

Research trends in leadership communication using Motivating Language Theory: a systematic literature review

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Abstract The Motivating Language Theory (MLT) offers a robust framework for analysing how strategic verbal communication can motivate individuals and enhance organisational performance. This study answers the research questions of identifying the profile and characteristics of the MLT research literature, examining the theories and variables used in MLT studies in organisational communication, and mapping existing research to highlight gaps and suggest future research directions. Using a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA protocol, 77 articles from the Scopus database were analysed with Microsoft Excel and VOS viewer. Findings reveal a growing interest in MLT, particularly in the private sector, with most studies employing quantitative methods. The review highlights diverse theoretical integrations, identifies research gaps, and recommends future studies in cross-cultural contexts, high-pressure industries, and remote or hybrid work settings to advance both theoretical and practical insights in organisational communication.

Keywords: leadership communication; motivating language theory; leaders' motivating language; organisational communication

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies indicate that leadership communication significantly impacts employee performance. Effective and clear communication by leaders enhances employee satisfaction, thereby improving performance. Effective communication from leadership fosters a positive work environment and reduces employee turnover (Shen & Austin, 2017). Leadership communication will increase employee engagement by sharing the organisation's vision and expectations. Therefore, employees are more creative, committed, and productive (Davis et al., 2024; Ramirez-Lozano et al., 2023).

Effective leadership communication is essential for promoting employee transparency and trust, as well as for cultivating a positive organisational culture. Employee trust will subsequently enhance satisfaction and performance (Hubbart, 2024), and encourage employees to express their opinions and contributions to the organisation (J. Mayfield et al., 2024). Effective leadership communication fosters psychological safety among employees, enabling them to express ideas without fear of negative repercussions. This environment is crucial for cultivating a culture of improvement and innovation (Malewar & Gupta, 2023). Clear and motivating leadership communication improves employees' decision-making abilities, which is essential for organisational efficiency and effectiveness (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016b).

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In organisational communication, leaders positively impact the organisation by influencing and motivating members through empathetic two-way communication to direct, delegate, evaluate, and involve the participation of organisational members (Umar, 2021). Effective leadership communication encompasses conveying messages clearly, ensuring they are well-received, actively listening, offering constructive feedback, fostering collaboration, demonstrating empathy, and respecting cultural diversity, language, and background. Additionally, it involves inspiring and motivating others to realise their full potential (Purnawanto et al., 2024).

Sullivan's Motivating Language Theory (MLT) provides a comprehensive model for understanding how language impacts workers. This theory proposes three types of language: (1) Giving-Direction Language, which functions to provide direction and guidance so that employees can gain an understanding so that they can carry out their duties and roles well; (2) Empathetic Language, which functions to provide attention and empathy to create a supportive work environment; and (3) Meaning-Making Language, which serves to provide meaning that employees play an important role in achieving organisational goals. The combination of these three languages will improve employee motivation and organisational outcomes (Binyamin & Brender-Ilan, 2018; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Zhao & Ali, 2024).

A systematic literature review on MLT has not been widely done. In contrast to the existing literature review, this study emphasises the mapping of theories and variables used in MLT research over the past decade. An overview of the latest research trends, gaps and potential future research directions will be obtained through MLT research mapping. A review of previous research can also provide insights into the implementation of theory, practical applications, good practices, and the development of training programs that are beneficial for strategic decision-making, especially in the context of organisations, where leadership communication is indispensable for organisational cohesiveness and productivity. This study aims to discover the trend of publications related to LML globally over the past ten years. The objectives are described in the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the profile of the MLT research literature (year, source of publication, author, most cited publications, method, location of the study, and research subject)?

RQ2: What and how are the theories and variables used in research on using MLT in organisational communication?

RQ3: How are MLT research mapping, gaps, and future research directions?

METHODOLOGY

This study used the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which used a systematic method to collect, assess, and synthesise data, which helps reduce bias compared to traditional narrative reviews, resulting in more objective and unbiased conclusions (Mantsiou et al., 2023). SLR aims to synthesise all research publication documents available on a particular research question using explicit and possible methods to replicate. This study undertook a comprehensive approach to ensure the review covers the existing research and provides a complete and thorough summary (García-Peñalvo, 2022; Phillips et al., 2024; Turk, 2021). With SLR, researchers can identify knowledge gaps and areas that require further investigation to effectively direct future research efforts (Gunnell et al., 2020).

This study employed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) protocol to conduct a complete and transparent systematic review. Data was collected using PRISMA flowcharts, including four stages: identification, abstract screening, manuscript feasibility, and article selection (Figure 1). The study is based on references from the Scopus database, accessed on January 15, 2025. Scopus was chosen because it is one of the largest databases of abstracts and curated citations, covering a wide range of scientific journals, conference proceedings, and books globally and regionally. The Scopus database ensures that only high-quality data is indexed through rigorous content selection and independent re-evaluation (Baas et al., 2020).

Article search on the Scopus database using the query 'motivating language' or 'motivational language' in the column of article title, abstract, and keywords resulted in 168 documents. Furthermore, manuscripts are screened based on several inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for the selected articles are as follows: (1) research articles, (2) published in 2015-2024, (3) published in English, (4) reviewed organisational communication,

and (5) full-text articles are available. From the inclusion criteria, as many as 83 complete articles were obtained. Finally, the researcher conducted a feasibility test on complete articles to filter the articles included in the review and obtained 77 articles. Furthermore, the article was analysed using Microsoft® Excel® for Microsoft 365 MSO (version 2412) and VOS Viewer version 1.6.20.

