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Internal communication in the digital workplace: digital communication channels and employee engagement.

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

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<p>Organisational communication has been considered the backbone of the modern business's success for years. A company and its stakeholders raise significant interest and demand for transparency, effectiveness, and flexibility toward communication strategies. Fundamentally, communicating is a process of exchanging information. In the digital world, a single piece of information is digitalized and connected. Organisational communication has transformed significantly during the last decade as the ultimate results of megatrends as globalization and digitalization.</p> <p>This thesis scrutinizes communication issues in the case company's internal communication. The problems arise from low communication interaction and unclear strategies. The objective of this is to provide readers with profound knowledge of internal communication in a digital workplace. The author aims to help researchers and companies to review their communication process and build proper communication plans.</p> <p>To examine the issues, the author studies literature, chooses research methodology, formulates a survey, produces findings, and gives suggestions. Critical topics needed to be investigated are channel preferences and the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. Exploratory research and descriptive research are approaches to the thesis's questions and problems.</p> <p>This research gains insights into the commissioned company's internal communication that the company had a two-way communication flow with both informal and formal types of information. They also had a good feedback scheme. However, the company found challenges in selecting the right channels among the multiple channels available, in detecting the right group of employees, and in creating precise content for internal communication. One important finding was that effective internal communication helped employees become involved and engaged in their work.</p>	
Keywords	communication process, internal communication, channels, digital communication, employee engagement

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1 Introduction

Internal communication has raised its role significantly in recent years. On the one hand, at a managerial level, managers desire to spread and implement innovative ideas within a short time; on the other hand, their employees desire to be kept informed whenever changes take place. However, these demands are not always matched due to ineffective communication.

1.1 Thesis objectives

This thesis is going to elaborate on the employee experience in internal communication in an organisation. The researched company requires to retain their anonymity so that the description of the company will be demonstrated in the objective standard. The company has launched their digital internal communication system for nearly two years, and coped with many unexpected issues during the implementation, maintenance, and development communication processes. The thesis will research the company's internal communication in their headquarters located in Helsinki, Finland. The company raised the problem that employees show their low interaction and interest in some communication platforms.

The thesis approaches the problem via exploratory and descriptive research purposes. The targeted population to gain responses from are all employees working in the Helsinki office. The author surveys to examine how employees consider communication structure, communication channels, and their engagement in internal communication. The main objective of the thesis is to provide companies, communication experts and academic researchers a base to see through how internal communication becomes affected by channels, users, administrators, structure, and strategic plans. This objective has the main question: How does internal communication meet the employees' needs and relate to employee engagement?

To answer to the main question clearly, there have been five sub research questions formulated:

1. What are communication channel preferences?
2. How do the channels meet the employees' needs?

3. How engaged are the employees?
4. What is the relation between employee engagement and internal communication?
5. What are suggestions for the company's internal communication strategies to improve their employee engagement?

Questions 1, 4 and 5 serve as exploratory research to clarify the internal communication situation in the researched company in terms of channels, audiences, and strategies, while the two other questions belong to descriptive research to examine how internal communication satisfies employees.

This thesis has six main parts, including the introduction, theoretical framework, methodology and analysis, the result analysis, the discussion, and the conclusion. The first part, the introduction, states the thesis topic, a company issue, objectives, and research questions. This is to navigate readers to a level of reference for this study to their interest. Chapter 2, the theoretical framework, introduces and clarifies sources of literature to formulate the knowledge base. The next chapter, methodology, gives an approach and a process to conduct the survey, to which readers can evaluate the thesis's validity and reliability. Chapter 4, the results, demonstrates data in graphs to offer insights into the researched company and provide answers to the research questions discussed in chapters 1, 2, and 3. The next part is the discussion, which focuses on clarifying findings, then delivering suggestions to the researched company and recommendations to further studies. The last chapter is the conclusion, stating the outcomes of the thesis, relation of objectives and results, and connection among findings and suggestions.

1.2 Theoretical framework

To formulate the thesis validity and ensure the quality of this research, the theoretical framework, known as a solid knowledge foundation, is built based on organisational communication, communication structure and functions, internal communication, and internal communication in a digital workplace concept.

Regarding organisational communication, communication process and key functions will be described. The basic communication process theory used in this study

is developed by Shannon & Weaver (1949). Although the theory was published in 1949, the model retains its value in the field of communication. The model is widely used as a base to further develop and adopt new factors into these processes. Huczynski & Buchanan (2007, 2017) in their book *Organizational Behaviour* features the model by Shannon & Weaver (1949). To support Huczynski & Buchanan, Robbins & Judge (2013) have applied the Shannon & Weaver (1949) model in their publishing. However, the model confronts criticisms such as a lack of implications in a modern context such as skills, channels, and cultures. Following organisation communication process is a set of key functions of communication such as coordination, socialisation, innovation. This approach is supported by many researchers such as Myers & Myers (1982) and Neher (1997), but criticized by Robbins & Judge (2013) that the approach does not consider motivations or employee experience in communication.

In terms of internal communication, corporate communication, channels, and employee engagement are clarified. There are ways to approach internal communication. Welch & Jackson (2007), Welch (2012), and Bovee (2016) bring their views to define internal communication in an organisation. The author, then, will go for the direction suggested by Welch & Jackson (2017) that internal communication comprises all activities in all levels in an organisation. After that, channels in communication are reviewed based on Welch (2011- 2012), Friedl & Vercic (2011), Men (2014), and Erjavec *et al* (2018). Channels are classified into different groups based on their functions, audiences and transferring capabilities. A media-rich theory introduced by Daft & Lengel (1986) supported by Robbins & Judge (2013: 348) is applied to conduct a comprehensive interpretation of channel roles in internal communication. Finally, employee engagement in digital internal communication concepts are developed based on Argenti (2009), Mishra, Boynton & Mishra (2014), Deloitte (2013), Huczynski & Buchanan (2017), and Capgemini (2018). Literature resources for this concept are newly formed. The author gathers literature about digital communication mostly from online-based libraries and publications of prestigious consulting companies in the field of business.

1.3 Glossary

- Internal communication: a communication within an organisation at all levels
- Corporate communication: a communication process between employees and

employers. The communication flow is one-way (from employer to employees) or two-way (from employer to employees and vice versa)

- Employee engagement: emotional and physical states affect an employee when performing his/her tasks
- Digital workplace environment: an environment where digital systems and technologies deal with almost all business demands.
- Digital communication: communication apply technologies and digital systems in its process.
- Channel of communication: a tool to use to transmit information
- Intranet: a private network for internal communication to transmit information
- Workspace: a forum within an intranet system to serve specific groups of employees or business functions.
- Instant messaging: a type of communication channel with a concept of direct interaction.
- Employee experience: an experience of an employee when using his/her company facilities or services.

2 Theoretical framework

In the age of digitalization, communication plays an important role in workplace transformation. Within the scope of the research, the author will create a detailed framework of organisational communication regarding the communication process, internal communication, digital workplace, and employee engagement to internal communication.

2.1 Organisational communication

The field of organisational communication study is diverse thanks to a wide range of different theories, models, and practices, which are believed to fill the “conceptual

toolbox” of researchers and readers (Marc Anderson 2007, cited in Huczynski & Buchanan 2017: 198). Organisational communication, therefore, could be seen from a variety of tools and perspectives to deal with many issues and problems surged in certain circumstances.

2.1.1 Communication process

The most commonly adapted communication process is created by Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949). They view communication under the eye of technical professionals with the theories about how information flows in a mechanistic system. Shannon & Weaver (1949) raise the great question in their research “how can an information source get a message to a destination with a minimum of distortions and errors?”. The question draws the huge attention from scholars and persists as a common basis for organisational communication discussion.

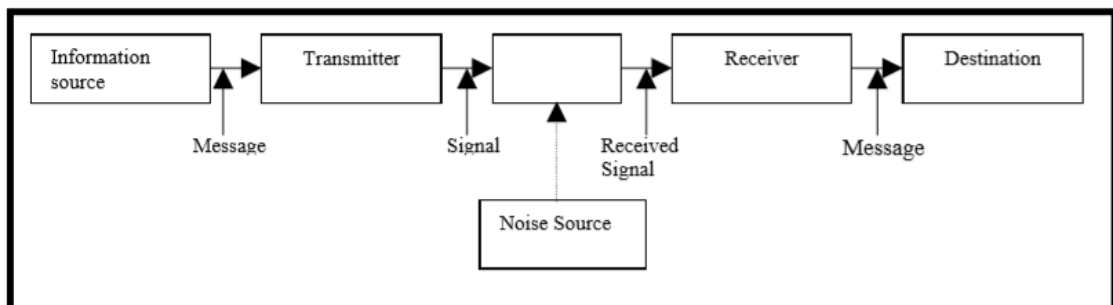


Figure 1: The communication process adapted from Shannon & Weaver (1949)

Figure 1 illustrates the process of communication with key perceptual filters within a context: the sender, encoding, the message, the channel, decoding, the receiver, noise, and feedback.

Although Huczynski & Buchanan (2017: 217) criticize that Shannon & Weaver (1949) introduce the process in electronic systems rather than in organisational communication, Shannon and Weaver create a core value of communication with five fundamental stages named as “coding”, “decoding”, “perceptual filters”, “noise”, and “feedback”. A sender starts to communicate by encoding/coding his/her thought into a symbolic form. The message is, then, placed in oral or written form and sent via formal or informal channels depending on the sender’s choice. In response, the decoding process is activated by the audience of the transmitted message. The receiver translates the symbols into understandable form; however, the communication barrier (noise) such as perceptual problems, information overload, semantic difficulties, or

cultural differences will distort the clarity of the message. Feedback, therefore, becomes an integral part of all. Feedback checks on how successful transmitter and receiver have been in transferring our messages as originally intended. It determines whether understanding has been achieved. (Robbins & Judge 2013: 338; Huczynski & Buchanan 2017: 217).

The model created by Shannon & Weaver (1949) has been criticised to be out-of-date in the context of the modern environment. The model describes the one-way round, while the communication cycle continuously runs between senders and receivers. Communication is not merely between two people, but a group of people, which means that communication now comprises more dynamic elements such as channels, psychological and physical filters, social and cultural aspects, even individualism and collectivism.

2.1.2 Key functions of organisational communication

In the old school of thought, the functions of organisational communication retained the basic concepts such as informing, directing, regulating, socializing and persuading (Myers & Myers 1982; Neher 1997). These researchers focused on the social and organisational functions rather than the functions of specific communication acts. In brief, three primary functions in communication were listed as below:

- *Coordination and regulation of production activities*: the function evolved from one-way, top-down communication to complex, interactive, lateral communication. The traditional bureaucratic management was replaced due to the constant change in production activities. The redundant communication was claimed to waste capital and human resources. The requirement for a dynamic working environment fuelled the need for lateral communications between production workers and their managers.
- *Socialisation*: the function emphasized the human relations within an organisation, which asserted that effective collaboration came from the good relationship between an organisation and its employees, and among employees. The socialisation function was believed to shape organisational culture and climate.
- *Innovation*: the function indicated the importance of communication in facilitating innovative thoughts and ideas. Innovation focused on how a new concept was accepted within an organisation to bring positive changes to management.

However, these approaches are criticised to focus mainly on the outcomes of acts of communication but not mention about motivations underpinning these actions. Robbins & Judge (2013) have filled the gap. They claim that communication in an organisation serves four major functions such as control, motivation, emotional expression, and information. Organisations have authority hierarchies and formal guidelines, which employees follow to perform their job. These activities perform a control function of communication. Another function is a motivation that is clarified through employees' tasks, performances, and rewards. Communication within the group is a fundamental mechanism by which members show their satisfaction and frustrations. This, therefore, provides for the emotional expression of feelings and fulfilment of social needs. The final function of communication is to facilitate decision making. Individuals and groups need the information to make decisions by transmitting the data needed to identify and evaluate choices.

2.2 Internal communication

2.2.1 Definitions and approach

Internal communication is widely used to imply a core of organisational communication, which is defined to comprise all communication within the boundaries of an organisation (Welch & Jackson 2007). Bovée (2016) define internal communication as the process of exchanging information and ideas, while Welch & Jackson (2007) and Welch (2012) claim internal communication is a range of formal and informal communication between employees and employers. These various points of view toward internal communication imply that internal communication is an important function of an organisation that is responsible for all internal exchange of information between stakeholders at all levels.

However, it is claimed that the boundaries of organisations, which are believed to set the limit for internal communication, solely reflect the physical limitations between internal and external aspects of organisation. The new approach to internal communication, therefore, has been researched by many. Welch & Jackson (2007) view the internal communication from the points of stakeholders, which has been recognized as a comprehensive picture of internal communication from the insight of an organisation. They claim that internal communication consists of four dimensions representing different participant groups at all levels in an organisation.

