

Internal communication development at Hotel Kämp

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<p>The objective of this research-oriented thesis is to generate a thorough analysis of existing employee communication between departments at Hotel Kämp; methods used for unobstructed internal communication flow and potential improvement actions based on the research in communication enhancement trends in organizations worldwide.</p> <p>In the theory part of the thesis organizational internal communication is defined, and all essential elements of it, including objectives, tools and channels, are discussed. Additionally, information on current communication trends is presented based on recent releases of experts' research of internal communication future. Theoretical information has been acquired through academic books, as well as communication industry articles and latest communication trends related publications on various web pages.</p> <p>The aim of empirical research of the thesis is to determine whether tools and methods used for internal communication flow at Hotel Kämp are effective enough to truly make a difference in terms of the modern environment of constant industry change. Conducted qualitative research creates a unique opportunity to determine potential improvement actions that can be implemented to elevate the current performance of Hotel Kämp internal communication strategy.</p> <p>The thesis is commissioned by Hotel Kämp. The organization is a legendary luxurious hotel located in central Helsinki. Completed in 1887, the only one in its kind, Hotel Kämp became an essential part of Finnish culture and history. Nowadays Hotel Kämp is a part of Leading Hotels of the World, one of the largest luxury hotel collections in the world, comprised of more than 375 hotels in 75 countries. As a commissioning party, Hotel Kämp is interested in thesis findings, as, through productivity analysis, they eliminate underperforming communication methods and bring the potential of applying new technologically advanced communication tools using a delicate balanced approach tailored exclusively for Hotel Kämp internal communication culture.</p>	
Keywords Organizational communication, internal communication, communication development, communication channels, Hotel Kämp	

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1 Introduction

In the nowadays fast-paced constantly changing business environment companies that recognize the importance of investing into the development of internal communications stand out from their competitive set and have engaged and committed employees (Verghese 2012, 6). But what is the secret to turning internal communication strategy into a powerful function that allows employees to interact on common ground and supports leaders' ability to have control over continuous information flow within the organization?

The following research will focus on current state of internal communications at Hotel Kämp, a member of Luxury Collection Hotels and a legendary hospitality entity in Helsinki, Finland. The purpose of the study is to determine elements, advantages and impediments of internal communication strategy, and conduct a thorough evaluation of it, culminated with development suggestions for the company.

Selection of the thesis topic was not coincidental. Over an extensive four-year experience at Hotel Kämp, the author had a unique opportunity to witness major fluctuations in internal communications through the challenging times of brand transition, full house renovation and management change. Internal communication shifts, which occurred over the course of time, had raised a lot of interest towards ways of internal communication strategy stabilization, and added elements that can make it more efficacious. In consequence of the times, when communication failed, or did not work as intended, the author has decided to take a profound look at the roots of the issues and find out what can be done to elevate the communication performance. Upon thesis topic presentation to Hotel Kämp as a commissioning party, it was found that a study like that has not yet been conducted at the hotel and, therefore, would benefit the company a lot.

1.1 Thesis objective and research questions

The key goal of this research-oriented thesis is to fully analyze current internal communication strategy at Hotel Kämp and develop an understanding of its efficiency levels, advantages and drawbacks. Gathering all internal communication methods, tools, achievements and concerns into one big picture creates an outlook on the current communication structure and its flaws that need to be promptly acted upon. Such research becomes especially beneficial to the commissioning party due to the fact that the aforementioned strategy flaws might not be very clear in the day to day work activities, but still have a disrupting effect on other much thought-through and invested-into parts of company's business strategy.

The author of the thesis performs a qualitative interview-based research that helps to uncover internal communication culture at Hotel Kämp from both managerial and employee perspective. Empirical research focuses majorly on internal communication strategic priorities, barriers, tools, channels and future perspectives, information on which is acquired from practical experience of staff members of Front Office department – epicenter of all hotel communications occurring internally. Main research questions of the thesis include the following:

- What are the main characteristics, advantages and drawbacks of Hotel Kämp current internal communication strategy?
- Does Hotel Kämp recognize potential benefits of unobstructed internal communication flow?
- Are internal communication tools used at Hotel Kämp agile and effective enough to constantly deliver on desired communication goals?

1.2 Thesis structure

Thesis is designed in accordance with traditional thesis structure, being divided into theoretical, empirical and discussion parts. It consists of 5 main chapters: Introduction, Theoretical framework, Research implementation, Research results and Conclusions and recommendations.

Theoretical part of the thesis presented in chapter 2 starts with definition of internal communication and its key characteristics, bringing an understanding of internal communication flow directions as well as internal communication processes with formal and informal focus. Following the overall analysis of organizational communication comes presentation of complex communication process structure with all its elements such as communication tools, methods, channels and objectives. Theoretical part is concluded with an informative scrutiny of current trends in internal communication applied by companies worldwide for the purpose of communication enhancement.

Research implementation is presented in chapter 3, which begins with explanation of qualitative method choice, research objectives and the reasoning behind choosing certain interviewees. Summary of the interviews commences the Research results chapter, giving a closer look at interviewees' opinions and detecting their concordant and opposing points. Empirical research findings in-depth analysis is also presented in Research results thesis chapter.

Conclusions and recommendations chapter opens up further discussion of empirical research results in conjunction with theoretical findings and strategy improvement suggestions generated from combining them together in one analysis. Self-evaluation and learning outcomes gained from thesis writing process conclude the thesis report.

1.3 Introduction to Hotel Kämp

Kämp Collection Hotels (previously Kämp Group) is a Finnish hotel and restaurant company, which owns a wide range of hotels and restaurants within the Helsinki area as well as Kämp Spa wellness center. The company was founded in 1887 and is based in Helsinki, Finland. CapMan managed funds, Berling Capital Oy, Rake Oy and Kämp Collection Hotels' management owns Kämp Collection Hotels. The company has approximately 400 employees and its turnover is approximately 50 million euros. Kämp Collection Hotels is an essential part of the heart and spirit of Helsinki city. It fulfills customer expectations by emphasizing individual needs of each customer and focusing on providing easily accessible and truly enjoyable experiences. (Kämp Collection Hotels 2017.)

