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Communication management across multiple campuses: A case study of Laurea UAS

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to find the best possible communication techniques to manage communication, specifically in the area of university-to-student communication, and in cases when school have several campuses. I examine the Laurea University of Applied Sciences in my case study. The literature review focuses on studies in the fields of internal communication, communication management and communication tool use habits of the "net generation". Data was collected in eight interviews with Laurea staff. Findings were analyzed using the constructivist approach and the support of the theoretical background. Analysis then results in proposals to address and correct the main problem areas. These proposed improvements are to utilize centralized communication, visualizing the message, the right timing and a directive communication style.

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background information

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the communication strategies for the degree student's learning path at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences (UAS). I describe the current requirements and approaches taken, note problems with the current approaches, and finally, suggest potential improvements. The communication described covers all official information that must be distributed to the student during approximately three and half years of education. This communication has traditionally been one-way, from Laurea UAS to its students, and includes formal, usually time-specific information such as welcome letters and information to new incoming students, study offers, instructions and reminders of enrolling for studies, semester schedules and so on.

Laurea is an University of Applied Sciences operated as a limited company. It provides higher education on seven campuses in the Helsinki Metropolitan area. Campuses are located in Hyvinkää, Kerava, Otaniemi (Espoo), Tikkurila (Vantaa), Porvoo, Lohja and Leppävaara (Espoo). Laurea has ten bachelor's degrees and master degrees in three fields. Laurea offers studies in Finnish and in English. Laurea has about 8000 students and 500 employees. An effective communication model is therefore very important in order to create a holistic and cohensive relationship with students.

My thesis will consider what approach offers the most effective and flexible solution for managing continuous, planned and unplanned communication practices. As part of this research, it is also important to acknowledge faculty management perspectives about what students – or their generation - are generally thinking about internal communication in organizations, and what is most likely to appeal to them based on those findings.

1.2 Aim of study

One challenge that faces Laurea UAS is that students are not getting equal or uniform information from all staff across campuses. The level and quality of information sometimes depends on the knowledge and commitment of teaching staff – who are often seen

as the means of direct liaison with students. This statement is based on my observations and personal experience as a Laurea employee since 2013. I have worked in the areas of student interfacing, student feedback and knowledge of education of tutors. Laurea UAS started to educate tutor teachers only few years ago, and mostly participants of these workshops are new teachers. These tutor teachers are available to support and guide students throughout their studies, and will have specific knowledge of the field of study of their allocated students. In contrast with these newer tutors, teachers with longer established careers in Laurea UAS are at times hesitant to abandon past methods and styles, using older communication methods with an "as done before" mentality even though considerable changes and improvements are now available. Subsequently, the communication is not standardized, and this presents the biggest communication problem at the moment. This is the defining problem that first interested me in this thesis topic.

Laurea uses websites for external communication ("first contact" information, before school has started), intranet websites for internal communication (available after student registration once they are allocated a user identifier) and e-mails to deliver official information. Laurea also deliver information in on-campus meetings, for example, during tutoring hours. Still, when asking students about those practices in informal situations, it is clear that many of the students do not access or utilize many of the written messages. They get their information though Facebook pages and other informal tools where they create groups and use them to interact with their peers. Laurea's problem is not usually a lack of communication but often the opposite: students receive a lot of information about each topic, but the messages are not uniform or from an official source.

1.3 Research question

My research question is therefore: What are the best communication techniques for Laurea University of Applied Sciences to manage and deliver the most effective student communication to learners?

My literature review will focus on academic studies about internal communication, information plans, communication programs and schedules used during organizational mergers. I research which elements are recommended for an effective communication

management. Additionally, I conduct a literature review about how the so-called "millennial" generation see communication tools and how they use them, as described in previous studies.

To make my research comprehensive, I interview several communication and education managers who are in charge of various areas of communication of education in Laurea UAS. I describe the current concerns about the communication thus far, what kind of communication has been planned and how it fits with the company's overall strategy.. By focusing on the thoughts and objectives of faculty communication managers, I establish a clear vision of goals and intent. One such goal - as is typical in universities or other higher education institutions – is to foster and encourage faster graduation, without sacrificing educational quality. When students are aware of available resources and options, and also their possibilities and duties, they are more committed due to better knowledge of their study path and Laurea UAS's expectations of them.

1.4 Research methodology

In order to answer my research question, I have chosen a qualitative research method with semi-structured theme interviews.

According to Corbin and Strauss (2015, 4):

> Qualitative research is a form of research in which the researcher or a designated co-researcher collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide.

I use this method and interviews as the specific technique to gather information, because of the "social context" nature of this topic;

> Interviewing is a form for collecting qualitative data from people in an attempt to understand the social context and the inner meanings of the respondents (see Brennan 2013, 28).

I set out to capture the requirements, and concerns of key persons in Laurea's units directly responsible for student affairs. My interviewees work in a variety of key roles in faculty and are decision makers in their units. Eeach is heavily involved with the topic

of student communication. More detail about the process of choosing interviewees is provided later in this chapter.

The process of conducting research interviews started in August 2016, when I first met with the Communications Director of Laurea, who is responsible for external communication and marketing, but not for student communication. Together, we considered whose roles and knowledge were relevant and important to this research topic, and who were the most critical persons to be interviewed in this process. Our goal was to build the widest possible vision and insight into student communications. We produced a list of seven roles and range of resposibilities considered crucial to this process. After some initial interviews I noticed the absence of a representative from one of the Laurea sub-regions so I added one more position/professional to the list.

The key positions chosen were

- ✓ Vice President (Educational and Regional Development)
- ✓ Director of Education Process
- ✓ Service Coordinator
- ✓ Head of Student Affairs Administration
- ✓ Head of Student Affairs
- ✓ Laureamko Student Union President – current and former
- ✓ Head of Admission Services

Each of my eight interviewees is in charge of their own particular field.. All those fields have job functions which are critical to communicate to students.

Interviews were conducted in the format of a semi-structured theme interview, with some broad, predetermined questions but mostly involved free discussion about the theme of student communication. Quoting Taylor & DeVault (2015, 123.) "Whether or not you use a formal interview guide, it is always good idea to try to come up with a set of open-ended, descriptive questions prior to an interview. We think of these as conversation starters."