Table 1: Internal communication matrix adapted from Welch & Jackson (2007)

Dimension of internal communication	Level	Direction	Participants
Internal team peer	Team colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee
Internal project peer	Project colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee
Internal line management	Line managers/Supervisors	Predominantly two-way	Line managers-employees
Internal corporate	Strategic managers/top managers	Predominantly one-way	Strategic managers-all employees

The first dimension classifies employee-to-employee communication as internal team level communication. Employees use internal communication tools to discuss their tasks in day-to-day activities. Sharing the same contents of communication as the team level does, the second dimension known as project-level internal communication involves many workers being responsible for a certain project. Third, line management communication is at every level within organisations because line managers work in the roles of both employees and supervisors. Communication at this level relates directly to employee engagement via employee appraisals and development discussions. Last but not least, the fourth level of internal communication is internal corporate communication, which has participants as strategic managers and all employees using mainly one-way communication. The content of this communication focuses on organisation issues such as new development, goals, objectives, vision, values, and achievements. The internal corporate communication focuses on all the employees with views to promoting employee engagement, commitment, and awareness of the changing environment with a strong sense of involvement. (Welch & Jackson 2007)

Communication at corporate level and line management level is the main concern of this study because internal communication related to employees' roles and organisational issues are the most essential elements in workplace relationships.

2.2.2 Channels

Communication channels hold a vital role in the communication process because the message could not reach the receiver, the message would not be negotiated, and managers and employees could not interpret others without channels. However, each type of a communication tool owns both strengths and weaknesses, which could support, or distort, or even influence receivers' interpretation of the messages. Recently, many business communication scholars show their strong interests in the role of media in organisational communication to help managers understand their employees (Welch 2011 2012; Friedl & Vercic 2011; Men 2014; Erjavec *et al* 2018). They believe that the use of communication channels has a significant impact on the flow of information, resulting in changes in communication strategies, employee-employer relationships, and employee engagement.

Internal communication channels are modes by which communication is conveyed. Over decades, the channels have been categorized in different ways into oral, written, and electronic, or into traditional and social media channels (Friedl & Vercic 2011). Traditionally, communication channels were divided into five groups, including face-to-face, group, written, traditional communication technologies, and computer-mediated communication technologies. To date, Friedl & Vercic (2011) identify there are two groups of channels, namely social media and traditional media. The social media include blogs, wikis, social networking, podcasting, video and photo sharing, and instant messaging. While, traditional internal communication media are magazines, intranet news, television, email, newsletter, and team meetings.

The very well-known theory, which serves as a media selection model based on the effectiveness of communication channels in transmitting different types of information, is the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel 1986). Although the theory was developed 30 years ago, it retains its values regarding identifying the links among communication channels, employee performance, and leadership. Daft & Lengel (1986) defines information richness as "the ability of information to change understanding within a time interval". They find out that the richness of a medium is measured based on its three characteristics, which are:

- An ability of a channel to handle multiple information cues simultaneously, and

- An ability of a channel to generate rapid feedback, and
- An ability of a channel to create a personal focus.

As the capacity to convey information of each communication channel varies upon its features and users, choosing the right channel in a specific context to transmit information vastly affects the success of communication. A channel is considered a rich medium when it can handle the huge amount of information within a short time and facilitate fast feedback. Others are considered lean channels if they convey a message in one-way communication without feedback or cues. (Daft & Lengel 1986; Robbins & Judge 2013: 384)

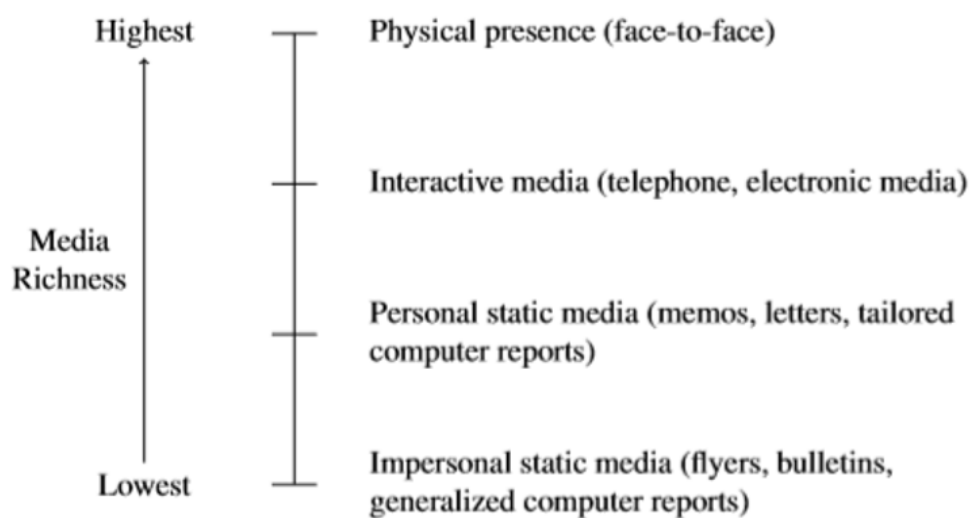


Figure 2: Media Richness Hierarchy (Daft & Lengel 1988)

Figure 2 is an original form showing how a hierarchy of media richness is based on four main features such as physical presence, interactive media, personal static media, and impersonal static media. It can be understood that the more instantly interactive a channel is, the higher the scores it receives.

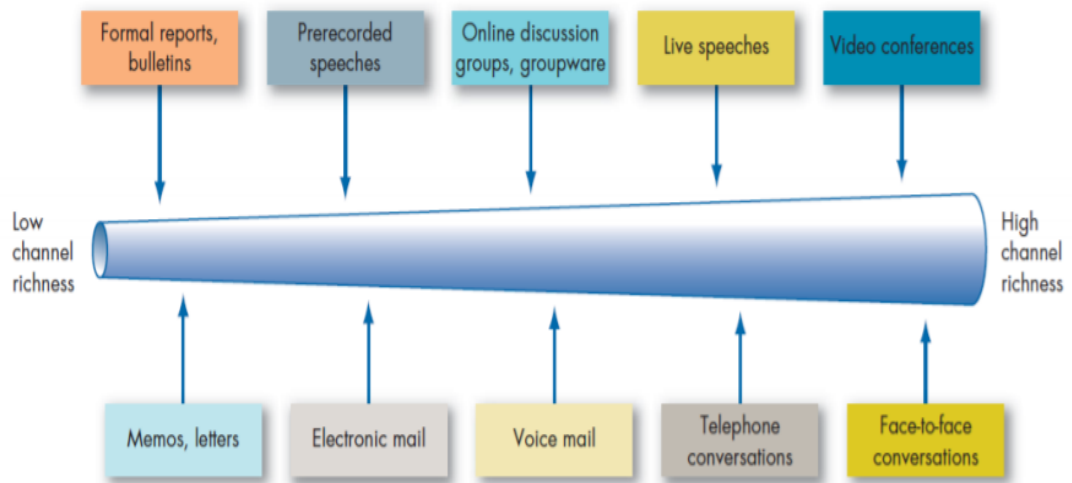


Figure 3: Information richness and communication channels. (Robbins & Judge 2013:384 adapted from Media richness theory by Daft & Lengel 1986)

Figure 3, then, paints the picture again by reviewing the original version of media richness and showing the position of specific channels on the richness scale. Face-to-face conversations and video conferences are recognized as the most straight-forward channels because they allow employees to communicate using both verbal and non-verbal ways to convey messages with little noise. However, the main disadvantage of these channels is time-consuming. The face-to-face meetings, video conferences and phone calls are preferred in the dynamic working environment or complex tasks, while memos and letters are commonly used in one-way communication that does not require immediate feedback. (Robbins & Judge 2013: 384-385).

Huczynski & Buchanan (2017: 239) show another viewpoint toward the information carrying-capacity in that they divide communication channels based on communication directions. A range of mechanisms used in top-down and one-way communications comprises the management chain of command; regular meetings with senior and/or middle managers; in-house newspapers and magazines; notice boards; videos; conferences and seminars; employee reports; team briefings; and email and intranets. While, two-way communications prefer to use open channels such as social media, “speak out” programmes, idea schemes, an appraisal system, and an attitude survey. These channels advocate better communication and become a part of strategic communication to maintain and develop corporate mission and vision.

Daft & Lengel (1986; 1988) claim that choosing the right channel depends vastly on the nature of the message. Communication messages can be divided into two types: non-routine and routine. Non-routine communications usually contain more ambiguous and complex information, causing chances of misunderstanding; whereas routine communications are often simple, straight-forward, and logical.

	<i>Communication Failure</i>	<i>Effective Communication</i>
Rich	Data glut. Rich media used for routine messages. Excess cues cause confusion and surplus meaning.	Communication success because rich media match non-routine messages
Media Richness	<i>Effective Communication</i>	<i>Communication Failure</i>
Lean	Communication success because low media match routine messages	Data starvation. Lean media used for non-routine messages. Too few cues to capture message complexity.
	Routine	Non-routine
	Management Problem	

Figure 4: Media selection adapted from Daft & Lengel 1988.

As can be seen from Figure 4, successful communication results from the right media selection. Effective communication will be achieved when routine information is sent via a lean channel, and non-routine messages are transmitted via rich media.

Communication failure could happen if employees or managers use rich media for routine tasks or lean medium for non-routine works. In brief, rich communication channels will do their best when used in complex and ambiguous situations because they could make an instant response with correction if needed. Rich channels used for simple tasks can waste users' time and confuse. In addition, lean communication media is a good choice for straightforward information without the urge of time.

Daft & Lengel (1986) believe that the performance will be improved when the channels reach the needs of organisation information to process these tasks in circumstances of uncertainty.

Bill Quirke (2008, cited in Huczynski & Buchanan 2017: 239) agrees the communication channels are in close relationship with the degree of communication involvement and the degree of change within an organisation. The more significant change is, the more employees and more rich channels need to involve.

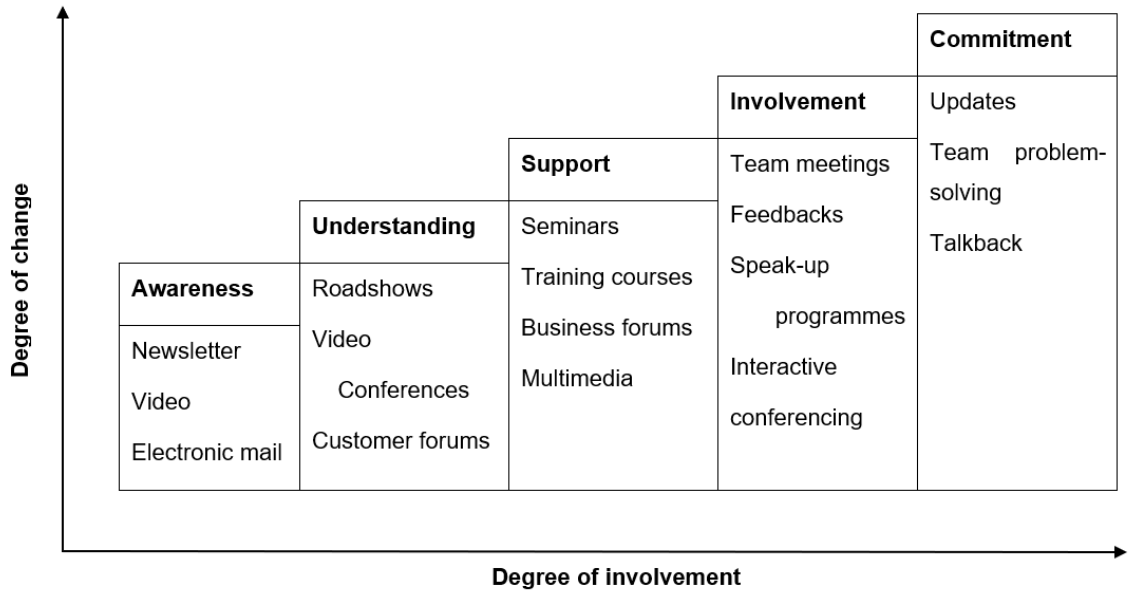


Figure 5: The communication escalator adapted from Quirke (2008) cited in Huczynski & Buchanan 2017: 239

Figure 5 demonstrates what channels meet the level of involvement of employees. The level of flexibility and capacity of communication channels relate closely to the involvement scale include awareness, understanding, support, involvement, and commitment. It seems that the more open the tools are, the better employee engagement the organisation will attain. In a constantly changing environment, open communications promote collaborative working, advocate autonomy, and boost employee loyalties.