Hotel Kämp is the company's most well-known hotel with its rich history that dates back to the late 19th century, when Carl Wilhelm Kämp, a popular restaurateur in Helsinki, owned a property, where, together with his wife - Maria Kämp, he has decided to build a modern luxury class hotel. Completed in 1887, the only one in its kind, Hotel Kämp immediately became an exclusive place offering a wide range of extraordinary services. The hotel became a part of Finnish culture and history, due to its famous visitors, such as politicians, artists, musicians and sport legends, regular politically important and business meetings in the hotel's conference rooms and restaurants. (Hotel Kämp 2017.)

In present times Hotel Kämp continues to embrace its rich past with timeless classic elements both in service and interiors, while introducing modern features to maintain high levels of functionality (Hotel Kämp 2017). The number of Hotel Kämp internationally recognized awards, which are proving the high standards of customer service, extraordinary accommodation, high quality dining options and the luxurious status of Hotel Kämp, is very high and year by year a strong working team at its premises is striving to do their best to achieve even better results.

1.4 Thesis limitations

Due to internal communications being a broad topic, limitations have been set to ensure relevance and validity of the study.

This research focuses on defining internal communication, its elements, ways of its measurement, challenges and opportunities. The purpose of this study is not to build a brand new communication strategy, but to analyze the existing one and enrich it with development suggestions based on theoretical research and author's personal hospitality experience.

Another limitation of the study is connected to empirical research. The qualitative research was conducted in a form of interviews of Hotel Kämp Front Office members. The number of interviews was limited to two, due to the various positions held by interview participants at Hotel Kämp. Selected number of interviews gave an opportunity to get thorough insight into the topic with more detailed discussions and the range of interviewees' roles in the company revealed different perspectives. Only Front Office department members were chosen for the qualitative research, due to the division's central role in Hotel Kämp internal communications and its ability to set exemplary communication tone for other departments.

2 Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework section introduces definitions and theories of organizational internal communication and its main elements. This chapter gives the reader an opportunity to get acquainted with internal communication subject as well as its components that maintain internal communication processes flow in corporations. Furthermore, theoretical part of the thesis uncovers the most recent ongoing trends organizations worldwide interpret in their strategic work activities to elevate internal communication effectiveness.

2.1 Internal communication in an organization

Internal communication is a fundamental part of all work interactions within an organization that coordinates, motivates and empowers employees and therefore, directly affects company's productivity. Employees' full understanding of organizational communication goals and acknowledgement of their own responsibilities that ensure efficient communication flow creates an informed and committed workforce, which eventually produces better outcomes. (Ragusa 2010, 6.) Over the years of studies into the subject, realization of communication significance has grown in corporations. The communications discipline has transformed from supplementary to compulsory and has been proclaimed "the life-blood of the organization". (M. Goldhaber 1990, 5.)

In terms of hospitality being a business made up of people, the significance of smooth internal communication flow rises. In a hospitality entity the success of a company as a whole majorly relies on employees' satisfaction with their performance and productivity of communication between colleagues while delegating tasks and performing daily work activities. Basic understanding of communication processes in these terms may support hospitality firm's operations, however, is not sufficient enough to deliver better results on a regular basis. Effective internal communication strategy that considers the complexity of employee communications and, is closely connected to the corporation's exclusive business strategy, is the necessary key to the organizational stability and success, which is why it is important to define its fundamentals and elements, and understand the most efficient ways of its creation. (Hola 2014, 162.)

According to Workplace Communication Workbook by Regional Skills Training Pty Ltd by Department of Education Australia, initially, communication is the process of information and idea exchange between the involved parties. Successful communication occurrence implicates unobstructed message delivery from the sender to the receiver, however does not always entail an effective communication flow. Sufficient communication process that can convey productive results involves both parties' ability to fully understand the deliv-

ered information and respond to it using modern communication methods and tools. (Regional Skills Training Pty Ltd, 5.)

Term internal communication despite being widely recognized can be difficult to define due to its complexity and the variety of interpretations of it existing nowadays. According to Bove'e and Thill, a more simplified way to define it is "the exchange of information and ideas within an organization". For this research being a profound study into the communications within a large multicultural company and the ways of developing the existing communications strategy, a more complex definition of internal communication is required, such as "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organization". (Kalla 2005, 304.)

Key characteristics within organizational communication concept include communication flow direction, communication formality and the level at which communication takes place. Communication flow can be categorized into vertical, horizontal and diagonal directions, and organizational communication as a whole can have formal or informal focus. (Baker 2002, 4.)

Communication between employees holding positions at various hierarchical levels of a company is *vertical* in its nature. When information concerned with organizational rules and regulations passes through a chain of command from the top leadership reaching the employees, it creates an example of *downward* communication. Downward communication functions best when top management members as its initiators have high motivation for their message, instruction or feedback to be delivered successfully to teams at every level of the firm. Alternative communication, commenced by front line employees for the purpose of delivering the information on current trends or changes at their organizational level, suggestions, reports or complaints through the chain of command to the top executives, forms an *upward* communication flow. Despite being initiated by the employees, upward communication's successful implementation majorly relies on top management's willingness to adopt the information and enable its full effectiveness. In such circumstances, factors such as proper message allocation, information clarity and its potential positive organizational influence play a defining role in upward communication system's ability to be utilized and make a difference. (Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey 2005, 28-29.)

Horizontal communication direction represents information exchange between peers on the same hierarchical level within one department or different functional divisions of the company, while *diagonal* one reflects communication between workers of different status located in various organizational units. Some authors combine two terms together and

refer to them as *sideward* or *lateral* communication due to their resembling characteristics. In terms of constantly expanding modern corporations with complex structure and strong teamwork emphasis, the need for effective lateral communication between team members both within and across departments rises. As companies develop internal trainings to promote knowledge and expertise sharing, they aim at reaching a more efficient work process model through concurrent efforts of every geographically dispersed organizational unit. (Turkalj & Fosic 2009, 36.)

Depending on the style of information exchange, the focus of communication can be formal or informal. *Formal* communication type represents connection that follows information delivery channels pre-defined by the hierarchical structure of the company and has a purpose of transmission of official messages directly related to organization's daily work activities. Formally focused communication flows in four aforementioned directions and can occur in various forms such as reports, manuals, orders, requests and commands. *Informal* communication in turn, being unimpeded by the chain of command and free in its flow direction, forms unofficial information exchange between employees that holds social interactions, friendships and mutual interests as its foundation and creates an implicit bond that brings added effectiveness to internal communication between co-workers. (Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey 2005, 28-29.)