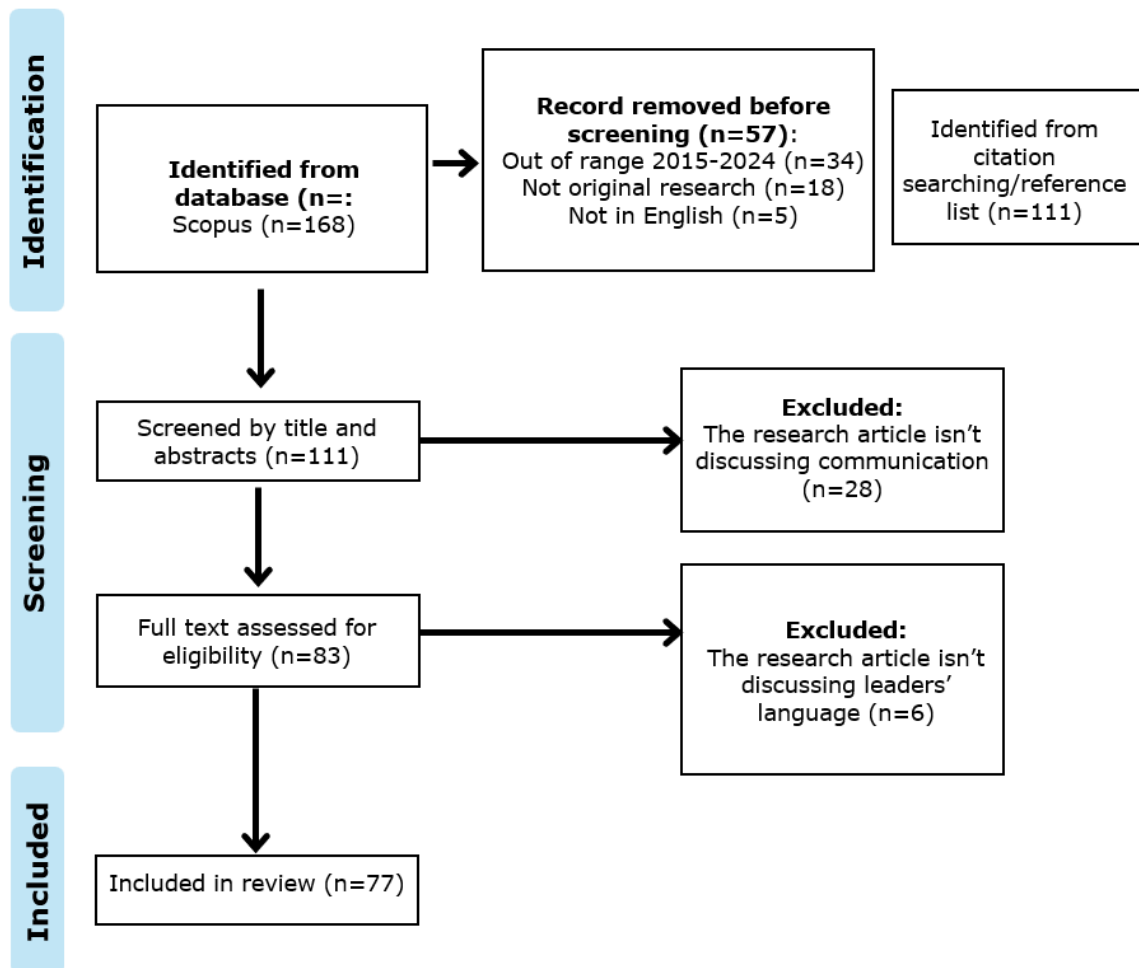


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram
 Source: Author data processed, 2025

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Year and frequency of publication in Motivating Language Theory

MLT research has continued to increase over the past ten years (Figure 2). From 2015 to 2024, research on MLT appears to be expanding in scope and application, illustrating a growing interest in how motivating language affects various organisational and employee outcomes. Early studies focused on the fundamental aspects of MLT, such as its impact on communication competence and job satisfaction. Over time, research has explored more nuanced applications, such as the role of MLT in driving employee engagement during crises, increasing organisational commitment, and supporting innovation and proactivity.

In aggregate, the development of the scope and complexity of MLT research increased, integrated with other theories, and expanded into diverse organisational settings. The result shows a positive trend in exploring and validating the impact of motivating language in various cultural and organisational contexts.

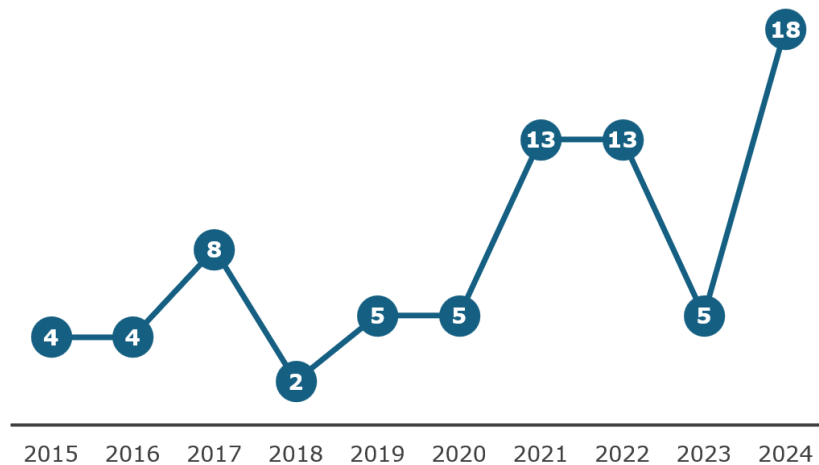


Figure 2. MLT research year and frequency 2015-2024
 Source: Author data processed, 2025

Source of the most publications research on Motivating Language Theory

From the data of MLT research publications over the past 10 years, this topic has received attention from various academic journals (Figure 3). The journal that published the most MLT research is the 'International Journal of Business Communication', with 18 publications. This data shows that LML is closely related to business communication, which aligns with the findings of several studies that show that LML can improve communication effectiveness in business organisations. Effective communication will increase job satisfaction and productivity and improve company outcomes (W. T. Holmes, 2023; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2020).