Miller (2012: 51-55) shares the same view toward how internal communication channels reflect the corporate working styles, affecting work performance. Internal communication in classical approaches focused on routine tasks, which commonly used written mode and formal style. Therefore, the communication direction was usually vertical and more formal top-down. The new approach to internal communication has been changing to two-way communication, which stresses the role of the new communication mechanisms concentrating on dealing with problems and open-door policies to encourage innovative working culture. Multichannel is preferred in a modern workplace to handle the increasing amount of information needed to process urgently.

2.2.3 Employee engagement via internal communication

The most commonly used concept of employee engagement is developed by Kahn

(1990) when he sets the ground defining the term “personal engagement” as “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance” (Kahn 1996:94). According to Kahn (1990), three elements influence the formation of employee engagement, including meaningfulness, safety, and availability. The perspective cultivates in organisational management contexts to understand people’s motivation and sense of meaning at work. The scholar emphasises that personal, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organisational factors influence employees’ experiences and their performances. Employee emotions result in their positive or negative attitude towards their organisation and leaders. In other words, engagement implies that emotional and physical factors reflect each other in performing an organisational role. (Kahn 1990)

Schaufeli & Witte (2017) state that these terms “work engagement” or “employee engagement” can be used interchangeably. Work engagement, which is mostly used in scientific literature, is a positive and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is defined as “the high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence also in the face of difficulties”. Dedication refers to “being strongly involved in one's work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge”. Absorption is defined as “being fully concentrated on and happily engrossed in one's work”. In brief, an employee is recognized as an engaged worker when (s)he works hard (vigor), deeply involved in his/her organisation (dedication) and feels happy when working (absorption). (Schaufeli 2018: 99)

Employee engagement is usually measured according to the three dimensions previously described -vigor, dedication and absorption- with the Utrecht Work Engagement Scales (UWES; Schaufeli 2002 cited in Schaufeli 2018). UWES has been validated and used many times, which proves its excellence in interpreting employee engagement. Although UWES originally has 17 items, it becomes more concrete with an ultra-short version with only three items as shown in table 2 below. (Schaufeli 2018)

Table 2: Employee engagement concepts adopted by Kahn 1990, Schaufeli *et al* 2002 and Schaufeli 2018.

Term	Key elements	Measurement
Personal engagement	Meaningfulness	
	Safety	
	Availability	
Employee engagement	Vigor	UWES item "At my work I feel full of energy"
	Dedication	UWES item "I am enthusiastic about my job"
	Absorption	UWES item "Time flies when I am working"

In addition to 'customer care', nowadays, managers pay much attention to their employees, recognising that employees contribute an integral part to the success of the business. Internal communication, to some extent, is dealing with employees to help their voices be heard and feel satisfied via effective communication. The main goals of internal communication are keeping staff informed of any changes and the company's strategies, and facilitating engagement. Employees increasingly demand involvement and participation in conversations that could drive organisational changes, and they expect senior managers to listen to and act upon their feedback. However, this may not happen in many companies where seniors simply are not involved in the same conversation established by their lower-level employees. (Argenti 2009; Mishra *et al* 2014)

Employee communication needs were originally stated by Goldhaber, Porter, Yates and Lesniak (1978, cited in Ruck 2012) that these needs included information-related jobs, job-related matters, organisational decision making, and opportunities to have their voice heard and evaluate superiors. Since then, Chen *et al* (2006: 242) argue that

there is a lack of research on relations between employee satisfaction and organisational communication practices. They state employees' contributions to company successes or changes have been ignored within organisational process, which creates a gap between employee and employer interrelation. Besides, TowersWatson (2010) adds while organisations do an excellent job in conveying information top-down, they find themselves ineffective at communicating to employees about their impacts on customers or business growth. The survey indicates that employees feel disengaged when their employers rarely communicate to make them feel their work counts or keep them updated with changes. Today, the roles of the employee in business effectiveness are critical to an organisation, which motivates companies to create an open-oriented communication environment at the workplace.

To encourage employees to share their thoughts, internal communication needs to be transparent and trusted (Mishra *et al* 2014). These scholars emphasise that a positive working environment derives from open communication. Organisations gain credibility from employees when managers care and listen to their subordinates. To do so, managers are advised to adopt the best suitable communication to send out their messages. How to choose the right communication for specific types of information is discussed previously in the Chapter 2.2.2.

2.3 Digital workplace- the new work environment

A business work environment has shifted dramatically since the day the workplace was purely a physical space occupied by employees during office hours. Nowadays, digital platforms are where employees work and connect virtually rather than physically. The rise of technology allows employees and employers to collaborate and share knowledge regardless of their locations, which results in the urge for a new communication approach instead of a traditional "create and push" information approach.

Many scholars and professionals agree that there are three main reasons for the rapidly changing world including the shift of workforce, information overload, and the need for speed (Argenti & Barnes 2009; Deloitte 2013; Huczynski & Buchanan 2017; Capgemini 2018).

- The shift of workforce implies that millennials known as a tech-savvy generation have quickly replaced the baby boomers who continue to retire.

- Information overload shows that employees are bounded by a ton of data that needs manual work. As a result, employees need technology advances to help.
- The need for speed becomes a criterion for success in today's intensely competitive business. Employees need to work faster and more efficiently to get their jobs done.

2.3.1 Digital workplace concepts

Deloitte (2013) describes the term of digital workplace as the modern working environment where technologies are integrated into every corner of a business to serve the organisational functions such as communication, human resources management, strategic management, sales and marketing, etc.. Gartner (2016) believes that the workplace is no longer the collection of chair and desk. Today, the workplace includes the integration of information technology and digital devices like computers with a hybrid cloud provider and intelligent network. Capgemini (2018) defines the future workplace is a digital system using technologies to deal with almost all business demands.

Moreover, Paul Miller, CEO and founder of the Digital Workplace Group, adds that the digital workplace is no longer a destination, but it is an experience when all people join to use digital tools to be successful in their jobs and learn new knowledge (Harvard Business Review 2016). Currently, most organisations already use many of the digital components on a regular basis. For instance, employees respond to work emails from intranet apps in smartphones, check potential sales opportunities, react to internal announcements, and chat with colleagues via Skype.

Although organisations are believed to earn more than less if they launch the digital workplace, they face many new challenges regarding organisational management. The predictable difficulties could be a balance between online and offline communications, talent attraction, and innovative strategic management.

2.3.2 Digital communication as internal communication strategy

The workplace is changing rapidly with connected users. The demand increases for quick and easy access to the right information, news, tools, and collaboration with the right place and format. Employees might be able to reach all work-related information

through one platform. The digital workplace enables computer-mediated communication and collaboration.

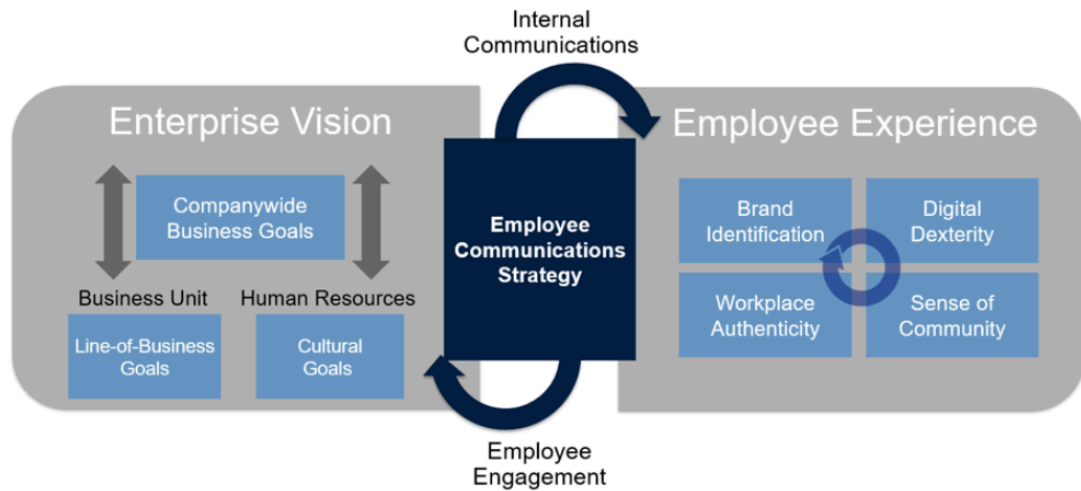


Figure 6: A strategic role of employee communication in the digital workplace. Mike Gotta in Gartner Digital Workplace Summit 2018 featured by Chow (2019)

Figure 6 depicts the model suggested by Gotta (2018) as to that how employee engagement and internal communication together build a connection between enterprise vision and employee experience. Enterprise vision is developed from business goals and culture goals, which will be transmitted to employees via communication with an aim to generate a company-based community. The community would return value to an organisation by showing engagement at work. Thus, to conclude, an employee communication strategy is critical to leverage employee-employer relations.

Everse (2012) claims that there are four steps to build a strategic communication model, including a strategic view, right tools, a development process, and the right team. Firstly, a strategic view of communication shapes mindsets and actions. Leaders and communication managers are required to clarify the stage for communication with a mission, purpose, and objectives. A strategic mindset was claimed to yield efficiency, time, and money to an organisation.

Secondly, Everse (2012) asserts that the proper set of tools will boost the effectiveness of planning and implementing a strategic plan. What/How/Who model should be applied to drive the best possible outcome. A leader defines messages or experiences of communication that he/she aimed to convey. Consistency in delivering a message is important for employees to receive the concept. For example, a company wants to

market itself as a natural-friendly brand and spread its pride in green values to all employees. They would need to build precise category plans to post news, plan events, create information, or design image within an environmentally friendly theme, and that the contribution of their organisation to society is highly appreciated. The leader, then, specifies how the information reaches audiences, and who the targeted population is for their plan is. An optimal choice of channel is based on the channels' strengths and weaknesses. For example, email can reach all employees, but it might not be suitable to announce urgent information such as news about water leakage, while Yammer, a social platform, could be the best to inform people at work on that day. The last note is who the audiences for a piece of news matters are. Information for which group within a corporation should be defined. For example, people working in marketing might be interested in sales and branding events rather than a well-being seminar.

Thirdly, a development plan is needed to review the results and follow the initial objectives. A development plan guarantees consistency in actions and builds the system to communication implementation. It is suggested to clarify phases such as approval, initiation, concept, budget, distribution, and feedback. Clear processes could help to prioritize tasks, keep track of work done, and cut wasted efforts.

Last but not least, the final step is forming the right team of people with passion and expertise. Employees with experience and background in communication could understand and see the potential of each phase in the communication plan. The suitable one would be passionate about mentoring and motivating employees. Besides, hiring new team-players and external partners could bring new initiatives, strategies, and mindsets.

3 Research methods

The previous chapter has presented the literature review and the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. This chapter is going to describe the methodology of this study with four sub-sections. Methodological choice outlines the chosen research design to answer the research questions in chapter 1. Then, the case company, data collection, and analysis are described. Finally, this study's reliability and validity are discussed.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Quantitative research

Quantitative research uses a range of statistical and graphical techniques to assess relationships between variables. Through the analysis, conclusions can be generated, or the hypotheses tested. Normally, the data collection from the quantitative method is conducted in a standard manner, so it is important to ensure that questions are understandable to people who are researched. There are two options within a quantitative research design: a mono method and a multi-method. The mono method uses merely data collection to evaluate the theories like a survey or online polls, while the multi-method will gather data via more than one data collection techniques such as open questions in a survey, structured observations, and questionnaire. Multi-method is more preferred in a business environment because it enables researchers to gather a richer approach to data analysis and interpretation. (Saunders, M. Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. 2016: 166).

After considering, the author chooses multi-method quantitative research. The research will use a survey and structured observations in a single-case study. According to Harrison, H Birks, M. Franklin, R. Mills, J. (2017), there are several advantages of a case study. First, the reality of the research is continuously checked thanks to the iterative process between theory and data. Second, the flexibility of case study research enables researchers to acquire comprehensive and in-depth insight into a wide range of data. Thirdly, a case study is considered a bounded system. Within the case study's context, many questions that ask "why", "what", "how" will be answered to understand deeply behaviours, processes, practices, and relationships. (Harrison *et al.* 2017)

3.1.2 Research purpose

There are two research purposes within the study, which are exploratory and descriptive. Exploratory research investigates unstructured and less understood research problems. This normally develops a hypothesis, then tries to solve a less known phenomenon by finding out what happens and looking for new viewpoints and new phenomena. The key characteristic of exploratory research is flexibility, since new information may change the direction of the research. Moreover, exploratory research enables a researcher to examine the relationship among variables. Exploratory

research often answers “what” research questions. (Saunders *et al.* 2016: 169). The research questions that are exploratory in nature are the following:

- What are communication channel preferences?
- What is the relation between employee engagement and internal communication?
- What are suggestions for the company’s internal communication strategies to improve employee engagement?