Although informal network is unofficial, it has a powerful effect on corporations' communication environment due to its fast paced distribution. While waiting for information to be officially announced, employees use the informal network as their source of information. Informal networks exist as a result of communication being a natural human impulse. Management does not have full control over them, however can elevate the accuracy of the data being transferred through informal channels. Consequently, it is crucial for employees and managers to take time to engage into informal networks through socializing activities alongside with learning the formal communication methods and principles. (Ergen 2011, 63-64.)

2.2 Internal communication objectives, tools and channels

The most thoroughly constructed messages will not have any substantial impact on organization's procedures if not distributed using the right tools through the right selection of channels. Taking into account rapidly developing technologies in the modern age, informational channels in use require regular analysis and updates in order to remain applicable in terms of constantly changing employee environment. (Barton 2014, 13.) Additionally, various communication methods have to be paired with corresponding internal com-

munication objectives in order to ensure efficient and influential information delivery among all involved parties within an organization. (Tavana & Puranam 2015, 151.)

Setting clear and realistic communication objectives is an essential step in designing an effective internal communication strategy as it allows combining right communication methods with particular employee segments and directing them towards reaching one of the established communication goals. The process of choosing the objective set is often confronted by various barriers such as lack of base research data and inability to select measurable and attainable target points. Nevertheless, the barriers can be outperformed by conducting profound research, collecting the necessary data and setting measurable, realistic and specific goals within the right employee segments. (Ruck 2015, 122.)

Tavana and Puranam (2015, 151.) consider awareness, understanding and commitment to be three crucial communication objectives that identify selection of internal communication methods. Creating high awareness levels among the employees refers to delivering information on any ongoing changes in the company to the specific employee groupings and making sure of its acknowledgement. Understanding, in turn, means recognition of the delivered information on the deeper level that includes working with it and knowing what a certain change brings to the company and daily work activities. Lastly, commitment stands for enabling employee action and involvement in the ongoing transitions within the company. Creating awareness is a simpler task, as it is based solely on the delivery of the right information to the right employee groups. Understanding and commitment can be more difficult to achieve due to additional communication and strong employee relationship ground required.

Once clear objectives have been set, the challenge of detecting the channels to use and pairing them with the right employee segments comes forward. As defined by Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey (2005,22.), communication channel is “a means by which a message is carried from one person to another”. The specific form of encoding the message within the channel is called communication tool or communication medium (Blundel & Ippolito 2008, 8). There are different communication tools available, including email, memos, instant messaging, formal and informal meetings, focus groups, briefings, newsletters, charts and posters, and many other arriving with technological advances. Choosing the right channel is not as easy as it might seem, as tool, information type and target audience need to be considered at once. The most suitable channels and tools depend on the specific situation. The best strategy is multi-channel approach, due to its ability to reinforce the message by presenting it to the audience in different ways. (Eunson 2013, 511.)

As emphasized by Barton (2014, chapter 4.), a tool such as internal communication matrix can be of great help in the process of choosing the right variety of channels. Knowledge of channel inventory currently used in the organization as well as profound analysis of company's ability to undertake newly developed channels that show to be productive in the competitive set are required in order to create an effective matrix than can truly make a difference.

An important component of building a comprehensive communication matrix is preliminary channel evaluation research that allows to eliminate a number of channels have not been effective long-term and have not shown sustainable results over a course of time. Such research can be conducted by creating a full list of communication channels available in the company and conducting a benchmarking analysis using the employee response data collected with surveys and during monthly meetings. (Ruck 2015, 144.)

Creating communication channel matrix on the basis of the aforementioned preliminary research is beneficial as it uncovers the purpose of each individual channel as well as the channel-employee segment combinations that work best brought together. Despite the fact that every internal communication channel can spread the information, individuals perceive information differently. Therefore, a well-designed multi-channel communication strategy is required in modern corporations in order to make information delivery effective and consistent. (Barton 2014, chapter 4.)

When choosing the channels to include into the matrix, it is important to remember that every channel has its advantageous and disadvantageous points. As mentioned earlier, the initial research eliminates the least effective and outdated methods, whereas the remaining currently used and newly developed channels are yet to be evaluated, leveraged for their best features and, if necessary, combined with other methods to maximize their performance. (Barton 2014, chapter 4.)

Another important aspect in the discussion of internal communication tools is employee-training system implemented alongside them. According to Eugene McKenna (2000, 572.), training is a technique that improves employees' competences and elevates their ability to adjust to changes at the workplace. As original communication tools are being developed and new tools introduces, the number of various formats the messages come in rises. Such tendency calls for advanced skills that provide an ability to understand and effectively use communication tools, and therefore, also for sufficient preliminary training of staff members and managers. (Finch, Hansen & Alexander, 2010.) In addition, fundamental training provision ensures that employees get an opportunity to absorb all relevant

information and to feel confident about their work-related activities and decisions. This, in turn, amplifies employee engagement and establishes behaviors that meet company's long-term objectives. (Towers Perrin, 2003.)

Numerous research outcomes including the results presented by market research consultancy ComRes and communications headhunter Elwood Atfield in their recently joint release indicate that, despite the multitude of innovative communication tools and channels being introduced in nowadays constantly developing business environment, the original tried and tested methods are still used as a solid communication base. That way delivery on set communication objectives is ensured and the risk of too rapid shift to brand new tools, that might not turn out as effective, is avoided. (Elwood Atfield & ComRes, 2016.)

2.3 Training and development

The topic of employee training and development is undergoing major discrepancy in opinions with regards to it nowadays. On one hand, companies are noticing the potential training and development holds on a larger scale. Alternatively, some common arguments about the high costs and time-consuming nature of training processes exist as well. (Government of Alberta, 2005.) So, how to decide, whether investing time and money into employee skills development is worth it in the long run?

Research has shown that advancement in a form of skills training brings real return on investment that includes increased productivity, employee loyalty, reduced errors and stronger performances. Companies that offer skills development opportunities tend to retain employees, and employees with newly acquired advanced competences, in return, benefit the worker, enhancing company efficiency and reaching its goals. (Government of Alberta, 2005.)

