



Elevating employee experience through improved People & Culture communication practices

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Abstract

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<p>Employee experience is an increasingly crucial factor for organisations that wish to achieve strong results, and successful communication with employees is a prerequisite for organisational performance.</p> <p>This thesis studies the ways in which internal communication implemented by an organisation's People & Culture function can support building a positive employee experience. Its aim is to explore how internal communication produced by the People & Culture department is defined, which internal communication practices currently exist in the commissioning organisation and what kind of improvements can be adopted to enhance employee experience.</p> <p>The thesis was commissioned in May 2023 by Borealis Polymers Oy to support the improvement of employee experience in the organisation. It focuses on elevating employee experience specifically through means of internal communication implemented by the People & Culture function, and as such does not explore internal communication conducted by other departments.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the thesis explores internal communication and its implementation as well as employee experience and methods for its development. Additionally, the impact of internal communication on employee experience is studied.</p> <p>The development-oriented research was conducted as a case study with an online questionnaire and ideation workshop chosen as data collection methods, implemented in March and April 2024 respectively. The results are examined through thematic analysis and further cultivated into actionable suggestions for development. The proposed improvements to internal communication are distinguished between novel methods to be adopted and changes or upgrades to existing practices to be implemented. As a tangible outcome of the study, an action list to support the actualisation of development suggestions is produced.</p> <p>The thesis concludes with an evaluation of the study, reflection on practical implementation and suggestions for future research.</p>
Keywords Internal communication, employee experience, People & Culture

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to study the ways in which internal communication, specifically that implemented by the People & Culture function, could help improve employee experience. The thesis is development oriented and focuses on exploring both the as-is status of internal communication implemented by the People & Culture department of the commissioning organisation as well as the ideal to-be scenario. As a result, the thesis offers improvement suggestions to help cultivate a more positive employee experience through impactful internal communication.

This thesis builds on an internal study of employee experience conducted within the commissioning organisation in 2023. While the study itself did not directly explore the employees' thoughts on the success of internal communication or its impact on their experience of working within the organisation, it did produce insights around specific areas where the expectations of employees had not been met by the organisation. This thesis considers the possibility that the employees' experiences related to such areas could be improved by providing more (or different) information around those particular topics and/or by modifying, for example, the method, timing, channels or content of communication implemented by the People & Culture function. The thesis therefore aims to determine how the People & Culture function could support the development of a more positive employee experience within the organisation by optimising their communication practices.

The relevance of the thesis relates to the need of the commissioning organisation to cultivate an enhanced employee experience by ensuring its personnel are successfully and systematically informed about and involved in topics that impact them. Specifically, the thesis is designed to support the organisation in improving the internal communication implemented by its People & Culture function in ways that facilitate positive perceptions and reactions from the organisation's personnel. As such, the thesis closely examines the relation between internal communication and employee experience.

1.1 Objective and research questions

In exploring the impact of internal communication on employee experience, and by providing concrete improvement suggestions for internal communication produced by the People & Culture function, the objective of the thesis is to support the enhancement of employee experience at the commissioning organisation. The thesis is specific to the internal communication practices implemented by the People & Culture function, and as such does not aim to discuss all internal communication of the organisation nor that implemented by the respective Communication department – though some of the development proposals may also be applicable outside of the People & Culture department.

The following research questions are determined to help achieve the objective of the thesis:

Q1. How is internal communication defined or framed when implemented by the People & Culture function?

Q2. What are the current practices of internal communication carried out by the People & Culture function?

Q3. What changes or developments are needed to ensure enhanced employee experience?

The first research question supports the objective of the thesis by enabling a more thorough analysis of what is understood by internal communication in the context of this research, and by consequence, what is considered out of scope – i.e. internal communication implemented by those outside of the People & Culture function. In turn, the second question draws focus on what kind of internal communication practices currently exist, while the third research question aligns with the objective of the thesis by exploring what could be done in terms of changes or improvements to help facilitate an elevated employee experience. These questions serve as a baseline for designing the research itself. While chapter 4 offers more insight into development methods and design, it is worth indicating here that the chosen methods of data collection are in alignment with the research questions: a qualitative questionnaire is composed to help distinguish internal communication as a concept when implemented by People & Culture, and an ideation workshop is designed to support the examination of communication practices in detail.

1.2 Commissioning organisation

This development-oriented thesis is commissioned by Borealis Polymers Oy. Specifically, the research efforts focus on supporting the company's People & Culture function (formerly Human Resources) – a team of 9 professionals, at the time of research.

Borealis Polymers Oy is part of the global Borealis group that produces polyolefins and base chemicals and is a leader in polyolefins recycling. Borealis group employs approximately 6000 employees worldwide and is headquartered in Vienna, Austria. The company is owned by Austria-based OMV (75 %) and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, or ADNOC, based in the United Arab Emirates (25 %). Borealis operates in over 120 countries. (Borealis 2024a.) In Finland, Borealis' production plants and offices are located in Kilpilahti, Porvoo. Borealis Polymers Oy employs around 900 people. (Borealis 2024b.)

2 Internal communication

2.1 Definition

Corporate communication is the management function responsible for creating and cultivating relationships with those stakeholders that the organisation depends on economically and socially (Cornelissen 2020, 16). Corporate communication encompasses areas such as community, media and investor relations; public affairs; marketing; and internal communication (Cornelissen 2020, 27).

Internal communication comprises various kinds of communication, both formal and informal, that occur internally at all levels of the organisation (Men & Bowen 2017, 4). Cornelissen (2020, 287) suggests that internal communication refers to all the methods an organisation uses to communicate with its employees. Internal communication is often understood to be synonymous with 'staff communication', 'employee communication', 'employee relations' and 'internal relations' (Cornelissen 2020, 176; Men & Bowen 2017, 1). As stated by Men and Bowen (2017, 18), "Internal communication informs, acculturates, and connects stakeholders and plays an essential role in building relationships, employee identification, and internal communities".

Internal communication can also be referred to as 'workplace communication', which not only encompasses the entire work community, but notes that communication also takes place on forums that extend 1) outside the workplace and 2) into networks where members of the workplace communicate (Juholin 2017, 118). Workplace communication takes place constantly and everywhere – it is not restricted within geographic borders or office hours, nor can it be controlled by the organisation. Rather, trust must be placed in the judgement and morals of the members of the workplace. (Juholin 2017, 120.)

Internal communication can be further separated into two categories: management communication, which refers to communication between a manager and their subordinates, and corporate information and communication systems (CICS), which relay organisation-wide decisions and advancements to all employees through technologies and communication systems (Cornelissen 2020, 177). Alternatively, internal communication can be examined from a more strategic perspective, where the fundamental objectives of communication are that work is progressing, people feel well and the work community is thriving. Strategic internal communication should have a purpose, direction and goals. (Juholin 2017, 121.) According to Juholin (2017, 121-127), there are four dimensions to strategic internal communication (figure 1):

- Clear fact-based information sharing, so that employees can accrue and share knowledge.
- Responsible dialogue, to boost employee engagement through a sense of meaningful work.

- Conducted discussion, for employees to understand and make sense of things.
- Building a sense of community, to foster employee commitment and belonging.

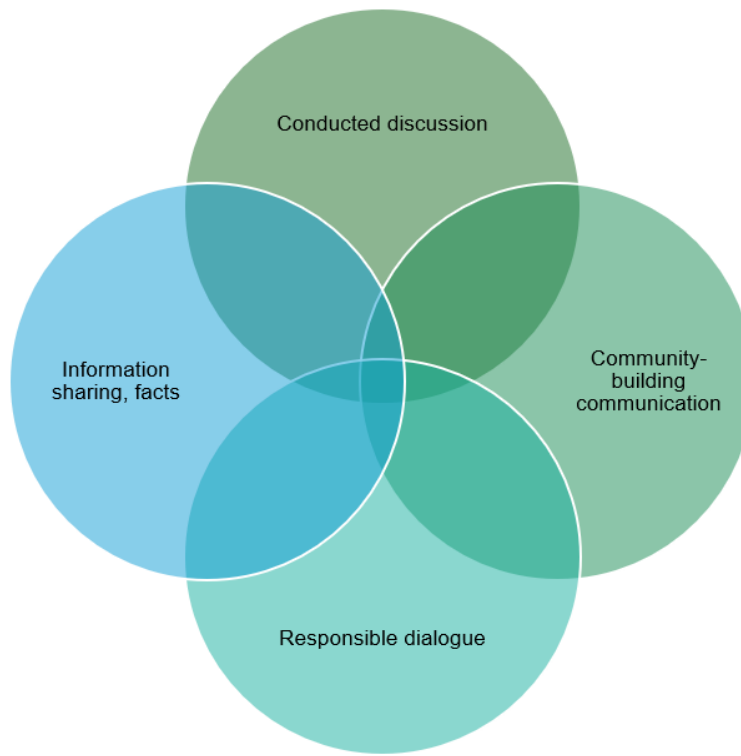


Figure 1. Visual representation of the four dimensions of strategic internal communication (adapted from Juholin 2017, 122)

2.2 Implementation: why and how

The reach and impact of internal communication is notable. Juholin (2017, 35) argues that when clear metrics, resources, goals and strategies are in place, the communication between members of the workplace plays a crucial part in securing results, occupational wellbeing and development. Positive, constructive interaction between people is one of the biggest assets of any organisation, and one that will support the organisation even in difficult times (Juholin 2017, 49).

According to Cornelissen (2020, 175), an organisation embraces diverse strategies for communicating with its employees in order to encourage employees' creativity, meet their individual needs and influence them to behave in ways that meet the organisation's ambition. Successful internal communication is a combination of both downward communication (informing employees of organisational topics) and upward communication (information flow from the employees towards their managers) (Cornelissen 2020, 178-179).