On the other hand, descriptive research addresses well-structured and understood problems. This research purpose tries to describe people, events or situations in a very precise manner by documenting the most interesting and core features. The key characteristics include structure, precise rules, and procedures. Descriptive research usually answers ‘who’, ‘where’, ‘how many’ and ‘how much’ questions. (Saunders *et al.* 2016: 169). The research questions that are descriptive in nature are the following:

- How do the channels meet the employees’ needs?
- How engaged are the employees?

3.2 Case company and background information

At the request of the research company, no identifying information about them will be stated in this thesis. Due to this restriction, the case company’s presentation is kept to a general level, so that the company or its employees cannot be detected.

The case company is a Finnish organisation with a 20-year history of development, which employs over 500 persons in around 11 countries. The company provides global business services, including market intelligence, market research, and market analysis. The company has offices in many places in the world such as Asia, Europe, and the Americas, so it could be considered a very diverse community. Due to that diversity, there are major differences in working styles, working cultures, and communication. Within the scope of the research, the author desires to look deeply into internal communication and employee engagement regardless of cultural aspects, so that the

office located in Finland with over 113 employees is chosen to conduct the research. In addition, the company's official working language is English, so it is good for the research to approach communication materials. The Finnish headquarters case company is hereafter referred to as "the company".

Background research of the company's internal communication was conducted at the beginning of the study with a view to acquiring a good basis for creating a survey. The major information was found on the company's intranet website. In addition, many interesting and relevant sources of data were provided by the company itself.

Table 3: Company's background information.

Organisational Communication	Materials	Channels
Internal Communication	Company presentations Knowledge sharing videos Employee magazine News Working forums Guidebooks Online polls Open discussions Conducted internal surveys	Intranet Magazine Instant messaging Internal social platform
External Communication	Company introduction	Company's website

Table 3 shows the material list that the author used to set propound understanding of the company's internal communication process and communication channels. The company communicates via several internal communication channels. Most of these channels were cloud-based platforms allowing users to create, update and exchange information internally. Employees could use these channels in both window and mobile displays, so they were able to access from their own devices or any devices having an internet connection. The chosen selection of the company's internal communication channels was described below:

- Intranet: The new version of the intranet has been launched for two years, so the company had put a great effort into managing it with a view to connecting employees, reducing paperwork, and gathering real-time information. In short, all possible information could be found in the intranet. There were three main parts of the intranet system: workspaces, news, and company information. First, the workspaces contained forums for specific functions within the organisation such as human resources, finance, management, marketing and so on. The forum was created to serve a group of employees who were responsible for the forum's content. Secondly, the news section was to update corporate information such as changes, strategies, events, and knowledge sharing videos. Thirdly, the company information section was to present the organisation chart, all branches, and key leaders. The study focused on the workspaces in the intranet and the whole intranet.
- Electronic mail (email): email was used on a regular basis to communicate about work-related topics.
- Magazines: the company magazine was issued quarterly. The channel mainly presented the employees' perspectives of the working environment, then shared working knowledge and interesting facts within the organisation.
- Face to face meeting/conversation: the channels could be understood as face to face team meetings or direct interpersonal conversations.
- Instant messaging: there were three instant messaging platforms available within the company, including Skype for Business, Yammer and Microsoft Teams. The main and common functions of these three tools were personal/group chat and video call. While Skype for Business owned only two functions like call and chat, Yammer had a range of convenient applications that Skype for Business did not have such as "like", "edit", and "delete" a message, file attachment, and hashtag a receiver in a group chat. Microsoft Teams was the same as the Yammer.
- Video conferences: video conferences were usually conducted via Skype for Business because employees were used to using it for video calls and online meetings.

The author worked as the Human Resources trainee in the Human Resources department for six months. During her time in the role, she worked closely with a communication specialist and a marketing specialist to produce internal and external communication content. Being an active member of the team, she realized that the company provided its employees with many different channels to communicate together. Before conducting a survey, the author approached a HR manager and specialists to map out the issues that the company needed to deal with. The most common difficulties were discussed below:

- Although there were many options for communication tools, it seemed hard to choose the common channels to send information and transmit the message through. Moreover, there was low interaction (a number of likes or comments in a post) between senders (admins-communication specialists) and receivers (employees)
- The frequent occurrence of information overload due to a huge number of links and information reposted in different internal communication channels.
- Low interaction caused a communication gap between top managers and employees.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

3.3.1 Survey as a data collection method

The choice of the survey design was the best possible method of collecting data for this research due to two research purposes as descriptive and explanatory. The survey consisted of three parts, which were employees' information background, ways of communication, and internal communication in relation to employee engagement. There were both closed and open questions. Internal communication-related questions in the survey were inspired by Karanges, E. & Beatson, A. & Johnston, K. & Lings, I. (2014: 69-71) and the former internal communication surveys done by the company. Besides, the author used a measurement model introduced by Schaufeli *et al* (2002) to examine the company's employee engagement. Closed questions in the survey were used to investigate the attitudes of the research's population towards internal communication channels and their preferences when using these channels. Open questions were to gather thoughts, initiatives, and concerns of the respondents. The

open questions, then, were expected to give clues and ideas for further research or to develop improvement for the company.

The survey was conducted in English, which was the company's official language. The HR manager, communication representatives, and the thesis supervisor had approved the sending out of the survey. The company authorized the company-owned account in Webropol, the online survey tool, to the author to design the survey. The period to collect responses for the survey was within three weeks. The author published a post on the company intranet to announce her research and ask for responses. A link to the survey and reasons for the research were clearly stated in the post. Then, the company representatives reminded the whole research population by email. Importantly, the survey collected responses without tracking the respondents' information, so anonymity was kept. The time for data collection was evaluated as being long enough because it followed the average time for the company's internal surveys. After this period, the data was retrieved directly from Webropol under the form of Microsoft Excel for later analysis.

The total number of employees working in the company was 113 people, of which 25 people responded to the survey. The response rate has generated nearly 23%, which was lower than expected. The expected rate should reach around 30% for a survey conducted via a web-portal of a specific organisation (Saunders *et al.* 2016: 441), still, the provided rate gave enough data to analyse.

3.3.2 Analysis

After the data had been collected and checked for errors, the author started to do a thorough analysis. Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) approach developed by Turkey's (1977, stated in Saunders *et al.* 2016: 511) had been nominated among the best way to present data and define the findings in the initial stages of analysis. The data approach focused on the use of graphs to elaborate data. This also enabled a data analyst to have flexible points of view towards spontaneous analyses to formulate new findings. However, this approach was claimed by Kosslyn (2006, stated in Saunders *et al.* 2016: 511) that terms of "graph" and "chart" can make an analyst confused because these words are normally used interchangeably. In the EDA approach, it is worthy for an author to state clearly structure and label each graph and table to avoid misinterpretation.

Regarding the data analysis process, the researcher followed three stages. Firstly, the thesis analysed data by presenting data in bar graphs and tables to show the relative rate for a single variable with the highest and lowest points. Then, proportions and percentages for these data values were delivered to obtain an in-depth understanding. Finally, there were discussions about relations and intersections between two or more variables with a view to clarify the thesis questions and confirm the thesis objectives.

3.4 Validity and reliability of the study

Validity and reliability of research are key judgements about the quality of the quantitative research. These two factors are explained later according to Saunders *et al.*, (2016: 202-204).

Research validity concerns many aspects such as internal validity, measurement validity, content validity, predictive validity and construct validity. Within the context of research, content and construct validity are mainly applied. Content validity elaborates to what extent a survey will cover or prepare knowledge to respondents. Questions in a survey should be considered whether they are critical, necessary, or neutral to ask. Construct validity pays attention to which set of questions a survey should comprise to demonstrate attitude scales or employee satisfaction. (Saunders *et al.*, 2016: 202-204). In this survey, the author formulated questions based on internal communication needs and materials provided by the researched company. All questions were carefully reviewed by the company's representative, the thesis supervisor together with the author to make sure that the questionnaire would be understood in the same way they were aimed to design.

In addition to validity, reliability refers to figure out consistency that a proper methodology will generate consistent results regardless of how many times a respondent answers to the same questionnaire. It is important to notice that there are four threats to reliability, including participant error, participant bias, researcher error, and researcher bias. (Saunders *et al.*, 2016: 202-204)

Regarding participant-related threats, participant error implies that respondents would not give reflective responses enough when they are affected by external elements such as wrong time, mistakes, or sensitive situations. Participants in this research were employees answering the survey. It could be the case they needed to be hurry before coming back home, or they clicked the wrong scale when answering. Participant bias,

then, describes biased responses due to the respondent's assumptions or insecurity. Data generated from them is difficult to avoid because there is an unrecognized boundary among opinions, thoughts, and biases. The respondents of the survey would answer questions in a good mood or a bad mood, which somehow affected results.

In terms of researcher-related threats, there are two factors namely researcher error and bias. The author did her best to follow formulating the questionnaire process carefully to make sure she did not use any favourable statements in her list of questions. As mentioned earlier in this study, the open discussion with a communication specialist and a HR manager was conducted to point out potential issues and propose a list of questions for this study, which aimed to ensure the reliability of this thesis. For the author, research bias was essential to notice that she observed and obtained a practical impression and experience of the communication structure and process at the researched company. Her working experience was noticed to avoid any subjective judgement, but this experience was expected to serve as a resource to confirm her understanding of the responses to the survey.

4 Results of the survey

There were three parts with 13 questions, as enclosed in Appendix 1. The first part contained three questions to ask to gather background information and navigate the right audience. To follow, there were seven questions about how employees in the company perceived and evaluated internal communication processes. The final part with two questions aimed to learn about how internal communication and employee engagement related to each other. One open question was also included.

4.1 Background Information

When conducting the survey, the author was requested to implement it in all 11 offices of the company. That was the reason that the question 1 asked about the location of the respondents. Due to the scope of this research, the author took only results of the Helsinki office into her analysis.

The second question was about an employment duration with a view to figuring out whether there were any differences in opinions from employees who have worked for long and short employment periods.

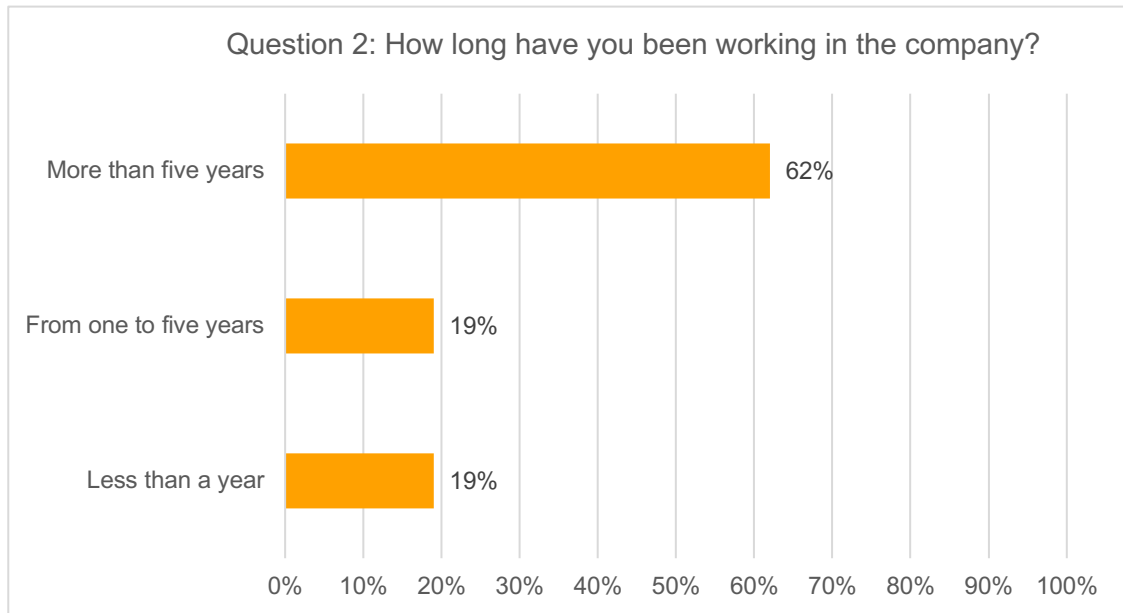


Figure 7: Employment duration of respondents

Figure 7 showed that two-thirds of all respondents have worked in the company for more than five years. The rest of the respondents were shared equally from two groups, one-to-five-year employment, and less-than-a-year employment. As the main responses arrived from employees working for a long time period, the results from other questions within this survey spectrum would mainly represent the opinion of these employees. One aspect also needed attention when analysing other questions' results was that the company's internal communication channels had been significantly changed within two recent years. The current internal communication shifted from company own-developed channels to cloud-based services outsourcing from a third-party operator.