When it comes to the argument on high training costs, a different outlook on the matter exists nowadays. In reality, training and development investments can turn out to be lower than financial or personal costs that follow destroyed work equipment, customer dissatisfaction or employee confidence decrease that leads to rising employee turnover and hiring costs, all due to the lack of training. This is why, as research suggests, companies expect to elevate employee training in the coming years, despite rising costs. (Government of Alberta, 2005.)

Internal communication training has some peculiar features of its own, which are best explored by a learning professional, specifically responsible for company's training process-

es. Before communication training is implemented, primary needs of it have to be identified to address the performance gap. This involves knowing the skills and knowledge required for the staff members to be able to work in line with major company goals, detecting the shortage and building that bridge between the existing and the desired. (Figure 1.) The important element here is focus on individual learning needs of the particular staff audience. Knowing what staff members are already aware of can help to eliminate the training appearing as waste of time and make the learning process more involving with the inflow of truly educational content. (Orey, 2015.)

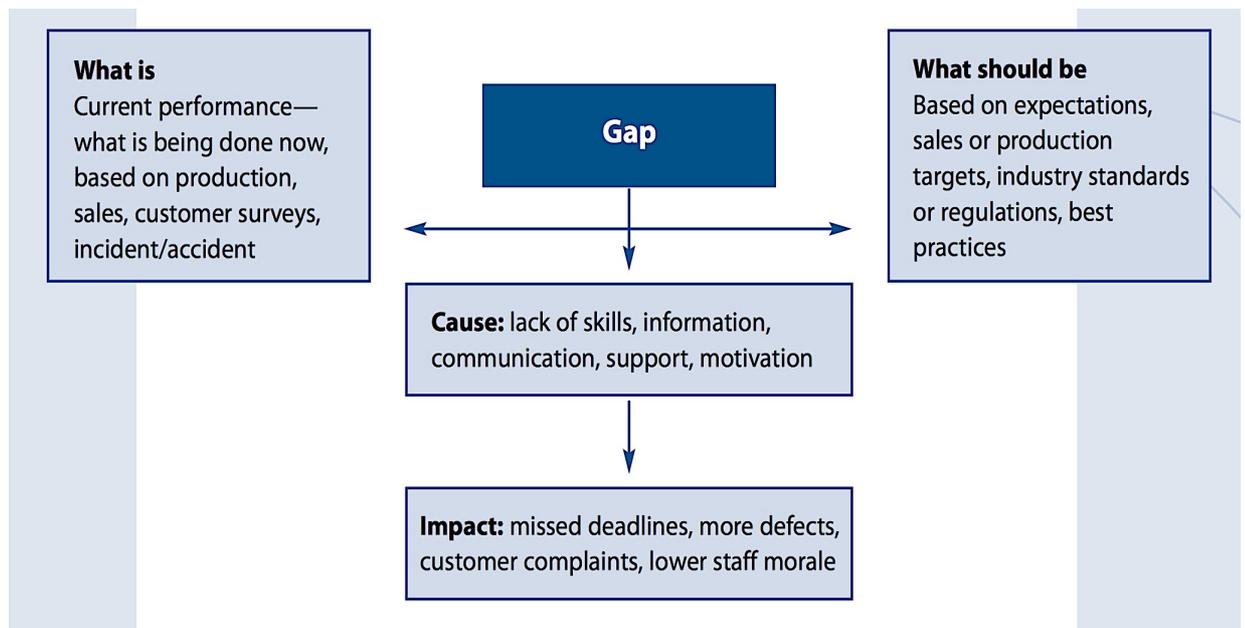


Figure 1. Gaps between “What is” and “What should be” adopted from (Government of Alberta, 2005.)

Once the learning needs have been identified, development training can be implemented with a few important consideration points regarding how adults perceive information best. Maureen Orey in his book on Communication Skills training refers to the assumptions on adult learners developed by Malcolm Knowles back in 1984. The highlighted assumptions suggest that the following:

- Adults need to know the reasons for why learning particular information is important
- Adults open up to the idea of learning when they know it will have a real impact on practical issues
- Adults want to be recognized for the wealth of knowledge they already have

Keeping the aforementioned points in mind, trainings need to be designed as highly interactive and involving sessions. Forcing a person to learn something is impossible, therefore, the only way to make training effective is to enrich it with a multitude of opportunities and encouragement. (Orey, 2015.)

Involving all training participants is key and, with the amount of varying ways employees perceive information, it is only possible by introducing diversified training tools in order to respond to every learning style. The tools may include presentations, discussions, exercises, group work, self-assessment and many others depending on the outcomes of the preliminary base research on what employees desire the most with regards to the training. (Orey, 2015.)

2.4 Current trends in internal communication enhancement worldwide

In recent years the topic of internal communications and employee engagement has been more valued by senior leaders in organizations worldwide. Internal communication professionals are conducting profound researches in order to determine effective communication strategies that perform towards building unified and motivated employee environment within corporations in the current times of rapid change. Previously mentioned survey conducted by ComRes and Elwood Atfield is one of the more recent analyses, that uncovers what to expect from the internal communication industry throughout year 2017, changes occurring in the communication methods companies use, as well as effects of social media on workplace communications. (Elwood Atfield & ComRes, 2016.)

ComRes and Elwood Atfield research shows that the purpose of internal communications in organizations has shifted majorly from primarily functional duties of transmitting information downwards from the top managers towards more strategic goals such as enhancing the understanding of company's business objectives among the employees and building employee's trust and engagement in the organization. Such change is not surprising keeping in mind that employee's ability to connect their personal role with the overall objective reaching strategy of the company, in other words, involvement, has proven to be one of the essential employee engagement drivers in organizations. (Cook 2008, 59.)

Although strategic purpose of internal communications became much more recognized in corporations, a number of barriers slow down the transition from functional to strategically directed internal communications function and, as a result, prevent companies from efficiently delivering on their strategic business objectives. Most current barriers include organizational hierarchies, budget allocation that does not allow development of internal communication tools and insufficient employee trainings for the use of resources available to achieve qualitative internal communications. (Elwood Atfield & ComRes, 2016.)