The second most published source is 'Development and Learning Organisation', with nine publications. The existence of research articles in the journal proves that MLT is closely related to organisations that have a growing vision and implement a learning culture. Furthermore, the existence of MLT research articles in the journals 'Management Research Review' and 'Corporate Communications' describes MLT's application in corporate management and communication. Other publications, such as the 'Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism' and 'Public Relations Review', point to the widespread application of MLT in various sectors, not only in the manufacturing industry but also in the field of hospitality and public relations, which shows the flexibility of this theory in a variety of industry contexts (Rabiul et al., 2022).



Figure 3. Source of most publications in MLT research 2015-2024
 Source: Author data processed, 2025

Most authors of Motivating Language Theory research

Data on the top 10 authors in the study on MLT show that this topic attracts attention from various academics with diverse research approaches (Figure 4). Jacqueline Rowley Mayfield and Milton Ray Mayfield are the most popular in MLT research. In addition to the articles included in this review study, many works in the form of books, research articles, or conceptual papers have been widely published. Their first publication on MLT is quite old, particularly in 1998, and continues to be used as a reference for recent research. Both are recognised as experts in the field of LML, and they productively conduct research with quantitative and qualitative methods to test, validate, and deepen the contribution of LML to organisational metrics and individual performance (W. T. Holmes & Scull, 2019) While the LML variable does not find a direct relationship to organisational variables, Mayfield integrates MLT with other theories, such as leadership theory, and puts LML as a mediating factor between leadership style and employee performance (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016b).

The next author who has published the most articles on MLT is William T. Holmes, with 11 publications. His expertise in the field of LML is evidenced by the many concept papers that build new MLT theories, models and frameworks. Holmes' contribution to the development of MLT is significant considering that there are still few researchers who study MLT conceptually, so his role is crucial to deepen contextual understanding, find new variables that can increase or inhibit the effectiveness of MLT, and of course, expand the theoretical boundaries of MLT (W. T. Holmes, 2024b; W. T. Holmes & Parker, 2018).

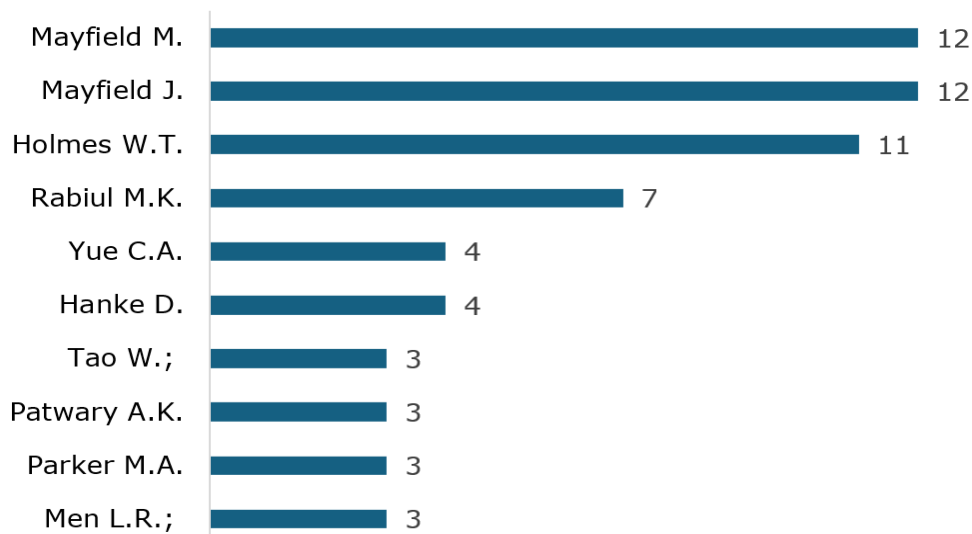


Figure 4. Most article authors MLT research 2015-2024
 Source: Author data processed, 2025

Md Karim Rabiul's name is still new to the MLT author, and his writing has only been recorded since 2021. His research areas, which include business, management and accounting, make him productive in conducting quantitative research related to LML, and his publications have received recognition because of their many citations. Other authors, such as Cen April Yue and Linjuan Rita Men, have researched MLT more quantitatively, showing interest in testing the MLT relationship hypothesis by collecting and analysing numerical data (Men, Chen, et al., 2021; Rabiul, Hasan, et al., 2023; Yue et al., 2021) Meanwhile, authors such as Michele A. Parker and Doreen Hanke conducted MLT research using a combination of conceptual, quantitative, and qualitative approaches. The data shows that the concept of MLT has been studied in a dynamic and multidimensional research landscape.