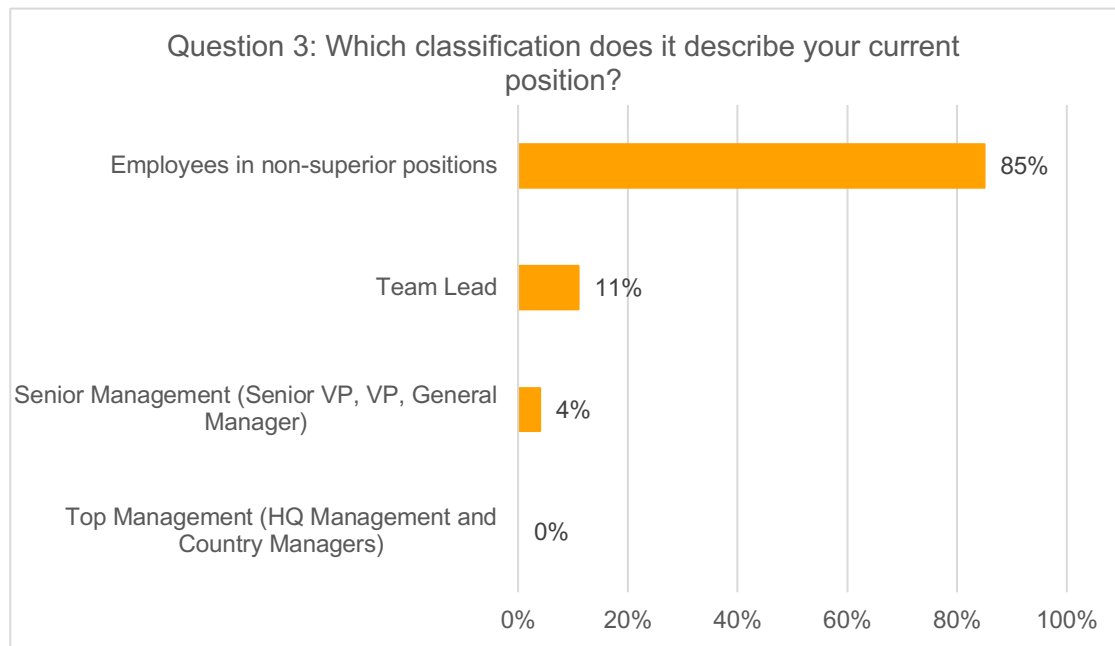


Figure 8: Classification describes a respondent' position

Figure 8 indicated that more than four-fifths of respondents were employees in non-superior positions, one out of ten respondents were team lead, and only 4% were in senior management level such as senior vice president, vice president, and general manager. Unfortunately, the survey did not reach anyone at top management level such as country managers and board members.

4.2 Internal communication and communication channels

The next seven questions were about internal communication flow and communication channel preferences. The aim of these questions was to know how supervisors and their subordinates communicate about both informal and formal information.

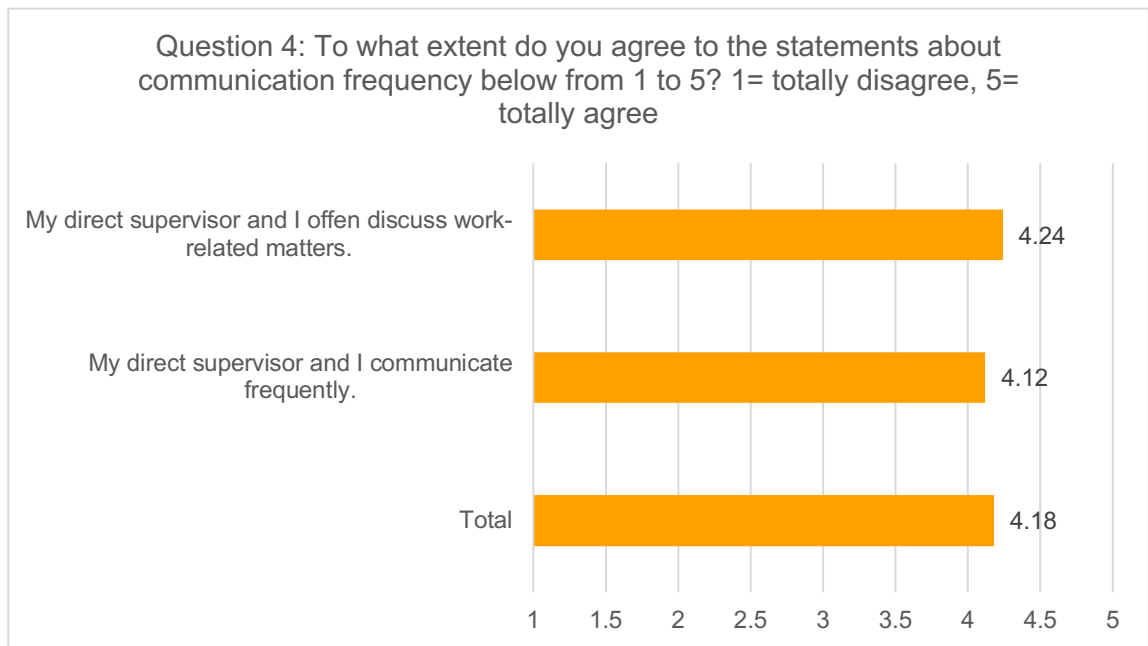


Figure 9: Communication frequency between a respondent and his/her supervisor

Figure 9 demonstrated a result of a question 4. Respondents were asked to evaluate how often they communicated with their supervisors. The average rating of these two statements shown above was 4,18, which means that respondents agreed and strongly agreed to the statements.

Table 4: Percentage of grade division in communication frequency

Statements	Grade 1-2	Grade 3	Grade 4-5
My direct supervisor and I communicate frequently.	8%	8%	84%
My direct supervisor and I communicate frequently.	8%	4%	88%
Total	8%	6%	86%

According to the percentages, 86% of respondents graded communication frequency from 4 to 5, only 6% expressed neutral opinions, and 8% marked 1 to 2 for this category. It confirmed that a respondent and his/her supervisor communicated frequently.

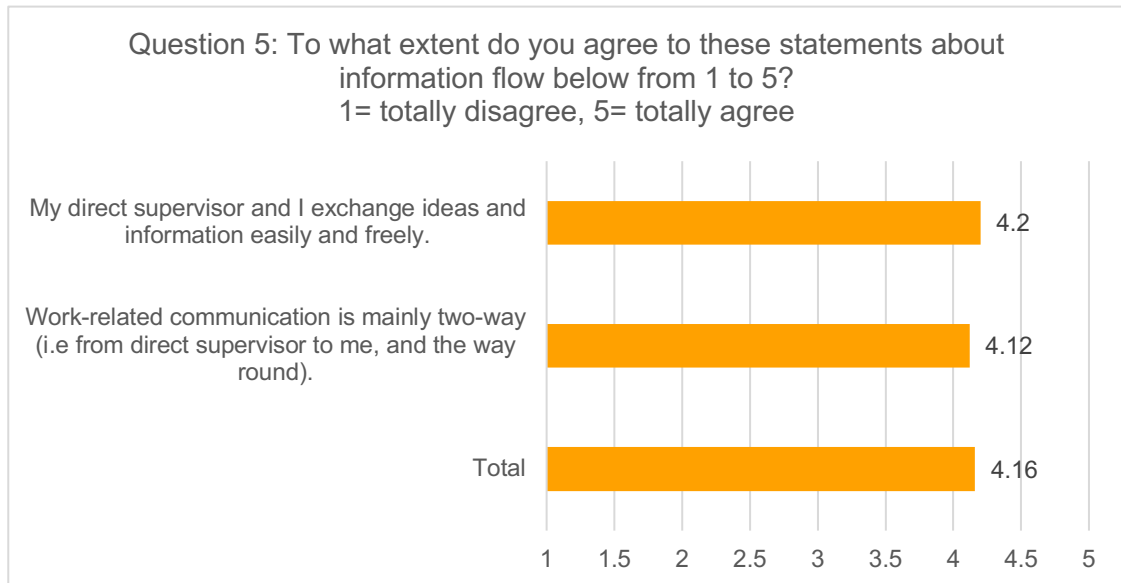


Figure 10: Information flow in the case company

Figure 10 depicted respondents' analysis for question 5. As the same trend recorded as question 4, this query revealed a very positive result that all respondents graded information flow with 4,16 out of 5 in total. 4,2 was a score for the statement about exchanging information easily and freely, and 4,12 was for the statement asking two-way communication in work-related topics.

Table 5: Percentage of grade division in information flow

Statement	Grade 1-2	Grade 3	Grade 4-5
Work-related communication is mainly two-way (i.e from direct supervisor to me, and the way round).	12%	4%	84%
My direct supervisor and I exchange ideas and information easily and freely.	8%	4%	88%
Total	10%	4%	86%

Table 5, then, supported figure 10 via showing percentages of grade division in each statement. 86% evaluated that communication flow was two-way, easy and free. Only 4% of respondents gave a neutral opinion, and 10% strongly disagreed and disagreed on the two statements. In other words, employees seemed to be satisfied with the flow of communication in the researched company.

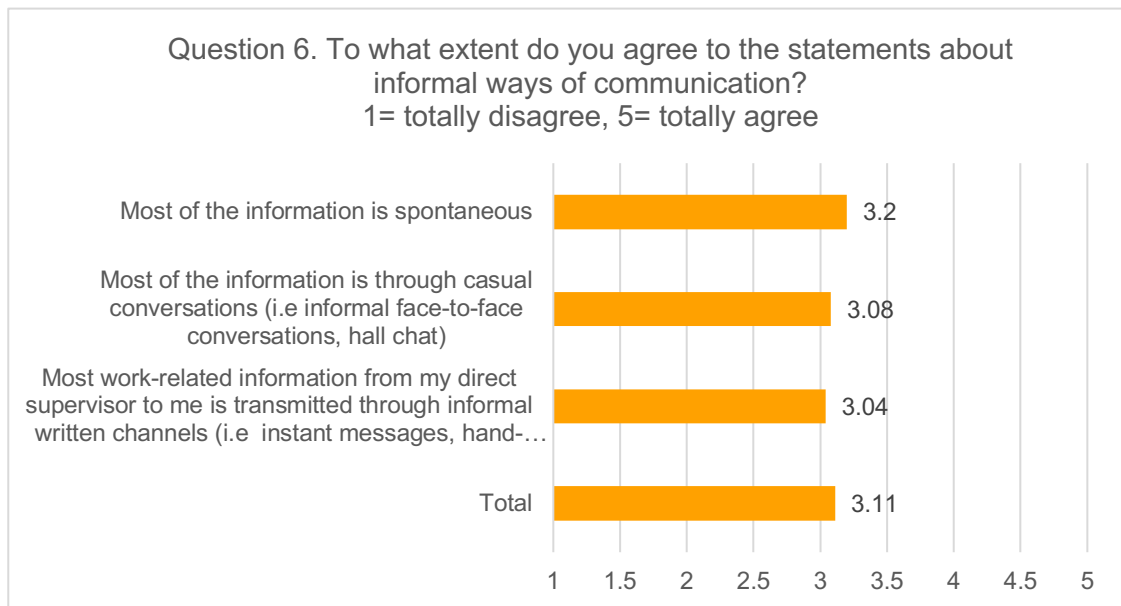


Figure 11: Informal ways of communication

Figure 11 indicated how respondents reacted to question 6. The author defined informal communication within this research that informal information was spontaneously generated like instant messages, personal messages, or hand-written notes. Channels to transmit this information were informal face-to-face conversations, hall chat, or instant messaging tools. Total evaluation of informal communication was 3,11 out of 5. The three statements' results saw a slight magnitude of changes that they were from 3,04 to 3,20 out of 5, which means employees agreed there was informal communication in work-related topics.

Table 6: Percentage of grade division informal communication

Statements	Grade 1-2	Grade 3	Grade 4-5
Most work-related information from my direct supervisor to me is transmitted through informal written channels (for example: instant messages, hand-written notes)	40%	16%	44%
Most of the information is through casual conversations (i.e informal face-to-face conversations, hall chat)	40%	20%	40%
Most of the information is spontaneous	24%	32%	44%
Total	34,70%	22,70%	42,60%

However, from table 6, the percentages of respondents choosing grades 1 to 2 were quite the same as those going for grades 4 to 5 with roughly 40% for each side. This means there was a strong difference in evaluation of informal communication. Some agreed and strongly agreed there was informal communication, but others held completely different opinions. Yet, 76% of the respondents with neutral and supportive answers agreed that most of the information arrived from informal communication was informal in this sense.