Mentioned barriers have been faced and widely researched by organizations already in 2016, one of them being the Institute of Internal Communications (IoIC) UK (2016, 2). In

their research on “Where’s internal communication headed” released in 2016, they described key solutions oriented on embracing the changes in the internal communications world and overcoming the addressed barriers. According to their findings, the following points need to be considered and included into actions towards eliminating the barriers:

- recognizing the power of data and getting more involved into measuring and evaluating company’s communication activities, as such research can be especially far-reaching in determining sets of investment priorities in a firm
- overcoming limitations organizational hierarchies bring to workplaces by redefining managerial roles enriching them with employee inspiring and engaging functions
- creating interactive trainings and campaigns that allow employees to participate in major company decisions, ask for any clarifications they might need, share their know-how and hence, ensure fully immersed workforce with no employees lacking necessary guidance

Another large trend besides strategic internal communication focus addressed by both IoIC UK and ComRes and Elwood Atfield research is growing use of two-way communication methods. The shift from solely hierarchical top-down information flow to a more dialogue based communication between senior managers and employees has been triggered by internal communication professionals realizing the power of personalized content delivered to precisely segmented audiences. Facilitating a dialogue between senior leaders and workers creates employee advocacy, shapes a trusting and inspiring work environment and yet again builds employee engagement so essential for reaching long-term corporate objectives. (Elwood Atfield & ComRes, 2016.)

Needless to say, the trend of digital technologies and social media transforming workplace communications can not be left unmentioned in the discussion of internal communications future. When it comes to the use of digital, it is substantial to remember that despite the multitude of beneficial effects technology can bring to communications, complete reliance on it has to be avoided in order to make introduction of new tools as smooth as possible and evade information overload. (Institute of Internal Communications UK 2016, 2.) It is all about finding that balance between using carefully selected technology for creating more personalized content, maximizing measurement and evaluation and using the right channel mix oriented on desired business objectives (Elwood Atfield & ComRes, 2016).

Social media, in turn, also has its advantageous points in being introduced into communication processes of the firm. Those include enabling two-way communication, simplifying information sharing and creating higher interest levels for employees to connect with their workplace. However, some internal communication professionals do not see the use of

social media as beneficial due to certain drawbacks connected to instability and inconsistency of social media communications. ComRes and Elwood Atfield study shows that internal social media application will rise in the years to come as the percentage of pro-technology employee increases. As for now, the best approach in terms of social media use in firm's communications comprises smooth introduction of internal social media in coordination with long-term strategic company goals, followed by effectiveness research that will show if that approach is beneficial to a particular organization. (Elwood Atfield & ComRes, 2016.)

In a nutshell, taking into account all aforementioned trends, internal communications are headed into the times where the focus lies majorly on the quality of communicated content, levels of employee engagement aligned with corporate long-term objectives and effective ways of applying new communication technologies to a non-disruptive and beneficial extent in the work environment (Institute of Internal Communications UK 2017, 2).

3 Research implementation

This chapter introduces a thorough explanation of the empirical research process including research method as well as data collection implementation and research objectives. Chosen research analysis method is also discussed in this part of thesis report.

3.1 Research method and objectives

Research method selected for this thesis is interview-based qualitative research. Qualitative method is best characterized as one focused on getting an understanding of various ways people perceive an aspect of social life. (Brikci & Green 2007, 6.) It generates word-based rather than numerical data for analysis and concentrates on exploring research participants' viewpoints, taking into account their complexity and considering different perspectives. (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge 2009, 6.)

Qualitative method was opted for as the most appropriate for this internal communication strategy research due to a number of its advantageous points, such as insightful reflection of perspectives and opinions and coverage of circumstantial conditions that affect human's reasons for specific conduct. A much behavior related topic of internal communications addresses the need for experience-based viewpoints generated from real work life contextual situations, which cannot be adequately presented with numerical data.

The main objectives of this qualitative research are comprised of creating the big picture of Hotel Kämp internal communication strategy with its positive and negative points and determining whether the importance of high-quality communication system is fully recognized at Hotel Kämp. Results of a research with such objectives brings the potential of evaluating the effectiveness of the current strategy and forming improvement suggestions based on previously obtained theoretical findings.

3.2 Research process

Chosen qualitative research method was executed in a form of two interviews of hospitality professionals within Front Office Department. Both group and individual interviews were conducted in order to acquire most veracious opinions in a tranquil dialogue setting as well as a more dynamic discussion-type arrangement.

Group interview included participation of a Duty Manager - certified member of Les Clefs d'Or Concierge union with extensive experience at Hotel Kämp Front Office, and a Guest

Service Agent, who has been advancing a promising hospitality career at Hotel Kämp for a number years. Both interviewees have acquired considerable experience through the most critical time at Hotel Kämp: a full-house renovation as well as major transition from Starwood to Leading Hotels of the World, which made them perfect interview candidates able to share the current state and the journey of internal communication strategy at the hotel.

Individual interview, in turn, was conducted with kind compliance of Hotel Kämp Front Office Manager, Arttu Kuromaa, who has built an impressive career path at Kämp Collection Hotels through Guest Service Agent, Duty Manager, Project Specialist and Accounting Coordinator positions since early 2011. His consistent passion for excellent customer service in combination with stable ability to keep work-related issues under control even at most challenging times has turned into a rewarding, but highly responsible position at Hotel Kämp. Sufficient experience acquired along the way has given Arttu Kuromaa full expertise on internal communication processes within the organization, which has made him an incredibly valuable source of information on the topic of this thesis. Despite fewer participants, the individual interview turned out to be longer as opposed to the group interview, as the Front Office Manager was able to share a lot of limited access information and give examples and explanation on why communication circulates a certain way.

Interview question set consisted of 12 questions focused on the characteristics of the current communication strategy at Hotel Kämp, communication environment, existing barriers to unobstructed communication, importance of smooth communication flow and the expected communication-related changes in the upcoming years. At the time of the interviews, theoretical part of the thesis was complete, which allowed the interview discussions to be correlated with the theoretical foundation of the thesis research.

Both interviews were conducted in English and recorded with permission of participating interviewees. The identities of group interview participants have not been revealed in accordance with their request. Transcription of the interviews was performed shortly after their acquirement, followed by response comparisons and thorough analysis.

