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Research Article

Exploring Leadership Communication Styles Through the Talent DNA Framework: An Interpretative Qualitative Study Based on Assertiveness Theory

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Abstract

Existing approaches to leadership communication offer limited insight into how natural talent tendencies shape leaders' communication styles. This study integrates the Talent DNA framework with Assertiveness Theory to examine how three talent dimensions—Drive, Network, and Action—relate to passive, aggressive, and assertive communication. Using a qualitative interpretive approach, the study drew on in-depth interviews and document analysis. Leaders with dominant Drive tended to communicate confidently and focus on goals, although excessive task focus could lead to aggression. Leaders with dominant Network tended to communicate empathetically and build relationships, but prioritizing harmony could lead to passivity. Leaders with dominant Action tended to communicate directly and decisively, which could become aggressive when they gave too little consideration to others. All three tendencies could support assertive communication when adapted to the situation. The study extends Assertiveness Theory by linking natural talent tendencies to communication patterns and offers practical insights for leadership development, talent mapping, and adaptive organizational communication.

Keywords: Leadership Communication; Talent DNA; Assertiveness Theory; Interpersonal Communication.

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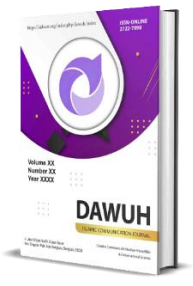

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the central elements in leadership practices within organizations, and five decades of research consistently demonstrate that leader communication is fundamental to leadership effectiveness across organizational settings (Liu et al., 2023). Communication is increasingly recognized as the foundation of leadership itself, as leadership effectiveness is largely enacted through communication processes that shape organizational meaning, relationships, and coordinated action (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). Recent scholarship further suggests that leadership communication should be viewed as a multidimensional capability encompassing responsiveness, authenticity, assertiveness, and relational communication, all of which contribute to employee trust, engagement, and organizational performance (Men et al., 2021; Rizvi & Popli, 2021).

Leadership effectiveness is not only determined by decision-making ability, but also by how leaders communicate with subordinates, peers, and organizational stakeholders (Kim & Lim, 2024). Recent studies demonstrate that leader communication significantly influences organizational trust, employee motivation, adaptive behaviour, and organizational commitment (Berg & Kauffeld, 2024). Effective internal leadership communication also enhances employees' communication satisfaction and strengthens employee advocacy, indicating that communication quality serves as a strategic organizational resource rather than merely an interpersonal competence (Thelen, 2021).

Within interpersonal communication studies, communication style reflects the manner individuals express thoughts, emotions, and authority in social interactions (DeVito, 2019). One influential framework is Assertiveness Theory developed by Robert Alberti and Michael Emmons through the book Your Perfect Right (Alberti & Emmons, 2008). This theory classifies communication behaviour into three primary categories: passive, aggressive, and assertive communication. Assertive communication is considered the healthiest interpersonal communication pattern because it balances self-expression with respect for others (Alberti & Emmons, 2008).

Recent organizational communication research has further demonstrated that leadership communication characterized by authenticity, openness, and symmetrical interaction strengthens employees' trust, organizational identification, and relationship quality. These findings suggest that effective leadership communication extends beyond assertiveness by emphasizing authentic and reciprocal communication behaviours (Men, LR, 2021).

In leadership contexts, assertive communication has been shown to strengthen organizational commitment and improve interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Susanto & Sofyan, 2024). Meanwhile, aggressive communication tends to create defensive climates and organizational tension, while passive communication often weakens leadership authority and clarity (Kim & Lim, 2024).

Beyond interpersonal effectiveness, assertive leadership communication has been shown to strengthen employee–organization relationships and organizational citizenship behaviour, particularly when leaders demonstrate authentic and responsive communication behaviours (Men, LR, 2021).

Alongside the development of leadership communication studies, contemporary leadership approaches increasingly emphasize the importance of understanding individual talent configurations as a basis for effective leadership development (Tjahjana et al., 2024). One emerging framework in Indonesia is Talent DNA, developed by Ary Ginanjar Agustian through the ESQ Leadership Center. The framework originates from Agustian's broader conceptualization of human potential and behavioural patterns developed through his work on emotional-spiritual intelligence

and the identification of recurring patterns underlying human responses and decision-making (Agustian, 2001, 2003).

Building on this foundation, Talent DNA conceptualizes individual talent as relatively consistent and naturally recurring patterns of how individuals are motivated, relate to others, process information, make decisions, and translate intentions into action. These patterns are organized into three overarching domains: Drive, referring to intrinsic motivation, values, and goal orientation; Network, referring to interpersonal interaction, relationship building, communication, and influence; and Action, referring to information processing, decision-making, execution, and problem solving (Agustian et al., 2025).