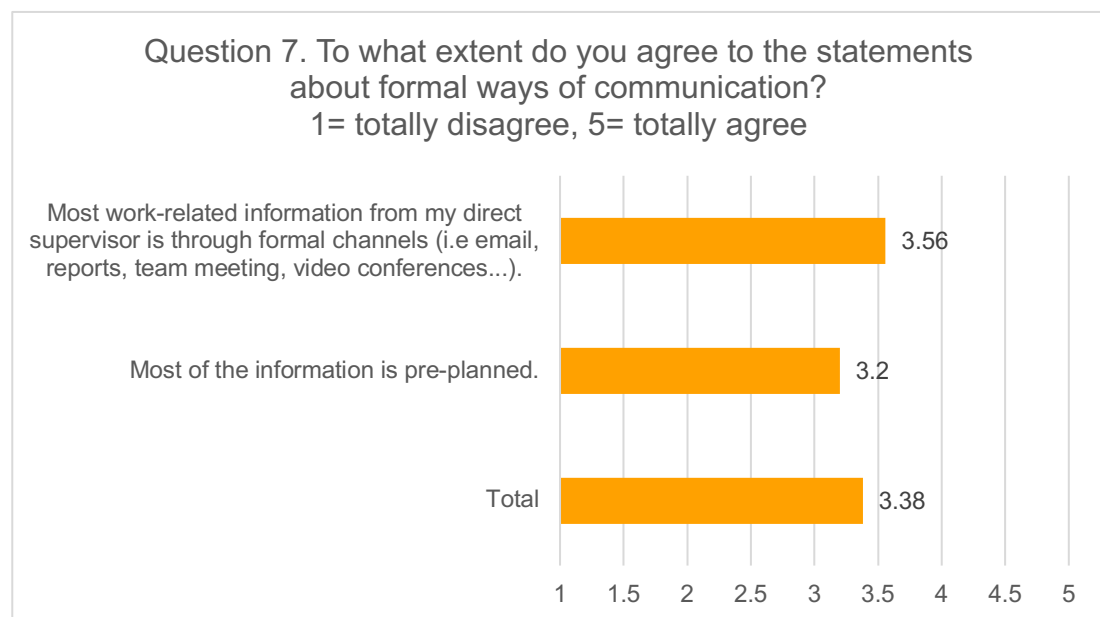


Figure 12: Formal ways of communication

Figure 12 illustrated the result of question 7, which was asked to know how employees were aware of formal communication. Formal communication in this research was information from direct supervisors to subordinates transmitted via formal channels such as email, reports, team meetings, video conferences, or announcements in the intranet. Formal ways of communication received a total score of 3,38 out of 5, which was somewhat higher than 3,11 for informal communication in question 6.

Table 7: Percentage of grade division in formal communication

Statements	Grade 1-2	Grade 3	Grade 4-5
Most work-related information from my direct supervisor is through formal channels (for example: email, reports, team meeting, video conferences...).	20%	24%	56%
Most of the information is pre-planned.	24%	36%	40%
Total	22%	30%	48%

The opinion that most work-related information was transmitted through formal channels was graded 3,56 out of 5 with 56% of all respondents supported. This means that employees confirmed formal channels were usually used for work-related topics. In addition, the contents of this communication were thought to be generated carefully with a score 3,2 out of five and 40% of respondents expressed supportive opinions.

The results from question 6 and question 7 implied that informal and formal communication in the researched company existed together and supported each other. It was quite flexible in the content of the communication.

Questions 8, 9 and 10 examined which communication channels were preferred in certain communication circumstances. There were 10 communication channels of in the list, including Microsoft Teams, Skype video conference, Skype instant messaging, workspaces in the company's intranet, the intranet, face-to-face meeting or conversation, Yammer, email, phone call or message, and magazine. Each question selected eight out of 10 channels to examine. Respondents were asked to mark from the least to the most preferred channels on a scale from 1 to 8.

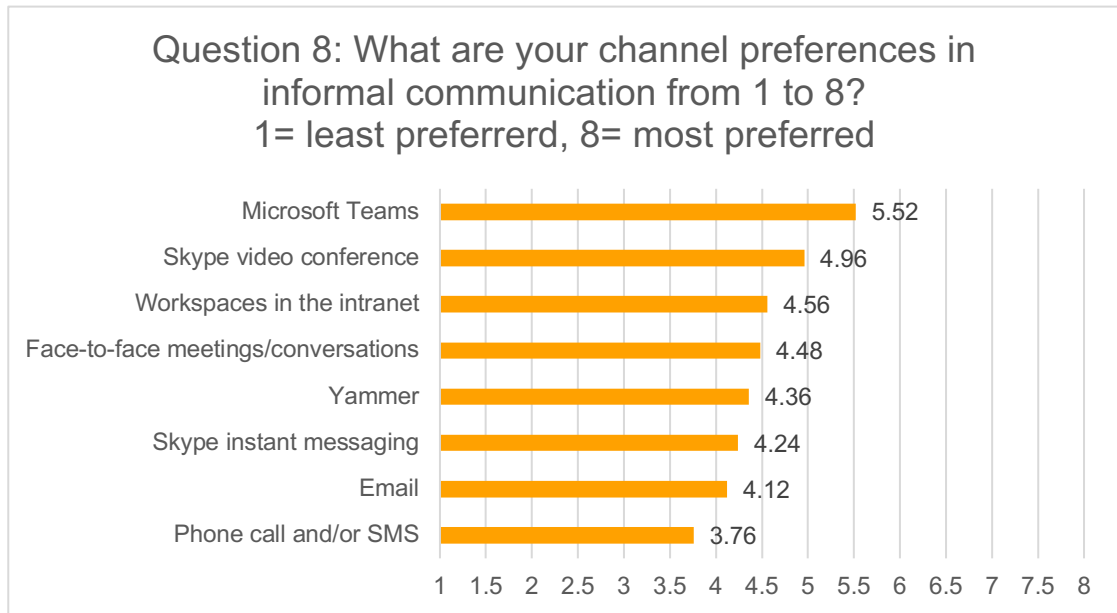


Figure 13: Channel preferences in informal communication

Question 8 listed preferred channels in informal communication from the most to the least. It was clearly shown in figure 13 that Microsoft Teams was nominated the most preferred channel in informal communication with an average score 5,52 out of 8, while phone call and/or message was the least favourable way with an average score 3,76 out of 8. In addition, Skype video conference, workspaces in the intranet, and face-to-face meeting and conversation were more likely to be used as informal channels, while the rest including Yammer, Skype instant messaging, and email were less preferred to be used in the same situation.

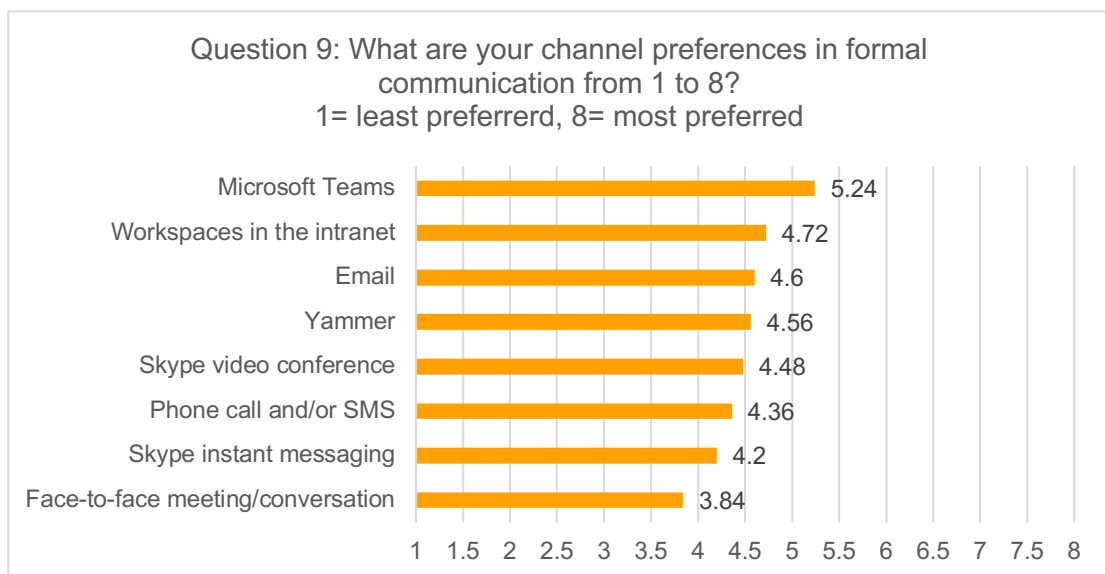


Figure 14: Channel preferences in formal communication

Figure 14 depicted the result to question 9, which asked about channel preferences in formal communication. Microsoft Teams was placed as the most used tool for formal purposes with 5,24 out of 8, while face-to-face meeting or conversation was evaluated as the least likely way to deliver formal information with only 3,84 out of 8. Moreover, workspaces in the intranet, email, and Yammer were recorded as more preferred channels than Skype video conference, Skype instant messaging, and phone call or message.

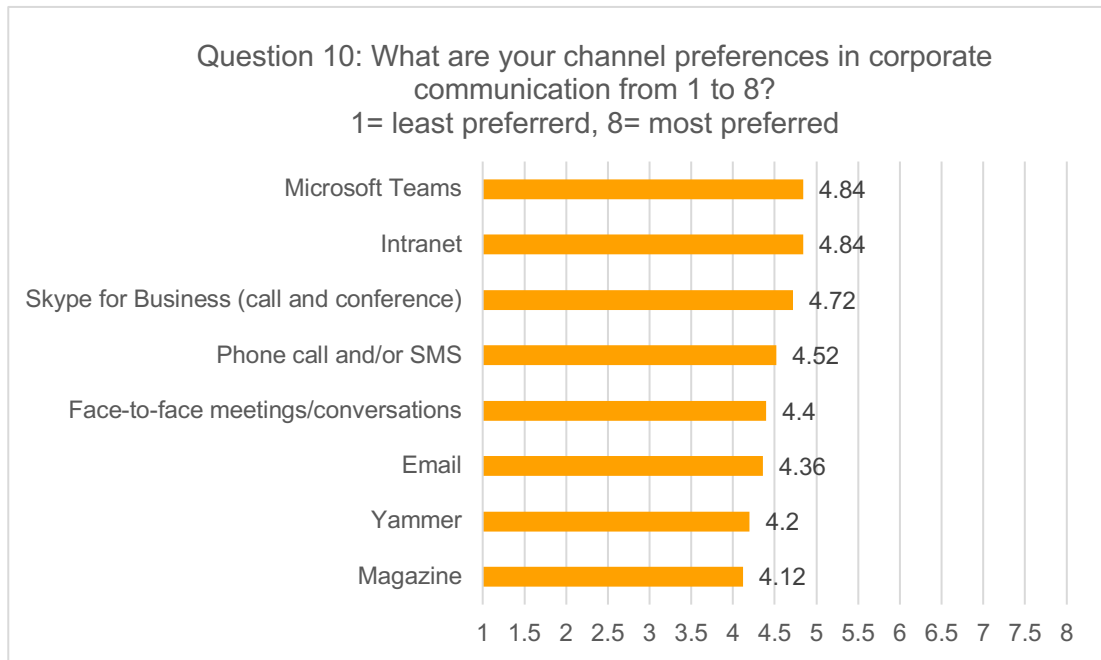


Figure 15: Channel preferences in corporate communication

Question 10 examined which channels of communication employees desired to use to know about corporate information. Intranet and Microsoft Teams were placed as the most preferred channels with the same grade rating 4,84 out of 8. The company's self-published magazine stood at the end of the list with 4,12 out of 8. Placing closely to Microsoft Teams and Intranet was Skype for Business with 4,72, while one level above the company's magazine was Yammer with 4,2. The middle group channels belonged to phone call or message, face-to-face conversation and meeting, and email.

As the results from the three questions 8, 9 and 10, Microsoft Teams was the best channel to use regardless of information types. The company's intranet also gained a significant impression because the channel was always in the top three most preferred tools. The company's magazine and phone call and message were among the least preferred channels.

This could be an unexpected result compared to the assumption of the company's communication specialists and HR department. Before conducting those questions, the author had conducted an unofficial interview with these communication specialists and the HR manager to know their preliminary thoughts towards possible trends. They assumed that the company's intranet and Yammer would be the best choices. No-one mentioned to Microsoft Teams. In this case, it could be concluded that gathering feedback on channel preferences would navigate communication process owners to select effective channels to approach targeted audiences.