Benefits to effective internal communication include more efficient employee management, improved group dynamics, and the opportunity to foster a knowledge organisation (Cowan 2017, 24-26). Notably, technological advancements have obscured the boundaries between internal and external communication: messages intended for internal audiences can easily be shared outside the organisation, for example through employees' social media profiles (Cornelissen 2020, 176).

According to Mikkola and Valo (2020, 9), the culture of a workplace is established and illustrated in communication. Conversely, communication can also change workplace culture. Interactivity is a highly valued aspect of communication, and advocating interpersonal relations as well as enabling ample opportunity to participate in interactions seemingly support well-functioning workplace communication. However, simply "communicating more" – i.e. building up the frequency of communication – is not the key to enhancing a workplace. It is rather the quality of communication that counts. (Mikkola & Valo 2020, 10.)

Internal communication can be implemented through a number of channels, namely digital, print, in-person and sporadic (Thornton, Mansi, Carramenha & Cappellano 2019, 188-190). Another way to categorise channels is to distinguish between formal and informal channels. Formal channels enable the organisation to govern the subject matter and circulation: examples include websites, newsletters and brochures. In contrast, informal channels – such as discussion forums and blogs – allow for less control but facilitate conversations and empower employees to contribute to the content. (Men & Bowen 2017, 77.)

As pointed out by Men and Bowen (2017, 88), it is crucial to consider the preferences and needs of the workforce when choosing the appropriate channels for internal communication. Other important considerations according to Men and Bowen (2017, 89-91) include:

- The objectives of the sender: what purpose does this message serve, and does it fit the dynamics of the channel?
- Attributes of the message: what is the tone, length, and level of formality or complexity of the message?
- Attributes of the channel: what skills does the channel require, and what kind of signal does it convey?
- Characteristics of the receiver: what are the needs of the employees taking into consideration, for example, their age, occupation, values, education level and channel access?

Cornelissen (2020, 123-124) points out that communication campaigns and programmes should be implemented based on set goals that have been clearly defined. In determining the objectives, practitioners can make use of the SMART principle: goals should strive to be specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and timely. Specificity refers to explicitly indicating what the communication

strives to accomplish. Objectives also need to be such that practitioners can measure whether they are being met. Goals need to be attainable and realistic considering the resources available. Finally, the time frame in which the objectives need to be reached should also be indicated. (Cornelissen 2020, 123-124.)

2.3 Roles and responsibilities

Juholin (2017, 131) argues that the question about who communicates is irrelevant, since everyone at a workplace must and can communicate. Nevertheless, different roles and responsibilities may be assigned or assumed based on, for example, one's expertise.

The act of communicating belonging to everyone within the organisation still necessitates skilled communication professionals to design, conduct and measure communication (Juholin 2017, 59). While the responsibility for communication ultimately falls on senior management, they can delegate this responsibility further within the organisation – for example to a Head of Communications or the Communications department, who plan, coordinate, lead and implement communication throughout the organisation. Responsibilities may also be delegated to a Marketing department or the People & Culture function. (Juholin 2017, 87.)

According to Cornelissen (2020, 177), responsibility for corporate information and communication systems (CICS) is often assumed by the organisation's communications department. Communications department and the People & Culture (or Human Resources) function are close to one another, notes Juholin (2017, 54), since topics such as organisational culture, occupational wellbeing and strategy processes constitute core areas for both. Employer brand and onboarding may be natural areas for collaboration, and any changes concerning the entire workplace will demand close cooperation between both Communications and People & Culture professionals (Juholin 2017, 54).

3 Employee experience

3.1 Definition

Employee experience refers to an employee's feelings and thoughts – related to the work itself, the work environment and the organisation as an employer – that are formed in the interactions between the employee and employer. Employee experience can be observed as the overall assessment of all interactions, or through separate work related moments. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2022, 120-121.)

Employee experience is not to be confused with, for example, employee engagement or talent management – it is far greater in scope. Employee experience can be defined as the total amount of impressions that employees have about their interactions with the organisation they are employed by. Notably, employee experience may not be a direct result of what has actually happened, but rather the employee's impression of it. Employee experience is therefore the sum of the expectations, experiences as well as perceptions of the employee. (Maylett & Wride 2017, subchapter Defining the Employee Experience.)

Morgan and Goldsmith (2017, subchapter Employee Experience) add: "From the perspective of the organization, employee experience is what is designed and created for employees, or put another way, it's what the organization believes the employee reality should be like." This viewpoint takes note of the potential disconnect between the employee experience perceived by the employee, and that identified by the organisation. Morgan and Goldsmith (2017, subchapter Employee Experience) hence proceed to interpret employee experience as the overlap between the employee's anticipations, requirements and desires and the organisational architecture of those anticipations, requirements and desires. (Figure 2.)

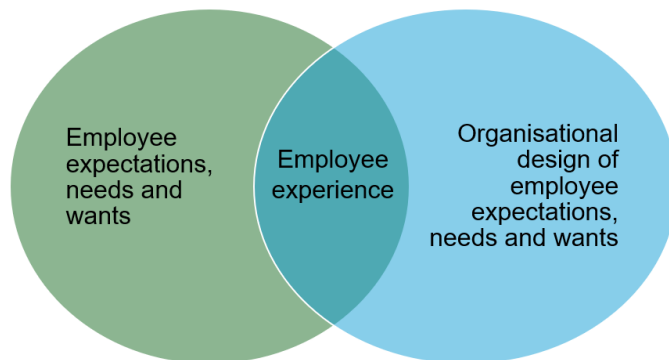


Figure 2. Visual representation of employee experience (adapted from Morgan & Goldsmith 2017, subchapter Employee Experience)

In developing employee experience, the intention is to improve the overall assessment by focusing on select, individual moments of interaction. The development of employee experience aims at creating added value for employees. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2022, 121.) As explained by Huhta and Myllyntaus (2022, 121-124), this value is typically materialised in four ways:

- Job satisfaction, wellbeing and engagement of employees.
- Distinction from other employers and competitors.
- Business advantage.
- Effectiveness in organisational development.

3.2 Development: why and how

“People are not assets nor are they resources; they are living, breathing human beings with incredible potential” (Whitter 2019, 172).

Experiences at work shape how employees feel and what they think about their employer. Experiences also impact employee behaviour. Organisations ought to therefore acknowledge the power of experiences and assume an active role in building them. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2022, 137.)

An experience consists of three stages, namely anticipation, participation and reflection. The depth of experiences can be examined by distinguishing five levels of experiences based on their significance: everyday, conscious, memorable, meaningful and revolutionary. Notably, all levels of experiences exist in work environments. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2022, 138-146.)

As proposed by Huhta and Myllyntaus (2022, 153), employee experience development comprises eight steps (figure 3). The first step is understanding the strategy of the organisation. Business needs together with the strategy serve as a starting point for employee experience development; after all, the implementation of a strategy calls for a particular kind of employee experience. Step two involves creating a framework for employee experience by outlining how exactly employee experience is understood by the organisation, ensuring sufficient comprehension of the concept. Thirdly, the as-is state is to be reviewed. This includes investigating not only the demands of the strategy but also what aspects are perceived to be important by the employees, and the current statuses of these two perspectives. Next, an employee experience strategy is defined, including the desired state, responsibilities and decisions to be taken. Based on this, an operating model for employee understanding can be established. This will involve outlining with what frequency and which tools the organisation intends to gather information about the experiences of its employees and the topics that matter to them. Step six is to develop employee-centric leadership within the organisation, as changes in the ways of leadership – such as valuing employees and carefully

listening to their needs – are a crucial part of becoming more employee-centric. The next step is to design processes for employee experience development. This can be done once the desired state has been clarified and functioning metrics for monitoring progress have been established. Ambitious employee experience development work will cover all three levels of development (organisation, process and team). Finally, step eight calls for a repeat of the entire process to identify new needs or changes and ensure continuous improvement. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2022, 152-155.)

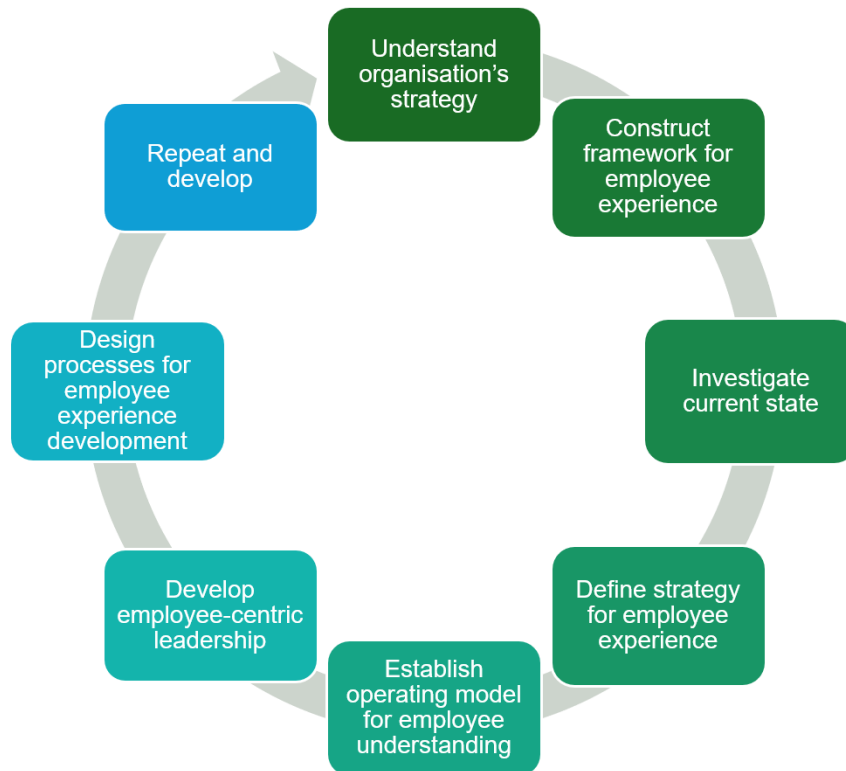


Figure 3. Visual representation of the eight steps of employee experience development (adapted from Huhta & Myllyntaus 2022, 153)

Employee experience is a crucial consideration for organisations as a sense of belonging can have a notable impact on results. Additionally, technological advancements and changing organisations mean expectation management is increasingly important. Keeping promises leads to building respect and trust – aspects that are fundamental for a positive employee experience. (Whitter 2019, 22-23.)