The framework further differentiates these domains into 45 talent types, with an individual's profile determined by the configuration and relative ordering of these tendencies rather than by a single categorical type. In its current assessment procedure, Talent DNA is administered through a structured online questionnaire consisting of 180 statements, which requires approximately 15–20 minutes to complete and generates an individualized profile of the respondent's dominant talent patterns (ESQ Talent DNA, 2025). Importantly, the framework is intended to identify behavioural tendencies and natural strengths rather than to diagnose fixed personality traits; consequently, its assessment results are positioned as a basis for self-awareness, talent development, and person–role alignment. The practical application of the framework has also expanded into organizational and public-sector talent management, including the mapping of employees and leaders, demonstrating its emerging institutional relevance in Indonesia (BKN, 2025).

From a leadership communication perspective, Talent DNA is particularly relevant because the Network domain explicitly concerns how individuals communicate, establish relationships, and influence others, while the Drive and Action domains provide complementary explanations for the motivational orientation and behavioural execution underlying communication practices. Thus, Talent DNA offers a potentially useful individual-difference lens for examining why leaders with different talent configurations may display different patterns of assertiveness, relational orientation, message delivery, and influence. Nevertheless, because Talent DNA is a relatively recent and organization-developed framework, its psychometric properties should be distinguished from those of more established personality and behavioural assessment models; therefore, the present study treats Talent DNA as a theoretically grounded emerging framework and empirically examines its relationship with leadership communication rather than assuming its validity a priori. This positioning is particularly important for establishing an academically defensible basis for investigating the relationship between individual talent configurations and leadership communication.

The Drive dimension reflects internal motivation, vision, and psychological energy. Network reflects relational orientation, empathy, and social interaction patterns. Relational communication also contributes to psychological safety (Coutifaris & Grant, 2022) by encouraging employees to voice ideas, ask questions, and participate in collaborative decision-making without fear of negative consequences (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2021). Action represents execution orientation, decisiveness, and operational movement (ESQ Corporation, 2025). These dimensions potentially shape leadership communication characteristics differently.

This study addresses the following research question: How are leadership communication styles constructed based on the dimensions of Talent DNA within the framework of Assertiveness Theory?

However, academic discussions integrating Assertiveness Theory with Talent DNA in leadership communication remain limited. Most studies examine leadership communication independently from talent mapping approaches. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how leadership communication styles can be interpreted through the Talent DNA framework.

METHODS

Type of Research

This study employed a qualitative interpretative method (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretative qualitative research seeks to understand social meaning, symbolic interaction, and subjective interpretation within human communication practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The interpretative paradigm was selected because leadership communication styles cannot be fully understood through numerical measurement alone, but require contextual understanding of meaning construction and interpersonal interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data collection techniques included literature review, interpretative conceptual analysis, and comparative analysis of leadership communication behavior based on Talent DNA dimensions. The primary analytical framework combined Assertiveness Theory by Alberti and Emmons, interpersonal communication theory, and Talent DNA dimensions by Ary Ginanjar Agustian. Data validity was strengthened through theoretical triangulation using recent scholarly publications from communication, leadership, and organizational behavior studies published within the last five years. The use of theoretical triangulation is consistent with interpretive qualitative research, enabling researchers to compare multiple theoretical perspectives in explaining leadership communication phenomena (Popli & Rizvi, 2021).

This study adopted a qualitative embedded single-case study design to explore how leadership communication styles are manifested across different Talent DNA configurations within a bounded organizational context. The case was deliberately bounded to one leadership training and consulting organization in Indonesia, allowing the study to examine leadership communication within its specific organizational, cultural, and professional environment rather than across multiple organizations. Following the case study principle that a case should constitute a clearly defined and bounded system, the organization served as the primary case, while individual senior managers represented the embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2018).

This design enabled the researchers to examine similarities and variations in leadership communication practices among managers operating within the same organizational context but possessing different dominant Talent DNA dimensions. Purposive sampling was employed to select nine senior managers representing different organizational functions, with participants selected based on their leadership responsibilities, direct involvement in organizational communication and decision-making, and availability of documented Talent DNA profiles. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, complemented by relevant organizational function and Talent DNA profile documentation where available.

The interview protocol focused on participants' experiences and practices related to message delivery, interpersonal interaction, assertiveness, influence, decision-making, conflict management, and adaptation of communication to different followers and situations. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), involving familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, development of themes, review

and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final analytical account.

The analysis was conducted across cases to identify recurring communication patterns and meaningful variations associated with the participants' dominant Talent DNA dimensions. Accordingly, the unit of analysis was not the organization as an abstract entity, but the leadership communication practices of individual senior managers as embedded units within the bounded organizational case, enabling the study to connect individual talent configurations with observed patterns of leadership communication while retaining the contextual depth characteristic of qualitative case study research (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Focus

This study focuses on exploring leadership communication styles by integrating Assertiveness Theory with the Talent DNA framework. Specifically, it examines how the three Talent DNA dimensions (Drive, Network, and Action) influence leaders' communication tendencies and how these tendencies can be interpreted within the passive, aggressive, and assertive communication patterns proposed by Alberti and Emmons. By combining a psychological talent mapping perspective with interpersonal communication theory, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how individual talent characteristics shape leadership communication behaviors in organizational contexts.