Most cited Motivating Language Theory research articles

The data in Table 1 indicates that the 15 most referenced papers on leadership motivating language demonstrate considerable significance across diverse contexts, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 epidemic. The most cited article, 'Examining the Effects of Internal Communication and Emotional Culture on Employees' Organizational Identification' by Yue et al.(2021), with an average of 22.75 citations per year, underscores the significance of internal

communication and emotional culture in establishing organisational identity among employees. This study demonstrates that LML contributes to direct communication and cultivating a supportive organisational culture. A separate piece addressing the pandemic highlights how LML may enhance employee trust and participation during a crisis, underscoring the vital role of leaders in maintaining team morale in challenging circumstances (Men et al., 2022; Tao et al., 2022) Furthermore, other research has associated LML with job engagement and inventive behaviours, illustrating its extensive influence on multiple facets of employee performance (Rabiul & Yean, 2021; K. Usmanova et al., 2022) These articles show that LML is crucial for enhancing engagement and job satisfaction and fostering proactive and inventive behaviour in the workplace. This data underscores additional research to comprehend and implement LML to enhance organisational dynamics and employee performance.

Table 1. Most cited MLT research articles 2015-2024

Title	Author	Cited per year
Examining the Effects of Internal Communication and Emotional Culture on Employees' Organizational Identification	Yue et al. (2021)	22.75
Fostering Employee Trust via Effective Supervisory Communication during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Through the Lens of Motivating Language Theory	Men et al. (2022)	22.33
Enhancing Employee Engagement via Leaders' Motivational Language in times of crisis: Perspectives from the COVID-19 outbreak	Tao et al. (2022)	15.67
Leadership styles, motivating language, and work engagement: An empirical investigation of the hotel industry	Rabiul & Yean (2021)	14.50
Impact of knowledge sharing on job satisfaction and innovative work behaviour: the moderating role of motivating language	Usmanova et al. (2020)	8.00
Fostering quality customer service during Covid-19: The role of managers' oral language, employee work engagement, and employee resilience	Rabiul et al. (2022)	7.67
Strategic vision and values in top leaders' communications: Motivating language at a higher level	J. Mayfield et al. (2015)	7.50
Does Transactional Leadership Generate Work Engagement in the Hotel Industry? The Role of Motivating Language and Job Prestige	Rabiul (2024)	7.00
Leaders' language and employee proactivity: Enhancing psychological meaningfulness and vitality	Binyamin & Brender-Ilan (2018)	6.71
The relationship between work engagement and psychological distress of hospital nurses and the perceived communication behaviours of their nurse managers: A cross-sectional survey	Kunie et al. (2017)	6.63
The effects of leader motivating language use on employee decision-making	M. Mayfield & Mayfield (2016b)	5.44
Communication: Empirically Testing Behavioural Integrity and Credibility as Antecedents for the Effective Implementation of Motivating Language	Holmes & Parker (2017a)	4.88
Leader Communication and Follower Identity: How Leader Motivating Language Shapes Organisational Identification through Cultural Knowledge and Fit	M. Mayfield et al. (2021)	4.75
The moderating role of message framing on the links between organisational identification and unethical pro-organisational behaviour	Alniacik et al. (2022)	4.67
Leader Talk and the Creative Spark: A Research Note on How Leader Motivating Language Use Influences Follower Creative Environment Perceptions	M. Mayfield & Mayfield (2017)	4.38

Source: Author data processed, 2025

Research methods of Motivating Language Theory research

In terms of methods, MLT research is dominated by quantitative rather than qualitative and conceptual approaches (Figure 5). From 2015 to 2016, quantitative research increased from 2-3 studies. The increase continues until 2021 and 2022, when it reaches 12 studies every year. This increase shows the tendency of researchers to test the correlational relationship between LML and some organisational variables that are more suitable for quantitative approaches. A quantitative approach is necessary because MLT is a relatively new concept compared to other theories in the realm of management, leadership and organisation. The quantitative approach allows researchers to collect large amounts of empirical data and provides objective and reliable evidence, thus supporting the development of new models and theories. More than that, research in the organisational area requires concrete data as a basis for making decisions. MLT research with a conceptual approach is small from year to year. This fact does not make MLT research with this approach unimportant. The stability of the existing research every year shows

a simultaneous update of the MLT concept, which is invaluable for the development of MLT. Qualitative approaches indicated limited interest, with only one study conducted in 2019, 2022, and 2023 (Desselle et al., 2022; Hanke, 2019; J. Mayfield et al., 2023).