4.3 Internal communication in relation to employee engagement

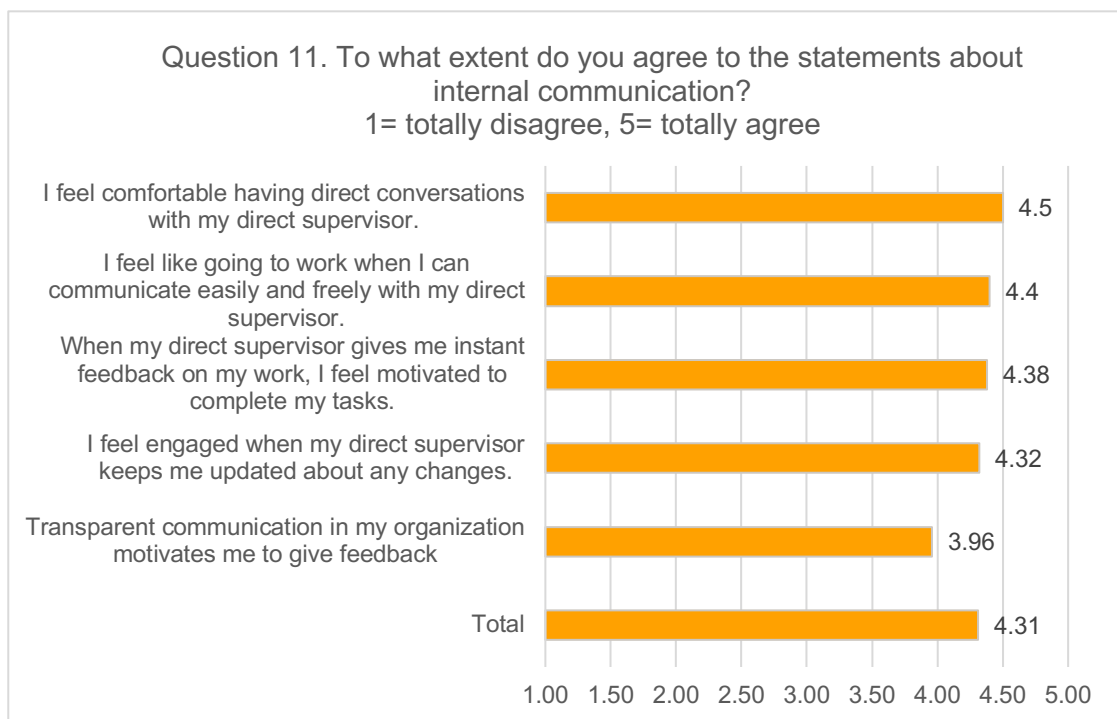


Figure 16: Internal communication

Figure 16 included five statements, which were designed to know how internal communication related to employee engagement. The results were so positive with a total grade up to 4,31 out of 5. Respondents agreed that they felt motivated and engaged when they could communicate comfortably and freely with their leads. Information updated also played a key to make them happy and involved in their jobs.

Table 8: Percentage of grade division in internal communication evaluation

Statements	Grade 1-2	Grade 3	Grade 4-5
I feel comfortable having direct conversations with my direct supervisor.	0%	4%	96%
I feel like going to work when I can communicate easily and freely with my direct supervisor.	4%	8%	88%
When my direct supervisor gives me instant feedback on my work, I feel motivated to complete my tasks.	4%	8%	88%
I feel engaged when my direct supervisor keeps me updated about any changes.	0%	8%	92%
Transparent communication in my organisation motivates me to give feedback.	12%	16%	72%

Table 8 showed the percentage of grade division of variables shown in figure 16. 80-100% marked "Agree" and "Strongly agree" with all these statements. It could be concluded that good internal communication, especially between direct supervisors and subordinates, played a significant role in boosting employee engagement. Open communication and feedback could be gathered when there was transparent communication.

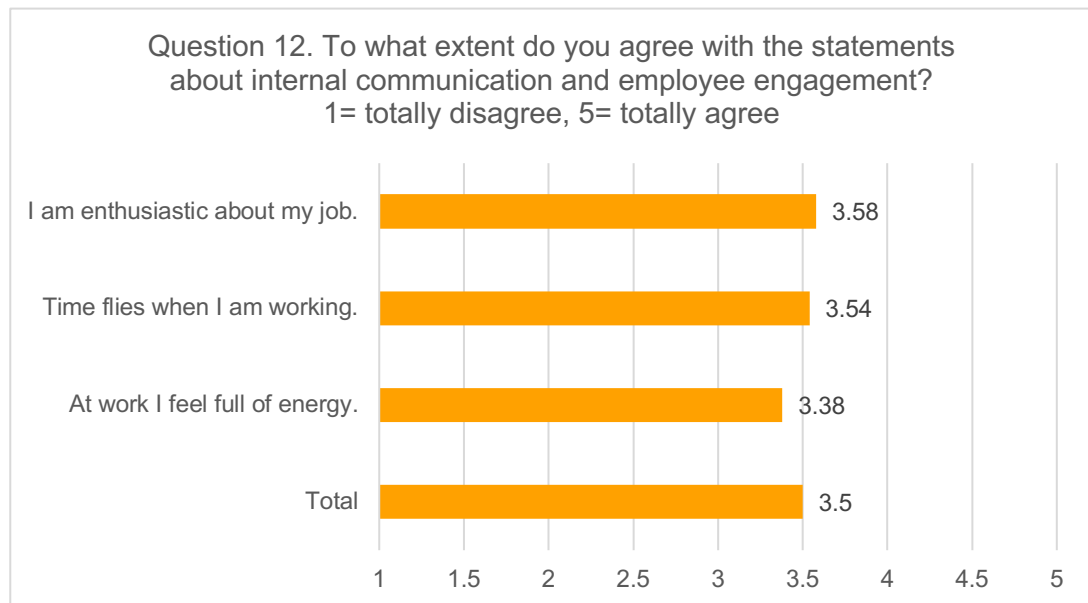


Figure 17: Employee engagement

Figure 17 examined how respondents felt engaged in their tasks. There were three statements to clarify three elements of employee engagement “vigor” “dedication” and “absorption”. These measurements based on the method introduced by Schaufeli & Witte (2017), which were discussed earlier in chapter 2. The total grade for three variables was 3,5 out of 5, which means that respondents felt engaged in their work. However, this result was lower than the total result of employee engagement related to internal communication.

Table 9: Percentage of grade division in employee engagement evaluation

Statements	Grade 1-2	Grade 3	Grade 4-5
I am enthusiastic about my job.	20%	24%	56%
Time flies when I am working.	20%	28%	52%
At work I feel full of energy.	24%	32%	44%

Table 9, then, elaborated on in which category respondents measured their engagement. It was seen that the three statements received quite the same outcomes. Grades 4 and 5 attracted the highest responses around 50%, the grade 3 shared around 25% to 32%, and the last group owned the rest. In short, over 70% of

respondents expressed neutral to strongly supportive opinions. These above outcomes indicated that employee engagement and internal communication supported each other. The better internal communication is, the more engaged the employees would be.

The last question, question 13, asked respondents to give their thoughts, wonders, or concerns regarding the company's internal communication and the survey questions. There were 11 out of 25 respondents giving their feedback. The open statements raised many contemporary issues in the company's internal communication, including out-of-date information and too many channels. Out-of-date information was usually found in the company's intranet, where information was stored year by year without a re-organisation or a clean-up. It was quite common that employees typed some key words to search for a specific document, then they encountered an old version of the one they wanted to find. Another problem caused a lot of time-consuming was too many channels to use with quite the same functions and purposes. This resulted in "frustration" as one of the respondents wrote. Information was reposted in different channels such as the intranet, Yammer, or email, which could disturb the receivers. Content of information about generic topics also bothered audiences because some of the information was claimed to be "nice to know" more than essential to know.

Among the answers received from the open question, some stated problems about employee engagement, including a lack of face-to-face interaction at the workplace, and a lack of interaction in the company's social platform like Yammer or the intranet. It could be the case when an employee came to work and return back to his/her home without talking face-to-face to anyone but using digital channels to send information. It was noticed by respondents that the interaction rate in the company's social platform was quite low with no interaction such as "like" or "comment" below the posted.

5 Discussion

This section is going to discuss findings of the results, recommend internal communication strategies, and give possible improvement for any further studies. In addition, the author also reflects on her learning process during doing the research.

5.1 Findings

The objectives of this thesis were to investigate how internal communication met the employees' needs and how internal communication related to employee engagement. By reflecting on relevant literature and analysing the results of the survey in chapter 5, the thesis's findings aimed to help communication specialists and people working in administrative roles to acquire a comprehensive understanding of effective communication to generate their own communication model and strategic plan. Effective communication was driven by communication structure, content creation, optimal choices in channels, and a relation between internal communication and employee engagement.

The communication process introduced by Shannon & Weaver (1949) reflect on the basic model of communication in the researched company. The fundamental stages remained their critical roles in transmitting information to make the process work properly. However, the practice of communication in the case study involved many unexpected parties and requires users' soft skills such as flexibility and adaptability.

Corporate communication normally represented a downward communication stream with one-way information flow. Senders were top managers who wanted to announce strategic and generic information in a standardized format, while receivers were employees in non-supervisory positions who were expected to absorb all the information and react accordingly. In practice, internal corporate communication recorded a significant change that a way of communication was mainly two-way, which enabled employers and employees to listen and receive feedback promptly. According to Robbins & Judge (2013: 338) and Huczynski & Buchanan (2017: 217), feedback plays an important role to determine the whole process's outcomes. In the scope of this research, it was right. Feedback helped to clear the noise in communication and supports an end-user to decode a message correctly. In business, feedback made an impact because it minimized gaps between parties and corrected when something was about to be out of track. In the research company, questioning was encouraged, and anonymous feedback was paid attention to. Moreover, the rise of feedback's role in internal communication advocated creative approaches to

employees in the workplace. Development discussion or survey would be good tools to get official feedback in a written form, yet communication skills to ask and give comments were among key factors to acquire reliable results. In addition to the corporate structure of communication flow, content or quality of information was critical to effective communication. The respondents desired to have more work-related or well-being-related topics besides corporate information. In the world of knowledge, sharing and connecting skilled labours tended to gain high interaction and attention.

Informal or formal communication in an organisation were highly likely to be interconnected. There was no significant boundary to show which information was formal or informal to limit certain channels or manners in use.

Another interesting finding was that channel preferences indicated different perceived concepts toward the optimal choice of communication tools. Based on the media richness theory introduced by Draft & Lengel (1988) and developed by Robbins & Judge (2013: 348), effective communication resulted from the right selections of channels. Routine information such as corporate news announcements would go to lean channels like letters, email, intranet, while non-routine ones such as unexpected changes might choose rich channels such as face-to-face communication, video call, and instant messaging. In practice, a selected channel depended on channel-owned functions, using habits and norms, contents of information, or feedback. It was depicted clearly in the survey's result that one channel could serve multiple purposes of communication. In addition, knowing preferred channels would navigate the communication specialist and the HR team to boost interaction rates by targeting the right audiences in the right platforms with the right content.

However, a variety of channels posed disadvantages to effective communication with too many channels being available causing information overload. A range of channels with similar functions led to the fact that the same information was posted and reposted, which caused frustration to receivers. Employees considered it time-consuming rather than value-added actions. From time to time, employees neglected generic topics or repeated posts. Based on the author's observation, it was true that the same content news appeared in almost all platforms, from the intranet, Yammer, to email. It might be the case that communication specialists' concept of communication tools was different from the perspectives of employees. The people in administrative roles wanted to make sure their colleagues would not miss information, while

employees considered that checking all channels to learn about the same topic was a way to waste their time. The rise of digital tools and digital workplace concept could ease colleagues apart. Some respondents mentioned that the lack of face-to-face interaction at work pushed him/her into awkward situations when colleagues tried to neglect his/her presence at work. Virtual communication was claimed to save time and make work flexible to collaborate, but the downside of advanced technologies could lead to a decrease in mutual relationships.

One important finding of the research was that internal communication supported employee engagement. Employee engagement, which is integrated into an effective internal communication environment seemed to attract very positive results from respondents. Elements contributing to a successful process consisted of two-way communication, an open communication style, responsive feedback, and a well-informed system. Argenti (2009) and Mishra *et al* (2014) emphasized the role of feedback in employee expectations to their employers in internal communication. Employees were motivated when their thoughts were known, and their voices were heard. Although the questions 11 and 12 in chapter 5 did not show and measure correlations between two variables “employee engagement” and “internal communication”, the answers in an open question implied how internal communication affects their motivation and engagement at work.

5.2 Suggestions for the company’s internal communication and further studies

5.2.1 Suggestions for the company

The thesis aimed to boost effective communication and employee engagement. At the time this thesis was written, the case company had adopted the current internal communication structure for nearly two years. During the last two years, one of the biggest concerns of people working in administrative roles like HR specialists was that interaction between senders and receivers was low. The specialists and HR managers were highly interested in what communication models and strategies they could develop and take action. The author had worked in the case company for half a year. Based on relevant literature, the research’s findings, an awareness of the thesis’s limitations, and in-house working experience, the author would like to suggest a strategic internal communication plan focusing on a digital workplace concept and employee experience.