4 Research results and analysis

This chapter presents valuable information received as an outcome of the interviews conducted with Front Office Department representatives of Hotel Kämp. The results are further analyzed applying the knowledge from theory thesis part with the intention of answering the main empirical research questions:

- What are the main characteristics, advantages and drawbacks of Hotel Kämp current internal communication strategy?
- Are internal communication tools used at Hotel Kämp agile and effective enough to constantly deliver on desired communication goals?
- Does Hotel Kämp recognize potential benefits of unobstructed internal communication flow?

4.1 Internal communication strategy evaluation

In pursuit of getting a good understanding of internal communication environment at Hotel Kämp and the circumstances forming it, the interviews started off with some of more general questions that gave respondents freedom to openly describe the nature of communication at their workplace.

Participants of both interviews had similar viewpoints on the overall communication environment at the hotel, stating that it is friendly and informal as an advantageous point, however indicating right away that it is definitely not ideal. From question one, interviewees have addressed some of the issues that in their opinion disturb the communication flow. This demonstrates that all interviewed workers are not leading their work life in denial. They recognize the problems, which is an essential step towards eliminating them.

Judging from the highlighted issues with internal communication, Hotel Kämp Receptionist and Manager on Duty feel like concerns, despite being brought up, are not acknowledged by the higher management. As per group interviewees, experience shows that issues that are spoken of do not get a practical response, which makes discussing them counterproductive and repulses the workers from sharing them on the first place. The management in turn, regardless of asking for improvement suggestions and trying to facilitate the dialogue, does not get a response. Such pattern makes communication very one-sided both in a downward and upward flow direction.

According to Mr. Kuromaa, described situation has another element to it. During the interview he has informed that the improvement feedback does reach him, whether distributed through formal or informal communication lines. However, the opinions on how to proceed seem to vary majorly from worker to worker, which is why it is difficult and time consuming to make a solid decision that would cater to everyone's needs. This could be the reason for employees feeling like their requests are not being considered.

With regards to the ongoing shift of organizational communication purpose from solely informational to strategic in modern corporations, Hotel Kämp has not acquired this trend just yet. As described by the Manager on Duty, company's mission and vision, in spite of being very familiar to the employees, acts mostly as a "poster on the wall". That point of view was supplemented to by the Receptionist, who informed about the lack of guidance and practical examples that could enable the mission and vision to direct daily work activities towards long-term company goals. Such responses indicate that the management has built the awareness of the mission and vision, but did not recognize the potential of giving thorough explanation illustrated with realistic examples in order to inspire employees to work in accordance with company's beliefs and goals.

One of the interview questions was designed to find out the levels of decision-making freedom employees have at Hotel Kämp, which within the right limits builds trust and employee engagement in the company. According to Mr. Kuromaa, the opportunity for each employee to make fundamental decisions exists, but doesn't necessarily work as intended due to the old-time habits that remain a part of daily work. The Front Office Manager also stated that the work limits are still to be discussed, which suggests that the decision-making freedom is real only in the desired communication strategy that has not been fully implemented yet. From the group interview it is clear that employees think that the new Leading Hotels of the World standards have affected the matter. Due to the new strict guidelines coming with the LHW brand in combination with no clear limitations from the management, the Receptionist, for example, feels like it is hard to show initiative and make fundamental decisions. Having personal experience working with LHW standards and knowing their effectiveness in other LHW hotels, the issue seems to lay less in the actual LHW quality requirements, but more in the way they are communicated to the staff in conjunction with Hotel Kämp daily work life limitations. As a result, staff members lose confidence in their work actions and prefer to ask for help from supervisors even in the most straightforward cases, which negatively affects employee involvement and trust.

Another aspect of employee engagement was discussed in the question on the ways employees socialize. From personal experience at Hotel Kämp and two other hotels on hos-

pitality career journey, it became clear that socializing activities make the biggest impact in team spirit building, majorly strengthen the teamwork during work shifts and ease communication flow between socially bonded colleagues. Group interview response indicated that even if the group events are happening, they are too rare and not organized enough. According to Arttu Kuromaa, this feedback has been received and, evidently, is being worked on. The situation came to the point it is at due to the management not being aware of the lack of socializing events previously. This could be a prerequisite for many aforementioned communication issues, so the acknowledgement of the problem is already a positive achievement.

4.2 Internal communication tools

Both individual and group discussions have highlighted email to be the most used communication tool at Hotel Kämp. Does it deliver on the communication strategy goals? Yes and no. While it does distribute all emerging information to staff members email inbox folders, without supplementary explanation and right approach this tool is not effective enough to fulfill understanding and commitment stages of internal communication. This point has been raised in the group interview a number of times: there are too many emails, the structure of emails is too complicated, the language used is too formal and not clear enough, there is no email follow-up, which all leads to the missed opportunity for the emails to be effective.

As per Arttu Kuromaa, the most difficult part is trying to find the balance between the frequency of sent information and quality of it, when staff members have different information processing abilities. Some employees want all detailed information, whereas others request main points only in an easy-to-browse-through form. According to the Front Office Manager, email communication tool could be very effective, if the process would run as follows: receive, read, understand, if not – ask. However, it does not seem to be happening that way. The reasons for that have also been discussed during the interview. In Mr. Kuromaa's opinion, the main stumbling-stones here are lack of responsibility to read the emails as well as reluctance to ask for explanation. Lack of willingness to read the emails is, on one hand, a motivational issue, linked to the shortage of socializing activities that could lift employee involvement, and, on the other hand, a problem of understanding the content, which makes employees give up reading the emails on the first place. Hesitation to ask for clarification, in turn, comes from a challenge to find the right time and right place to bring up questions without feeling like interfering at a busy time.

When it comes to the introduction of new communication tools, the current situation at Hotel Kämp holds that process back. In response to the question about employee trainings upon the announcement of new communication tools, Mr. Kuromaa gave an example of how changes are often introduced at Hotel Kämp. He described in details how new payment terminal system has been established recently with no sufficient training of the staff, which led to chaotic situation at the Front Office and service levels declination. With this example Mr. Kuromaa referred to the fact that, if the new tools would get introduced now, the little or no training pattern would most likely continue, and the tools would fail due to the inability to use them properly. Front Office Manager also mentioned that the issue here has to do a lot with allocation of internal communication duties. As long as there is no clear idea on who is responsible for the training and instructions in an organization, new communication tools would only have an opposite effect to what they are designed to do – slow the communication process down with uncertainty.

4.3 Recognizing the potential of an effective communication strategy

The interview questionnaire included an intriguing part aimed at finding out if internal communication strategy is prioritized as an essential element at Hotel Kämp to develop and work upon. Without that initial understanding of the potential benefits unobstructed communication flow can bring to the service product as well as to the overall working environment within the company, it is hard to find that motivation to perform a regular review and update on the used communication channels and tools and to elaborate a continuous communication strategy.

In Arttu Kuromaa's opinion, smooth communication flow would make a considerable influence. If a personalized strategy was developed on the basis of research and applied successfully, ensuring constant information delivery, facilitating the understanding levels and making employees confident in their work actions, it would eliminate the ambiguity and advance the service product at the hotel. According to Mr. Kuromaa, bringing current internal communication closer to the desired one has to start with supplementing the communicated information with background on why things are done a certain way. This indicates that Front Office leader recognizes the potential of an effective communication strategy to the point, where the improvement actions are thought of and discussed, which is a positive output.

Interviewed Manager on Duty and Receptionist believe that although improved communication strategy would help, it could make noticeable difference only in conjunction with other elements such as enhanced team spirit and closer focus on people within the com-

pany, who make achievement of business goals possible, rather than on business goals only.

As for the future predictions, the Front Office Manager informed that progressive change will be possible only with joint effort from managerial and employee sides. He also mentioned, that Hotel Kämp communication strategy will experience effectiveness disclosure of the existing communication tools, instead of the input of the new tools and methods. Nevertheless, according to Mr. Kuromaa, Hotel Kämp is ready to think new and dispose of some old habits, which are setting back the progression of the developing communication strategy.

All in all, both interviews turned out to be incredibly informative. It might seem like they were a bit negative with the amount of the drawbacks mentioned, but that only shows the truthful nature of the discussed in them issues. Interview responses contained answers to the main research questions and, therefore, commenced an insightful discussion on the possible improvement suggestions for Hotel Kämp internal communication strategy in the Conclusions and Recommendations chapter.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter includes the final conclusions of the research and realistic advancement suggestions that can be interpreted into the developing internal communication strategy at Hotel Kämp. In addition, self-evaluation of the thesis process is presented, concluding this thesis chapter.

5.1 Research conclusions and recommendations

Theoretical research has shown that companies began to recognize communication significance to a much higher extent in the recent years. (Ragusa 2010, 6.) Hotel Kämp is not detached from this trend. Realization of the importance of smooth communication is currently very high, however, as empirical part of the research suggests, is not yet supplemented by efficient enough efforts aimed at advancing internal communication.

The first step towards building an effective strategy will have to be in close connection with mission and vision of the company. According to Ruck (2015, 122.), the process cannot start without setting clear communication strategy objectives. Communication objectives, in turn, need to be paired with long-term organizational goals in order to ensure durable company prosperity. (Cook 2008, 59.) As empirical research revealed, organizational mission and vision statements at Hotel Kämp lost their primary guiding purpose due to the lack of explanation on what do they mean in practice. While employees may know and entirely agree with what the company stands for, without proper image of what it takes to live up to those aims and beliefs, they are not able to acquire the necessary inspiration from them. A good solution to this matter can be interactive meetings, where the focus is not only on learning mission and vision statements, but more so on understanding their background and the way they should be incorporated in daily work life. Especially effective can be shared exemplary success stories from co-workers on cases, where company beliefs were expressed at their best with certain employee actions.

The next internal communication strategy element to work on is research. It is important not to underestimate the power of research and analysis. Theoretical part of the thesis advises on preliminary research being capable of eliminating ineffective communication channels. According to Barton (2014), multi-channel internal communication approach based on the pre-conducted research ensures information delivery to every team member, despite the individual differences in data perception. From the interviews with Hotel Kämp Front Office it seems that there is no multi-channel communication system implemented at the moment. Yet employees' diversity in the way they comprehend new information is described as a barrier to balanced communication by the management. Im-

provement suggestion here would be to organize a thorough research into the channels and their pairing with employee segments on a more regular basis. It will give much larger insight into the topic than the universal annual survey, and, as a result, will give an opportunity to answer all employees' communication needs using appropriate communication channels.

Another component of internal communication strategy, which, as determined in ComRes and Elwood Atfield research, gained relevance in recent years, is reciprocal dialogue-based communication. (Elwood Atfield & ComRes, 2016.) Empirical research showed that internal communication at Hotel Kämp is often very one-sided. When the dialogue opportunity arises, employees share their concerns. Managerial response gets delayed due to the discrepancy in opinions and deficiency of the aforementioned comprehensive approach. Employees, in turn, append it to the historical pattern and stop seeing the purpose in sharing feedback. This continuous cycle leads to major communication gaps. Embracing the dialogue from both ends can resolve this issue. Individual interview with Front Office Manager suggested that feedback does move in upward direction from line employees to the managers. In order to make employees feel they are being heard, managerial response should be immediate. Surely, it will not be possible to interpret every single employee request or suggestion into life, but acknowledgement and consideration will build trust and employee engagement – solid foundation for unimpeded communication. Combined with increased opportunities for dialogue in a form of more regular staff meetings, it will bring circumstances, in which staff members will have no reason to hold back, and internal communication will not break at any point.

The next issue that requires immediate attention at Hotel Kämp is choice of communication channels and activating them tools. As Hotel Kämp Front Office Manager informed, most messages are currently distributed through an electronic channel in the form of emails. Despite some favorable points on quick delivery and vast coverage, problems with balance between frequency and quality of the messages have occurred with regards to this communication tool. Moreover, information overflow through that electronic channel has decreased the levels of employees' motivation to take notice of the emailed content. Hotel Kämp is not the only organization to face that issue. Baden Eunson (2013, 512), one of the theoretical part sources, informs, that some companies had to incorporate a "no email Friday" policy into their communication strategy in attempts to surmount email overflow.

A favorable solution for Hotel Kämp with regards to this matter includes several stages. Firstly, email communication needs to be redefined, specifically, clarity of the messages,

their extent and frequency. In order to avoid disagreements, it is best done in a communication development meeting setting with all Front Office staff members' participation. During the meeting, the format of the email messages can be discussed, as well as their regularity. For the staff members, who will feel the need for additional clarifications, certain Q&A sessions can be organized to ensure consideration of every employee's needs.