In my semi-structured interviews I followed the guidance of Corbin and Strauss (2013, 39) and covered the same topics with each interviewee. These writers point out the importance of preparing a "prompting" list to refer to and fall back on during discussions. The Student Year Clock (as show below) was designed ahead of the interviews based on possible planned management of communications, and served as my point of reference. It helped trigger conversation and discussion points depending on the particular experiences and expertise of the Interviewee.
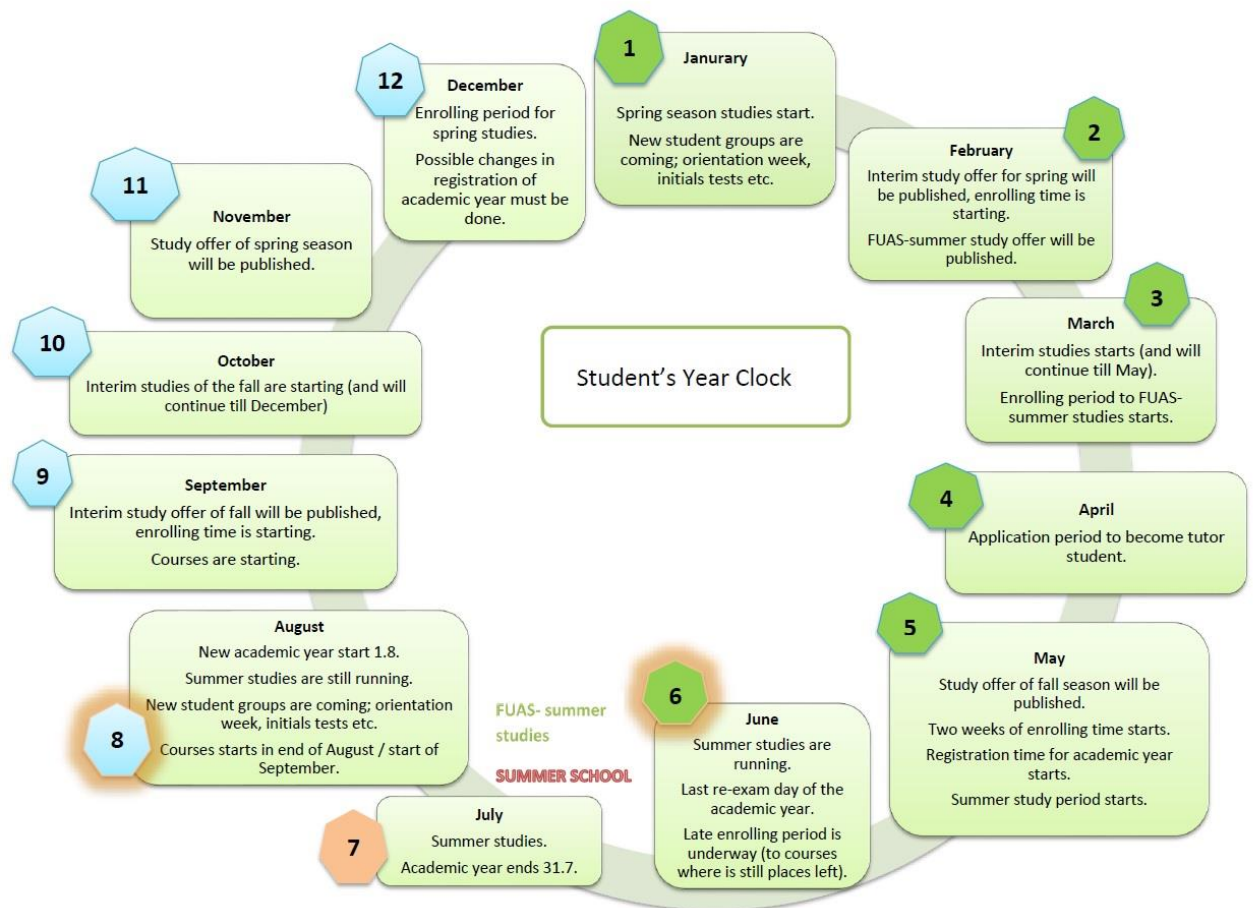
Figure 1: Student's Year Clock. Leppäniemi, 2016.

All professionals received their interview invitation approximately one month in advance. In each invitation, I explained what kind of research I was doing, the thesis topic and why she/he was chosen as an interviewee. Each interview was scheduled to last 90 minutes. Two weeks before their scheduled interview each person received a first version of the Student Year Clock picture (above). It describes the main time-sensitive

events and actions happening in academic year, particularly those that require specific communications. For example, in January the spring season begins and is one of two yearly student intakes when new students begin their studies. In May, the study offer for next autumn is published and a new enrolment period starts. At the same time registration for the next academic year is starting. This Student Year Clock has not been used in Laurea before but in interviews it got positive feedback, and I will come back to it in my analysis later in this study.

Interviewees also received instructions on how to prepare, as well as questions to consider in advance:

1. Which are your responsibilities in Laurea?
2. Which functions are those which are communicated to students?
3. Are they tied to the academic year schedule or featured on the Student Year Clock?
4. Are they recurring events, for example once each academic year or semester?

Questions were intended and designed to be relevant to each interviewee. Because the interviewees' roles, expertise and fields are diverse, I required simple, broad questions to allow each person's particular individual experiences to be captured. I spoke with each interviewee about their opinions, experiences and knowledge of student communication in Laurea. I collected data about key topics from each interviewee's field, and also the required scheduling times for when these topics need to be communicated to students. My original purpose was to collect data to detail all things needed to communicate to students, however the interviews produced much more detailed information than expected and allow the thesis to include much deeper analysis than I initially planned.

My research findings are presented in detail later in this paper but to summarize interviews, I feel I managed to successfully gather valid data with the interview method.

1.5 Ethics and privacy of data

All interviews were recorded as digital audio, with the knowledge and permission of all participants. During interviews I also took notes. Laurea as an organization typically has

an open communication style and every one of my eight interlocutors were comfortable to share their thoughts, knowledge and ideas.

Names of interviewees are not mentioned in my thesis. I state their titles because I the position is considered important as a sign of role in hierarchy or in management processes. On the basis of their positions, some interviewees have special knowledge about particular discussed topics and in those cases their title is provided to add weight and support the findings. All interviewees consented to their titles being used in this study.

As a privacy issue, this is not completely confidential. Anyone could find out who was in the mentioned role in Laurea at the time of these interviews but I do not anticipate this to be a significant or serious problem as participants understood and accepted this decision before answering the questions. The data collected in interviews isfocused more on content and message, than messenger, and are intended to describe current circumstances within Laurea. This thesis is an attempt to, for the first time, collect such feedback to make recommendations for improvements regarding best possible communication practices between Laurea and enrolled students.

It is worth noting that I work in Laurea and some of my tasks are related to student communication. However, the amount of these tasks is minor and I do not have a decision-maker role. While there is a risk that this may result in researcher bias, every effort has been made to ensure that all data captured from interviews is analyzed "as stated", and without any personal opinion influencing those results.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Internal communication refers to those messages delivered inside organization boundaries (Mazzei 2010, Greenberg 2011, Bharadwaj 2014, Mishra et al 2015). It creates a solid base of everyday business operations (Greenberg 2011, Bharadwaj 2014), and according to Bharadwaj (2014, 183.), it shapes the backbone of business. As Greenberg (2011, 321.) states, "it is vital because there can be no organizations without people communicating with one other". Internal communication is intended and required to provide all information that employees need to have to do their job (Mishra et al 2015). It is a very important tool for managers to use to identify, build up and preserve communication and relationship between employees and management (Chen 2008, Mishra et al 2014). These definitions provide a base to understand the content and intent of internal communication, and I use that foundation when presenting this thesis discussion of communication from University of Applied Sciences to its students. In this case, students can also be seen as stakeholders in the outcomes of the organization.

Communication inside of organizations is often a nextensive and multi-dimensional subject. It has continuously changed, influenced by technological advances and new organization structure models. In the history of humanity, communication has predominantly featured face-to-face interaction. Technological advances have changed interactions and new tools became an increasingly large and integral part of an organization's communication. Internal communication is an increasingly necessary function every day in every organization.

2.1 Strategic communication

Paul Argenti describes internal communication as strategic communication: when carefully planned and used correctly, it can change minds and increase commitment of employees or member of an organization (Bharadwaj 2014). Desmidt and George (2015) stated that the reason why strategy often fails is poor internal communication to an organizations' lower-level members, who are primarily responsible for implementing or executing the said strategy. I suggest that this should therefore be a key consideration that Laurea UAS should make when planning their communication to students. I also believe it is important to remember that internal communication is not an outsourced

function. Every single person in an organization is part of internal communication and has some kind of responsibility to contributing to effective internal communication (Mazzei 2010).

In times of change, communication becomes more and more important (Papadakis, 2005, Angwin, Mellahi, Gomes&Peter 2016). It is interesting to notice that the importance of clear communication is mentioned in many studies, and yet based on my personal experiences, it is often the first thing to be cut, and forgetten, when thing are changing –especially if the change is happening in a bad way. Papadakis, in his article (2005, 236.), studied the role of a broader context and communication program in merger and acquisition implementation success. Based on 72 different organizations, poor communication seems to be one of the reasons for failures for 50-75% of those organizations.

Angwin et al (2016, 2370) state that:

> "The discussion of communication in the merger and acquisitions literature is couched in broad terms such as 'open communication' and 'effective communication' and the rule of thumb is that more communication is better".

Clearly, communication programs are vital to the success of a merger and acquisition. The reason that I study cases of mergers is due to the Laurea UAS organizational changes that occurred at the start of 2014, and the fact that Laurea has seven campuses which all offer education. It is important to Laurea that communications and services be standard across each campus. It should not matter which campus a student attends, they should be presented with equal access to services, types of information and especially quality of information. In Laurea's strategy, it is intended that despite operating different campuses, Laurea services and operations be the same and uniform in nature everywhere. Papadakis also points out in his study (2005, 242) that information should reach everyone at the same time and often enough; he notes that "increased frequency of communication could also contribute to the creation of a common and clear vision".

Previous studies show that well-managed communication significantly improves the success rate of organizations operations and organizational changes. Successful internal communication prevents a variety of discontent, such as hostility or resentment and colleagues' alienation. (Papadakis, 2005, 250.) The weakness and the lack of communica-

tion can seriously affect a person's identification with the organization and it may adversely affect the performance of the organization (Angwin et al 2016, 2373). When questioning 47 companies post-merger in a Papadakis (2015) study, 45% responded that if given a chance to do things again, they would pay more attention to internal communication during the merger. I find these studies and findings interesting and relevant to my thesis topic. This could be seen as relevant in student communication too. I see that the first month(s) of studies are crucial – Laurea needs to create a communication program which works from the start and creates an environment that reinforces new students' comfort and commitment to Laurea. Each new student intake is a chance to make changes and improve communication management. Laurea should not make the mistakes of lack of communication as pointed out earlier by Angwin et al (2016).

Various studies have noted that internal communication has a growing role in members, and especially employees' engagement (Bharadwaj 2014, Desmidt & George 2015, Mishra et al 2015). I later examine studies that show how engagement is not only the business of organizations but also schools and universitiestoo. Students cannot be directly compared to employees, however they do share some similarities with shareholders. We can therefore expect that knowledge of how internal communication effects company-shareholder engagement can help us create better communication plans for students too. I examine this similarity in more detail later in this study.

Engagement has been defined in several ways and by several sources in Mishra et al´s (2015) article. Engaged employees are described as "feeling a strong emotional bond to their employer, recommending it to others and committing time and effort to help the organization succeed" (Quirke 2008 as cited in Mishra et al 2014:5) and Hewitt Associates (2009) describe "the measure of the employee's emotional and intellectual commitment to their organization and its success" (Mishra et al 2015). Committed employees are more likely to talk about their organizations in positive way and act more effectively every day to achieve the organization's goals. One survey by Mishra et al (2015) noted that the level of engagement of new employees typically starts high but it can drop in the first year and often fades completely after five years of service. This study points out how critical it is to commit employees to internal communication immediately as they start working and to maintain it with continuous, carefully planned internal communication activities. Front-line supervisors especially play a key role in actions of

maintaining employee engagement.. Because of apparent importance of these points, it is confusing that the effectiveness of internal communications is rarely measured. As many as "66% of internal communication practitioners did not have a measurement tool for assessing internal communication effectiveness" (Brahardwaj 2014, 184.)

Mishra et al (2015) remind us that internal communication involves both formal and informal communications across all levels of the organization. Members of an organization are its channel to deliver their branding, slogans and key messages in the public sphere. This is possible to do well if internal communication is working. The same thought process could also be applied to students enrolled in a university, that is, by improving communication channels and student satisfaction, students can later serve as ambassadors and marketers of the university brand.

2.2 Communication tools

Communication tools used in internal communication are multi-dimensional. They include the organization's intranet, newsletters (printed and electronic), some social media tools such as forums and blogs, live meetings and all types of printed materials (Mishra et al 2015). Men (2014) reminds us that phone calls, voice mails, video and audio are also included. Greenberg (2011) adds instant messaging as a tool for sending and receiving short messages, typically in small windows that open on our computer or telephone screens when receiving the message. Greenberg (2011) also says that when using multiple channels, communication become most effective however he is at the same time presenting media richness theory, which shows how the success of a good message also involves choosing the best way to deliver it. If you ever gave up writing an email and instead chose to telephone to deliver the same information, in order to give it priority, you know what Greenberg meant.

As important as knowing *what* to communicate to students, we need to decide *how* to deliver the message. According to Robinson et al (2011, 55.) in their studies of student communication preferences, "students do not necessarily wish to communicate for work and school purposes in the same ways they communicate socially". This study shows that despite the popularity of technology, students do prefer face to face communica-

tions over all other methods. Also, their preferred methods of communication in school or work are different than in social situations.

Table 1: Students' prefered communication methods (Robinson et al 2011, 57.)

Rank	Work/School communication	Social communication
1	Face to face	Face to face
2	Email	Telephone
3	Telephone	Sms texting
4	Chat	Facebook
5	Sms texting	Chat
6	Paper	Email
7	Facebook	Paper

While only five years old, this table is a bit dated given the advances in media. Newer technologies and innovations like WhatsApp messages may have changed opinions. There might also be quite significant differences in different countries. This survey was conducted in two countries and contains replies from 30 Norwegian college students and 41 American public university students. But what I think is important, is to notice that students use different communication tools for different purposes.

Scholars say that face-to-face is the best way to communicate (see Mishra et al 2015). According to Mishra et al (2015), face-to-face communication is considered more reliable than written communication because it provides greater information and/or because it includes all tones, voices and nonverbal features like body language and facial expressions. Men's (2014) study supports the previous thoughts: research from the middle of 1980s found that eminent features of effective communication included "immediate

feedback or interactivity, the use of verbal and nonverbal cues, natural language and personal focus" (Men 2014, 269.) These traits are all included in face-to-face meetings.

As has been suggested already several times in different content, face to face communication is considered the the richest method to communicate - it is usually identified as the most preferred option. However, when this is not possible, Robinson et al (2011, 59.) found "methods that were most preferred were those with the lowest perceived time to response."

When asking Ohio State University students how they would like their school to communicate to them the topics of their studies, e-mail was selected by 82%. It was clearly the most important, and preferred tool, for students. Social tools like Facebook, Twitter, etc. got less than 10% of replies. For general updates, 68.9% chose email and 33.7% chose the web, with the other modes of communication again being chosen by fewer than 10% of the students. (Robinson et al, 2011, 56).

In more recent years organizations have invested more money to create better tools and templates for internal organization communication (Bharadwaj 2014). This change is presumably triggered by research work which proves that internal communication may have effects on business growth (Bharadwaj 2014). Technological change and new developments have changed the landscape of communication. Several new channels have offered templates to process information quickly (Men 2014). In the same study, they include criticism that communication tool richness discriminates against persons based on their relative competence and skills with new media. As Young and Hinesly (2014, 429.) remind us, "some may not know how to use social media platforms, or may be reluctant to try new forms of technology". However the article of Sakal et als (2011) suggests otherwise; they comment that newer styles of using the internet do not require users to have extensive technological background or understanding. Based on my experience, I do agree with Young and Hinesly. Using new technological tools is easier for people who have the most experience with such technology and are therefore more comfortable with them. Older workers with limited experience with technological templates and tools are more likely to be stressed and will give up attempts to use them. This is certainly a challenge if one has an aging faculty.

Organizations have realized the value of social media to improve internal communications. When technological changes and new innovations are used in external communication and marketing, they will affect internal communication of organization (Young&Hinesly 2014). Use of social media has blurred the boundaries in communication hierarchies but it is still poorly integrated into the internal communication system of companies (Men 2014). Perhaps we should pay more attention to this, because according to Young and Hinesly (2014, 426) "when successfully implemented, such initiatives can have a dramatic impact on internal efficiency, team collaboration, innovation, organizational alignment, and cultural transformation." Organizations have seen possibilities and positive features, like efficiency, cohesion and collaboration, of social media. Between 2011 and 2012, organsations using at least one type of social media increased by 72%. Mostly social media (83%) was used in internal communication, secondly in communication with customers (74%) and thirdly with external partners (48%) (Young&Hinesly 2014).

But what are social media tools? According to sources, in this group belong video-conferences, social networks, collaborative document editing, blogs, video sharing, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), Wiki, microblogs and podcasts (Young&Hinesly 2014, 428.), listed here in order of most frequently used to least used. The key word to distinguish a one-way media tool from a social media tool is collaboration: a one-way media tool such as email broadcasts does not typically include the ability to provide real-time commentary and feedback.

Where in past the telephone revolutionized communication, today video is doing the same. When face-to-face meetings have proved the most effective way to communicate, it is no surprise that videos are "the next best thing" in situations when face-to-face meetings are not possible (Young&Henesly 2014). Bohannon et al (2012, 177.) said that "face-to-face communication is the richest medium that provides immediate feedback and conveys many cues in the form of natural language. Video-conferencing falls below face-to-face communication but above the telephone in terms of information richness." In the article of Bohannon et al (2012) they study and research the effectiveness of conversation when participants did not see but instead heard each other, compared to when they were both heard and seen through video. This research proved that efficiency of conversation was increased when participants could see each other. Video

tools – like most communication tools – can work in several ways. Posting video guides on websites is one way communication, asynchronous, and it is possible to do at any time. Opening a video meeting where each party can see the other, you are part of two way meeting which is also called synchronous and must necessarily be done at the same, specific time (Granda et al 2012). One of video's great features is that is is unchangeable. Spoken messages can – and usually do – change on their path inside an organization as they pass from person to person, video does not. Video delivers the same message each time. In Lehtinen's (2015) study employees appreciated direct messages from their managers, and evaluated this as more trusted information. That style of communication is easily done in large organizations via video tools and online distribution.

2.3 Net generation

"Net generation", "millennials", "generation Y"... the generation of today's higher education students have lot of labels and descriptions. In my thesis I am interested in studies that address their use of communication tools, for example, Kennedy et al (2007) in the article "The Net Generation are not big users of Web 2.0 technologies: preliminary findings" where they find that this new generation are maybe not the digital natives often described in literature. Millenials do use a number of digital tools but for different purposes than originally thought.

According to Kennedy et al, the "net generation" refers to persons born between years 1980-1994. In Lippincott (2012), he describes the net generation as born between years 1982-1991. Today's students in Laurea UAS most belong to this group, with fewer students born before 1980, and the youngest students born in 1997. For the purposes of this paper, I refer to all those student born after 1980 as "net generation". The study by Kennedy's et al. itself may be viewed by some as dated. The technological landscape and web-based tools and social media are changing so fast that nine years may mean dramatic changes in behavior and consumption patterns. I will keep that fact in mind when considering the findings of this article. The key point I think is important – and that will have not changed in these years – is the students' expectations, as Kennedy et al mentioned in their study: students do expect that technology will be an important part

of their education (Kennedy et al, 2007, 517.) And they use technology avidly in their life for social or academic purposes. That is why we should understand more about their technology usage habits – it is key to develop a good communication plan and engage students with it. (Lippincott, 2012, 538.)

"Web 2.0" is term a used in this study, and described as "referring to a loose collection of second generation web-based technologies and services, many of which are designed to facilitate collaboration and sharing between users" (Kennedy et al, 2007, 518.)

Students do not only consume information, they also create it. A leading writer in this area, Marc Prensky (2001) says that, "the brains of millennials actually work differently than those of individuals of earlier generations, as a result of their intense activity with video games and other digital media. This distinction results in their speed with technology, their multitasking capabilities, and their interest in interactive information products." (see Lippincott 2012, 540.) Today's students access and process information in different ways than previous generations. For example 98,5% of college students own a computer. 85,2% interact with Facebook or other social media (statistics from 2012 in Lippincott 2012, 540).

2.4 Communication effect on student engagement

Choice of communication method is not just about delivering messages, it also has a big impact on student engagement (Robinson et al 2011, Wahyu 2015). The study of Wahyu (2015) shows that "student engagement mediates the relationship between personality and communication as independent variables and satisfaction as the dependent variable" and that clear information and communication is a key to engaged students. And why is engagement important? Several researchers point out that engagement has a direct, positive effect on results which are in turn important to schools:

> Student engagement refers to enthusiasm, inspiration from study and a mental resilience when studying and has been shown to predict key outcomes such as grades and persistence and students' learning (see Qureshi, Wall, Humphries and Balani, 2015, 349.)

Engagement is not only manifest in companies but in schools and learning institutions too, and good communication leads to engagement – and engaged students will in turn be better motivated and produce better results. Studies show that students who are more engaged, indicate positive feelings and behavior patterns. (Wahyu, 2015). The consequences of the commitment has been studied in depth, but less so what is causing the commitment. Thus, it is difficult to encourage commitment or to make choices that support the process. (Quereshi et al, 2015, 349).

According to Wahyu (2015, 177), to get every member of the organization to develop internal communication is crucial to engagement process, because according to researchers, the willingness and ability to commit, and to achieve the goals set by the organization, is a unique emotional feeling. When students and faculty see the university communicating intensively and providing accurate information, it will increase their trust and confidence. Poorly-maintained communication has significant emotional consequences, which can be difficult to repair; distrust and discontent grows and, at worst, this can lead to personal crises and desire to leave the organization or community.

In words of Wahyu (2015, 184-185), learning satisfaction is an assessment of the students' academic and social processes are done for college.

In 2012, Reeve said:

> In the academic sector, engagement shows the active engagement of students in learning activities which also includes the engagement of the habits and behavior skills (concentration, attention, effort), emotional engagement which include motivations and feelings (interests and excitement in learning), and cognitive engagement that includes beliefs and values (the use of cutting-edge instructional strategies). (see Wahyu 2015, 185).

2.4.1 Communication and CRM

Communication has a strong relationship with customer relationship management (CRM) – and especially in the field of higher education where students can be thought of as customers or as stakeholders. CRM has been described as a strategic choice made by a company that aims for a larger number of customers, whereby they tailor their services to each customer, seeking to increase customer loyalty. According to Seeman and

O'Hara (2006, 24.), "as colleges increasingly embrace distance learning and e-business, CRM will become stronger and more pervasive". A person seeking higher education now has plenty of schools (physical and online) and options of where to study. There is high competition in education markets and that is increasingly changing the way Laurea will need to attract and retain students. All markets have changed a lot in past two decades. When customers have more options to choose from, markets are forced to change to be more customer-orientated.

In Finland almost all education is free, and the government pays financial aid to students. Tuitions starts to be charged from students outside of the European Union (EU) or European Economy Area (EEA) countries after 1.7.2017, and it is minimum 1500 euros per academic year. I think this is going to change and increase the competition between institutions. In my opinion, when we pay for something, we typically have higher expectations and the feeling that we have the right to claim better service and quality. As student satisfaction (as customers) becomes a more central and critical performance measure, good CRM can be big competitive edge.

The study of Grant and Anderson (2002) focusing less on technical detail and more on the benefits of said technology:

> A total of 75 percent of incoming traditional-age freshman have significant experience with information technology. This experience translates into higher student expectations regarding the available technology resources. Student expect technology to be an integral part of their entire educational process and anticipate a higher level of access to information. From the "student-as-customer" perspective, an educational CRM system would provide interaction with all the traditional student touch points – admission, registration, financial aid, etc. – through a single system that would facilitate a complete understanding of each student's unique situation. (see Seeman&O'Hara, 2006, 26.)

CRM could be a key contributor to Laurea's future success – especially as tuition becomes more market-oriented, and necessitates change in marketing and customer management. This thesis will now present the findings from the interviews and analyse these in light of the research problem and objectives of this study.

3 FINDINGS - CASE LAUREA UAS

In this chapter I present the contents of the interviews conducted in August 2016. I start by summarizing the general problems about information flow and communication management in Laurea. I then examine the two most discussed topics and problems from my interviews. It is significant that most interviewees mentioned, and limited their comments to, communication and information delivery in the initial study phase. They all emphasized it as one of the biggest areas which needs more careful planning and requires further development.

The second biggest topic highlighted in my interviews describes year-round studies and enrolments and clearly points out another significant problem Laurea has; the problem of conflicting information. While presenting the findings, I also include some recommendations suggested by participants as to how they think the communication strategy could be improved.

3.1 General problems in information flow and communication

Laurea's most recent significant organizational change was made in January 2014 when an effort was made to merge seven, largely independent campuses, each with their own processes and resources, to operate as one uniform, cohensive organization. Despite this process having completed almost three years ago, some campus cultures seem to retain old behaviours and routines – such as maintaining old habits regarding the delivery of campus-based information.

> Odds of errors increases because everyone continues to inform students in their own way (Director of Educational Process).

After eight interviews it is clear that one of the biggest problems is that different staff members do not know what information has been delivered to students. It would be impossible to always send all news (regardless of relevance or importance) directly to students and staff – everyone would drown in information. For some topics Laurea's communicators upload duplicate information to the employees' intraweb to announce what has been delivered to students. This flood of news, rapidly moves key information from the front page to newsletter archives where it is harder to find , as it is replaced by

newer, but potentially less important information. "Nice-to-know" information and crucial messages are announced and mixed in the same channel, where everyone can create content. No single staff member is responsible to check that important news is not drowned by the continuous less-important communication flow.

As such, Laurea does not seem to suffer a problem of lack of information. Rather, as Vice President (2016) summarized; "The role of communication professionals is often more to *reduce*, ratherthan *increase* information." Thus, an important task of Laurea staff is to filter only needed information to students, and to first consider if the students really require any particular piece of information. Is it enough if they know where to find the information when required? Official message channels do need to exist and always distribute carefully selected correct and up to date information.

Additionally, the style of communication was also discussed in the context of university funding and profitability. Interviewees were questioned regarding Laurea's communication style; does Laurea have too much inaccuracy or unnecessary information in its messages, and could Laurea achieve better results if it would give firmer calls to action instead of using more passive 'voice'. By better results I refer to the topic of university funding, as discussed with Vice President (2016). Study credits and enrolments influence the financing of higher education institutions by the Finnish goverment. A significant percent of the financing is derived from the number of students who complete more than 55 credits in each academic year. (Yliopistojen rahoitusmalli vuodesta 2013 alkaen). One obvious goal identified from these conversations is to improve student turnover and thereby increase funding and profitability. This could be achieved with proactive communication to alert students to complete courses they did not finish earlier in the current academic year.

A number of participants felt that responsibility of communication can, and should, be centralized to a few key persons. This would result in more standardized, formal messages from Laurea to its students. Currently, those interfaces where teachers and students meet and share information, like classes or online study bases are typically closed environments, and as a result other staff rarely know what information has been presented there, and so duplication or contradictory messages can occur.

It was agreed that formal instructions regarding student enrolments, and more general university operations, must not be defined per teacher, campus or education stream – instead standardized communication is required to mitigate the problem of confusing or creating mixed messages. Instead, a few spoke of the need to create a "uniform Laurea", a base standard. Other areas of university life, such as course-specific information, may add extra tailor-made information, giving more specific details or supplementary advice by being creative - and the combination of both base format and custom elements should produce the best possible results.

> We can not afford this [to do overlapping work]. If staff [headcount] is reduced, we need to look at the work. Things need to be done but not in this way. Duplication of work is the key point that we need to reduce.

> This is managerial work. It should be dealt with specifically by each team responsible for that job (Direct of Education Process 2016).

The head of Student Affairs (2016) and colleagues have good insight into students' problems, worries and thoughts. These professionals become involved when things are not going smoothly and when students have problems coping with their studies. That is why it is important to understand the different target groups for Laurea's messages. Target groups are often formed by the students themselves but the school can also have an effect; for instance Open University students are a different group to degree students and beginners are different to graduating students. English degree students are usually foreign students and typically seek more personal contact. They usually want to meet personally when they have problems and questions. Laurea also has students who are doing studies with other academic groups, for example accelerated learning path, jumping from course to course and doing studies with other groups than their "own group".

> This (information) can not be built just for our basic group (Head of Student Affairs 2016).

Special groups seem to cause most of the work in each office. Head of Student Affairs Administration (2016) pointed out the experience-based statement of "10-90 rule"; 10% of the students are causing the biggest work in offices and 90% of students require little additional effort, operating successfully with base material and instructions.

So-called "hand washing culture", as one interviewee labelled it, was also identified as a problem. This has two sides. Firstly, it could refer to several issues which need to be communicated, yet seem to be no-one's clear responsibility and are subsequently over-looked. Secondly, in contrast, occasionally there is an excess of persons delivering messages to "cover theirselves", as supported by the Vice President's (2016) comment:

> Do we really want to serve the student and her/his needs or is it more that we are making sure that if our superior or colleague asks whether we have informed about something, we can say 'yes, we have'? I think that is the big question in whole student communication.

This is described in more detail in a later section where conflicting communication is a big problem.

3.2 Communication at the start of the studies

As mentioned, the starting phase of a student's studies was one of the most discussed topics in interviews. I examine this phase in detail because of the critical importance of successfully communicating with, and engaging students during the start of their studies, and because of the flow-on effect to later phases. Solutions to challenges at this stage are often applied to subsequent challenges as well.

3.2.1 Admission

Descriptions of the start of studies took several shapes in interviews. The most clear was the moment when a new student commences studies in Laurea. Laurea has two intake periods; the end of August and the start of January. In 2017, Laurea has 1870 study places open to apply, and 1690 of them are in degree programs (Laurean tutkintojen aloituspaikkapäätös 2017, 2015).

The process of communication to new incoming students is an example of standardized electronic communication which takes the following form:

1. After application period, entrance exam and results Laurea receives a list of students who are accepted to Laurea. That is the moment when the student receives their first message: a notification of selection. This message is sent by studyinfo.fi which is "the official and up-to-date website with all the information about

study programs leading to a degree in Finland" maintained by the Finnish National Board of Education (Studyinfo 2016).

2. In addition to this, Laurea's Admission Office send their own message announcing results to all chosen students. This e-mail message is short and contains links and an invitation to view more information from Laurea's website "Information for new students". This website contains a collection of data and information that is required by new students. It provides a simple channel to deliver standardized information to each new student, as well as special information which depends on which campus the student was accepted into. A standardized message, equal and same for all new students is presented on the front page, and particular campus or education dependent information can be found from campus-specific pages.

Communication from the Admission Office has increasingly shifted to digital formats, and students no longer receive thick envelopes to confirm acceptance of their enrolment applications. All information to new students is delivered in e-mails and through this one website.

> It can be surprise [to new students] that they won't get any letter delivered to their home. Everything is working electronically. (Head of Admission Office 2016).

Communication and content of messages are revised so as to improve every semester, and student questions from earlier years help guide this improvement process. The following cases provide good examples of adjustments to Laurea's student communications and demonstration of its continual updates and improvements. In August 2016 new students for the first time had the chance to see their study schedules for the entire semester before school actually started. This modification got positive feedback and reduced the number of questions Laurea Admission Office typically receives regarding study schedules and contact days. Likewise, the process of issuing user identification and student accounts to new students changed for the better. Students can now register their accounts and receive their student number three days before the official starting day, as opposed to in past when the process involved waiting for studies to commence and physically visiting an application office. This improvement has greatly reduced workload and streamlined the starting phase of the studies in campuses. One student of-

fice reported that only a handful from hundreds of new students did not perform their code activation in advance.