An employee experience strategy should be the pinnacle of input, activities and notions from across the organisation. If done well, the strategy sets the organisation up for success. While People & Culture (Human Resources) professionals together with managers are the facilitators and architects of employee experience, it should be co-created with employees. Adequate consideration

should be given to differentiation: how does the organisation's employee experience stand out from the competitors? (Whitter 2019, 77-140.)

For employers, the significance of understanding the needs of employees will be emphasized in the coming 15 years as baby boomers reach retirement age: due to the ever-increasing competition over employees, the most successful organisations will be the ones people want to work for (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 17). In addition to changing demographics, the war for talent is being fed by a skills gap, talent shortage, turbulent business environment and organisations having to compete for talent across all industries and on a global scale (Morgan & Goldsmith 2017, subchapter The War for Talent).

3.3 Connection between employee experience and internal communication

3.3.1 Building suitable messages

"An open and positive tone will help to create trust and reliability between HR and the rest of the organization" (Mulkeen 2008, 42).

Employees experience their workplaces through social interaction. These interactions are framed by their context, which in turn is established through – among other factors – the employees' perception of the organisation and its purpose. (Mikkola & Valo 2020, 54.) Social interactions reinforce the shared values, beliefs and practices of the organisation which build and strengthen organisational culture (Juholin 2017, 49).

An organisation's performance is dependent on successful communication with its employees. Effective, habitual communication with employees is associated with employee productivity and commitment, as well as their work performance and satisfaction. (Cornelissen 2020, 176.) Mulkeen (2008, 43) argues that a team of People & Culture (HR) professionals can better position itself to develop internal communication across the entire organisation as well as boost its own credibility by communicating in a thorough, accurate, transparent and straightforward manner. Using understandable language, ensuring the information is correct and concise, considering the tone and channel of communication, knowing the audience and making use of statistics, visuals, humour or directness accordingly are all relevant factors for consideration when implementing internal communication (Mulkeen 2008, 42-43).

Dialogue – a process in which both the organisation and employee mutually engage in an exchange of ideas and opinions – has been found to be an important aspect of internal communication (Lemon 2019, 185-186; Cornelissen 2020, 283). Both dialogue and formal internal communication have valuable, positive contributions to employee engagement, i.e. the emotional

commitment an employee has to their organisation and its objectives (Lemon 2019, 185; Forbes 2012). As Lemon (2019, 185-187) points out, successful dialogue calls for active listening while face-to-face communication in turn enables participants to witness the commitment to the conversation.

As stated by Men and Bowen (2017, 121), a symmetrical communication system – one that fosters two-way information flow – is employee-centric and highlights reciprocity, employee participation and empowerment, listening, inclusion and feedback. Adopting such a system facilitates the employees to develop a lasting, dedicated, content and trusting connection to the organisation (Men & Bowen 2017, 121). Symmetrical communication has also been found to contribute to the development of a positive emotional culture in an organisation (Men & Yue 2019, 170).

Organisational identification – the perception of belongingness to and defining oneself on the basis of an organisation – is notably impacted by internal communication. In case of downward communication, when the transmitted information is perceived as reliable and adequate, organisational identification is enhanced. Organisational identification can also be elevated with upward communication, by ensuring employees feel listened to and involved in decision making. Establishing a balance between downward and upward communication is key: organisations must make sure employees are well informed while providing opportunities to speak up, feel heard and get involved. (Cornelissen 2020, 180.)

Organisations should communicate in ways that involve listening and building relations while displaying care and support. A positive exchange between organisation and employee begins with well-timed, fitting, enlightening communication. (Tkalac Verčič & Men 2023, chapter Discussion.) According to Men and Yue (2019, 171), communicating in a responsive manner also fosters a positive emotional culture within the organisation.

3.3.2 Understanding employees

In order for the organisation to better understand and engage with its internal audience, the characteristics of its workforce ought to be considered (Men & Bowen 2017, 31). Today's workforce is tech-savvy, global, multi-generational and diverse. Employees also tend to place greater value on their work-life balance. Not all employees are similar, however, and when striving for excellence in internal communication, organisations should aim for a comprehensive understanding of its workers. (Men & Bowen 2017, 31-35.)

A generation can be defined as a group of individuals most of whom are approximately the same age and share similar ideologies, problems, attitudes as well as historical or social experiences (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 21). Expectations, attitudes and values related to work can differ

between generations. For example, baby boomers typically work long hours and have meritorious, loyal careers; members of generation X traditionally have a higher education level and are more output-focused in their work than baby boomers; millennials (generation Y and Z) expect their work to be meaningful, motivating, gratifying and supportive of their development; while the lives of generation A members are surrounded by technology from the moment they are born, and the continued advancements in technology will create entirely new jobs for the members of this generation. (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 32-45.)

Generational differences may also cause conflicts in the workplace – representatives of older generations may feel that their younger counterparts lack appreciation for traditional values, while younger colleagues might consider their elders to not have kept up with the times (Mellanen & Mellanen 2020, 28). Considering how many aspects in the work environment could potentially be experienced or interpreted differently due to generational differences, it seems reasonable to assume internal communication practices may also be viewed in varying ways by each generation.

Understanding the organisation's employees and their wants is important – but this should be accomplished without being insincere or invasive (Cowan 2017, 106). According to Cowan (2017, 123), a crucial dimension of internal communication is emotional management. "Emotional management means understanding that in difficult situations employees manage their emotions by seeking affirmation from others in order to stabilize their sense of the event that has caused an emotional rupture" (Cowan 2017, 123). Supportive internal communication bears many benefits for employees; social support not only impacts quality of work, but also boosts learning and fortifies motivation, satisfaction and commitment to work. Social support can be divided into three categories: instrumental, emotional and informational. Emotional support, which refers to allowing employees the opportunity to share their feelings and obtain psychological distance from their emotional reactions to stressful situations, together with informational support – equipping employees in need of support with relevant advice – stem exclusively from social interaction. (Mikkola & Valo 2020, 149-153.)

Internal communication should aim to express to employees what the organisation can offer them. A comprehensive communication strategy includes presenting the organisation as an appealing employer that offers development, social and interest value. Development value refers to the organisation offering its employees possibilities for individual and professional growth; social value consists of opportunities for cultivating relationships and connections; and interest value alludes to the organisation providing a stimulating, creative and productive work environment. (Tkalac Verčič & Men 2023, chapter Discussion.)

Improving the quality of internal communication enhances employee motivation. Communication transparency can be boosted by establishing a solid balance between the organisation's use of mediated and interpersonal channels (Men, Neill, Yue & Verghese 2022, chapter Discussion and Conclusion). Men (2014, chapter Discussion) indicated employees feel more content with the organisation when their managers utilised more face-to-face channels for communication. In addition, it seems today's employees favour obtaining information from the organisation – about changes, events, arrangements and procedures – through email as well as face-to-face channels. In comparison, print channels are less preferred. (Men 2014, chapter Discussion.)

4 Research and development methods

This chapter outlines the research approach and chosen methods for data collection and analysis, while providing a more in-depth explanation of the planning and implementation of data collection activities.

4.1 Research approach

While there are several research approaches that may fit the purpose and objective of this development-oriented thesis, the most appropriate one is case study. With its inquisitive nature, a case study aims to produce improvement suggestions to a specific problem. The focus of a case study is an in-depth understanding of the target – whether an organisation, a product or a process – in its operational environment. Through this detailed, newly produced knowledge, it is then possible to support development and offer suggestions for improvement. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 3.2.) This approach is fitting for the development task in question, since the objective is to improve specifically the organisation's People & Culture driven internal communication to cultivate a better employee experience. By carefully studying the subject matter through relevant literature and appropriate data collection methods, it is possible to accumulate in-depth knowledge and form an understanding of internal communication implemented by the People & Culture function, as well as propose ideas and offer development suggestions on how to improve this communication to facilitate an enhanced employee experience.

4.2 Methods of data collection

As data collection methods, the research utilises a qualitative questionnaire as well as an ideation workshop.

Questionnaires enable relatively fast data collection and can be implemented in many ways (online, face-to-face or mail). Questionnaires can concern various subjects and phenomena as long as there is adequate initial information available about the chosen topic. It is crucial that the questions included in a questionnaire align with the objectives of the study at hand. The explicitness of these questions, as well as the length and layout of the questionnaire should be carefully considered to encourage responses. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.4.) For the purposes of this study, an online questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions is chosen as a data collection method as it will yield qualitative data useful for both the research itself and planning the ideation workshop to follow.

In turn, the ideation workshop (i.e. brainstorming session) encourages the People & Culture team to work together to generate additional data. Brainstorming entails a group of people coming

together and producing novel ideas or solutions with the help of a facilitator. Brainstorming principles include not judging the ideas of others, valuing the quantity of ideas over their quality, and developing each other's ideas further. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.7.) This data production method will be beneficial to the development task as it allows the People & Culture team to freely ideate new innovative ways of internal communication, while creating a sense of involvement in and ownership of the topic from the start.

4.2.1 Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was designed to collect qualitative data for the research and provide a baseline for planning the ideation workshop to follow. The questionnaire consisted of the four open-ended questions listed below. For space-saving purposes, 'People & Culture' was abbreviated to 'P&C' in the questionnaire.

Question 1: Systematic internal communication (=directed towards personnel) is implemented within our organisation by other parties in addition to P&C. Which or what kind of internal communication do you feel P&C is specifically responsible for?

Question 2: In your opinion, which or what kind of internal communication falls outside of the responsibility of P&C?

Question 3: Consider the internal communication implemented by P&C thus far, and how successful you perceive it to have been. Within the internal communication implemented by P&C, what is currently working well?

Question 4: What is not working within the internal communication implemented by P&C, or what should be improved in your opinion?

These questions were designed based on the objectives of the thesis and the research questions outlined in chapter 1. Specifically, the first two questions relate to the definition of internal communication when implemented by the People & Culture function (supporting research question number one), while questions three and four explore the current practices by outlining what aspects of internal communication are perceived as functioning well or needing improvement (aligning with research questions two and three).

The questionnaire was created using MS Forms. Each question was mandatory to answer for the completion of the questionnaire. The online questionnaire was sent out to the target group which incorporated the most relevant subject matter experts – in other words, the People & Culture team and the Communications Specialist of the commissioning organisation, making the total number of

invitees ten. As the target group consisted of Finnish speakers only, the questionnaire was conducted in Finnish. The questionnaire included a foreword that outlined what the questionnaire was about and when it would close, and explained the anonymity of responses and how they would be utilised. The questionnaire in its original form is presented in appendix 1, while the English translation is shown in appendix 2.

An email including the questionnaire link and cover letter (adapted from the questionnaire foreword) was sent out to the target group on 18 March 2024, eighteen days before the workshop. The questionnaire was active for four days, during which time one email reminder was sent to the target group. The invitees were asked to respond to the questionnaire regardless of their ability to attend (or not attend) the upcoming workshop. Sufficient time for the researcher to study the questionnaire responses before designing and implementing the ideation workshop was ensured by having the questionnaire close on 22 March 2024, two weeks before the planned workshop date.

4.2.2 Workshop

An ideation workshop was planned for the same target group who was invited to participate in the online questionnaire. The workshop was to serve as a brainstorming session designed to yield rich qualitative data for the research, while further engaging the People & Culture team with – and encouraging ownership of – the topic. The workshop was run under the theme of ‘Elevating employee experience through internal communication implemented by People & Culture’. As the topic is closely related to the work of every invitee, the workshop was organised at the premises of the commissioning organisation during work hours.

The workshop was facilitated by the researcher. As such, a facilitator is not a participant of the workshop, but instead plans, implements and makes assessment of the session. The facilitator is responsible for explaining the purpose and flow of the workshop to participants, observing the ideation work, supporting the group and, if necessary, guiding the conversation back on track to ensure the goal of the workshop is kept in mind. To cultivate an atmosphere of free ideation and creativity the facilitator ensures that ideas are not evaluated, criticised or dismissed during the session (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.7). Importantly, the facilitator does not partake in the ideation exercises but remains an observer who refrains from disclosing or promoting their own ideas. The role of the facilitator was explained to the workshop participants at the beginning of the session to avoid any confusion.

An overview of the workshop schedule is provided in appendix 3. The session began with an introduction to the workshop itself – why it takes place, how it will run and what the role of the facilitator is. This was followed by a presentation on the subject matter: outlining the background and

arguments for the research, providing context and framing for the most important terminology (namely 'employee experience' and 'internal communication') and offering a summary of the questionnaire results. The purpose of this was to ensure everyone shares a common understanding of the topic while simultaneously laying grounds for ideation.

The introductory part of the workshop was followed up by the first ideation exercise. It focused on the content of internal communication by asking, on one hand, what kind of topics would the personnel want to know about, and on the other, what topics People & Culture could tell them about. The exercise made use of the *idea walking method*, where everyone not only shares as many of their own ideas as possible, but also views and examines each other's ideas in order to come up with new ones and further develop existing ones (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.7). This was done with the help of post-it notes and a large brown paper in a prominent place in the room. Participants were encouraged to ideate in ways that suit them best: individually or with others, in silent contemplation or through discussions, by reading, writing or asking questions. All ideas were noted down and added onto the brown paper, which participants were encouraged to examine to acquaint themselves with the ideas of others.

The second exercise moved on from the content of communication (the "what") to explore the channels, schedules, roles and responsibilities as well as tone of communication (the "how"). This exercise mimicked, to an extent, the *learning café* or *world café method*: participants are divided into groups, sitting at their own tables. All groups produce ideas around the same topic, but each group adopts a specific viewpoint. Ideas are noted down on paper, and after a while, groups switch to the next table to continue ideation, now from a fresh viewpoint. This results in a number of ideas generated from various viewpoints. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.7.) The method facilitates relevant discussions that are fully in the hands of the participants, about issues they consider significant. While participants take charge of examining and deliberating the topics, facilitators offer directions and organise the space to enable a welcoming, relaxed atmosphere. (Hyper Island Toolbox s.a.). Due to the number of participants and the variety of aspects to be discussed in this exercise, the method was slightly modified. Participants were split into two groups, both of which were given a unique viewpoint. One group was assigned the perspective of People & Culture professionals, while the other group ideated from the point of view of employees. The viewpoint of the group remained unchanged throughout the exercise. What changed, however, were the topics of ideation: one group started by focusing on the channels of communication and the related schedules, while the other group began generating ideas around the tone of communication as well as the relevant roles and responsibilities. Halfway through the exercise, groups switched tables in order to exchange topics, but their unique viewpoints remained. This way ideas were ultimately produced on all aspects by both groups, and hence from two relevant viewpoints. Thoughts

and discussions were noted down in the form of mind maps on large pieces of paper, and upon switching tables, groups continued building on each other's mind maps from their own perspectives.

For the purposes of cultivating creative flow and free ideation, the facilitator reminded participants not to restrict their thinking by focusing on what is attainable or realistic with current resources, but rather to envision an ideal scenario where internal communication could be implemented in whatever way they wished. To further support ideation during both exercises, the facilitator placed various prompts around the room for participants to easily refer to. These include printouts of selected highlights from the results of the previous internal study on employee experience, a list of helpful tips for ideation built into the presentation material and copies of Osborn's checklist to support new ways of thinking. The Osborn checklist (figure 3) is a tool that helps bring about novel ideas even when discussing a familiar topic (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.7).

Can it be adapted?	Can it be modified?
Can it be magnified?	Can it be minimized?
Can it be put to other uses?	Can it be substituted?
Can it be rearranged?	Can it be reversed?

Figure 4. Visual representation of Osborn's checklist (adapted from Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.7)

To further promote open ideation, a relaxed environment was created through atmospheric means such as music and a selection of snacks. The workshop ended with a brief description of how the thesis research would continue and when the participants could expect further information and conclusions to be shared.

RSVP invitations to the workshop were sent to the target group well in advance: on 1 March 2024, five weeks before the workshop date. This allowed the invitees to make any necessary

adjustments or preparations to ensure attendance on the day. An additional welcome message containing further information regarding practicalities (such as what to bring and where to meet) was sent on 4 April 2024, one day before the workshop, to those invitees who had confirmed their attendance. The workshop took place as planned on 5 April 2024.

4.3 Methods of data analysis

As the data collected through both the questionnaire and the workshop is qualitative it is analysed through qualitative methods. The chosen method is thematic analysis, where patterns and themes are drawn from the gathered data – by e.g. clustering, pattern-finding, counting or making comparisons – and assessed critically. (Moilanen, Ojasalo & Ritalahti 2022, subchapter 4.5.) This data analysis method allows for common themes or patterns to emerge, enabling a better interpretation of the data. This in turn facilitates drawing accurate conclusions and offering appropriate improvement suggestions to the commissioning organisation.

5 Results of questionnaire

The aims of the questionnaire were to clarify firstly how internal communication is understood when implemented by the People & Culture function, secondly what kind of communication practices currently exist, and thirdly in what ways these practices could be modified or improved to facilitate a more positive employee experience. Ten people were invited to respond to the questionnaire, and in total, eight responses were received. This can be considered a sufficient number of responses to regard the data as representative of the target group. The collected data is outlined in the subchapters below.

5.1 Topics of communication in scope (Question 1)

The first question asked respondents specifically which (or what kind of) internal communication they feel the People & Culture function to be responsible for. Translated responses are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Responses to question 1 translated

Q1: Systematic internal communication (=directed towards personnel) is implemented within our organisation by other parties in addition to P&C. Which or what kind of internal communication do you feel P&C is specifically responsible for?
Payroll administration topics (delivery schedules for materials, tax cards etc.), recruitments, employer branding, changes in responsibilities within P&C.
Topics that impact the whole personnel and content that applies to line manager work, which is in our area of responsibility. Even if a topic applies to the entire personnel, it might not be our responsibility, e.g. IT or HSE topics.
Personnel matters (e.g. salary increases, annual holidays, taxes), recruitment related topics (e.g. summer recruitment), employer branding, keeping line managers updated, trainings, organisational changes/appointments.
Personnel topics.
Communication that is regarding topics primarily under P&C responsibility, such as CLA topics, payroll and reward, P&C tools, performance reviews etc.
Personnel benefits and changes to them, new people, people leaving the company.
Personnel matters that apply to the whole personnel, such as salary increases, system updates, topical issues, occupational wellbeing, etc.
Various practical personnel topics, related to e.g. salaries, holidays. Training and development related matters, employer brand. Training and sharing information with line managers.

The responses demonstrated consensus around the following themes and topics as 'belonging' to People & Culture, and therefore within the team's area of responsibility to communicate about: topics that apply to the entire personnel (e.g. salaries and payroll, annual leave, collective labour agreements, performance reviews and personnel benefits); recruitment and employer brand; training and development; changes in roles and responsibilities within the People & Culture team;

organisational changes within the company, appointments, newcomers and leavers; and tools and systems provided to the personnel by People & Culture.

It was also pointed out that some of the themes People & Culture is responsible for communicating don't necessarily apply to all personnel: an example of this was communication directed specifically to line managers. In other words, not all internal communication implemented by People & Culture concerns the personnel as a whole, but rather a certain group of people within the organisation. Similarly, there may be some themes or topics that apply to the entire personnel, but do not fall under the responsibility of People & Culture – for example, IT (information technology) and HSE (health, safety and environment) related topics.

5.2 Topics of communication out of scope (Question 2)

The second question explored internal communication from a contrasting perspective, asking respondents which (or what kind of) internal communication they deem to fall outside the responsibility of People & Culture. Answers are translated and listed in table 2.

Table 2. Responses to question 2 translated

Q2: In your opinion, which or what kind of internal communication falls outside of the responsibility of P&C?
HSE topics, financials, production related/operative issues, sustainability topics.
For example IT and HSE topics do not belong to us, wellbeing is a shared topic with HSE, related to which more cooperation could be done with them.
Financial topics, safety, generic group-level information.
All other topics besides personnel topics.
Communication related to matters which are under the primary responsibility of someone other than P&C.
General Porvoo location relevant information/changes.
Safety related, certain HSE topics, communication with certain stakeholders should be done by them e.g. equality, but of course P&C can affect and bring the message forward and could be in our interest to do so.
Strategic matters, investments, crisis communication (although it has aspects related to personnel and their families) related to Borealis or Borealis Porvoo.

Respondents concurred on the following themes as being outside the People & Culture area of responsibility: generic information regarding the company, either locally or globally; strategic topics, investments and financial results; production related topics; sustainability; health, safety and environment; crisis communication; and information technology related topics.

Notably, there were some inconsistencies between the responses to the first and second questions: a couple of specific themes were mentioned as both 'belonging' to People & Culture and

simultaneously not falling within the team's area of responsibility. This could indicate a difference of opinion among respondents, or perhaps a more general unclarity regarding roles and responsibilities. The themes in question were occupational wellbeing and topics related to equality, including the work of the company's equality committee.

5.3 Successful current practices (Question 3)

The third question encouraged respondents to contemplate on the internal communication implemented thus far, how successful they perceive it to have been, and to name aspects that are currently working well. Translated responses are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Responses to question 3 translated

Q3: Consider the internal communication implemented by P&C thus far, and how successful you perceive it to have been. Within the internal communication implemented by P&C, what is currently working well?
Information is poorly accessible, and behind several clicks.
I may be somewhat naive, but I think our pages are for the most part a successful form of workplace communication. I also like the news articles with which we can quickly produce quality communication, which supports intranet news in that they are always easy to find on our sites.
For some themes communication is done very systematically. For example line manager info sessions are a functioning concept. In terms of the summer job process communication has been somewhat smooth and it has been done systematically. SharePoint pages are good, if only they were up-to-date. Joining leadership groups etc. is a good thing.
I don't know.
Usually communication is clear and the message is understood. Info sessions have generally raised positive feedback.
There is room to improve and planning must be increased. What is working well are the line manager info sessions, informing about salary increases (CLA) and the merit process.
Newsletters and SharePoint have improved communication a lot.
Communicating about practicalities works well. Line manager communication has been strengthened.

Based on the responses the target group agrees the following elements of as-is communication to be favourable: internal communication platform (SharePoint site) of People & Culture, used for sharing information with personnel; news articles and newsletters built on the aforementioned platform; 'information sessions' organised especially for line managers; the presence of People & Culture colleagues in various leadership teams.

Additionally, certain themes and topics were listed by respondents as having been particularly well communicated lately. These included the recruitment of summer trainees as well as salary increases and the organisation's merit process.

5.4 Development opportunities (Question 4)

Reversely, the fourth question asked respondents to identify what is currently not working in the internal communication implemented by People & Culture, or what should be improved. Answers are translated and listed in table 4.

Table 4. Responses to question 4 translated

Q4: What is not working within the internal communication implemented by P&C, or what should be improved in your opinion?
Information/documents difficult to access and not up to-date. Information exists on Teams, shared hard drive, SharePoint etc. Need to separately go and explore the personnel matters page.
Planning of communication could be further improved, and clear campaigns could be adopted, because a repeated message would be very good. Also multi-channel approach.
Updating of SharePoint sites, regular information sharing on intranet (+info screens) about the topics that impact all personnel. Clear email messaging could also be done more.
General communication is hard to come by, meaning people struggle to find where we communicate. We have various information in so many different places. Not everyone might know where to find information about things. In other words we don't have one clear channel for communication.
Communication may not reach everyone. Not everyone reads intranet or their emails actively, or is able to join info sessions. Sometimes we definitely forget to communicate relevant topics or we could communicate about them earlier.
More regular communication about upcoming trainings.
We are generally not skilled at communicating about things so I don't think it's working and I am one of those stakeholders myself who doesn't manage communicating well. In addition we don't use different channels or keep up with the times, e.g. social media is still underutilised.
Communication regarding e.g. the new employer brand could be strengthened. P&C could take on a more substantial role in the organisation of personnel events (annual celebration, family day etc.)

The answers were found to be corresponding in the following areas: lack of structure, planning and consistency resulting in unsystematic and irregular communication; information (for personnel) is available but is difficult for them to find, or not easily accessible; information shared with personnel may be outdated or may not reach the right recipients; no utilisation of clear campaigns to emphasise or repeat important messages.

In addition, particular themes were mentioned as benefitting from increased focus or effort from People & Culture in terms of communication towards personnel: namely upcoming training & development opportunities, the organisation's new employer brand and company events organised for the entire workforce.

Interestingly, further deviations were identified in the responses to the third and fourth questions. While some respondents were displeased with People & Culture communicating and sharing information through various channels, believing this to cause confusion among the personnel, others felt the team was not utilising enough channels to ensure their messages reach every member of the intended audience. Additionally, some of the respondents noted the clarity and easy-to-understand nature of internal communication as a success, while some listed clear communication as a point for further improvement.

6 Results of workshop

The aim of the workshop was to produce plentiful ideas around the content, channels, schedules and tone of communication as well as related responsibilities in order to facilitate internal communication that positively impacts employee experience. In other words, the focus was on the ways in which People & Culture could, through the internal communication they produce, help elevate employee experience in the organisation. The workshop further involved the target group in the topic and in doing so encouraged ownership of the area.

A total number of ten people were invited to participate in the ideation workshop, eight of whom attended. This was deemed adequate for the purposes of the research and for the practical implementation of the workshop itself. Data gathered from the two ideation exercises are outlined in the respective subchapters below.

6.1 Exercise 1: The 'what'

This part of the workshop was aimed at gathering as many ideas as possible around which topics, themes and matters the People & Culture function should communicate in order to support a more positive employee experience. The subject was approached from two perspectives: on one hand, what might the organisation's personnel like to know of, and on the other, what could the People & Culture team tell them about.

6.1.1 Personnel perspective on content

The various ideas that were generated from the perspective of the personnel fall under the categories listed below. While the categories are named as result of thematic analysis, the ideas outlined for each category are in their original form, merely constructed into full sentences for the ease of the reader. The number in brackets indicates how many ideas in total – some of which may have been repeated by several participants – were noted down related to that particular subject.

Payroll (8). Employees would like to learn more about their own salaries: what they are based on, how they can be further increased, and how they compare to the salaries of others. This includes transparent information about grading, pay positions, collective labour agreements and how to interpret salary slips.

Career development (8). Personnel are interested in the ways they can develop themselves. This incorporates not only the internal trainings and vacancies that are on offer, but also the career paths and opportunities that exist within the organisation and how employees can further their career through projects.

Perks (5). This relates to the employees' desire to know more about the various employee benefits on offer as well as rewards and occupational health services.

Impact (4). Personnel are keen to hear about their value to and effect on the organisation. For example: how can I support the implementation of the organisation's strategy? What are the organisation's expectations of me as an employee? What is the value of my work, and in what ways are the values of the organisation present in my work?

Contacts (3). Employees wish to be better acquainted with the People & Culture team and to know whom to contact – in other words, to have a clear contact person for each topic.

Future (3). This has to do with employees seeking information about the organisation's future and what's to come; for example, expected personnel changes.

Challenges (3). Personnel look to People & Culture for support in various work-related challenges. These can include, for example, ensuring one's voice is heard at work, asking and receiving help when work is too draining, or dealing with unexpected situations at work.

In addition to the above, other ideas for internal communication content included sharing information regarding IT tools (2), events and clubs (2) and sustainability (1).

6.1.2 People & Culture perspective on content

From the perspective of the People & Culture function, on the other hand, the developed content-related ideas can be categorised as below. Again, the ideas are outlined respecting their original form but composed in a reader-friendly manner. Categories result from thematic analysis, and the number in brackets indicates total number of ideas noted for each category, irrespective of whether each idea was novel or if some repetition occurred.

Responsibilities and tasks (7). This involves sharing information about who the People & Culture team are, who is responsible for what, what kind of processes exist within the People & Culture area and where personnel can find further details. It also encompasses bringing to front the various tasks accomplished by People & Culture that are less visible to personnel, for example employer brand work.

Payroll (6). The People & Culture team could explain to personnel topics such as salary increases and adjustments, paylines, grading, salary development and rewards.

Leadership (5). Further information and support can be provided to line managers by communicating about, for example, how to improve team morale and what constitutes good managerial

work and leadership. The latter could be accomplished with the help of the organisation's recently updated leadership competences.

Self-leadership (4). This relates to supplying the entire personnel with improved self-leadership knowledge to support their work. Information could also be offered related to topics such as conflict resolution and soft skills.

Culture (4). The People & Culture team are equipped to communicate to personnel about the values and culture of the organisation on a concrete level. Other important topics – whistle blowing, for example – could also be incorporated into these messages.

Future (3). Information regarding future plans within People & Culture, as well as information about personnel related future plans in the entire organisation could be shared with the employees. In some cases – or rather, for certain themes – this could be done by providing the personnel with an 'annual overview' of what is to come.

Furthermore, ideas for internal communication were generated related to sharing information about career development opportunities (2), employee benefits (2) and occupational wellbeing (2). The ideation also inspired participants to note down a couple of quick-fix actions for improving the existing platform for internal communication through updates to specific content.

6.2 Exercise 2: The 'how'

The second part of the workshop was designed to generate ideas around the appropriate channels, schedules and tone of internal communication implemented by People & Culture as well as the related responsibilities. As with the first exercise, these aspects were also approached from two perspectives: the view of personnel versus the view of the People & Culture team.

6.2.1 Channels and schedules

In terms of channels and schedules, both the personnel perspective and People & Culture perspective yielded rich ideas and thoughts. These are translated and listed in table 5.

Table 5. Ideas related to channels and schedules translated

Personnel perspective	People & Culture perspective
Won't read intranet due to lack of time	Need to use intranet for most crucial announcements
Want to utilise mobile apps; all information should be available in a mobile way	Want communication to successfully reach its intended audience now and in the future

Personnel perspective	People & Culture perspective
Would like to watch videos, especially about bite-sized news or facts	Could further share news as “advertisements” via on-premise info screens; screens to be used for reminding and nudging
Value chance encounters and face-to-face interaction with People & Culture contacts	Prefer to have one main channel where information is shared and stored, e.g. SharePoint
May want to use an internal social media platform: ability to comment, ask questions, voice concerns	Could consider internal social media platform, but attention must be paid to how to measure effectiveness/reach of various channels
Enjoy info sessions organised by People & Culture	Can organise info sessions for line managers virtually (MS Teams) four times a year; in addition, similar sessions for all personnel
Would like to see People & Culture contacts more often: visits, ‘open door’ days	Need to reach entire personnel through chosen channel(s): equal consideration to be paid for every employee
Wants information to be exact, correct and scheduled regularly (=can be anticipated) regardless of channel	Need an annual overview or other kind of framework for scheduling

Furthermore, while discussing channels and schedules of communication the group pointed out some additional matters. Firstly, information should be shared in a “lively” means – for example, in video format as mentioned above – in a way that simultaneously facilitates efficiency and reduces the frequency of reoccurring questions towards People & Culture personnel. Secondly, the communication should not only be accurately targeted, but bite-sized and include a call-to-action to find out more about the topic on the designated platform. Communication campaigns could be utilised for certain themes; such campaigns could include providing so-called teasers to stimulate the interest of employees, dispensing more detailed information and ensuring comprehension through repetition of key messages. Finally, a need for extra resources within People & Culture was identified to ensure the implementation of successful internal communication. Specifically, as People & Culture professionals do not identify as experts in the field of communication, there is a necessity for a specialist to take care of People & Culture related communication within the organisation.

6.2.2 Responsibilities and tone

Discussing the tone, voice and style of internal communication from the perspective of employees as well as People & Culture, the group came up with the thoughts translated and outlined in table 6.

Table 6. Ideas related to tone, voice and style translated

Personnel perspective	People & Culture perspective
Prefer less corporate jargon	Aim to communicate in an uncomplicated manner, steering clear from unnecessary abbreviations
Want communication to serve each individual employee and ensure we get the assistance we need; show interest in everyone	Try to make messages as easy to understand as possible, reducing number of follow-up questions
Prefer communicating in a conversational manner in real time	Require a skilful facilitator to optimise info sessions
Want communication to be clear, concise and appropriate, but casual and relaxed in tone	Adopt a caring approach instead of a hard, authoritative tone
Would not mind if communication included subtle messages related to e.g. employer brand or the values of the organisation	Create more modern messaging that aligns with organisation's values in content and style; communication must look and feel 'right'

Again, the importance of timely and targeted messaging was emphasised. In addition, the group indicated that internal communication should convey a sense of customer service towards the personnel: that People & Culture are there to help them, and that the purpose of the communication is to ensure employees are content, cared for and enabled to do their work efficiently. The quality and tone of translations – for messages originating from headquarters – was also noted as a relevant aspect to consider. Finally, it was pointed out that in an ideal scenario where a designated specialist were to take care of People & Culture communication, this expert could ensure that the tone of communication aligns with the channels being used, and would be able to evaluate the impact of the chosen tone on the appropriate audiences.

Lastly, the roles and responsibilities in People & Culture communication were explored. From the viewpoint of the employees, the ideation yielded the following thoughts:

- For any news or announcements, a relevant contact person's name ought to be mentioned for the recipient of the message to know whom to contact in case of questions.
- In general, a clear responsibility split within People & Culture is needed to ensure employees understand who deals with which issues.
- It is worth remembering that personnel may not receive People & Culture related messages directly from the source, but through line managers or assistants, for example. Hence it is crucial to ensure these parties have the correct information and know to whom in the People & Culture department they should direct potential questions or comments.
- Ideally, personnel would have one familiar point of contact for People & Culture related communication.

The ideas generated from the People & Culture perspective largely echoed those listed above.

Moreover, the People & Culture viewpoint further emphasised the need for a dedicated expert who

would be responsible for regularly collecting all relevant and timely information together and sharing these with the organisation's personnel. This would not, however, eliminate the need for naming specific subject matter experts for each particular topic to indicate respective responsibilities within People & Culture to the personnel.

7 Discussion

This chapter draws on the results to outline relevant conclusions and suggestions for improvement for the commissioning organisation. Credibility of the research is discussed along with the practical application of the outcomes. Lastly, the chapter provides recommendations for future research and summarises the lessons learnt during the thesis process.

7.1 Conclusions

The data yielded by the questionnaire and ideation workshop is rich and enables plentiful analysis. Based on the results, there seems to be a common understanding among the target group of what constitutes internal communication when implemented by the People & Culture function – though some grey areas were identified. Specifically, while several topics that concern the personnel as a whole are seen as within the area of responsibility of People & Culture (such as payroll and salaries, employee benefits and training and development), there are also themes that apply to every employee that do not fall under People & Culture responsibility; for example, financials, sustainability and crisis communication. Moreover, not all topics that People & Culture are responsible for communicating concern the entire personnel (e.g. information aimed specifically at line managers). Occupational wellbeing and equality related themes were noted as causing some confusion regarding their respective communication responsibilities. It would be beneficial for the People & Culture function to clarify any potential misunderstandings with the relevant stakeholders regarding communication responsibilities to ensure no crucial topics are accidentally overlooked and as a result not shared with the personnel. Additionally, it was noted that internal communication does not only consist of one-way information sharing but is rather a conversation between the organisation's personnel and the People & Culture function that ought to be nourished.

Building on the results outlined in the previous chapter, internal communication implemented by People & Culture can be defined as sharing relevant, personnel-related information to the organisations employees and enabling, encouraging and engaging in topical conversations with personnel to foster an inclusive, supportive and open environment. Internal communication produced by the People & Culture function is distinguishable from internal communication implemented by other stakeholders in that it exclusively involves topics that specifically impact, apply to and involve the organisation's employees – whether all of them or smaller distinct target groups – while simultaneously having the organisation's personnel at the core of the topic itself. In other words, the communication is *for* the employees, *about* the employees.

As such, internal communication implemented by People & Culture is at the heart of not only informing but relationship building, tying in with the assessment of Men and Bowen (2017, 18) that

internal communication socialises and connects employees while constructing communities. The definition formed based on the results of the research also echoes Cornelissen's (2020, 178-179) idea that both downward and upward communication – information flowing both ways – are needed for prosperous internal communication. Internal communication enforced by People & Culture is not only the sum of updates and notifications provided to employees, but it also encompasses the opportunities created and carried out by the department to facilitate discussions and conversations with employees to promote a two-way exchange of thoughts and ideas.

Current practices of internal communication carried out by the People & Culture function are, based on the results of the research, somewhat in alignment with this notion. Information sharing is performed around numerous topics and through various channels, such as email, MS Teams, intranet, newsletters, a dedicated People & Culture SharePoint site as well as on-premise TV screens. On the other hand, facilitated discussions and conversations fostering upward communication may appear less prominent at first glance. These do, however, exist – for example in the form of separately organised physical visits or virtually set up sessions where some time is specifically reserved for open dialogue. Implementing such communication practices is crucial, as providing opportunities to partake in interactions aids in establishing advantageous internal communication (Mikkola & Valo 2020, 10).

7.2 Development suggestions

Development of internal communication practices to elevate employee experience can be explored from two angles: on one hand, improvements or changes that could be applied to current practices, and on the other, entirely new practices to be adopted. Below subchapters explore ideas from both perspectives based on the results of the research. An action list created on the basis of the results and their analysis, which summarises the issues discussed in detail below, is presented in appendix 4.

7.2.1 Proposed improvements to current practices

To ensure that the internal communication carried out by the People & Culture function better facilitates enhanced employee experience, certain changes and developments to current practices in the commissioning organisation are needed. These proposed improvements mostly relate to the content and channels of communication.

It is noteworthy that, based on the results outlined in the previous chapter, there is significant overlap between the topics the target group presumes the personnel to want to know of, and the themes that the People & Culture team could communicate about. This positive correlation can be further capitalised by ensuring the internal communication produced by People & Culture regularly

includes such themes. Transparently sharing information related to paygrades and salary development, for example, could improve employee experience by allowing personnel a more holistic understanding of what their own salary is impacted by and the means through which they could aim to work towards further salary development. As Mulkeen (2008, 43) states, communicating in a transparent manner can also help People & Culture boost its own credibility. Similarly, communicating more frequently – or in more detail – about career development opportunities as well as personnel benefits could elevate the employees' awareness of the various perks and options for personal growth offered by the employer. According to Tkalac Verčič and Men (2023, chapter Discussion), internal communication ought to try conveying to the employees what it is that the organisation can offer them. Tying in with transparency and knowledge increasing, it is vital for the People & Culture function to clearly communicate to the organisation's personnel about the tasks and responsibilities the People & Culture department answers for, including whom in particular to contact for which issues. Employees should be made to feel supported and valued through internal communication: this could be accomplished by offering information about what to do or whom to contact when facing challenges at work, and bringing to light the contributions and impact of employees' efforts in the workplace. Additionally, it is important to ensure communication around both self-leadership and team leadership topics for employees to feel supported in their roles, increase their understanding of themselves and others, and excel in their own work. This type of social support has a notable effect on employee experience by strengthening motivation, satisfaction and commitment to work as well as increasing learning and impacting the quality of work (Mikkola & Valo 2020, 149-153). Employee experience could also be elevated by ensuring that People & Culture, through their internal communication, provide concrete examples of the organisation's culture and values "in action", thereby making these topics more tangible for the personnel.

While the future of the organisation – including, for example, upcoming changes that may impact its personnel – was brought up as another relevant subject for internal communication, this may ultimately be a topic the People & Culture function will not be able to provide much input on, especially preliminarily. Nevertheless, it is crucial to transparently share the information that does exist to further build trust between the People & Culture department and the organisation's personnel. Some ideas for content of communication were also noted as not directly belonging within the People & Culture area of responsibility (such as IT and sustainability topics), however it could be beneficial for the People & Culture department to acquaint themselves with where such information is shared or made available in order to better assist employees. As Mulkeen (2008, 42) notes, establishing trust and reliability between the personnel and the People & Culture function will be aided by a positive, open tone. Honest communication is therefore a necessity for any organisation in building a more positive employee experience through increased trust.

As for the channels and ways of communication, and in order to build on what is already perceived to be working well within the internal communication practices of People & Culture, the existing information sharing sessions (organised virtually via MS Teams) could be further cultivated by ensuring regularity – through, for example, scheduling these events and planning them well in advance – and fostering a more conversational approach that invites employees to actively participate and engage in the content. An appointed facilitator could be of notable help in achieving this change and encouraging participation from attendees. However, while People & Culture ought to be present and reachable through virtual means, they must also make themselves available for chance encounters and in-person discussions on company premises. After all, face-to-face communication and actively listening to the employees are, according to Lemon (2019, 185-187), some of the ingredients for successful dialogue. Presence, availability and approachability, both virtually and physically, are needed. People & Culture are advised to increase their physical presence by organising (more) casual visits to various departments, adopting a more active role in planning and implementing company events, and inviting employees to visit the People & Culture offices by hosting an ‘open doors’ event. Such means could increase employee experience by creating a sense of an approachable, welcoming People & Culture department while simultaneously facilitating opportunities for discussions. Similar actions could also be utilised for increasing awareness among employees of the different roles and responsibilities within People & Culture.

It is important to acknowledge that while utilising the organisation’s intranet for notifying employees about crucial topics is at times imperative, and the platform technically enables an organisation-wide reach, such abundance of information is continuously shared on the site that as a result, news produced by People & Culture may ultimately go undetected by a number of employees. Furthermore, it is understood by People & Culture that despite having access to it, some employees are unable or unwilling to regularly monitor the information shared on this platform. Hence, employing more than one channel, especially for the most critical announcements, is encouraged to ensure best possible reach. In choosing the right channels for internal communication, it is vital to note the purposes and features of the various messages and whether those suitably fit the channels; the necessary skill level required to use the channels; and the wants and needs of the employees (Men & Bowen 2017, 88-91). Ideally the utilised channels are ones that every employee has equal access to and where personnel is already established to regularly visit (or where usage is relatively easy to initiate). As several various channels in addition to the intranet – such as MS Teams, email, newsletters, SharePoint and on-premise TV screens – are already in use, People & Culture are advised to agree upon a common structure for employing these channels to ensure that the team itself, as well as the employees receiving the messages, have a clear understanding of which channels feature which topics. Or, perhaps, which channel is regarded as the main source

of information, and which ones offer additional support (where needed) in repeating or further cascading key messages and directing employees to the main channel.

Based on the results of the research, the current internal SharePoint site dedicated to People & Culture related topics is proposed as the main channel for implementing internal communication. As is, the site already houses a vast collection of relevant information including documents and news articles designed to support personnel throughout their employment. As pointed out in the questionnaire results, the site enables online communication and information sharing in a way that enables the recipient of the message to return back to the source later on if needed, meaning no messages are lost. Considering the adoption of the SharePoint site as the main channel for internal communication implemented by People & Culture, the team ought to ensure that all relevant information is indeed incorporated into the site and that this information is accessible, up-to-date, easy to find and presented in an understandable manner in order to provide a positive user experience for the employees. Employee experience could be further elevated by having the People & Culture team agree and, importantly, follow through on a regular review and update of the page content to ensure quality of communication, and by making further use of the social features the site offers (such as commenting). After all, enhancing the quality of internal communication raises employee motivation and facilitating opportunities for employees to speak up, be listened to and feel involved bolsters their organisational identification (Cornelissen 2020, 180; Men et al. 2022, chapter Discussion and Conclusion). Agreeing on the SharePoint site as the main channel of communication necessitates the team to ensure that the organisation's personnel are aware of the site as well as how to access and navigate around it. This could be assured by, for example, utilising an upcoming personnel-wide information sharing session to demonstrate the platform to employees in practice.

Additionally, improvement suggestions to current practices include employing more calls-to-action (CTAs) in internal communication – for example, adding a 'visit our SharePoint site to learn more' link to newsletters – to activate employees in looking up further information self-sufficiently. This could in turn reduce the number of repetitive enquiries for information via email or phone towards People & Culture, easing their workload. Repeated enquiries were pointed out as a pain point during the ideation workshop. Conversely, the workshop brought forward positive perceptions regarding some recent communication efforts implemented by the team, related to, for example, the organisation's summer job recruitment process as well as the separately organised information sharing sessions for line managers. One development suggestion is therefore for the People & Culture function to implement a deep dive into these recent, positively perceived communication efforts to explore what exactly contributed to their success in order to identify best practices and replicate them in future communication. Finally, drawing from the results, People & Culture are advised to

adapt the tone and style of their communication as appropriate for each message to further create a sense of an employee-centric, service oriented and approachable People & Culture function. Corporate jargon and unnecessary abbreviations are to be avoided for the purposes of constructing clear, understandable communication. The tone should be aligned with not only the content of the message and the desired impact, but also the intended recipient: at times, a more informal style may bring about favourable results, while on occasion an authoritative approach might be necessary. As Men and Bowen (2017, 31) state, the characteristics of the employees are to be taken into account for the organisation to better engage with and understand its internal audience.

7.2.2 Recommended new practices for implementation

For the People & Culture function of the commissioning organisation to elevate employee experience through their internal communication a few improvement suggestions, specifically focusing on novel practices, are designed based on the results of the research. Firstly, People & Culture should not restrict themselves to current ways of communicating and distributing information, but instead courageously map and adopt modern means of creating and sharing content. An idea generated in the workshop was to create modern-format, bite-sized content for the employees that would be easy to both access and consume. This may involve looking for entirely new ways of creating and sharing content instead of relying on current methods and channels. The team could look into, for example, how artificial intelligence (AI) could be utilised in content creation, and test if communicating via short video clips accessible through company phones may work. At the core of such exploration must be the improvement of the quality of communication – for as Mikkola and Valo (2020, 10) note, in enhancing a workplace it is the quality of communication (more so than its frequency) that counts.

Secondly, building on the results, the People & Culture function is advised to design communication campaigns around themes or topics deemed important or identified as needing further emphasis. Campaigns would add an aspect of repetition to key messages, further supporting comprehension and retention among employees. Such campaigns could also feature so-called teasers of upcoming topics to better prepare employees ahead of time for certain tasks or allow them to anticipate information around critical matters. It is crucial to remember to build and implement such campaigns based on clearly defined goals. For this purpose the People & Culture team could make use of the SMART principle. (Cornelissen 2020, 123-124.) To test the reach of campaigns (while also checking the success on various channels), different campaigns could be built – each with their own unique topics – and shared exclusively on select channels. Afterwards, People & Culture could reach out to personnel to verify which campaigns have been heard, seen or read.