Before going to present the plan, the author reflects on the research company's communication planning process that a strategic communication concept might not be placed in the core of business development strategies. Communication was claimed to hold a strategic role to boost employee experience, but the researched company has not yet formed any specific plans regarding internal communication. The company had only one communication specialist for the global management and for the Helsinki headquarters, who worked as a member of the human resources team. The communication specialist worked with the HR manager to plan for all communication-related activities during a year. They admitted that there was a lack of human resources in the team due to a limited budget. The communication specialist handled all channels of internal communication and held full responsibilities to produce, edit, and post information. She also worked as a communication coordinator for several projects. In addition, two internal communication surveys were usually conducted annually. This was a big plus to the stage of feedback in a communication process, yet no significant changes were recorded after the surveys' results. One of the reasons led to the issue that was a lack of team members to take care of a systematically change.

By following an approach to a strategic communication suggested by Everse (2012), the author creates a plan with steps as below:

- Building a strong strategic foundation of communication and forming a team of internal communication
- Planning and reviewing internal communication regarding contents, channels, and audiences
- Gathering feedback and being ready to change

First, a strong strategic foundation drives from leaders. Mindset and actions are closed in the way strategies are created. Top managers of the researched company would organise a panel discussion to set goals and roles of internal communication in building an organisational culture. The vision would be creating an open and innovative community of employees. The goals could consist of encouraging the use of digital tools to interact, listening to feedback and nurturing initiatives, and motivating a knowledge-sharing culture. Leadership in communication would be paid attention to and a communication team should be formed. Tasks for the communication team

would vary, but the core responsibilities are to follow the approval plan, adjust flexibly, produce contents precisely, and track stages of communication processes.

Second, the detailed actions will be planning and reviewing contents, channels, and audiences. In the case company, a category plan with precise content is not clear. Although employees are able to find information in the intranet, they usually find the results of their searches out-of-date. Clearing-up old information and keeping it updated are time-taking tasks requiring a comprehensive understanding of internal communication functions and contents of documents. It is suggested that they should fix a period of time and set a person in charge to check information, and delete or hide the old information. In addition, to advocate people to interact with corporate information, the content should be designed properly and consistently. There should be a bank of communication materials such as photos, images, banners for communication specialists to use when demonstrating some ideas in pictures. A poorly designed post with a meaningless picture ruins a core message.

Moreover, planning and reviewing channels of communication are needed. The results in chapters 4 and 5 indicate that employees were discouraged by reading repeating information. Channels like Microsoft Teams, workspace in the intranet, Yammer, and Skype were preferred for sending messages. Channels such as magazine, and email are not strategic ways to convey corporate messages to employees. Moreover, detecting which kinds of information should be transferred via what channels should be taken into account. For example, it might be better to feature a corporate announcement related to the previous fiscal year performance in the intranet, instead of Yammer. Reposting this kind of news would not be recommended. Furthermore, face-to-face interaction is highly recommended. The company could organize team-building activities quarterly to help employees know who their colleagues are. Face-to-face is encouraged, especially in knowledge-sharing events or timing occasions.

Audience groups should be clarified to adjust the content of communication and process channels. Audience groups are top managers, team leads, senior employees, and entry-level employees. Targeting the right group of the audience makes differences in writing style and communication tools. The majority of news and announcements in the intranet and Yammer are rarely aimed at serving specific groups. They seem to reach the whole population instead of informing a part of the company's employees. The author recommends that communication specialists should

use hashtags in their posts to raise attention to key topics and to targeted people to whom messages are aimed. Contact information for further questions should be stated clearly in posts like events, urgent announcements, appointments to make employees feel they are welcome to give comments or propose new ideas.

Last but not least, gathering feedback and adopting new trends in internal communication require communication managers and experts flexibility and adaptability. There should be guidelines on how to use the intranet and corporate digital tools effectively. The guidelines should state communication goals and vision, then give tips to use search functions, detect out-of-date information, and guide to reports to people in charge. The researched company has not created any guidebook or documents that teach users about the digital workplace and digital tools at work. The guideline will help new employees notice communication culture at the beginning of their work to adapt to the company. It also serves as a document for all other employees to review and even contribute their own findings to uncovered functions. Communication specialists, therefore, save time and effort maintaining digital tools themselves. These instructions require frequent updates and feedback gained from former internal communication surveys.

5.2.2 Suggestions for further studies

After reviewing the results, findings, limitations, and suggestions for the company, the author asserts that there might be room for improvement. For academic researchers, the view brought by this thesis can be used as a base to apply, improve, and reflect when conducting internal communication and employee engagement research. They can apply the approach to internal communication within a digital workplace concept as a way to build their own framework, implications, and model. For companies and organisations, it is worth bearing in mind the strategic role of communication to build business culture and improve employee experience. The results of this thesis can serve as a basis for creating strategic plans and actions. In addition, it can be valuable to researchers or companies to test the survey and gather pre-results before conducting a survey on internal communication regarding channel preferences. Therefore, they can compare and contrast their predictions and later results to clarify gaps between researchers and respondents.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that further research can make an in-depth analysis of the role of communication skills in internal communication and how these skills can affect

employee experiences and how a company or an organisation can boost these skills of their employees. Within the scope of this thesis, the author acknowledges that flexibility and adaptability in communication matter to an interaction. However, there is not yet comprehensive research on the ways communication skills affect communication processes.

Furthermore, in terms of digital strategies in internal communication, the author recommends taking a survey investigating to what extent employees are aware of their employers' strategies and how a company perceives digital communication concepts. In the thesis, the author approached a digital workplace concept via digital communication tools as channels. There are still many other elements in a digital workplace and internal communication such as flexible working styles, remote working and change management.

5.3 Reflection on the learning process

While writing this thesis, the author has learned many valuable theoretical and practical lessons. The thesis gave her a chance to research particular topics that she was interested in. She realized that writing a thesis was a challenge to help undergraduates prepare, revise, and acquire both knowledge and skills before entering an intensive competition in job hunting.

To complete this paper, the author has been to many different stages of learning processes. Learning how to form a topic, which ought to be both relevant to the business needs and academic requirements, required many hours of thinking and rethinking about her ideas. She used to choose a quite broad area as communication but had no clue which elements of communication she should have taken a deep look into. Thanks to the internship in the researched company, she was able to figure out her topic to research, which was internal communication. One of the keys she learned was that narrowing and navigating topics helped to form a solid foundation for the thesis. Reading and applying critical thinking to materials supported her well in building and developing the thesis survey and its findings. There were a number of resources available related to communication, so she needed to decide which resources were relevant and reliable to refer to. Difficulties that she found the most challenging during this time were how to specify and relate theories to practices and how to measure practices by applied theories. This stage took her considerable effort and time to come

over.

In addition to knowledge, skills were what she gained significantly. Time management skills, stress handling capability, and self-reflection attitude mattered to her. Without any of those, she could not complete this thesis. She has also adapted problem-solving skills when she confronted very hard questions and then tried ways to answer them to continue her writing.

The thesis, for the author, was a memorable and valuable journey of learning. She received inspiration, support, sympathise and love from her colleagues, supervisors, and closes friends to be strong and brave. She gained more skills and lessons which will benefit her career path after graduating.

6 Conclusion

The thesis is the research about internal communication in the headquarters of a global company located in Helsinki, Finland. The commissioned company requires to be anonymous in this paper, so there is no specific information that could be revealed. The author has worked in the company for a haft of a year as a human resources trainee. She had a chance to look deeply into the company structure and communication style. This research will serve as a base to help communication specialists and people working in administrative roles to acquire a comprehensive understanding of effective communication to generate their own communication model and strategic plan.

There are five main findings of this thesis, including communication structure, channel preferences, advantages and disadvantages of these digital channels, and relations between internal communication and employee engagement. The company communication structure is solid and flexible with many factors and elements included such as receivers, senders, information, noise, feedback, channel, and perceptions. Besides, the company information flow is two-way, which is claimed to be good for both employers and employees. Several preferred channels of communication are revealed. These channels help to work efficiently with instant responses, transparency, and user-friendliness. However, there are some disadvantages such as information overload, out-of-date information, and low interaction. Another interesting finding is that internal communication supports employee engagement at work.

The thesis also confronts some limitations such as possible biases generated from respondents' points of view and a slightly unproven relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. Nevertheless, the thesis does its best to serve as a basic knowledge to academic researchers and communication experts to build their own implication, model, framework, and approach to digital communication and employee experience. The research suggests a strategic action to build communication strategies based on three steps. The first is to create a solid base of communication with vision, mission, and goals, then form a team of communication experts to work on a proposed plan. The second is a plan-to-review action in internal communication with the core elements including precise content, preferred channels, and targeted audience groups. The last step is to gain feedback and change accordingly.

Complex and rapidly-changing communication trends have taken time for communication experts to adapt to. A challenge for these professionals to conduct a comprehensive and strategic plan in their field is how to gain interest and change the mind-sets of the top managers to recognize the role of communication in employee performance and productivity. Companies should put communication in the centre of building a working culture and promoting employee experience. These organisations also need to invest serious resources in turning their strategies into practice. In addition, the concept of the digital workplace is an innovative way to change and optimize communication processes. In this thesis, the concept is approached via communication channels. Since the approach depicts only one element of a digital workplace, there is still room for improvement in future studies. The author believes that the thesis will help to clear the role of internal communication strategy in building a long-term business goal, which is to achieve happy employees who perform well.

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The internal communication survey in the case company

1. Background information

Question 1: What location is your office?

- Finland
- Malaysia
- Singapore
- China
- The Americas
- Franch
- Germany
- England
- Norway
- Estonia
- Sweden

Question 2: How long have you been working in the company?

- More than five years
- From one to five years
- Less than a year

Question 3: Which classification does it describe your current position in the company?

- Employees in non-supervisory positions
- Team lead
- Senior management (senior VP, VP, general manager)
- Top management (the global management team, country managers, board of directors)

2. Internal communication and communication channels

Question 4: To what extend do you agree to the statements about communication frequency from 1 to 5? 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree. 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= totally agree

- My direct supervisor and I communicate frequently.
- My direct supervisor and I often discuss work-related matters.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree to the statements about information flow from 1 to 5? 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree. 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= totally agree

- Work-related communication is mainly two-way (i.e from direct supervisor to me, and the way round).
- My direct supervisor and I exchange ideas and information easily and freely.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree to the statements about informal communication from 1 to 5? 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree. 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= totally agree

- Most work-related information from my direct supervisor to me is transmitted through informal written channels (i.e instant messages, hand-written notes)
- Most of the information is through casual conversations (i.e informal face-to-face conversations, hall chat)
- Most of the information is spontaneous

Question 7: To what extent do you agree to the statements about formal communication from 1 to 5? 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree. 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= totally agree

- Most of the information is pre-planned.
- Most work-related information from my direct supervisor is through formal channels (i.e email, reports, team meeting)

Question 8: What are your channel preferences in informal communication from 1 to 8? 1= least preferred, 8= most preferred

- Email
- Face-to-face meetings/conversations
- Microsoft Teams
- Phone call/SMS
- Skype video conference
- Skype instant messaging
- Workspaces in the intranet
- Yammer

Question 9: What are your channel preferences in formal communication from 1 to 8? 1= least preferred, 8= most preferred

- Email
- Face-to-face meetings/conversations
- Microsoft Teams
- Phone call/SMS
- Skype video conference
- Skype instant messaging
- Workspaces in the intranet
- Yammer

Question 10: What are your channel preferences in corporate communication from 1 to 8? 1= least preferred, 8= most preferred

- Email
- Face-to-face meetings/conversations
- Intranet
- Magazine
- Microsoft Teams
- Phone call/SMS
- Skype for Business
- Yammer

Question 11: To what extent do you agree to the statements about internal communication from 1 to 5? 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= totally agree

- Transparent communication in my organisation motivates me to give feedback
- I feel engaged when my direct supervisor keeps me updated about any changes.
- When my direct supervisor gives me instant feedback on my work, I feel motivated to complete my tasks.
- I feel like going to work when I can communicate easily and freely with my direct supervisor.
- I feel comfortable having direct conversations with my direct supervisor.

3. Internal communication in a relation to employee engagement

Question 12: To what extent do you agree to the statements about employee engagement from 1 to 5? 1= totally disagree, 2= disagree. 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= totally agree

- At work I feel full of energy.
- Time flies when I am working.
- I am enthusiastic about my job.

Question 13: If you have any feedback on channels of internal communication in the company, employee engagement, and the survey, please specify: