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Interpersonal Communication Role in Cross-Sector Collaboration: A Case Study of Look Communication and BCA

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Abstract

Look Communication, a creative agency specializing in event management and strategic communication, has maintained a long-term cross-sector collaboration with PT Bank Central Asia Tbk (BCA), a leading financial institution in Indonesia, for nearly a decade. Despite the longevity of this partnership, the collaboration frequently encounters challenges arising from the contrasting organizational disciplines and cultures between the creative and financial sectors. As this dyad remains underexplored, particularly in the Indonesian context, this study offers a new empirical perspective on cross-sector collaboration dynamics. This study explores the strategic role of interpersonal communication in facilitating effective cross-disciplinary collaboration between the two entities. Employing a qualitative intrinsic case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including a Senior Account Executive and the Director of Look Communication, a client representative from BCA, and an independent public relations practitioner for triangulation. The analysis reveals that Joseph A. DeVito's five elements of interpersonal communication provide an analytical framework for understanding how trust, mutual understanding, and sustained interaction are developed and maintained. These elements openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality form the core of the interpersonal communication in cross-sector collaboration and enable deeper insights into how trust and shared understandings emerge through everyday interactions. Furthermore, the Client-Firm Relationship model proposed by Pritchard and Smith underscores the importance of sustained communication in fostering trust and cooperation. The findings suggest that interpersonal communication functions not only as a mechanism for sustaining long-term professional relationships but also as a strategic foundation for managing organizational differences and enhancing collaborative effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

interpersonal communication, client-firm relationship, cross-disciplinary collaboration, creative agency, financial institution.

Introduction

In the context of increasingly complex social, economic, and technological landscape, cross-sector collaboration has become a vital role in achieving shared goals and mutually beneficial outcomes (Cara Hayes, n.d.). Furthermore, cross-sector collaboration is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach to addressing the complexity of organizational and social challenges that cannot be addressed by any single sector alone. Recent studies have shown that cross-sector collaboration enables the integration of diverse resources, expertise, and perspectives to generate long-term value and impact, particularly in the context of a dynamic business and social environment (Ba et al., 2024; Bryson et al., 2006; Qaedi Aqsa & Nugroho, 2023). Therefore, cross-sector collaboration is no longer seen as an alternative option, but rather as a strategic necessity in managing inter-organizational relationships (Wang, 2025). By integrating these three perspective, interpersonal communication, client-firm relationship, and cross-sector collaboration, this research contributes to the study of

communication, management, and organizational behavior that focuses on relationships between organizations.

Although cross-sector collaboration plays a crucial role, various empirical studies confirm that it is not easy to undertake. Differences in institutional logic, sectoral rationalities, organizational culture, and decision-making processes make cross-sector collaboration inherently complex. If it did not manage effectively, these differences may lead to misaligned goals, coordination, barriers, and a tendency toward mutual blame among collaborating actors (Alderwick et al., 2024; Pulido-Gómez et al., 2025; Wang, 2025). Expanding on this, Williams et al. (2024) demonstrate that in complex collaborative environments, structural mechanisms alone are insufficient; strong relational factors, specifically interpersonal relationships built through daily interactions, are critical to overcoming structural rigidity and facilitating effective coordination. The complexity of cross-sector collaboration, therefore, extends beyond administrative issues to the quality of the human bonds that connect organizational actors.

One of the key issues in cross-sector collaboration concerns the development and maintenance of inter-organizational trust. Recent studies have shown that trust is a key prerequisite for long-term collaboration, as it influences organizations' willingness to share information, manage shared risks, and maintain long-term commitments (Li et al., 2025; Siddiqui et al., 2025). When mistrust begins to build, cross-sector collaboration tends to be transactional and vulnerable to conflict. Recent studies also confirm that trust cannot be built solely through formal contracts or organizational governance mechanisms. Such approaches often underemphasize the social dynamics of day-to-day collaboration. Trust instead develops through repeated interactions, informal communication, and the emergence of psychological safety among organizational actors (Fitzhugh et al., 2025; Nyéki & Juhász, 2025). These findings further demonstrate the need for approaches capable of capture of the social interaction process that shape trust over the long term.

In this competition, communication plays a vital role in collaboration between two different sectors (Ahmadi, 2024). Interpersonal communication, in particular, is relevant for bridging communication gaps because of its role in building shared understanding, managing differences of interest, and creating cooperative working relationships between organizational actors (Keyton, 2017). Empirical research also shows that effective interpersonal communication practices encourage the formation of trust, openness, and a willingness to share information in collaborative context (Berampu et al., 2025).