Such campaigns, as all activities incorporated in the internal communication implemented by People & Culture, are to be included in an annual plan. Based on the results, a clear need can be identified for a framework or overview of communication activities on an annual basis. Such a plan would provide structure as well as assist in timely – even predictable – and consistent communication. The predictability of communication could in turn support employee experience by enabling personnel to know what is to come, and as such build reliability and foster a sense of trust. An annual plan is considered a practical way of organising upcoming tasks and events; its purpose is to visualise and remind of reoccurring, important communication activities. The plan is adjustable and as such can be added to or further detailed throughout the year. (Juholin 2017, 99-100.)

Finally, an argument is to be made for the necessity of a dedicated internal communication specialist within the People & Culture function. As Juholin (2017, 59) points out, communication should be modelled, managed and measured by a skilled professional. It is vital for organisations to assess the available resources for communication: organisations that do not have an interest in directing resources into communication should not expect notable results (Juholin 2017, 87-88). It is evident from the results of the research that the People & Culture team of the commissioning organisation are in need of additional resources to help properly conduct internal communication while ensuring the desired quality. Ideally, a dedicated role for an internal communication specialist would be established, with responsibility for coordinating, planning, implementing and following up internal communication practices. Each member of the People & Culture team would retain ownership and responsibility for their own field of expertise and continue to be named as the subject matter experts for their respective fields. However, the communication specialist would ensure that all relevant topics and themes are regularly collected and brought to the attention of personnel while safeguarding the timeliness and effectiveness of the produced communication. Such a set-up would further assist in communication not being neglected, left up to chance or being de-prioritised to allow for the completion of other urgent tasks, and in this way would also facilitate equal opportunity for all personnel-relevant topics and themes to be promoted. The role would ideally be taken up by a skilled communicator who is a professional in the field and can dedicate time and resources to ensuring messages reach their intended audiences. In addition, the specialist would be capable of (and responsible for) determining the right tone as well as honing the 'look and feel' of communication, and ultimately following up on the success and ascertaining the effectiveness of communication.

7.3 Evaluation and practical application

As this development-oriented thesis was focused on collecting qualitative data by design, it can be evaluated against the aspects of credibility and transferability. Credibility refers to the extent to

which the results reflect reality, while transferability deals with whether the results could be assigned to a different context. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, chapter 6.2.) The study can be considered credible as the results of both the questionnaire and the ideation workshop reflect the reality of the studied target group. However, it is worth noting that where a personnel perspective is outlined within the results, this perspective was adopted by the target group upon request from the researcher. Hence it does not reflect the actual firsthand experience of the personnel of the commissioning organisation – though People & Culture colleagues are also part of the personnel themselves – but rather an imagined impression of how the personnel may perceive certain issues. The study can also be recognised as transferable, since the overall results are not specific only to the commissioning organisation but reflect a more generic view on internal communication implemented by a People & Culture function.

The practical application potential of the results for the commissioning organisation is notable. The study produced insight into how internal communication implemented by the People & Culture function is defined, what current internal communication practices exist and what kind of improvements or changes to those practices, as well as novel methods, can be adopted by People & Culture to elevate employee experience within the organisation. Employee experience poses a vital factor for organisations to consider as a sense of belonging can have a fundamental impact of results, and an organisation's performance is contingent on successful communication with its employees (Cornelissen 2020, 176; Whitter 2019, 22-23). As such the thesis succeeded in answering the research questions defined at the start of the process and achieved its objective of supporting the enhancement of employee experience at the commissioning organisation. Moreover, an action list (appendix 4) was constructed to further assist the commissioning organisation in applying the results of the study into practice. While outside the scope of this thesis, after implementing the proposed methods the commissioning organisation could opt to measure their realised impact through an internal study of employee experience and its evolution, for example 6 months after the implementation of improvement suggestions recommended by the thesis.

7.4 Suggestions for future research and lessons learnt

As mentioned in evaluating the credibility of the study, while a personnel perspective was noted in the research, it was not based on primary accounts. A suggestion for further research would therefore be to explicitly study the topic of internal communication and its impact on employee experience from the viewpoint of employees themselves. This could be done by designing a survey for employees and/or conducting interviews with them to examine, for example, the content, channels and style of communication they would prefer. Such results could then be compared with the outcomes of this study to determine similarities or inconsistencies between the perspective of

personnel and that of People & Culture. This would enable building an increasingly accurate overview of the ways in which internal communication can support a more positive employee experience.

In terms of the lessons learnt during the thesis process itself, the importance of scheduling and planning for the various steps of the study well in advance – especially the questionnaire and ideation workshop – was highlighted. The process also served as a reminder to prepare (to the extent it is possible) for unexpected eventualities impacting the timeline and implementation of the project. Indeed, the most notable challenge was ultimately time, or more precisely, the lack thereof. What should have been done differently was the evaluation of how time-consuming the analysis of results would be. The problems caused by this error in judgement were solved by revising the work schedule. In contrast, the most successful aspect of the process was by far the execution of the ideation workshop: not only due to the plentiful data produced by it, but because of the enjoyable nature of the event itself, enabled by careful planning and preparation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Original questionnaire (in Finnish)

Työntekijäkokemuksen kohentaminen P&C:n tuottaman viestinnän avulla | Ennakkokysely

Tämä on ennakkokysely perjantaina 5. huhtikuuta kello 9-11:30 järjestettävää työpajaamme varten. Kysely koostuu neljästä kysymyksestä.

Kaikki vastaukset ovat nimettömiä. Vastauksia hyödynnetään työpajan suunnittelussa, toteuttamisessa sekä YAMK-opinnäytetyössä, joka keskittyy työntekijäkokemuksen kehittämiseen P&C:n tuottaman sisäisen viestinnän avulla.

Kysely sulkeutuu perjantaina 22.3. kello 23:00. Vastaathan kyselyyn, voitket pääsisi osallistumaan työpajaan.

Kiitos avustasi!

* Required

1. Yhtiön sisäistä (henkilöstöön kohdistettua) suunnitelmallista viestintää tuottavat organisaatiossamme muutkin toimijat kuin P&C-osasto. Mistä tai millaisesta sisäisestä viestinnästä koet nimenomaan P&C:n olevan vastuussa? *

2. Entä mikä tai millainen sisäinen viestintä on mielestäsi P&C:n vastuualueen ulkopuolella? *

3. Pohdi P&C:n tähän asti toteuttamaa yhtiön sisäistä viestintää, ja kuinka siinä on mielestäsi onnistuttu. Mikä P&C:n tuottamassa sisäisessä viestinnässä toimii hyvin tällä hetkellä? *

4. Entä mikä P&C:n tuottamassa sisäisessä viestinnässä ei toimi, tai mitä tulisi mielestäsi parantaa? *

Appendix 2. Translated questionnaire (in English)

Enhancing employee experience with the help of communication implemented by P&C | Pre-questionnaire

This is a pre-questionnaire for our workshop organised on Friday 5 April at 9-11:30. The questionnaire consists of four questions.

All responses are anonymous. Responses are utilised in planning and implementing the workshop, and in a Master Thesis focused on improving employee experience through internal communication implemented by P&C.

The questionnaire closes on Friday 22 March at 23:00. Please respond to the questionnaire even if you are unable to join the workshop.


Thank you for your help!

1. Systematic internal communication (=directed towards personnel) is implemented within our organisation by other parties in addition to P&C. Which or what kind of internal communication do you feel P&C is specifically responsible for?
2. In your opinion, which or what kind of internal communication falls outside of the responsibility of P&C?
3. Consider the internal communication implemented by P&C thus far, and how successful you perceive it to have been. Within the internal communication implemented by P&C, what is currently working well?
4. What is not working within the internal communication implemented by P&C, or what should be improved in your opinion?

Appendix 3. Workshop plan

Workshop details	
Time reserved	2½ hrs
Method	In person, on premise
Agenda	
9:00-9:10	Welcome Opening of workshop
9:10-9:30	Introduction to topic & overview of questionnaire results
9:30-10:10	Exercise 1: Content
10:00-10:30	Break
10:30-11:10	Exercise 2: Channels, schedules, tone and responsibilities
11:10-11:30	Wrap-up & next steps

Appendix 4. Action list based on results

ACTION LIST FOR PEOPLE & CULTURE <hr/> INTERNAL COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT	
Enhance current habits	Adopt new practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure to communicate about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salaries, grading, paylines and reward • Career development opportunities • Personnel benefits and other perks • Roles and responsibilities in P&C • Value and impact of employees' work • Support systems (for everyday work as well as challenging situations) • Leadership skills (self and team) • Organisational culture & values in practice • Be visible, present and available both virtually and in-person • Schedule info sessions regularly and plan for them well in advance • Agree on one main channel for communication; utilise others for "advertising" to increase the reach of your message • Ensure communication is always understandable, accessible and up-to-date • Teach employees where further information can be found; include calls-to-action where relevant • Pay attention to your tone and style; match them with the content of your message • Identify best practices by deep-diving into most successful instances of communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be curious and courageous: look for and try out new ways of creating and sharing content! • Aim to create bite-sized, easy-to-consume communication – how about utilising videos, social media or AI? • Design communication campaigns to support retention and make use of teasers to intrigue your audience • Compose and adhere to an annual communication plan (or similar framework) to build structure and enable timely communication • Appoint a dedicated, skilled specialist responsible for coordinating, planning, implementing and following up internal communication practices to safeguard the quality and effectiveness of communication
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Remember:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Don't merely inform – ask, listen, engage and involve!</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">  </div>	