Informants

Nine senior managers were selected as informants through purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in leadership, organizational decision-making, and interpersonal communication within the bounded case organization. The selection was intended to achieve information-rich variation across managerial functions, leadership tenure, and dominant Talent DNA configurations rather than statistical representativeness. In accordance with purposive sampling principles in qualitative research, participants were selected because their positions and experiences enabled them to provide substantive information relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

To enhance transparency and contextual understanding, Table 1 presents the participant profiles, including managerial role, organizational function, leadership tenure, gender, and dominant Talent DNA dimension. The inclusion of participants with different dominant Talent DNA dimensions was particularly important because the study sought to examine whether and how differences in individual talent configurations were reflected in leadership communication practices. Gender was included as a descriptive characteristic where relevant to contextualizing the participant group, but it was not treated as an analytical variable in this study. Leadership tenure was also considered to provide contextual information regarding participants accumulated leadership experience and exposure to organizational communication situations. The participant profile therefore served not only to describe the sample but also to establish the empirical basis for comparing communication patterns across different Talent DNA configurations within the same organizational context.

Table 1. Profile of Study Participants

Participant	Managerial Role	Function/Department	Leadership Tenure	Gender	Dominant Talent DNA Dimension
D1	Deputy Director	Customer Executive & Engagement	11 years	[F]	Drive
N1	Senior Manager	Solution Development & Delivery	15 years	[M]	Network
A1	Deputy Director	Solution Design & Management	10 years	[F]	Action
D2	Deputy Director	Business Development	15 years	[M]	Drive
N2	Senior Manager	Business Development	12 years	[F]	Network
A2	Deputy Director	Solution Design & Management	10 years	[M]	Action
D3	Department Head	Business Management Program	11 years	[F]	Drive
N3	Program Manager	Second Generation Program	10 years	[F]	Network
A3	Deputy Director	Sales Retail	15 years	[F]	Action

Research Location

The study was conducted in Jakarta City, a region known for its cultural diversity and a blend of urban and semi-urban populations. This setting provided a unique context for explore the differences of leadership communication styles can.

Instrumentation or Tools

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to delve into managers' experiences, focusing on their leadership communication style and interpersonal relationship processes in diverse organizational settings. Data Collection Procedures: In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face at participants' offices or virtual platforms, lasting approximately 30–60 minutes each.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software to identify recurring patterns and themes related to leadership communication styles and their relationship with participants' Talent DNA configurations. The Talent DNA dimensions were not inferred from the interview data; rather, each participant's dominant Talent DNA dimension was determined from the formal Talent DNA assessment administered to the participants prior to the qualitative interviews. The assessment results were obtained from the participants' official Talent DNA profiles and were used as an individual-difference reference point in the subsequent qualitative analysis. The assessment identifies participants' relative strengths across the three overarching Talent DNA domains; Drive, Network, and Action; and provides an individualized profile indicating the participant's dominant talent configuration (Agustian et al., 2025).

These assessment results were subsequently integrated with the interview data through a deductive–inductive analytical process. First, the researchers coded interview data inductively to identify participants' actual communication behaviors, experiences, and perceptions without forcing the data into predetermined categories. Second, the emerging communication themes were compared across participants according to their formally assessed dominant Talent DNA dimensions. This comparison was used to examine whether particular communication tendencies, such as assertiveness, relational orientation, influencing behavior, decision-making, or action orientation, were consistently associated with specific Talent DNA configurations. NVivo was used to organize interview transcripts, coding categories, thematic relationships, and cross-participant comparisons, thereby facilitating systematic and auditable analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Importantly, the Talent DNA assessment results functioned as contextual and comparative data rather than as predetermined evidence of a particular communication style; consequently, the qualitative findings were derived primarily from participants' narratives and observed patterns in the interview data, while the Talent DNA profiles provided the analytical lens through which similarities and differences across participants were examined. This procedure ensured that Talent DNA dimensions were based on formal assessment results rather than researcher interpretation of interview responses, thereby strengthening the methodological credibility of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis uncovered three primary themes from interviews with managers:

Leadership Communication Based on Drive Dimension:

Leaders with a dominant Drive orientation demonstrated communication patterns characterized by confidence, achievement orientation, strategic direction, and a strong focus on organizational goals (ESQ Corporation, 2025). This tendency was evident in the interview narratives of the Drive-dominant participants. For example, one participant emphasized the importance of maintaining clear direction when communicating with the team:

> "…For me, when I communicate with the team, the most important thing is that they understand where we are going. I usually start with the target, what we need to achieve, and why it is important. Once the direction is clear, I give them the freedom to determine how they will achieve it...", Participant D1, 2026.

This statement illustrates a communication pattern in which leadership messages are organized around objectives, direction, and the expectation of collective movement toward defined outcomes. Similarly, another Drive-dominant leader stated :

> "…I don't like meetings that end without a clear action. If we have agreed on a target, I will make sure everyone knows what needs to be done, who is responsible, and when it has to be completed. I push the team because I believe good intentions are not enough; we need to produce results…", Participant D2, 2026.

Rather than primarily emphasizing relational harmony, these statements indicate a tendency to use communication as a mechanism for clarifying expectations, mobilizing action, and maintaining performance standards. Such characteristics are consistent with assertive communication, which involves expressing thoughts, expectations, and objectives directly while maintaining respect for the rights and perspectives of others (Alberti & Emmons, 2008).

The finding also corresponds with research on empowering leadership communication, which suggests that communicating clear goals and expectations while simultaneously allowing opportunities for employee input can contribute to team effectiveness and psychological safety (Hopkinson et al., 2021). However, the qualitative data also indicate that the strength of Drive may become counterproductive when goal orientation is not accompanied by interpersonal sensitivity. As one participant reflected,

> "…Sometimes I realize that I can be too direct, especially when the team is not moving as quickly as I expect. My intention is to push them to achieve the target, but I have been told that the way I communicate can sometimes feel too demanding. I have learned that being firm does not always mean speaking more strongly; sometimes I need to listen first…", Participant D3, 2026.

This illustrates the potential boundary between constructive assertiveness and aggressive or overly controlling communication. In this respect, Drive should not be interpreted as inherently aggressive; rather, its communication effect appears to depend on how strongly achievement orientation is balanced with listening, empathy, and relational consideration. This interpretation is consistent with Alberti and Emmons (2008), who distinguish assertive expression from aggressive communication, and with recent leadership research emphasizing that effective communication requires leaders to integrate strategic clarity with relational sensitivity (Liu et al., 2023).

Therefore, the Drive finding in this study suggests that a dominant Drive configuration may provide leaders with a strong communicative orientation toward vision, goals, strategic direction, and action, while its effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to regulate the potential tendency toward excessive dominance or control.

Leadership Communication Based on Network Dimension:

Leaders with a dominant Network orientation demonstrated relational, empathetic, and collaborative communication patterns, particularly through active listening, emotional responsiveness, interpersonal openness, and efforts to maintain constructive relationships (ESQ Corporation, 2025). These characteristics were reflected in the participants' descriptions of how they interacted with colleagues and subordinates. For example, Participant N1 explained,

> "…Before I respond, I usually let the person finish speaking. Sometimes what they need is not an immediate solution, but someone who understands what they are experiencing…"

This statement illustrates an active-listening orientation in which the leader prioritizes understanding the other person's perspective before providing a response. Similarly, Participant N2 described a mediating approach to interpersonal conflict:

> "…When two people in my team have different opinions, I normally bring them together and ask each person to explain their perspective. I don't want to immediately decide who is right or wrong. I prefer to find a solution that both sides can accept..."

This interaction pattern indicates that Network-oriented leadership communication is not limited to interpersonal warmth but also involves mediation, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem solving. Emotional responsiveness was also evident in Participant N3's account:

> "…When I see that someone is unusually quiet or their performance suddenly changes, I usually approach them personally and ask what is happening. I think we need to understand the person before we discuss the performance…".

Such behaviour demonstrates the integration of relational sensitivity with leadership communication, whereby emotional and interpersonal cues are considered before addressing task-related issues. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that supportive communication, active listening, and relational responsiveness can contribute to interpersonal trust, employee voice, and psychological safety within teams (Berg & Kauffeld, 2024; O'Donovan, 2021).

Within Assertiveness Theory, these patterns can be understood as assertive-supportive communication, in which leaders express their perspectives while remaining attentive to the needs, emotions, and perspectives of others (Alberti & Emmons, 2008). However, the interview data also suggested a potential limitation of a strongly relational orientation. Participant N3 acknowledged,

> "…Sometimes I know that I have to confront someone, but I delay the conversation because I don't want the person to feel uncomfortable or damage our relationship..."

This statement illustrates how the strength of Network, maintaining interpersonal harmony, may become a communication constraint when it reduces decisiveness or encourages avoidance of difficult conversations. Thus, the Network finding suggests that relational orientation can strengthen listening, mediation, emotional responsiveness, and collaborative decision-making, but its effectiveness depends on the leader's capacity to combine interpersonal sensitivity with the assertiveness required to address conflict and make difficult decisions. This interpretation reinforces the view that effective leadership communication requires a balance between relational sensitivity and the capacity to communicate clear positions, particularly in situations involving disagreement, accountability, or organizational change (Paterson, 2020; Liu et al., 2023).

Leadership Communication Based on Action Dimension:

Leaders with a dominant Action orientation demonstrated communication patterns characterized by directness, practicality, rapid decision-making, and a strong emphasis on execution (ESQ Corporation, 2025). Unlike the strategic emphasis observed among Drive-dominant leaders or the relational emphasis of Network-dominant leaders, Action-oriented leaders tended to use communication primarily as a mechanism for translating problems into immediate decisions and concrete actions. This pattern was particularly evident in situations involving operational disruption

and time pressure. Participant A1, for example, described his approach during an unexpected operational problem:

> "…When there is a problem in the field, I don't wait for a long discussion. I identify what is causing the problem, decide what needs to be done immediately, and then communicate the instruction to the team. After the situation is under control, we can evaluate what happened…"

This statement illustrates the Action orientation through rapid problem identification, prioritization, decision-making, and execution. A similar pattern emerged in routine operational communication. Participant A2 explained,

> "…When I give an assignment, I try to make the instruction very clear of what needs to be done, who is responsible, and when it has to be finished. I don't want people to leave the meeting still wondering what they are supposed to do…"

The emphasis on task clarity, responsibility, and deadlines demonstrates how Action-oriented leaders translate communication into specific behavioural expectations. Deadline pressure further intensified this pattern. As Participant A3 stated,

> "…If we are close to a deadline, I become more direct. I will tell the team what has to be completed today and what can wait. At that point, I focus on getting the work finished rather than discussing too many alternatives…".

This finding suggests that Action orientation may be particularly functional in situations requiring rapid prioritization and operational responsiveness. Such characteristics are consistent with research indicating that leadership communication openness and responsiveness can support organizational adaptability and effective responses to uncertainty and change (Men, 2021). The Action orientation also corresponds with research emphasizing the importance of decisiveness and execution in leadership under conditions requiring rapid responses and problem solving (Kim & Lim, 2024).

However, the interview data also indicated a potential interpersonal risk associated with highly action-oriented communication. Participant A1 acknowledged,

> "…Sometimes I realize that I move too quickly and give instructions before checking how the team feels about the situation. For me the priority is solving the problem, but for them it can feel like I am being too demanding..."

This reflects the potential transition from constructive directness to aggressive communication when speed, efficiency, and task completion are prioritized at the expense of emotional and relational considerations. From the perspective of Assertiveness Theory, therefore, Action-oriented communication can be effective when directness and decisiveness are balanced with respect for others' perspectives and emotional needs (Alberti & Emmons, 2008).

Overall, the findings indicate that a dominant Action configuration is manifested in leadership communication through rapid crisis decisions, clear operational instructions, deadline-oriented communication, and immediate problem solving, while its effectiveness depends on the leader's capacity to combine executional speed with interpersonal awareness.

This study finds that leadership communication style can be understood as an interaction between interpersonal assertiveness orientation and dominant talent configuration. Rather than treating Talent DNA dimensions as fixed communication styles, the findings indicate that each dominant configuration is associated with a distinctive communication tendency that may facilitate particular leadership functions while also creating specific interpersonal risks when expressed without sufficient balance.

The qualitative evidence suggests that Drive-dominant leaders tend to communicate through strategic direction, goal clarification, performance expectations, and mobilization of action; their communication strength lies in providing vision, maintaining focus, and creating a clear sense of direction, while the potential risk is excessive dominance or pressure when achievement orientation overrides listening and relational sensitivity. Network-dominant leaders, in contrast, demonstrate communication through active listening, emotional responsiveness, mediation, interpersonal openness, and collaborative decision-making. Their strength lies in building trust, facilitating dialogue, and creating psychologically supportive communication climates, whereas excessive concern for relational harmony may result in conflict avoidance, delayed confrontation, or passive accommodation. Action-dominant leaders tend to communicate through direct operational instructions, rapid decision-making, problem solving, prioritization, and execution, making this configuration particularly valuable in situations requiring responsiveness and timely action. However, excessive emphasis on speed and execution may reduce opportunities for consultation and emotional consideration, potentially resulting in communication perceived as overly directive, impatient, or impulsive.

These patterns are consistent with the principles of Assertiveness Theory, which distinguish constructive self-expression from both passive accommodation and aggressive communication (Alberti & Emmons, 2008), while also extending the analysis by showing how assertive communication may be expressed differently according to the leader's dominant talent configuration. Accordingly, the conceptual model developed from this study incorporates not only communication tendencies and potential risks but also the observable empirical indicators, communication strengths, and corresponding developmental priorities associated with each Talent DNA dimension, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Interaction between interpersonal assertiveness and dominant talent

Talent DNA Dimension	Empirical Communication Indicators	Dominant Communication Tendency	Communication Strengths	Potential Communication Risks	Development Recommendations
Drive	Communicates goals and targets clearly; emphasizes strategic direction; challenges teams toward	**Assertive–Strategic**	Vision, clarity, confidence, goal alignment, motivation, strategic focus	Excessive pressure, dominance, controlling communication, insufficient listening	Practice **assertive + empathetic communication**; increase active listening; invite alternative perspectives; distinguish

	results; mobilizes action; communicates expectations confidently				firmness from pressure
Network	Listens before responding; explores others' perspectives; mediates disagreements; responds to emotional cues; encourages collaborative discussion	**Assertive–Relational**	Trust building, empathy, psychological safety, collaboration, conflict mediation	Conflict avoidance, over-accommodation, delayed difficult conversations, excessive concern with harmony	Develop **constructive confrontation**; communicate difficult messages directly; set boundaries; practice decisive communication
Action	Gives concise instructions; clarifies responsibilities and deadlines; makes rapid decisions; prioritizes tasks; focuses on immediate problem solving	**Assertive–Directive**	Responsiveness, decisiveness, efficiency, execution, operational clarity	Impatience, insufficient consultation, perceived harshness, impulsive decisions	Slow down when necessary; check understanding; invite input; regulate tone; balance execution with relational awareness

These findings support contemporary perspectives suggesting that effective leadership communication is not merely a transmission of information but a dynamic relational process through which leaders shape organizational meaning, trust, collaboration, and employee participation (Popli & Rizvi, 2021). The findings further suggest that Talent DNA may provide one useful individual-level lens for understanding variations in how leaders enact this communication process, particularly in relation to strategic direction, relational engagement, and action orientation. However, the observed differences should not be attributed exclusively to Talent DNA. Leadership communication is embedded within a broader organizational and situational context, and alternative explanations may include organizational culture, role and task demands, leadership experience, gender, age, organizational position, and industry or professional context.

For example, organizational cultures that emphasize hierarchy and performance may encourage more directive communication regardless of an individual's dominant talent configuration, whereas collaborative cultures may reinforce participative and relational communication practices. Similarly, leaders occupying operational or crisis-oriented roles may be required to communicate more directly and rapidly because of the demands of their positions, rather than solely because of an Action-oriented Talent DNA profile. Leadership experience may also influence communication flexibility, as experienced leaders may have developed adaptive communication strategies through repeated exposure to diverse interpersonal and organizational situations. Demographic characteristics such as gender and age may further intersect with

organizational expectations and socially constructed communication norms, although these factors were not treated as explanatory variables in the present study (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Northouse, 2022). Thus, the similarities observed among leaders sharing a dominant Talent DNA dimension should be interpreted as contextually situated patterns rather than evidence of a deterministic relationship between talent configuration and communication style. This qualification is particularly important because the present qualitative case study is designed to explore patterns and meanings within a specific organizational context rather than to establish causal effects or generalizable relationships.

Nevertheless, the consistency of communication patterns observed across participants with similar dominant Talent DNA dimensions suggests that Talent DNA may function as one relevant individual-difference factor alongside organizational and contextual influences. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary views of leadership communication and psychological safety, which emphasize that employee voice and interpersonal openness emerge through the interaction of leader behaviour, relational conditions, and organizational context (Coutifaris & Grant, 2022; Edmondson, 1999).

Accordingly, Talent DNA should be understood not as a standalone predictor of leadership communication effectiveness, but as a potential explanatory lens that interacts with organizational culture, role demands, leadership experience, and other contextual conditions to shape how leaders communicate.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this study suggest that effective leadership communication is not determined solely by an individual's communication behaviour but is shaped by the interaction between interpersonal assertiveness and underlying talent characteristics. Consistent with Assertiveness Theory, leaders who are able to balance self-expression with respect for others demonstrate more effective communication than those who rely predominantly on passive or aggressive styles (Alberti & Emmons, 2008). This finding is also consistent with the concept of leader attentive communication, which emphasizes leaders' ability to actively listen, acknowledge employees' perspectives, and respond appropriately to their communication needs (Decuypere & Verdorfer, 2022).

Rather than viewing communication solely as message delivery, attentive communication positions leadership as a reciprocal interaction that strengthens trust and employee engagement. In the present study, this perspective is particularly reflected in the Network dimension, where relational sensitivity complements assertive communication and contributes to more effective leadership interactions. The present findings extend this perspective by indicating that such balance is influenced by leaders' dominant Talent DNA dimensions. Specifically, the Drive dimension strengthens strategic and goal-oriented communication, the Network dimension enhances empathy and relational engagement, and the Action dimension promotes decisiveness and execution. These dimensions collectively contribute to the development of an assertive communication style when they are appropriately balanced.

Comparison with Previous Studies

These findings are consistent with previous leadership communication research emphasizing that effective leaders integrate clarity of direction with interpersonal sensitivity to foster trust,

motivation, and organizational commitment (Berg & Kauffeld, 2024; Kim & Lim, 2024). This finding is consistent with Liu et al. (2023), who argue that contemporary leadership communication extends beyond information transmission to include relational influence, meaning construction, and adaptive interaction.

The present study contributes to this perspective by suggesting that the observed communication characteristics are associated with and can be meaningfully interpreted through leaders' dominant Talent DNA configurations. Rather than proposing that Talent DNA determines or causes a particular leadership communication style, the findings indicate that different talent configurations may be reflected in distinctive ways of expressing goals, engaging with others, making decisions, and translating intentions into action. In this regard, Talent DNA provides an individual-difference lens for interpreting variations in leadership communication, complementing established perspectives that conceptualize communication competence as a combination of learned skills, relational processes, and contextual adaptation.

The findings suggest that leaders with different dominant configurations may display different communicative preference, for example, greater emphasis on strategic direction among Drive-dominant leaders, relational engagement among Network-dominant leaders, and direct execution among Action-dominant leaders. These patterns should nevertheless be understood as contextually situated associations rather than deterministic relationships, because leadership communication is also influenced by organizational culture, role demands, leadership experience, interpersonal relationships, and situational conditions (Northouse, 2022; Popli & Rizvi, 2021).

Thus, the contribution of this study lies not in establishing Talent DNA as a causal determinant of leadership communication, but in proposing that individual talent configuration can serve as a complementary analytical lens for understanding why similar leadership communication demands may be enacted differently by different leaders. This perspective extends existing discussions of leadership communication by bringing greater attention to individual differences while recognizing that communication behaviour emerges through the interaction between individual tendencies, learned competencies, and organizational context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Liu et al., 2023).

This conceptual integration enriches current leadership communication theory by providing a talent-based explanation for variations in assertive communication among leaders and offers a new perspective for leadership development that aligns communication competencies with individuals' inherent strengths. While previous studies have emphasized leadership communication attributes such as authenticity, responsiveness, motivating language, and openness (Men et al., 2021; Rizvi & Popli, 2021), the present study extends the literature by demonstrating that these communication tendencies may originate from leaders' dominant Talent DNA configurations rather than communication skills alone.

Limitations and Cautions

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research employed a qualitative embedded single-case study design involving nine senior managers within one training and consulting organization in Indonesia. Accordingly, the study does not represent multiple industries, company sizes, or independent organizational settings. Although the participants varied in terms of managerial functions, leadership tenure, and dominant Talent DNA configurations, they shared the same organizational environment and therefore may have been

influenced by common organizational culture, leadership norms, policies, and communication practices. This bounded context limits the transferability of the findings to other organizations, industries, organizational sizes, and cultural settings, particularly where leadership roles and communication expectations differ (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Second, the findings rely primarily on participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions, which may be subject to recall bias, selective reporting, and social desirability bias. Although the use of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to provide rich descriptions of their communication practices, self-reported accounts may not fully correspond to their actual communication behaviour in organizational interactions. Future research could strengthen the evidence through observational data, subordinate or peer assessments, and longitudinal designs.

Third, the study focused specifically on the three Talent DNA dimensions; Drive, Network, and Action; in relation to Assertiveness Theory and therefore does not claim to provide an exhaustive explanation of leadership communication. Other individual, relational, organizational, demographic, and contextual factors, including personality characteristics, organizational culture, role demands, leadership experience, gender, age, and industry context, may also contribute to differences in leadership communication (Northouse, 2022; Liu et al., 2023).

Finally, because the study is exploratory and based on a small purposive sample, the observed associations between Talent DNA configurations and communication tendencies should not be interpreted as evidence of causality or statistical generalizability. Instead, the findings provide contextually situated insights and an exploratory analytical framework that can be examined and tested through larger, multi-organizational, mixed-methods, or quantitative studies in future research.

Therefore, the proposed conceptual relationships should be interpreted as exploratory rather than definitive. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, incorporate quantitative or mixed-method approaches, and test the proposed framework across different organizational sectors and cultural contexts to enhance its validity, reliability, and broader applicability.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, several directions for future research are recommended. Future studies should validate the proposed conceptual framework using quantitative or mixed-method approaches with larger and more diverse samples across different industries, organizational levels, and cultural contexts.

Researchers may also examine the statistical relationships between the Talent DNA dimensions (Drive, Network, and Action), assertiveness orientations, and leadership outcomes such as employee engagement, organizational commitment, psychological safety, team performance, and innovation. In addition, comparative studies across leadership levels, organizational cultures, or national settings would provide a deeper understanding of how contextual factors influence talent-based communication styles. Longitudinal research is also recommended to investigate whether leadership communication patterns evolve over time as leaders develop their competencies or receive communication and leadership training.

Finally, future research could expand the present framework by integrating Talent DNA with established leadership theories, such as transformational, authentic, servant, or adaptive leadership, to develop a more comprehensive model of leadership communication and leader effectiveness.

Practical Implication

The findings suggest that leadership development programs should move beyond generic communication training by incorporating talent-informed communication profiling and personalized development interventions. Rather than treating all leaders as having identical communication development needs, organizations can use Talent DNA profiles as an additional diagnostic lens to identify dominant communication tendencies and potential interpersonal risks.

Based on the findings of this study, organizations can develop dimension-specific coaching modules. For Drive-dominant leaders, development should emphasize strategic storytelling, goal-oriented communication, active listening, perspective-taking, and techniques for communicating high expectations without becoming overly controlling or aggressive. For Network-dominant leaders, coaching should focus on assertive expression, constructive confrontation, boundary setting, difficult conversations, and the ability to communicate decisions clearly while maintaining relational sensitivity. For Action-dominant leaders, development should emphasize concise and effective instruction, decision communication, crisis communication, emotional regulation, and techniques for slowing down sufficiently to seek input and consider interpersonal consequences when situations require consultation.

Across all three dimensions, assertiveness training can be incorporated to help leaders distinguish constructive assertiveness from passive accommodation and aggressive communication (Alberti & Emmons, 2008). Development interventions should also include structured feedback practices, such as 360-degree feedback, behavioral observation, peer coaching, and post-conversation reflection, so that leaders can compare their intended communication style with how their behavior is experienced by others. The implementation can follow a cycle of Talent DNA: profiling → communication diagnosis → individualized coaching → behavioral practice → feedback → reassessment, thereby connecting individual talent characteristics with observable communication behaviors. To evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions, organizations should establish measurable indicators at both individual and organizational levels, including improvement in active listening, clarity of communication, assertive behavior, quality of feedback, conflict-management effectiveness, employee perceptions of psychological safety, employee voice, interpersonal trust, and team engagement. Such indicators can be assessed through pre- and post-intervention surveys, 360-degree assessments, behavioral observation checklists, coaching evaluations, and follow-up assessments.

This approach positions Talent DNA not as a deterministic classification system, but as a developmental lens for tailoring leadership communication interventions to individual tendencies while maintaining flexibility for organizational and situational demands. Such personalized leadership development is consistent with the broader emphasis on individualized approaches to leadership capability development and organizational effectiveness (Rachmani et al., 2025; Northouse, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Leadership communication style is closely connected to individual talent tendencies reflected in the Talent DNA dimensions of Drive, Network, and Action (ESQ Corporation, 2025). This finding supports the growing body of leadership communication literature emphasizing that effective leadership is fundamentally enacted through communication processes that integrate

strategic direction, interpersonal relationships, and organizational influence (Liu et al., 2023). Through the framework of Assertiveness Theory by Alberti and Emmons, leadership communication can be interpreted as behavioral expressions balancing self-orientation and relational orientation (Alberti & Emmons, 2008). Leaders with dominant Drive tend toward strategic assertive communication, Network-oriented leaders toward empathetic assertive communication, and Action-oriented leaders toward directive assertive communication. However, imbalance within these dimensions may shift communication behavior toward passive or aggressive tendencies (Paterson, 2020).

This study contributes theoretically by integrating Assertiveness Theory with the Talent DNA framework to offer an individual-difference perspective on leadership communication. Its original contribution lies in proposing that the three Talent DNA dimensions; Drive, Network, and Action; may be associated with distinctive ways in which leaders enact assertive communication, including differences in strategic direction, relational engagement, decisiveness, and potential communication risks. Rather than replacing established theories of leadership communication or conceptualizing Talent DNA as a causal determinant of communication behavior, the study positions Talent DNA as a complementary interpretive lens through which variations in leadership communication tendencies can be examined. The findings therefore extend existing discussions of leadership communication by connecting individual talent configurations with observable communication patterns while recognizing the influence of organizational culture, role demands, leadership experience, and other contextual factors (Northouse, 2022; Popli & Rizvi, 2021).

However, the proposed Talent DNA-leadership communication framework remains exploratory and contextually bounded. The findings are derived from nine senior managers within a single organizational case and therefore cannot establish causal relationships, statistical generalizability, or the universal applicability of the proposed communication patterns. The identified associations should consequently be interpreted as empirically informed propositions that require further examination.

Future research should test the framework using larger and more diverse samples across multiple organizations and industries, employing quantitative or mixed-method designs to examine the reliability, construct validity, strength of associations, and potential moderating effects of organizational culture, leadership experience, role demands, and demographic characteristics. Longitudinal research could further examine whether Talent DNA configurations remain consistently associated with communication behaviors across different leadership situations and whether targeted communication interventions produce measurable developmental outcomes. Thus, the principal contribution of this study is not the definitive validation of Talent DNA as a predictor of leadership communication, but the development of an exploratory, theoretically integrated framework and a set of empirically grounded propositions that provide a foundation for subsequent validation and theory development.

Methodologically, this study offers insights into the use of qualitative thematic analysis to examine leadership communication through the combined lens of psychological talent mapping and interpersonal communication theory. Practically, the findings provide implications for leadership development programs, talent mapping initiatives, organizational communication training, and adaptive leadership education, particularly in contexts seeking to align leadership communication strategies with individual talent profiles.

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