Previous study has revealed that the quality of interpersonal communication with 5 main dimensions: Openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality, has a positive correlation in the formation of trust and relational commitment in inter-organizational relationship (DeVito, 2022; Yusnita, 2024). In the context of cross-sector collaboration, interpersonal communication serves as an important mechanism for bridging organizational cultural differences and aligning long-term expectations between organizational actors (Siddiqui et al., 2025). The research gap becomes even more apparent when linked to the context of the creative industry and agency-client collaboration, which

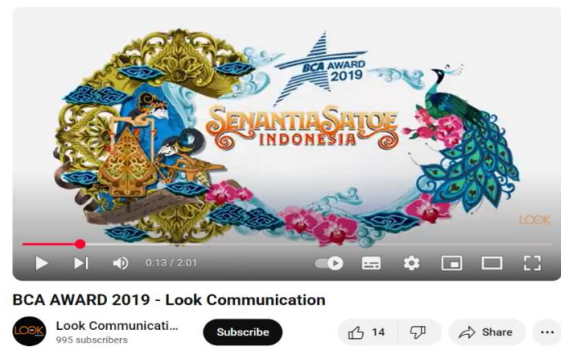


Figure 1. Look Communication and BCA Publication at the BCA Award 2019

Source: YouTube Look Communication, 2019

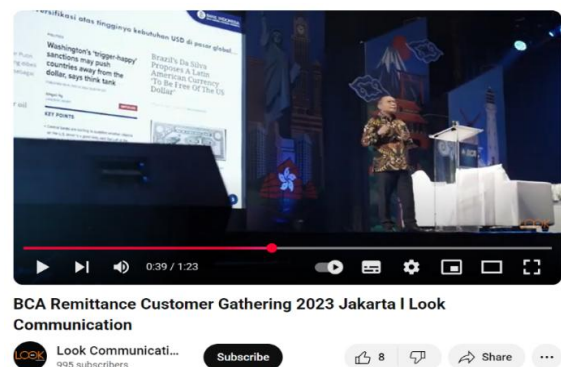


Figure 2. Look Communication and BCA Publication at the BCA Remittance Customer Gathering 2023

Source: YouTube Look Communication, 2023



Figure 3. Look Communication and BCA Publication at the BCA Solitaire Imlek 2025

Source: YouTube Look Communication, 2025



Figure 4. Look Communication and BCA Publication at the BCA Wealth Summit 2024

Source: YouTube Look Communication. 2024

relies heavily on the intensity of interactions, work flexibility, and interpersonal relationships in managing long-term relationships, because the cross-sectoral studies in Indonesia are still dominated of regional development, public services, and the tourism sector (Murtini Anindya et al., 2025). However, the study of cross-sector collaboration between the creative industry and financial institution is also important to study, with significant differences from work logic, to organizational culture, and by using interpersonal communication as a strategic mechanism, this study can provide a rich context for the development of cross-sector collaboration theory.

Högberg (2024) also revealed that Account Executive plays a role as a boundary spanner who uses sensemaking to bridge the gap between Look Communication's creative culture and BCA's corporate structure. This also strengthens the urgency to examine how proactive communication searches are essential for adapting creative services to rigid financial sector needs (Wang et al., 2025).

Empirically, cross-sector collaboration can also be observed through publicly documented collaborative practices. The collaboration between Look Communication and PT Bank Central Asia Tbk (BCA) is reflected in a number of event productions consistently published on Look Communication's official YouTube channel (see Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4).

In this study, the partnership between Look Communication and PT Bank Central Asia Tbk is examined not only from the perspective of cross-sector collaboration, but also through the lens of client-firm relationship concept, this concept highlights six elements for long-term partnership such as trust and mutual understanding, goals and expectations, anticipating and handling risk and failure, open and honest exchange, importance and good communication, and access to management (Pritchard & Smith, 2015).

Furthermore, this research aims to examine how interpersonal communication facilitates the management of communication gaps and cultural differences in cross-sector collaboration between Look Communication and PT Bank Central Asia Tbk in maintaining a long-term partnership and productive collaboration.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of interpersonal communication practices between Look Communication and PT Bank Central Asia Tbk in the cross-sector collaboration (Yusuf, 2021). An intrinsic case study was selected because the collaboration represents a unique and information rich case of sustained partnership between creative agency and a financial institution in the Indonesian context.

The researchers acted as the primary instrument for data collection. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants who were directly involved in managing the collaboration. These informants included a Senior Account Executive (SAE) and the Managing Director of Look Communication, a client representative from PT Bank Central Asia Tbk, and an independent public relations practitioner to support data triangulation (Sugiyono, 2020). Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted in person.

In addition to primary data, secondary data were analyzed to contextualize and support the interview findings. This data included internal company documentation, project-related

reports, academic literatures, and digital publications produced by Look Communication, particularly event documentation videos published on its official YouTube channel. The secondary data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, focusing on patterns of interpersonal communication practices, interaction dynamics, and representations of collaborative processes relevant to the research focus.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing perspectives across multiple informants and data sources. Moreover, the data analysis is following the model of Miles & Huberman framework that consists of data condensation, data display, and verification (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Through this approach, the study highlights the role of interpersonal communication in facilitating cross-sector collaboration between Look Communication and PT Bank Central Asia Tbk.

Result and Discussion

This intrinsic case study examines the strategic role of interpersonal communication in building and maintaining long-term cross-sector collaboration between the creative agency Look Communication and the financial institution PT Bank Central Asia Tbk (BCA), which has lasted for 13 years. From this research, the researcher found that long-term relationships in this cross-sector collaboration are supported by specific interpersonal communication practices based on Joseph A. Devito's interpersonal communication aspects, namely: Openness, Empathy, Positive Attitude, Supportive Attitude, and Equality.

This study found that openness constitutes a fundamental element in long-term cross-sector collaboration between Look Communication and PT Bank Central Asia Tbk. Openness was reflected in transparent information sharing, the absence of unilateral decision making, and the communication of both routine matters and emerging challenges. As stated by a client representative from BCA, Look Communication consistently communicates information promptly and transparently, ensuring that all decisions and obstacles are openly discussed [Personal communication, March 11, 2025].

BCA representatives further noted that, in practice, members of Look Communication's top management participate in transparent communication through channels such as WhatsApp group chats and regular weekly meetings with clients [Personal communication, March 11, 2025]. However, the Director of Look Communications stated that maintaining long-term relationships in cross-sector collaboration requires boundaries. There are some matters that should not be communicated openly to clients, particularly internal matters. This is to maintain the company's integrity and prevent client trust from being eroded by internal agency errors [Personal communication, March 06, 2025].

From here we can see that in maintaining long-term relationships in cross-sector collaboration, Look Communication has high professional transparency with limitations that are also created to directly mitigate potential conflicts, because information and decision-making are carried out very quickly and transparently. This is in line with Labiba et al. (2025) have found in previous research that mutual understanding among team members directly influences the quality of creative delivery.

This study shows that empathy in cross-sector collaboration serves as a catalyst that fosters trust between the two sectors. In this study, empathy is understood as a communicative practice grounded in mutual understanding and supportive intentions that facilitate coordination and continuity of each party's work processes. According to BCA client representatives and Senior Account Executive Look Communication, both sectors have a mutual understanding of the work processes

that occur during the planning to implementation of the project, the client stated that Look Communication always understands the needs and bureaucracy within BCA, the empathy that is established between the two indeed stems from the initial communication that was created [Personal communication, March 11, 2025].

On the other hand, Senior Account Executives (SAEs) demonstrate the appropriate attitude, where the empathetic attitude that has been established between cross-sector collaboration can create informal relationships that then create closer feelings [Personal communication, March 10, 2025]. On the other hand, the SAE of Look Communication also stated that he applies active listening to understand all client needs from the start of the meeting. This aligns with the active listening skills used for effective communication (Roxann Londono, 2023).

Based on this study, the empathy that exists between these two sectors has the function of reducing suspicion and creating a sense of comfort and trust between the two, so that they can work together in the long term, even though they are based on different sectors. A study by Boies et al., (2015) showed that interpersonal trust cascades from leaders to the collaborative team, enhancing creative output.

Furthermore, the positive attitude created in this cross-sector collaboration is crucial for maintaining a constructive and professional climate, especially when facing obstacles and differences of opinion. Client representatives felt that whenever faced with sudden changes or even differences of opinion during planning, Look Communication always responded with positive language, never using inappropriate language [Personal communication, March 11, 2025].

As a client, the representative of BCA, he saw that Look Communication always showed its professionalism in working together, not only in its delivery, but Look Communication always came up with solutions when faced with obstacles and differences of opinion. The representative described this reliability in perceptual terms, nothing that the majority of encountered problems were successfully resolved, while a small proportion remained attributable to unavoidable human error that was mutually understood by both BCA and Look Communication [Personal communication, March 11, 2025].

A positive attitude in handling problems and debates in project planning and implementation is certainly important for clients, to see the potential for long-term cooperation for cross-sector collaboration, as conveyed by Public Relations Experts, who emphasized the necessity of consistently maintaining a professional and composed "tone and manner" during all discussions, regardless of the challenges or events that arise [Personal communication, March 05, 2025].

The positive attitude that Look Communication always shows in handling differences of opinion, which are always resolved with various solutions, is a positive attitude that is applied, this is important to maintain long-term relationships in cross-sector collaboration.

The supportive attitude demonstrated by Look Communication and BCA can be seen in each party's view of each other as more than just a vendor and client, but rather as strategic business partners. In this case, the supportive attitude translates into concrete actions from Look Communication to BCA, fulfilling its needs and requirements based on data, insights, and solutions, as a form of professional support. Meeting client needs based on valid, pre-planned data is a form of professional support demonstrated by the agency to its clients, as conveyed by PR Expert, she emphasized that the professional support can be shown through the seriousness in strategy development, she stated that any approach it should base on data, insight, or even high level planning must begin with a thorough analysis before action is taken [Personal communication, March 05, 2025].

This is also understood by SAE Look Communication, which demonstrates a professional, supportive attitude by fulfilling the client's wishes based on the brief provided with several options as backup. SAE Look Communication reported that they consistently offer clients more than one option or solution. They explained that their approach is not limited into one option initially proposed; rather, they provide additional options and solutions that remain fully aligned with the client's brief [Personal communication, March 10, 2025].

This is also appreciated and seen by BCA clients, and they consider this as real action, not just false promises. Furthermore, the client representative suggested that it is preferable for Look Communication to conduct through internal discussion and return to the client with a more mature solution. This approach, they argued, serves to prevent the issuance of empty or false promise regarding the resolution of issues [Personal communication, March 11, 2025].

The support shown by Look Communication to BCA by providing valid data and ideal solutions is done to ensure clients can feel professional support in each of their projects. Both Look Communication and BCA feel they are not just vendors and clients, but the collaboration between them was fundamentally defined by the concept of partnership, which the agency viewed as inherently involving reciprocity. This perspective was mutually affirmed by BCA. Throughout the cross-sector collaboration, both parties operated as equal partners, a dynamic which eliminated any perception of one entity being more powerful or inferior. A client representative from BCA emphasized that this foundational communication that they were partners was established from the start, ensuring the relationship was never defined by a higher or lower status [Personal communication, March 06 & March 11, 2025].

Thus, the relationship that has existed between Look Communication and BCA for approximately 13 years is not only a transactional relationship, but has developed into a strategic partnership based on equality and reciprocity. These findings align with previous studies which argue that interpersonal communication in cross-sector collaboration does not end with the completion of a formal contract but is intentionally maintained to create opportunities for future collaboration (Dwityas et al., 2021). In practice, this is reflected in the role of Account Executive as not merely a liaison between the client and the agency, but also as a communication facilitator and interpreter who bridges differing organizational perspectives and expectations (Octaviani & Gafar Yoedjadi, 2023; Syamsiani & Fatimah, 2019; Vijaya Gunaldi, 2024).

Based on the analysis of the interview data we conducted, it confirms that Devito's five elements of interpersonal communication were consistently applied throughout the collaboration. These elements not only facilitated smooth information exchange but also strengthened the relational foundation for cross-sector collaboration between Look Communication and BCA.

Interpersonal communication as a critical strategy in sustaining cross sector collaboration.

The results of this study shows that interpersonal communication is not merely a supporting factor but a critical strategy in sustaining cross-sector collaboration between a creative agency and a financial institution. The 13 years partnership between Look Communication and BCA exemplifies how consistent and effective communication can bridge the gap between two different sectors in long-term collaboration.

The first major finding openness and honesty reinforces prior studies emphasizing transparency as a determining factor of success in different sector collaborations. However, this study extends the discussion by showing that interpersonal communication not only functions as a means of exchanging

information, but also as a strategic relational mechanism in managing organizational cultural differences, and openness must be balanced with empathy and equality in order to manage the cultural differences between two sectors.

The second findings of this research concerning trust and mutual understanding validate Pritchard and Smith's Client-Firm Relationship model, particularly the elements of trust, mutual understanding, and the importance of good communication. In the Look Communication and BCA case, trust did not emerge spontaneously but was cultivated through repeated interactions and reliable performance. This indicates that interpersonal communication is the mechanism through which trust is gradually built and reinforced. Reinforcing this observation, [Donbesuur et al. \(2021\)](#) demonstrate that organizational trust is a critical factor that enhances the effectiveness of alliance capabilities, thereby driving superior partnership outcomes. Though this needs to be examined deeper in a separate research framework.

Interpersonal communication managed the cultural differences

The third findings highlight the challenges of cultural differences between Look Communication and BCA. While earlier studies reported similar tensions in cross-sector collaborations, this study adds nuance by demonstrating how interpersonal skills such as empathy and supportiveness help neutralize these challenges. Recent scholarships by [Edmondson & Bransby \(2023\)](#) reaffirm that an environment of psychological safety is essential for fostering interpersonal risk-taking, thereby enabling the uninhibited sharing of creative ideas. By positioning themselves as adaptive partners, Look Communication managed to align its flexible work style with the rigid structure of BCA as a banking institution.

SAE roles in cross-sector collaboration

The fourth findings concerning the role of the Senior Account Executive (AE) sheds light on the importance of boundary-spanning roles in cross-sector collaborations. Rather than functioning solely as service providers, Account Executive (AE) serve as mediators between Look Communication and BCA, negotiating meaning, expectations, and priorities across two different sectors. This role reinforces the centrality of interpersonal communication in managing relationships within complex collaborative settings.

These findings suggest that interpersonal communication serves as both a relational mechanism and a strategic tool for managing differences, building trust, and sustaining long-term collaboration between two different sectors, which makes it different from the organizational communication approach which emphasizes structural coordination or formal mechanisms. The case of Look Communication and BCA provides empirical evidence that effective interpersonal communication can transform potential barriers into opportunities for synergy, thereby contributing to the broader understanding of how cross-sector partnerships can be sustained over time. For further research, it is hoped that it can focus on cross-sector collaboration between creative agencies and corporations but from different industries or institutions from financial institutions. Future research may further examine evaluative mechanisms of cross-sector collaboration, particularly in partnerships that have been established over a long period of time, to better understand how long-term relational dynamics influence collaborative effectiveness.

Conclusion

This research concludes that interpersonal

communication plays a vital role in cross-sector collaboration between Look Communication and BCA. The findings shows that the longevity of their 13 year collaboration is determined not only by service delivery but also by the consistent application of interpersonal communication practices that foster trust, empathy, openness, and equality across organizational boundaries, and its relevant to practitioners, particularly Account Executives, Partnership Manager, and Creative Agency Leaders involved in cross-sector collaborations. Understanding the role of interpersonal communication can help practitioners manage organizational cultural differences and build long-term working relationships.

The discussion highlights that such communication practices bridge cultural and structural differences between Look Communication as a creative agency and BCA as a financial institution. The role of the Account Executive is particularly important, functioning as a mediator between agency and client to negotiate meanings, expectations, and priorities, thereby enabling the two sectors to collaborate productively despite contracting organizational logics. These insights strengthen the Client-Firm Relationship model by demonstrating that elements of trust, commitment, and shared understanding are built through consistent interpersonal communication practices. Openness contributes to relationship transparency, empathy strengthens mutual understanding, while equality supports long-term commitment between client and agency.

The research contributes to the broader field of communication studies by positioning interpersonal communication not merely as a supportive element, but as a strategic mechanism for cross-sector partnership sustainability. This case adds to current knowledge by demonstrating how DeVito's five elements of interpersonal communication and the client-firm relationship elements can be applied in practical, long-term collaborations between industries with different institutional cultures.

Future research may expand on this study through a comparative approach across industry sectors, such as comparing creative finance collaboration with creative technology or creative government collaboration. Furthermore, the use of mixed methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of interpersonal communication on the performance and long-term of cross-sector collaboration.

Author Contributions

Both authors were solely responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, data collection through in-depth interviews, data analysis and interpretation, and the drafting and revision of the manuscript. Both authors also conducted the literature review, developed the theoretical framework, and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

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Conflict of interest

Both authors declares that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this research or the publication of this manuscript

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