Secondly, new internal communication tools need to be introduced in order to activate a multi-channel approach that would take the pressure off the email communication. Needless to say, the tools have to be implemented alongside sufficient training. Best practices from luxury hotels, the author had an opportunity to gain experience from, suggest that every new channel and tool taken into use has to be launched with a step-by-step usage explanation from the designated trainer. The training itself can also include a variety of tools, such as face-to-face meeting and video manuals.

An example of an effective communication tool from author's hospitality experience can be a "Concierge Assistant" internal communication tool used at Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. It is an electronic system that contains all concierge-related information on each hotel guest. The policy at Four Seasons is that all employees, no matter from which department, are highly knowledgeable and can answer any guest's question. "Concierge Assistant" tool ensures that guest information reaches all employees immediately, which eliminates miscommunication during shift change as well as between departments. In addition, every communication tool at Four Seasons is accompanied by adequate training. Every employee has a Four Seasons family passport that contains information on each training completion status. Without training completion, employees cannot begin operating the respective tools. The idea of this example is to show potential communication tools to incorporate into the multi-channel communication mix. The communication model at Hotel Kämp is not meant to be the same, but should acquire corresponding internal communication training elements. Stepping outside of the comfort zone by selecting unexpected tools to use and starting them with of proper employee training, can bring auspicious outcomes making internal communication dynamic and versatile.

Lastly, the motivational levels of Hotel Kämp employees need to be elevated. The original communication tools can be improved and new communication channels can be activated, but these actions will not be effective without employee commitment. Theoretical research has shown that sufficient training provides employees with information necessary to make confident decisions in their daily work activities. This certainty on the right manner of their actions brings long-term engagement and boosts employee interest in continuing to develop their professional skills. (Towers Perrin, 2003.) According to empirical research find-

ings, solid training system at Hotel Kämp is not established. When changes are introduced, there is no proper follow-up training to make staff members familiar with the new principles. An improvement suggestion here starts with intensified measures from Human Resource department. As a prerequisite for effective employee training, socializing events can be organized on a regular basis to let employees get to know each other in a more informal setting and, as a result, be comfortable to communicate and share best practices and knowledge with each other. This way employee training sessions can be dynamic and involving and, therefore, make employees look forward to them. In addition, training culture at Hotel Kämp can be consolidated with a new Training and Development Manager position. Such responsibility allocation will allow stable control over training-related matters, eliminate existing confusion and positively change employee-coaching culture at Hotel Kämp.

The main purpose of the thesis research was to analyze current internal communication state at Hotel Kämp, focusing on its efficiency, benefits and drawbacks, and develop improvement suggestions for the existing internal communication strategy based on theoretical findings and personal hospitality experience in luxury hotel sector. Both target components have been delivered upon, therefore, the aim of this study has been reached.

5.2 Evaluation of the thesis process

Thesis development process turned out to be more time consuming than originally anticipated. Despite high interest in the topic and the potential findings of the study, some barriers appeared along the way, preventing the work to be completed in the initially determined timeframe.

The thesis process was interrupted in May 2016 with an exciting opportunity to take part in a Manager-in-Training program at Four Seasons Hotel St.Petersburg, Russia, resulting from participation in Young Hoteliers Summit 7th Edition. Thesis study was intended to be continued during the MIT program, which turned out to be intense, and therefore, did not allow any activities besides it. Nevertheless, experience with Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts turned out to have a highly positive effect on the research process. Internal communication at Four Seasons St. Petersburg functioned in an astonishingly smooth way. This example of advanced communications gave the author communication outlook on a larger scale and commenced a thorough thinking process on how the observed best practices can fit into Hotel Kämp strategy.

As improvement suggestion, the thesis could have been completed as a more solid process with a better schedule. However, when life brings opportunities that are impossible to turn down, solutions that combine what is best for studies and career need to be made. Thesis development was an incredibly educational process that generated the understanding of research implementation and all its elements. The author's hospitality experience was beneficial for conducting the empirical research, whereas the knowledge acquired from the theoretical research and its application for development of improvement suggestions can be considered substantial.

Conducting the thesis was one of the most time-consuming processes in the author's study timeline. In spite of personal delays, thesis was completed by the end of the author's study time at Haaga-Helia in May 2017. Research oriented thesis on the topic of Internal Communication Development at Hotel Kämp was created by combining author's hospitality experience in luxury hotel sector with theoretical findings on the subject in order to obtain a bachelor's degree in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management.

5.3 Commissioning party feedback

Positive feedback was received from Hotel Kämp management shortly after thesis completion, as the research has uncovered sufficient information for future improvement of internal communications.

More specifically Mr. Arttu Kuromaa noted:

"The research findings were very much in accordance with Hotel Kämp internal study that was conducted earlier this year. However, this thesis provides much more detailed information in the challenges and itemizes possible reasons for failure in communication. Most importantly it provides suggestions in how to proceed in order to improve. The thesis will be a valuable tool in developing the internal communication at Hotel Kämp."

(Kuromaa 6 June 2017.)

As mentioned by the commissioning party representative, this thesis research became a more in-depth study into the subject of internal communications at Hotel Kämp in accordance with the originally intended purpose of the thesis work. It also provided development suggestions that, according to the commissioning party, will be used in the upcoming communication improvement processes. Such feedback makes the author excited for the future of communications at Hotel Kämp and interested in potentially conducting another study into Hotel Kämp communication processes in the upcoming years.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questionnaire

1. What characterizes your organizational internal communication?
2. How familiar are staff members with mission and vision of the company?
3. Do staff members have an ability to make fundamental decisions to increase their work performance?
4. Do staff members interact on social level?
5. What communication tools are used in the organization?
6. Are there any barriers to organizational communication at Hotel Kämp?
7. Do staff members have access to sufficient training upon the introduction of new internal communication tools?
8. How do you describe the balance between frequency of the information delivery and quality of the messages?
9. Does Hotel Kämp take effective measures to ensure fulfillment of awareness, understanding and commitment stages of organizational communication strategy?
10. In your experience, what benefits does unobstructed communication flow bring to the service product at Hotel Kämp?
11. What are your current internal communication needs?
12. What changes do you expect to see in Hotel Kämp communication in the upcoming years?