From this, it can be seen that in the context of student admissions, issues in communication do not appear to be a problem of missing message content or their delivery. Rather, as Head of Admission Services (2016) points out:

> When we receive feedback that they (new student) did not receive any information and then we ask if she/he received the message, they typically respond "Yes". [When we ask:] "Well did you read it?" [They reply:] "No." … That kind of feedback we sometimes get. But most [of the new students] get our information, understand it, and we won't hear from them. Everything is just fine.

In this case, there are two challenges to address; first, some new students do not read information they receive. This problem also continues later in the study path; i.e. students not reading Laurea messages. The second problem for Admission Office is that they do not get timely information from campuses. The Admission Office do not create the content of messages by themselves, but rather ask the information from campuses and Heads of Student Affairs, who are responsible for this process of delivering information on time to Admission Office. Heads of Student Affairs are usually neither the persons who produce nor hold the information, they too are often "middlemen", and take the role of coordinators in the process of gathering and delivering study communications. Ultimately, if information is not delivered before a specified deadline to Admission Office, they in turn cannot send that on time to new students. The period from the delivery of the selection letter to the students' first day in school typically six weeks at a minimum and should in theory allow sufficient time to provide detailed communication, but complications caused by waiting lists and delayed acceptance mean the process is often not straight forward or easy. Head of Admission Office (2016) adds that this is why often so much administrative work and study guidance steps are rushed in the final two weeks before studies start:

> There is a reason and it is because we do not have information about all students before. The waiting list officially ends in the middle of August. That is nationwide rule.

A student is officially Laurea's after this waiting period, which is ending around two weeks before studies starts. However, the interviewees pointed out that this creates confusion around the question; who is responsible for students at that time, and when does

this responsibility begin? When does Admission Office's responsibility end and the following units start? Currently, no-one seems clear and the "hand washing culture" described earlier may start already at this stage.

The Head of Student Affairs' unit works very closely with students. They answer questions before studies start and deal with a variety of problem-solving cases during studies. In this interview the importance of the time between being informed of a study place and the actual starting day was noted:

> Process would work better, if it would be less anticipatory (Head of Student Affairs 2016).

A study-oriented applicant will often search for a lot of information between receiving an acceptance letter and their first day of studies. The Head of Student Affairs sees this as the time when Laurea should be able to serve students more effectively. In particular, during the January intake this is critical, because time is significantly shorter from selection letter to the first study day than in August.

3.2.2 Student orientation

The first week of studies is called orientation week. Orientation week traditionally involves the delivery of a lot of information – possibly too much; programs of the week are planned so that they include information about broad topics including studies, student financial aid, student health care, student union membership, and so on. Initial tests to establish students' skills in languages and maths are also usually placed in first week, even if some of them are not topical until some much later date. In interviews, the concept of overload of information came up many times:

> Information overflow needs to be avoided. Presently, during orientation weeks we are explaining all the possible things [regarding study and university operations] and after we won't talk about them anymore. (Head of Student Affairs Administration, 2016)

Well planned communication management needs to address this problem.

> Information delivery must be scheduled to fit the right time of the student's learning path. (Head of Student Affairs Administration, 2016)

According to participants, Laurea has started a process to address this problem of information overload. Laurea's Service Coordinator is leading a new induction letter se-

ries which is meant to help students navigate the information flow during their first weeks. These induction letters will give information in smaller installments and be delivered to new, inexperienced students before the school starts. Communication tools and channels were also discussed, and video tools or even audio recording were seen as new tools to deliver messages in this process.

Besides those inexperienced incoming school-leaving students, other categories also exist. Those include transfer students who are changing their campus or school. Likewise, when students take a leave of absence, should they be considered to be present students or instead, possible, and hopefully, returning students? And if the absence has been longer than one term, are they in the group of "other new starters" as described below?

One interviewee explained that students who are returning from longer absence, like maternity leave, conscription or longer sick leave, should be also treated like new students. Lots of things may been changed since they were last actively studying. The interviewee called this an "early support model".

3.2.3 Communication for students enrolling outside normal intake times

The concept of fixed study semesters have been changing so that there are studies offered and enrolling time almost continually throughout the year. In the past, study semesters had been divided into two semesters: autumn and spring. As summer studies have become more and more popular and availability increased, a third semester has became commonplace. Now students of Laurea can choose from wide range of summer studies. A additionally Professional Summer School, FUAS-studies, summersemester.fi. Green Card and mid-term studies all offer virtual studies at the half way point of the spring and autumn semesters.

As a result, a student can enroll to study more or less continuously, with a wide range of courses available year-round. This creates a significant need for continual communication. Visualization offers a simple way to educate students as to the availability of year-round education opportunities. Some participants believed that the suggested Year Clock of Study would be a valuable tool for everyone from teachers to student offices and as part of online web communications.

> What (studies) and when is offered – how would information be available in best possible way? (Director of Education Process, 2016).

Study offers are already a big topic to be communicated. Here I note that the problems are mostly in overlaps in messages; contents and instructions. Staff members whose career with Laurea began prior to 2013, i.e. before the recent organizational change, occasionally retain old habits and behaviors. For example, during interviews, it was mentioned that study offer and enrolling time can be communicated by as many as four or more different persons or units, in a mixed combination of both formal and informal messages.

> Why are student offices informing students [about study offers]? The student office is not part of the process. Old habits are still living. When processes are changing, functions are changing, but old habits are still living. This was student office's task in year zero. (Director of Education Process, 2016).

Personalized tasks, with clear lines of responsibility, are easier to handle and result in less ambiguity. In the Open UAS and FUAS summer studies unit of Laurea one person is in charge of studies – and responsible for the related communications of them. This sole point of responsibility reduces duplication of communication, and avoids conflicting and contradictory messages, and ultimately prevents the types of confusion and uncertainty seen in other units with less clearly defined communication roles and responsibilities.

3.2.4 Registration phase

The next phase was seen as a good example of where standardized and focused communication has helped Laurea's processes. In this case, one unit takes care of every message's content and delivery. I, note however, that it is ultimately still in each students' responsibility to take a key role in ensuring the success of message flow.

Registration for the academic year is done once per year and takes place in early summer and continues until middle of August. Registration needs to be done even if student subsequently decides not to do any studies. During registration, the student will declare whether she/he is going to be present or absent. Neglecting to register results in that student losing their study entitlement. They can apply to have their entitlement restored but this process must be paid for and this part of the process causes lot of unnecessary, labor-intensive work. By clearly communicating registration requirements, and describ-

ing the process and consequences of failing to complete the process, Laurea can aim to greatly reduce instances of lost entitlements, and the resulting workload.

The path of communication of this process follows these steps (Head of Student Affairs Administration, 2016):

1. First a general message to everyone in students' intraweb.
2. Several weeks before the registration deadline deliver a personal e-mail for students who have not reacted in any way yet.
3. Close to deadline, a second personal e-mail for students who still have not registered for academic year.
4. If students miss these chances, their case will be moved to Heads of Student Affairs in their respective campuses.

The interviewee described common problems that upset this otherwise generally successful process. First of all, they questioedn whether e-mail is the right tool to deliver messages. The respondent suggested that a text message would work better because students are not reading school's e-mails during summer, and the personal e-mail addresses that students give for school information are often old or not even working. A second problem seems to be some misunderstanding of the importance of the message. Even when the message is written in such a way that it states "You have not been signed up yet", students still seem to feel that it does not apply directly to them.

3.3 The role of Student Union in student communication

The student union Laureamko plays a big role in students' everyday life. The student union represents the interests of all Laurea students; including quality of education and student welfare (Laureamko 2016). The student union also has an important role in Laurea's wide education development group, which has a big decision making role in every field of education, including student communication, says Vice President of Education and Regional Development (2016). The education development group, together with the student union, may pick topics and campaign together to make changes or raise visibility for key topics. For example, in autumn 2015, there was a success feedback campaign regarding study quality, which was decided together but marketed and communicated "in students' voices" by Laureamko.

The positive impact of these communications can be seen for instance in the starting phase of study. Laureamko has a webpage for new students where they deliver information about topics like student cards, student life culture, parties and provide links to social networks like Facebook. Student union has "Laureamko week" which is during the first study week and feature several union events.

During later phases of studies Laureamko continues to deliver a wide range of different messages. Of most interest were their methods, and I think Laurea could learn valuable insights from Laureamko by studying these methods. For instance Laureamko has a webchat which is available weekdays, from Monday to Thursday 9-16 and on Fridays 9-12. The President (2016) says that via the chat channel, students can get answers on a range of questions about difficulties in studies, study cards etc. The President sees this as support service of Laurea, not just a Student Union service. Laureamko also make so called "triangles", paper newsletters folded as triangles on lunch canteen tables. Current and interesting things are mentioned briefly and new triangles appear roughly monthly.

Laureamko is a great help to Laurea when it comes to communication flow. Laureamko has campaigns which remind students to enroll for the academic year or studies, give feedback etc. However, there is still the challenge of too many parties communicating different versions of the same information. The Head of Student Affairs Administration (2016) described how the most crowded period in student offices is the first week of semester, especially in August when each new academic year starts. Most of the students need discount cards and forms for public transportation or lunch discounts. Some of this workload could be reduced with an appropriate message from the two units working together, as the student union membership card replaces the need to complete all these forms. Some students do not want to pay for student discount card and membership but it is highly possible some of the students simply do not know that they do not need any other forms if they have a student union card. This is a good example where increased cooperation with the student union could be a big help to Laurea's processes' and improved performance when providing services.

4 ANALYSIS

After interviews, one thing became very clear: the need to standardize the communication is crucial. As the Vice President (2016) stated, standardized communications will set the "Laurea level", base standard, and it must determine the minimum level of communication management in order to ensure information quality. Everything that is done in campuses after that, should support this base message, adding something extra or specific to that campus, and therefore give better service. Campuses can still have their own campaigns, tutor teachers can still run helping clinics and tutoring hours or send messages to their own groups, but Laurea has to have someone, person or team, who is the so-called liability carrier.

My analysis includes four main topics I see as the crucial factors to create better student communication in Laurea UAS. These factors are centralized communication, visualizing the message, the right timing and directive communication style. These will be discussed in more detail below.

4.1 Centralized communication

4.1.1 Key person to manage student communication

Based on the findings and theory, especially those studies referred to in chapter 2.1, it is my suggestion that Laurea should have a single, key person to be in charge of student managing communication. In a university of applied sciences, with 8000 students and seven campuses it is surprising that the need to examine and unify communication has not been decided sooner. Duplication of work and information was highlighted in interviews, and I would argue that the situation can be improved with one key person in charge of that work. That person would be aware of all messages delivered to students and be able to avoid duplication, and would serve as a single point of contact when other staff members are unsure whether or not a particular message or information has previously been delivered.

This key person should work closely with Education and Regional Development, Admission Services, Student Affairs and the Marketing and Communication teams. They

should know Laurea's strategy and all communication distributed should follow and adhere to Laurea's vision.

Another reason why I suggest one key person is so that they could filter information streams, and distinguish between 'nice-to-know' and 'necessary' information. To combat information overload Laurea has to focus on what is really important and be sure that crucial information is delivered and made available as a priority.

Such a change would take time, and in this case, increase university costs by one person's salary, however I strongly believe it would be a worthwhile investment. Providing the ability to harmonize the content, location, delivery and quality of core university-related information will result in better student satisfaction and ultimately performance or graduation rates.

4.1.2 One main channel of communication

Laurea is using two intrawebs – one for staff (Intra), and one for students (LINK). These should be the main internal communication channels. Overlaps exist, and based on my experience and close work with teachers, I know that information is also delivered on the e-learning platform, e-mails, Facebook pages etc. I do not see this use of multiple platforms itself as a problem if it is done well, and I explain why in the following sections.

The LINK pages have prompted good feedback from students, according to the Formal President of Student Union, who sees and handles that information. However, as with any information distribution channel, efforts should be made to steer students to this resource when they have questions, and the use of competing communication channels (such as email lists) must be used carefully so as to not detract from the perception of LINK as an authoritative source. There should always be one main channel, in this case LINK, and others would simply support it. As theoretical background showed in chapter 2.2., when given the choice of communication tools, students rated emails as their second most preferred option after face to face meetings. I therefore believe e-mail contact is justified, but should always contain links and guide students to LINK to view the most up to date information. In additional, all such official information should be presented in formal pages written and maintained by a publicly named professional so as to

clearly identify the person responsible. This ability to identify responsibility is a crucial issue for management to be aware of communicational decisions and actions of the organization.

This suggestion of one main channel corresponds to one of the main concerns expressed by Laurea's Vice President, who raised on a number of occasions the students' need to know where to look information as they need it. Laurea has already done a great job creating and launching the platform to provide and centralize this information. In future, the important work is to keep the LINK content always updated and relevant, renew information, and most importantly, guide information seekers to this page.

4.2 Visualizing the message

Visualizing the message came to light in several interview discussions. Video is seen as a new tool which would be a more effective and modern way to communicate than the predominantly text formats currently used. My literature review supports this idea, for instance in Young and Hinesly's (2014) study (see chapter 2.2), where they suggest that videos are "the next best thing" in situations when face-to-face meetings are not possible. Immutability is one of the best features of video as a communication tool. Laurea is a dual language organization where all material is (or at least should be) produced in Finnish and English. This might be one reason why videos are not yet a commonly-used tool in (student) communication in Laurea. Native Finnish speakers are often hesitant to produce content in English, despite it being desirable that the subject matter expert be the same person producing educational material. But visualizing can, and should, involve more than only video. Laurea could produce images and diagrams to present topics (such as time-critical events) in a simple format. At a glance, a student could grasp the basic knowledge of the topic. This visualization techique has been used successfully in cases that I have encountered in my work tasks. More detailed information could of course be provided as textual or other formats.

As an example of this technique, several years ago the business education unit at Laurea provided a notebook which explained the whole education plan and the different methods of teaching that they used. Each notebook included the picture seen below:
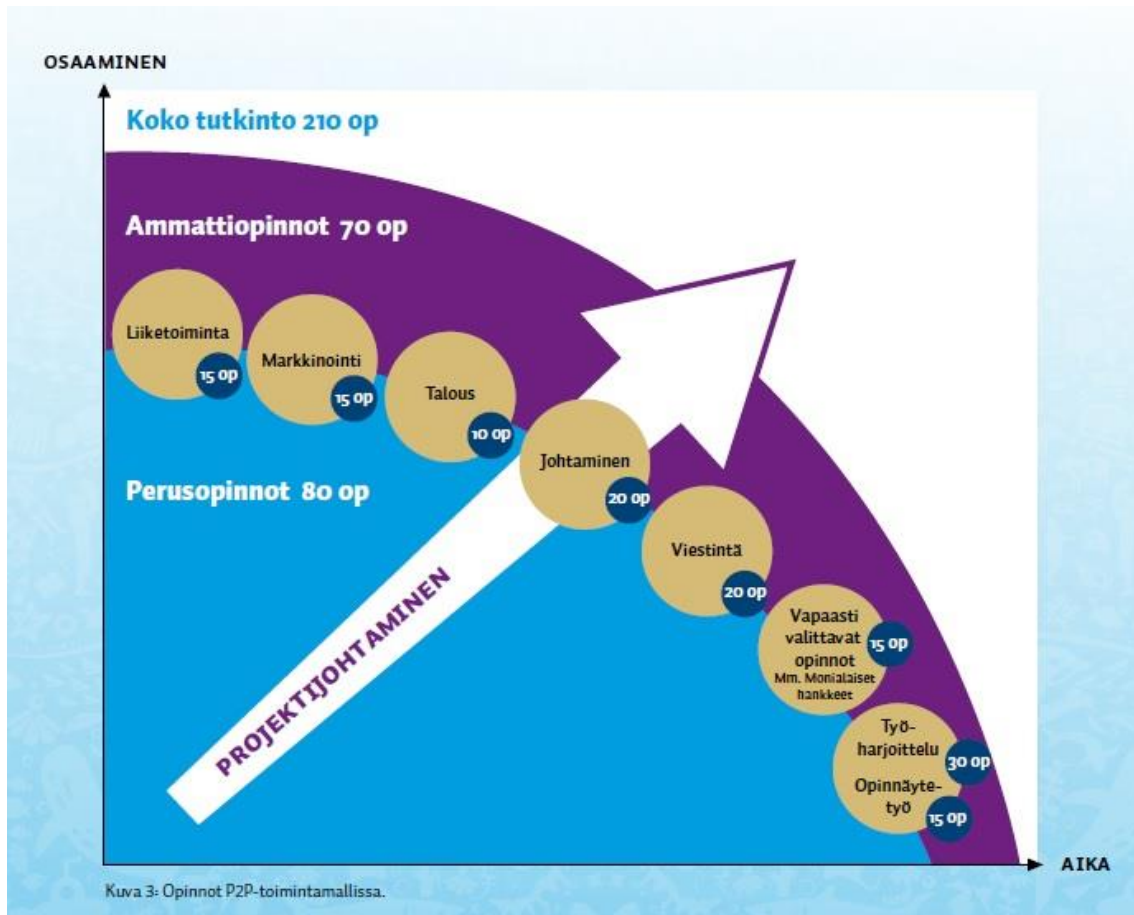
Figure 2: Peer to Peer study methos and content of studies. (P2P Approach 2009.)

This Peer to Peer project management study method was implemented in 2009 and this notebook was made to explain study method to students. It describes the basic studies (blue), worth 80 credits, which include the top five beige circles describing the fields of study, for example, marketing and finance, and stating how much credit students need to achieve in each field. In addition, these student can chose elective studies worth 15 credits. The last circle includes internships worth 30 credits and a thesis for 15 credits. In addition to these student will choose 70 credits (purple) of professional studies in any field(s). Together these will be 210 credits, what is required in Bachelor of Business Administration degree. Now, in 2016, this picture is outdated, but when it was current, it was a proven example of visualized message that worked.

As recently as 2013-2015 when working with business students, I used this diagram to illustrate their curriculum. It helped students to plan their studies and me to guide them when the most asked question was "Do I have all the compulsory studies I need to grad-

uate?" This image contains the equivalent of several pages of text format information – and suggests that visualisation is an approach Laurea should apply more in communication to students. Visualization requires filtering of information and extracting essential points. It meets the challenge the Vice President posed about reducing information load at the start of chapter 3.

4.3 The right timing

Timing of the communication was raised in discussions from several different perspectives. Mostly it was seen as a problem during commencement of studies in orientation week, when students often experience information overload. This problem is recognized at the management level and some of the recommended improvements have been already started. Standardized communication should be restructured to withhold or delay non-critical information until such time as it becomes relevant. This would see, for example, that students do not receive information about reexamination procedures until they approach the time of their first exams.

Orientation week was not the only case where timing of communication could be improvedAt the close of the academic year, by using active campaigns to prompt students to complete any outstanding courses, Laurea could increase the rate of graduation, and as a consequence, profitability. These campaigns must be delivered with sufficient notice to allow students time to sign up for reexamination and complete outstanding requirements. Such communication could be expected to raise the number of graduating students in spring, before the end of academic year. According to the Head of Student Affairs (2016), some students who are supposed to graduate before summer holidays, are too late in their submissions and they need to apply for a grace period so as to graduate in August. This is not common but every case causes unnecessary extra work. Early and proactive communication could help mitigate some of the problem. My recommendation is to include notices and descriptions of the graduation process in spring season newsletters which would be sent to students who have enough credits so that their graduation seems possible and likely.

4.4 Directive communication style: Calls to action

Finally, I recommend that communication style should be more directive, such as calls to action instead of softly worded questions and proposals. Rather than asking if students want to graduate, Laurea should instead adjust tone and give clear instructions on what to do so that they would graduate. As suggested previously, a graduation newsletter would be of great help and may influence students to be more proactive.

Critically, Laurea has to ensure it does not place obstacles of their own making in the way of this process. Currently, there is one re-examination day per month in each campus, regardless of progress through the academic year. One possible improvement would be to provide special re-examination days "to complete your unfinished courses". These actions would relate to and support other business considerations, like the requirement for 55 credit points per academic year to trigger additional government funding. The month of May could be promoted as a key re-examination month to expressly allow students to finish courses and complete required credits before summer. I suggest these kind of campaigns be created and implemented. In this way, Laurea would be better positioned to achieve its goals – both financial and educational - demonstrating flexibility towards students while creating high motivating energy to complete studies. Finally, it would signal their commitment and dedication to student-centered communication and ultimately, educational success.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The inspiration for this study arose from my personal interest in the topics of internal communication and student communication. As I am currently working in Laurea UAS, it was natural to seek a thesis topic relevant to this organization. An organizational lack of equal and standardized communication is a problem with which I am already familiar, as a result of my experience working in within Laurea in areas of organization-student interfaces for over three years. Laurea's management were interested to hear suggestions and recommendations regarding standardized student communication.

This study's research question is; what are the best communication techniques for Laurea University of Applied Sciences to manage and deliver the most effective student communication to students? To establish the required theoretical background I focuse mostly on studies on internal communication as well as its importance to engagement, and managing communication. My studies of student communication and communication tool usag habits of the "net generation" provide a the student perspective to the topic.

The aim of the study was to discover the main problems in managing communication processes and to design effective solutions to those problems. In eight interviews I establish the main problems in process: they are uncertainty about liabilities, conflicting communication and information overload. I present the most frequently discussed topics as my case studies - admission, student orientation and enrolment - as good examples of the main problems in Laurea's processes.

The need for standardized communication became obvious and apparent as I began to collect my data, and the more I researched, the more urgent and important this change of approach seemed. Laurea's most recent significant organizational change in 2014 has not been successful in the perspective of student communication. Some campus cultures seem to retain old behaviours and routines – such as maintaining old habits regarding the delivery of campus-based information. I strongly suggest dedication to change, and offer solutions in my analysis. There I point out and suggest improvements to the four

most important topics: centralized communication, visualizing the message, the right timing and a directive communication style.

Some of these changes are easily implemented, for example making the style of communication be directive, simply by editing existing materials to change tone and language. Other changes would be wider-reaching and require more planning and effort. With regards to centralized communication I recommend that there be one key person to manage student communication. This would require Laurea to hire and name this key person to manage this process, assigning them clear responsibility and providing all other staff with a single point of contact. While this would mean an additional staff member and initial cost increase, this approach has already been utilized within certain organizational units on a smaller scale, and proven to be highly successful. For example, all communication related to registration for the academic year is handled solely by the Head of Student Affairs Administration. The positive outcome has been that there is no conflicting information released around this topic, and both staff and students have more clarity around the process. By applying the similar approach across the organization we could expect similat improvements. I see centralized responsibility as an essential change to the organization. As the number of students and variations in their study backgrounds increases and becomes more and more heterogeneous, I see it as important that one professional must know all processes and take responsibility for all communication. Laurea needs to create a base level, or standard, of student communication which guarantees unified information to all students. The current situation whereby some messages are delivered per campus, some as a uniform message from management, and some either both or neither, can not be considered as a sustainable or acceptable solution.

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APPENDICES

Figures

Tables