questions, report mistakes, challenge assumptions and request clarification without interpersonal penalty. This dimension links employee wellness with operational learning and safety. Inclusive and intercultural accessibility concerns understandable language, accessible formats, multilingual or assisted alternatives and sensitivity to cultural, cognitive and sensory differences. Inclusion is therefore not an additional service after a standard system has been designed; it is a defining the quality of the communicative environment.

Digital-human balance and trust address the appropriate combination of applications, kiosks, biometrics, artificial intelligence, displays and face to face support. The dimension recognises both the convenience of digital communication and the continuing value of human interaction, particularly for ambiguity, reassurance and complex needs (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2025).

Finally, coordinative and operational reliability concern shared situational awareness, message traceability, escalation, inter-agency consistency and communication continuity. This dimension clearly demonstrates that wellness depends partly on reliable operations: contradictory or delayed information generates strain for both employees and passengers.

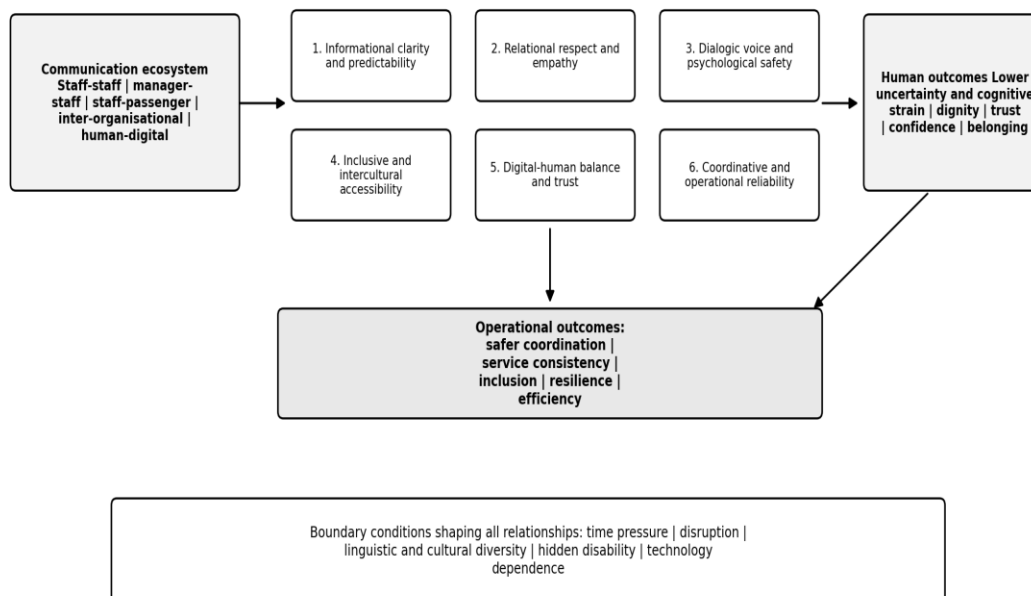
Table 2. Theoretical foundations and conceptual boundaries of the six ACWF dimensions

ACWF dimension	Definition / conceptual boundary	Theoretical or literature foundation	Key constructs	Relevant prior research
Informational clarity and predictability	Accurate, timely, consistent and actionable information at recipient level; distinct from system-level coordination.	Airport information, wayfinding and cognitive-load literature.	Accuracy; timeliness; consistency; actionability; predictability.	Choi et al. (2024); Kontogiannis (2024); Wang & Wang (2025)
Relational respect and empathy	Quality of interpersonal treatment and responsiveness; distinct from psychological safety, which concerns freedom to speak up.	Strategic/internal and supportive communication literature.	Respect; empathy; listening; responsiveness; relational trust.	Men (2014); Qin & Men (2023); Abdul Rahman et al. (2025)
Dialogic voice and psychological safety	Ability to ask, clarify, challenge and report concerns without interpersonal penalty.	Psychological safety and dialogic internal communication.	Voice; clarification; speak-up; error reporting; interpersonal safety.	Edmondson (1999); Lee (2022); Hu et al. (2024)

Inclusive and intercultural accessibility	Communication usable across language, ability, sensory, cognitive and cultural differences; focuses on differential access.	Human-centred design and accessibility literature.	Accessible formats; assisted alternatives; language access; cultural sensitivity.	ISO (2019); Cerdan Chiscano & Darcy (2024); Dos Santos et al. (2024)
Digital-human balance and trust	Fit between digital/automated and human channels, including trusted escalation to human support.	Digital internal communication, channel choice and human-centred design.	Channel fit; social presence; human fallback; digital confidence; trust.	Tkalac Verčič et al. (2024, 2025); ISO (2019)
Coordinative and operational reliability	System-level alignment, continuity and escalation across actors and channels; distinct from recipient-level message clarity.	Aviation safety communication and stakeholder coordination literature.	Shared awareness; inter-agency consistency; traceability; escalation; continuity.	Chatzi & Kourousis (2024); Welch & Jackson (2007); Nordin (2023)

Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis based on literature cited in the manuscript.

AIRPORT COMMUNICATION WELLNESS FRAMEWORK (ACWF)



Source: Author's conceptual development.

Figure 1. Proposed Airport Communication Wellness Framework

Framework Relationships and Boundary Conditions

Figure 1 proposes that communication wellness emerges across five communication relationships: staff-to-staff, manager-to-staff, staff-to-passenger, inter-organisational and human-digital interaction. The six dimensions influence human outcomes including reduced uncertainty and cognitive strain, dignity, trust, confidence and belonging. These outcomes can, in turn, strengthen operational performance through safer coordination,

consistent service, inclusion, resilience and efficiency. The framework does not suggest that communication alone determines wellbeing or operational outcomes. Instead, it identifies communication as a consequential mechanism through which organisational and technological conditions become human experiences.

For conceptual purposes, the six dimensions are regarded as distinct but interconnected. They remain non-sequential and mutually reinforcing with each dimension positioned at the same conceptual level rather than as a hierarchy. Informational clarity and predictability derived around what recipients can understand and anticipate whereas coordinative and operational reliability concern whether organisations and channels produce aligned and continuous information. Relational respect and empathy address how people are treated in interaction, whereas dialogic voice and psychological safety concern whether people can speak, question and report concerns without interpersonal penalty. The dimensions may reinforce one another, but strength in one dimension is not assumed to compensate automatically for weakness in another.

The relationships are shaped by boundary conditions. Time pressure can transform minor ambiguity into significant cognitive strain; disruption increases the need for timely, consistent and empathic information; linguistic and cultural diversity influences how messages are interpreted; hidden disabilities affect communication and assistance needs; and technology dependence changes the availability of alternative support. These conditions explain why the same communication technique may not lead to the same result. They also make ACWF context-sensitive without restricting it to one country or airport.

Theoretical and Practical Contribution

The main theoretical contribution is the reconceptualization of professional communication as a condition of human wellbeing in airport operations rather than a transmission or service variable. ACWF finds shared mechanisms across previously independent employee, passenger and operational literatures to link organizational communication, wellbeing and airport studies. It also eliminates psychological safety from the internal team by putting airport communication in a context of employers, authorities, service providers and technologies. The resulting meso-level framework connects human experiences to organizational and operational systems but does not equate wellness to personal resilience.

ACWF also differs from adjacent models in scope and unit of analysis. Aviation and safety communication models primarily emphasise on hazard control, reporting and coordination. Psychological safety focuses on interpersonal risk-taking and voice whereas organisational wellbeing and occupational health address broader employee health and functioning. Meanwhile, human-factors models examine person-system performance and error; and service communication commonly focuses on service encounters and customer outcomes. ACWF does not replace these approaches. It integrates communication-specific mechanisms across staff, passengers, partner organisations and human-digital interactions to explain how the airport communicative environment can simultaneously shape human wellness and operational reliability.

Future Empirical Operationalisation

Future studies can operationalise the six dimensions using observable or reported indicators. For instance, informational clarity could be retrieved via information accuracy, timeliness, cross-channel consistency and next-step clarity. On the other hand, relational respect could be accessed through respect, empathy, listening and responsiveness whereas dialogic voice and psychological safety could be indicated by people willingness to ask, challenge, report and seek clarification. As for inclusive and intercultural accessibility could be accessed through language accessibility, usable formats and assisted alternatives. For digital-human balance can put consideration on the aspects of channel appropriateness, trust in digital information and access to human fallback. Finally, for coordinative and operational reliability could be measured through inter-agency consistency, message traceability, escalation clarity and continuity during disruption. These indicators can first be refined through

qualitative interviews, journey mapping and scenario analysis before proceeding to scale development and quantitative validation.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted on how professional and workplace communication, organisational well-being and human-centred airport operations can be synthesised into an Airport Communication Wellness Framework. The proposed solution is a six-dimensional framework which integrating informational clarity and predictability; relational respect and empathy; dialogic voice and psychological safety; inclusive and intercultural accessibility; digital-human balance and trust; and coordinative and operational reliability. Together, these dimensions explain how airport communication may reduce or intensify uncertainty, cognitive strain, exclusion and relational risk while influencing safety, service consistency and resilience.

ACWF is an initial conceptual contribution rather than a validated measurement model. The value lies in defining a theoretically coherent research domain and demonstrating why communication should be evaluated by the human conditions it creates as well as by the messages it transmits. Reframing communication in this way supports a broader vision of the airport as a human-centred operational ecosystem in which employees, passengers, partners and digital systems must remain not only connected, but also able to understand, participate and function with dignity and confidence.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable. This conceptual paper did not involve human participants, animals or primary data collection.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

No new dataset was generated or analysed for this conceptual paper.

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