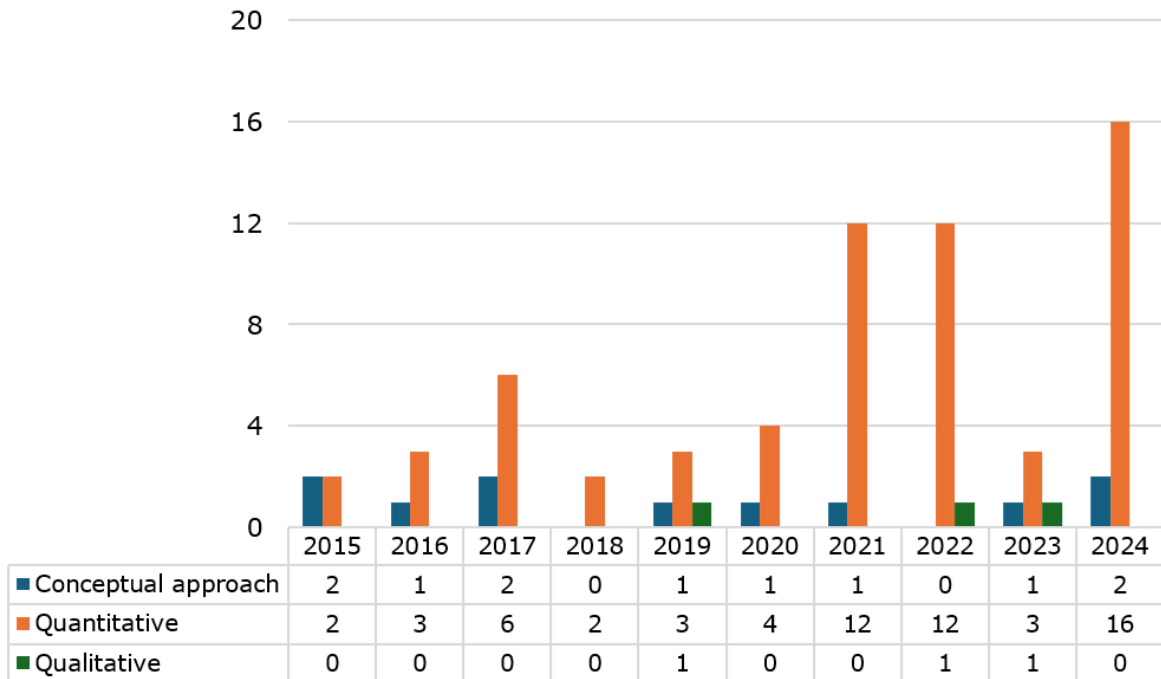


Figure 5. MLT research methods 2015-2024
 Source: Author data processed, 2025

Meanwhile, the conceptual method remains relevant for those interested in developing new theories or understanding existing concepts more deeply. However, the low number of conceptual research studies may indicate that researchers are more interested in outcomes that can be measured and applied practically in an organisational context. Although rarely used, qualitative methods are still important to provide a more prosperous and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Location of research on Motivating Language Theory

Research publication data on LML in various countries show significant variations in the number of studies conducted (Figure 6). Of the 66 publications that used quantitative and qualitative methods, 41 studies took place in the United States, far outpacing other countries. This result may reflect greater interest and investment in leadership communication research in the United States, driven by the high business and academic need to understand and develop effective motivational strategies. In addition, as a global centre for higher education and research, the United States has the infrastructure and resources to support extensive research in this field (Farr & Lind, 2019).

South Korea, China, and India, with five to six articles demonstrating interest in LML research. These two nations have sizable economies that are expanding quickly, which may make it necessary to comprehend the dynamics of successful leadership in many cultural and economic contexts. MLT research in these countries is important in adapting communication strategies to improve performance and productivity in organisations operating in highly competitive environments (Nguyen et al., 2021; K. Usmanova et al., 2022).

Countries including Malaysia, Turkey, and Bangladesh are increasingly interested in this topic throughout the Asian and Middle Eastern areas. Due to substantial cultural disparities from Western nations, research in these regions may concentrate on implementing motivation theory within local contexts. Moreover, with the escalating integration of the global economy, it is essential to comprehend how motivational techniques can be modified and executed effectively across various nations (Alniacik et al., 2022; Rabiul et al., 2021).

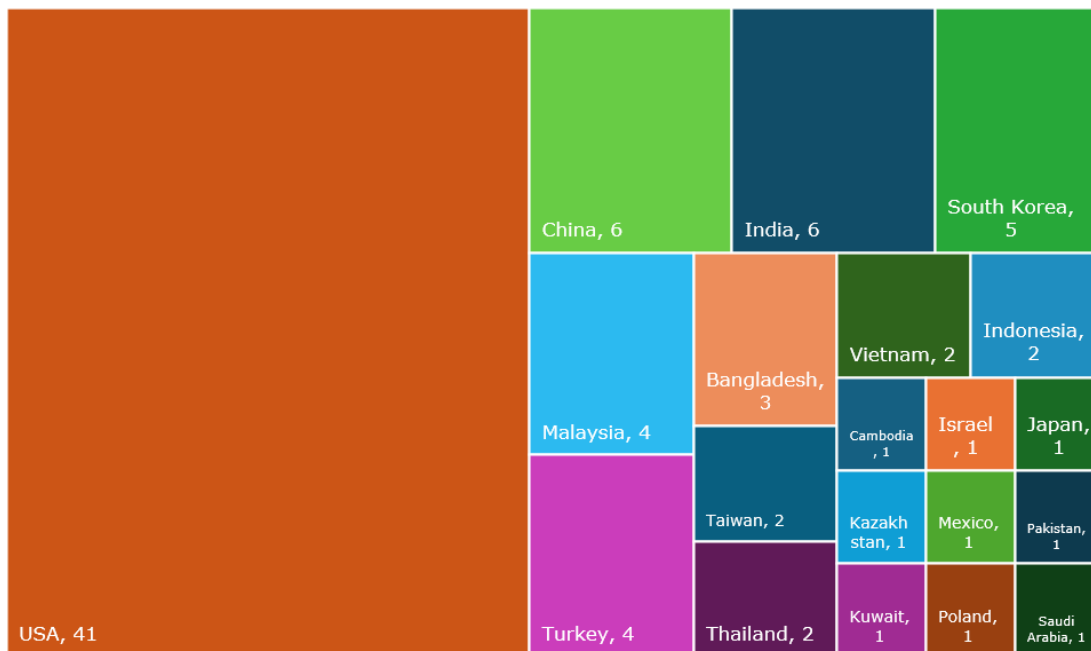


Figure 6. MLT research location 2015-2024
 Source: Author data processed, 2025

Research subject of Motivating Language Theory

Data on MLT publications indicates a notable trend in organisational research over the last decade (Figure 7). This research initially concentrated on the private sector, mainly enhancing employee performance and organisational outcomes. This is proven by the significant number of publications concerning private sector employees, totalling 15. This orientation is inherent, as the private sector frequently requires innovation and efficiency to enhance competitiveness and profitability. This research aims to identify effective methods for motivating employees to attain organisational objectives (Farr & Lind, 2019).

Over time, the research subjects transitioned to a broader range of domains. There is growing interest in the non-private and public sectors, including government organisations and education. This trend is evident in the substantial number of publications on government employees and academics, with three publications for each subject. This shift in focus may be motivated by the necessity to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in these sectors, which frequently encounter distinct challenges regarding employee motivation (Uluturk, 2024).

This research is increasingly focusing on the health and education sectors. The presence of three publications aimed at health professionals and five targeted at educators indicates an increasing recognition of the significance of motivation in sectors that directly affect societal well-being. The health sector faces challenges, including high work pressure and the demand for quality services, rendering employee motivation a critical concern. In the education sector, teacher motivation is crucial for establishing an effective and supportive learning environment (X. Ding & Wu, 2023; Ozeren et al., 2020; Uluturk et al., 2024).

Furthermore, research increasingly addresses specific and diverse sectors, including the hospitality industry and non-profit organisations. Seven publications focus on hospitality industry employees, while six address the non-profit sector, indicating a concerted effort to analyse motivational dynamics across various contexts. The hospitality industry is characterised by a dynamic work environment and significant customer service demands; thus, employee motivation is essential for customer satisfaction. Conversely, nonprofits encounter difficulties in employee motivation due to constrained resources, indicating a pressing need for research in this domain.

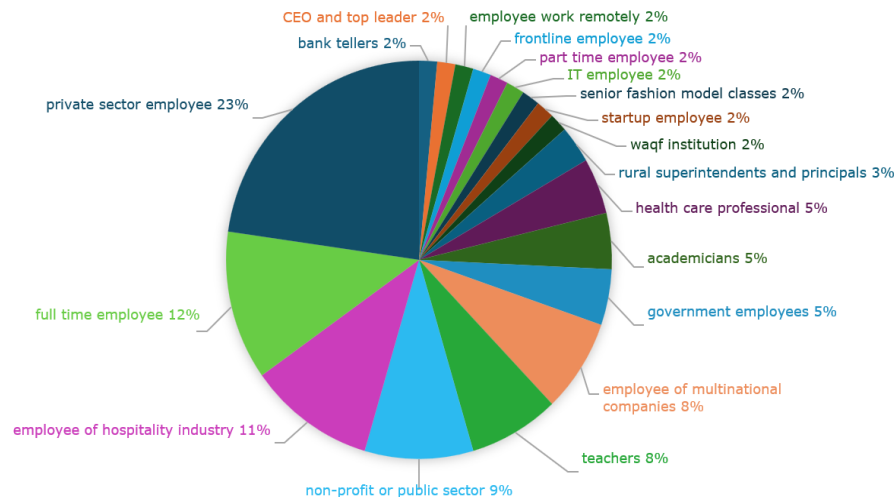


Figure 7. MLT research subjects 2015-2024
Source: Author data processed, 2025

Theories and variables used in Motivating Language Theory research

The study of MLT employs various theories to enhance the theoretical framework that informs our understanding of the effects and mechanisms of leadership communication. The Expectancy Violations Theory is frequently cited in academic discussions. This theory examines individual responses to unexpected behaviours exhibited by others. This theory aids in comprehending how variations in communication styles influence perceptions and outcomes, particularly within diverse cultural contexts like organisations in Mexico (Madlock & Sexton, 2015).

The Self-Determination Theory underpins various studies (Men, Chen, et al., 2021; Tao et al., 2022) that emphasise the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and connectedness, demonstrating that fulfilling these needs enhances motivation and engagement. The Servant Leadership Theory is proposed as a mediator between servant leadership and employee outcomes. Stewardship leadership highlights the importance of leaders in serving their followers while prioritising their development and well-being, aligning with elements of empathy and support in the LML (Gutierrez-Wirsching et al., 2015). Social Identity Theory examines how employees' perceptions of job prestige influence the relationship between leader-member exchange and work engagement. This theory analyses the impact of group identification on individual behaviour and attitudes, offering insights into how LML can enhance organisational identification (Rabiul, 2024).

Social Exchange Theory examines the connections among servant leadership, LML, and work engagement. This theory posits that social behaviour arises from an exchange process designed to maximise benefits and minimise costs, potentially elucidating how LML fosters positive exchanges between leaders and employees (Uluturk et al., 2024). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory investigates the impact of job demands and resources on employee well-being and performance, with a focus on the role of LML and psychological empowerment as mediators in the relationship between authentic leadership and work engagement (Uluturk et al., 2024). Speech Act Theory facilitates the analysis of the connection between LML and the quality of customer service. This theory examines the role of language in performing actions and shaping social interactions (Rabiul et al., 2022). The Conservation of Resources (COR Theory) examines the relationship between LML, employee service quality, and psychological resources, including competence and connectedness (Rabiul, Hasan, et al., 2023). Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is utilised in this study to examine the impact of effective communication, ethical culture, and LML on employee evangelism regarding the meaning of work. SCT highlights the significance of observational learning, social experience, and reciprocal determinism in influencing behaviour (Priadi & Thariq, 2023). Organisational Support Theory is utilised to analyse the impact of perceived LML and organisational support on mental health disclosure within the workplace. This theory examines employee perceptions of organisational support and its influence on attitudes and behaviours (Wang et al., 2024).

Alongside the theories, various additional concepts are examined in MLT research. The cybernetic feedback process serves as a model for understanding the LML in the context of

communicating strategic vision and values. This concept, rooted in systems theory, emphasises the role of feedback in enabling organisations to refine and enhance their communication strategies (J. Mayfield et al., 2015). Behavioural integrity and credibility serve as significant antecedents of LML. The alignment of a leader's words and actions is crucial for fostering trust and harmony, which are fundamental components of effective leadership communication (W. T. Holmes, 2016; W. T. Holmes et al., 2017). Furthermore, Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) was investigated to assess the impact of LML on voluntary behaviours that enhance organisational effectiveness (Sun et al., 2016).

This study outlined all variables utilised in MLT research over the past decade (see Appendix). The emergence of consistent LML variables as an independent variable highlights the significance of fostering positive behaviours and attitudes in the workplace. Researchers frequently link LML to enhanced communication competence, organisational commitment, and job satisfaction, highlighting its significant contribution to fostering a positive organisational climate (Alqahtani, 2015; Gutierrez-Wirsching et al., 2015; Madlock & Sexton, 2015).

In certain studies, LML functioned as a mediating variable, connecting other independent variables to the desired outcome. LML serves as a mediator in the relationship between leadership styles, such as servant leadership, and outcomes, including work engagement and organisational citizenship behaviour (Rabiul, 2024; Rabiul & Yean, 2021). The mediation role underscores the LML's capacity to enhance leadership's influence on employee behaviour, illustrating that effective communication via motivating language can augment the effects of various leadership styles on organisational performance.

LML, as a moderation variable, is infrequently examined yet holds significant importance in particular contexts. LML moderates the relationship between variables, including cultural factors and job satisfaction, indicating its potential influence on the strength or direction of these relationships. This condition indicates that the effectiveness of an LML may differ based on organisational culture or the specific context of the application, highlighting the necessity for leaders to tailor their communication strategies to fit their organisational environment (F. Ding et al., 2022; Gutierrez-Wirsching et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2024; N. Usmanova et al., 2020).

In several studies, LML was examined as a dependent variable, where factors such as behavioural integrity and credibility were explored as predictors of LML use. This perspective emphasised the importance of understanding the factors that motivate leaders to utilise LML effectively. Identifying these predictors enables organisations to enhance leader training and development in communication skills, thus optimising the advantages of LML for achieving organisational objectives (W. T. Holmes & Parker, 2017b, 2019).

Together with the LML variable, numerous additional variables frequently emerge. Job Satisfaction is commonly studied as a dependent variable influenced by LML and other factors. Studies indicate that LML enhances employee job satisfaction, influencing productivity and retention (Gutierrez-Wirsching et al., 2015; Karaaslan, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2021). Additionally, work engagement is frequently the subject of research. Job engagement reflects the degree of involvement and enthusiasm employees exhibit towards their work, with LML frequently identified as a positive contributor to this engagement level (Kunie et al., 2017; J. Mayfield et al., 2023; Rabiul, 2024).

Moreover, organisational commitment is frequently observed in this study, serving both as a dependent variable and a component of the measured outcomes. Organisational commitment indicates the degree to which employees feel connected and dedicated to their organisation (Talukder & Atinc, 2024; Zhao & Ali, 2024). Self-efficacy frequently serves as both a mediating variable and a measured outcome. Self-efficacy pertains to employees' confidence in executing tasks (Hanke, 2019). Researchers frequently centre on trust, particularly about leaders and organisations. The variables indicate that research predominantly examines factors influencing organisational behaviour and attitudes to foster a more productive and harmonious work environment (Ling & Guo, 2020).

Research theme on Motivating Language Theory

A network visualisation was obtained based on the analysis results using a VOS viewer, as shown in Figure 8. Network visualisations and the emergence of keywords from 77 publications on MLT over the past decade highlight significant themes and research opportunities. A significant theme is leadership communication. Leadership communication was identified as the

predominant theme of the study, comprising 12 events and exhibiting a total link strength of 50. This theme is closely linked to job performance and satisfaction, indicating that a leader's communication skills are essential for motivating and engaging employees. This theme aligns with the MLT, which emphasises the significance of a leader's communication style in motivating and engaging employees.

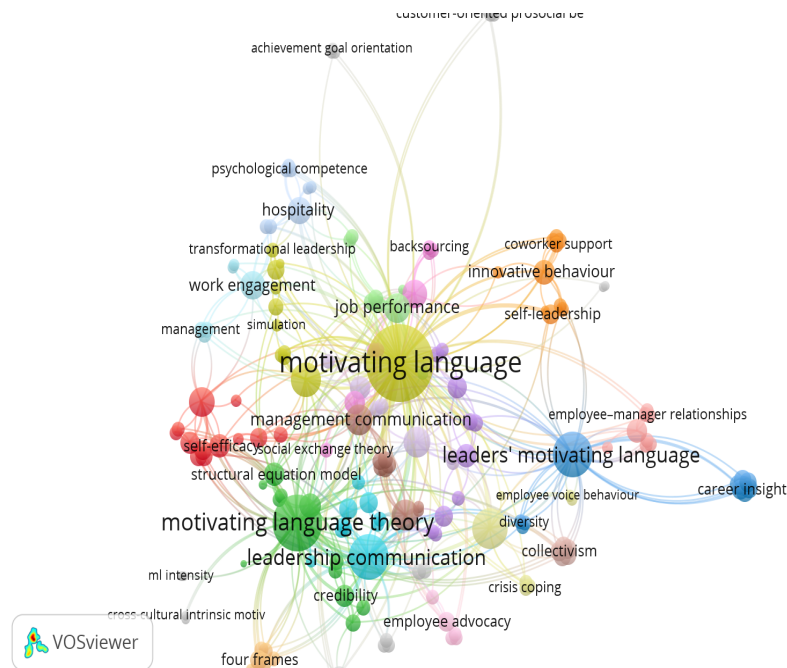


Figure 8. MLT research visualisation network in 2015-2024
Source: Author data processed, 2025

A recurring theme is MLT. This theme appears 25 times and has a total link strength of 93, indicating its significance in employee-manager relations and employee advocacy. This theory examines the impact of a leader's communication style on employee motivation and engagement. Additional research in this domain may yield insights into enhancing working relationships and organisational performance via improved communication strategies. The themes Performance and Job Satisfaction exhibited high frequencies (job performance: 5, job satisfaction: 5) and total relationship strength (20 each), highlighting their significance in assessing workplace efficiency and employee well-being. Employee engagement, characterised by four events and a total link strength of 19, is essential for comprehending the relationship between employees and their work and organisation, influencing productivity and retention.

The concept of transformational leadership is gaining increasing attention. Although not as widely recognised as other themes, transformational leadership is acknowledged for its capacity to foster peer support and promote innovative behaviours. This indicates that an inspiring and motivating leadership style significantly improves team creativity and support within the workplace. The theme of diversity and collectivism, pertinent to employee engagement and crisis management strategies, is increasingly recognised for its influence on team dynamics and organisational resilience. The theme of psychological competence is emerging as a significant area for further research, particularly in industries characterised by high levels of interpersonal interaction, such as hospitality. Developing and applying psychological competencies in diverse organisational contexts can enhance leadership effectiveness and employee performance.

The study reveals a number of MLT-related research gaps. While leadership communication and employee-manager relations have been extensively studied, there is a lack of research exploring the development and application of psychological competence in diverse organisational contexts, particularly in industries with high interpersonal interaction. Additionally, the influence of diversity and collectivism on the effectiveness of motivating language, especially in multicultural and crisis management settings, remains underexplored. The relationship between transformational leadership styles and the use of motivating language

in fostering team creativity and innovation also warrants further investigation. Moreover, there is limited research on the application of MLT across different industries and unique workplace environments, as well as on the long-term impact of motivating language on employee engagement and retention. Finally, few studies employ multi-method approaches or cross-cultural analyses to test the validity and applicability of MLT in various organisational and cultural settings.

This study contributes to Communication Studies by extending the Motivating Language Theory (MLT) to encompass cultural and leadership variables, thereby addressing its applicability in multicultural and crisis management contexts. By highlighting the roles of diversity and collectivism, the research suggests that MLT can be integrated with cross-cultural communication theories, offering a more nuanced understanding of leader-follower interactions in global organisations. Furthermore, exploring the relationship between transformational leadership and motivating language provides a theoretical basis for examining how communication styles drive creativity and innovation in teams. These insights encourage scholars to further theorise about the interplay between language, culture, and leadership in diverse organisational settings, thus enriching the theoretical landscape of organisational communication.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review provides a comprehensive overview of research trends in leadership communication using MLT over the past decade. The profile of MLT research literature from 2015 to 2024 shows a steady increase in publications, reflecting growing scholarly interest. The 'International Journal of Business Communication' is the leading source, followed by journals focused on organisational learning and management. The most prolific authors are Jacqueline Rowley Mayfield, Milton Ray Mayfield, and William T. Holmes, who have significantly contributed to MLT's empirical and conceptual development. The most cited publications highlight the importance of MLT in internal communication, emotional culture, and employee engagement, especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Quantitative methods dominate the field, with fewer qualitative and conceptual studies. Geographically, the United States leads in MLT research, with increasing contributions from South Korea, China, India, Malaysia, Turkey, and Bangladesh. Research subjects have expanded from private sector employees to include government, education, healthcare, hospitality, and non-profit sectors, indicating the broad applicability of MLT across various organisational contexts.

MLT research is theoretically rich, often integrating with theories such as Expectancy Violations Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Servant Leadership Theory, Social Identity Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands-Resources Theory, Speech Act Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Organisational Support Theory. These theories help explain the mechanisms and outcomes of motivating language in leadership communication. The variables studied include LML (as independent, mediating, moderating, and dependent variables), job satisfaction, work engagement, organisational commitment, self-efficacy, trust, behavioural integrity, credibility, and organisational citizenship behaviour. LML is consistently linked to positive organisational outcomes such as enhanced communication competence, job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment, both directly and as a mediator or moderator in the relationship between leadership styles and employee outcomes.

Mapping of MLT research reveals dominant themes in leadership communication, job performance, job satisfaction, and employee engagement. Emerging areas include transformational leadership, diversity and collectivism, and psychological competence. However, notable gaps remain. There is limited research on psychological competence in diverse organisational contexts, the role of diversity and collectivism in MLT effectiveness, and the interplay between transformational leadership and motivating language in fostering innovation. Additionally, the application of MLT in various industries and unique workplace environments and its long-term effects on engagement and retention are underexplored. Methodologically, there is a need for more multi-method and cross-cultural studies to enhance the generalisability and depth of MLT research.

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Appendix Available at:

