

The Role of Employee Communications in Employee Experiences: Case Company X

Annika Ryytänen



Author(s) Annika Ryyänänen	
Specialisation Master Degree Programme in Communication Management, Leadership & People Management	
Thesis title The Role of Employee Communications in Employee Experiences: Case Company X	Number of pages + number of appendices 81 + 2
<p>In today's world it is essential for organizations to create workplaces where people want to work at because the competition for talent is fierce and because it is the best way to overall organizational success. Today, people expect an engaging and enjoyable employee experience. It is not just about the physical workspace or benefits but about the company culture. It is generated by e.g. the technology provided, a clear vision and mission, coaching, meaningful work, feedback processes and great teams. Hence, communication in the workplace plays an enormous role in employee experience creation. However, the needs and wishes of different employees are unique and therefore, in order to design employee experiences, those needs and wishes must be understood.</p> <p>The objective of this Master's thesis was to understand what kind of employee communications positively contribute to the employee experiences of employee group Y at Company X. It aimed at finding out how employee communications are experienced currently, what are the current strengths and how could employee communications be developed in order to enhance the employee experiences of employee group Y.</p> <p>Thus, the theoretical framework used in this Master's thesis consists of Employee Experience (EX) and Employee Communication as well as of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which was applied in carrying out the research. AI is a positive strengths-based philosophy and approach to organizational development in which the existing positive cores are discovered, dreams are discussed and the suggestions for action are designed together with the employees.</p> <p>A questionnaire and Appreciative Interviews were carried out. The findings revealed that the communications in local teams and with many of the supervisors is experienced as interactive and positive whereas the communication processes in macro level was experienced less positively. The employee communications currently are considered somewhat fragmented and complex and the communication channels too many from the employee group Y's point of view. The interviews indicated that in order to develop employee communications in a way that would positively contribute to the employee experiences of employee group Y the mindset and practises should be more about two-way interaction. The matters that should primarily be focused on are participating the employees more in decision making and development work, especially in matters that have an impact on their daily work, ensuring that the processes and channels used for providing information regarding on-going and up-coming work shifts are prompt and simple, matching the needs of the employees. The information channels roles should also be clarified. This research can be taken advantage of as a benchmark for other departments of Company X and other organizations in developing employee communications and employee experiences by utilizing Appreciative Inquiry.</p>	
Keywords Employee Experience, Employee Communication, Appreciative Inquiry	

Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
1.1	Case Organization	5
1.1.1	Employee group of focus	5
1.2	Research objectives.....	6
1.3	Needs and benefits of the research for the commissioning organization	6
1.4	Research problem(s)	7
1.5	Cover Matrix.....	7
2	Employee Experience	9
2.1	EX – what is it?	9
2.2	Short history of Employee Experience.....	11
2.3	Why to invest in Employee Experiences.....	12
2.4	Reason for being.....	15
2.5	The three Employee Experience Environments.....	16
2.5.1	Cultural environment.....	16
2.5.2	Technological environment.....	19
2.5.3	Physical environment.....	20
3	Employee Communication	22
3.1	What is Employee Communications?	22
3.2	Purpose of Employee Communications.....	23
3.3	Dialogue, voice, silence and participation.....	24
3.4	Employee communications, engagement and employee experience.....	25
4	Appreciative Inquiry – a Positive Approach to Change	28
4.1	What is Appreciative Inquiry?	28
4.2	Appreciative Interview.....	29
4.3	D- phases of Appreciative Inquiry	30
4.3.1	Define.....	30
4.3.2	Discovery (Inquire).....	31
4.3.3	Dream (Imagine).....	31
4.3.4	Design (Innovate).....	32
4.3.5	Destiny (Implement).....	32
4.4	Why Appreciative Inquiry was chosen for this Master’s thesis	33
5	Conducting the Empirical Case Study.....	35
5.1	Desk study	35
5.2	Questionnaire.....	35
5.3	Appreciative Inquiry based semi-structured interviews.....	37

6	Questionnaire findings – Current experiences on employee communications.....	40
6.1	Level of satisfaction and willingness to recommend employer	40
6.2	Good team spirit, emphatic and supportive supervisory work	41
6.3	Need for participation and interaction in macro level	45
6.4	Complex communication technology, information coming from every direction ...	47
6.5	Summary of the questionnaire findings.....	52
7	Appreciative Interview results and Suggestions for Action.....	54
7.1	Discovery of Core Strengths	55
7.1.1	Supportive atmosphere in local teams.....	55
7.1.2	Exemplary supervisors.....	56
7.2	Dreaming of ideal employee communications	59
7.2.1	More interaction and participation instead of one-way announcements	59
7.2.2	Information regarding on-going and up-coming work shifts	63
7.2.3	Simple solutions, targeted and easily accessible information.....	64
7.2.4	More transparent employee communications	67
7.3	Designing concrete suggestions for action	68
7.4	Wrap up of the Appreciative Interviews	73
8	Conclusions.....	75
8.1	Answers to the research questions.....	75
8.2	Validity and reliability of this Master’s thesis	77
8.3	Discussion on recommendations for future.....	78
8.4	Reflection on personal learning	79
	List of Appendices.....	ii

1 Introduction

“Robots don’t care about experiences at work, but humans do” - James Morgan (Morgan, 2017, 6)

Traditionally organizations have been seen as providers of the possibility for people to make a living, to pay the bills, to provide for their families and to enable them to purchase necessary things. The purpose of organizations existence has commonly been to generate profit for stakeholders and organizations have assumed that people need to work there. This has been the usual way of thinking and organizations have had the power and control over its employees. However, this is no longer the case. (Morgan, 2017, xxii).¹

According to Morgan (2017, xxii) it is essential these days for organizations to create workplaces where people want to work at, rather than have to, because the competition for talent is fierce and because it is the best way to overall organizational success (Morgan, 2017, xxii). The simple forecast of Forbes supports this too: organizational future success factors and competitive advantage will be based on committed and well-being employees (Yohn, 2018)

This shift in approach from necessity to want is causing organizations to move from utility to overall employee experience (Morgan, 2017, xxii) and to providing a true motivating reason for being, which making profit for stakeholders often isn’t. Today, employees expect a productive, engaging and enjoyable work experience. Rather than focusing narrowly on employee engagement or culture, organizations are focusing on employee experience as a whole, bringing together all the workplace, HR, and management practices that impact people on the job (Bersin et al., 2017, 51). In addition to providing a subsistence of living, work and work community are a big part of both people’s individual and social identities (Juholin, 2013, 185) and therefore it is important also that the values of the organization match the individual’s own.

¹ This Master’s thesis report uses RefWorks citation manager for managing in-text referencing and bibliography.

Employee experience (EX) is about how employees experience their work, workplace and their role as an employee. It could simply be defined as a sum of all the things that people experience, feel, see and come across with as employees of an organization – their perceptions of what is it like to work in the organization. Investing in employee experiences is essential as organizations with motivated and satisfied employees, well-being culture, functioning technologies and comfortable physical spaces simply perform better. They are more engaged, willing to do their best, innovative, customer-oriented and positive about their employer - which in turn affects the attractiveness, the employer brand of the organization. Improving and optimizing employee experiences can thus help the employees perform in their jobs in the best possible way and ultimately the organization to achieve better business results. Therefore focusing on people and bringing humanity and experiences into workplaces is now on top of many organization’s priority lists. (Morgan, 2017, 1).

In addition to the employee perspective employee experience has to be looked at through the eyes of the organization as well and thirdly to understand the overlap between those two (Morgan, 2017, 7). Morgan (2017, 7) explains that the perspective of the employer on employee experience is about what is designed and created for the employees and what the organization believes the employees reality should be like.

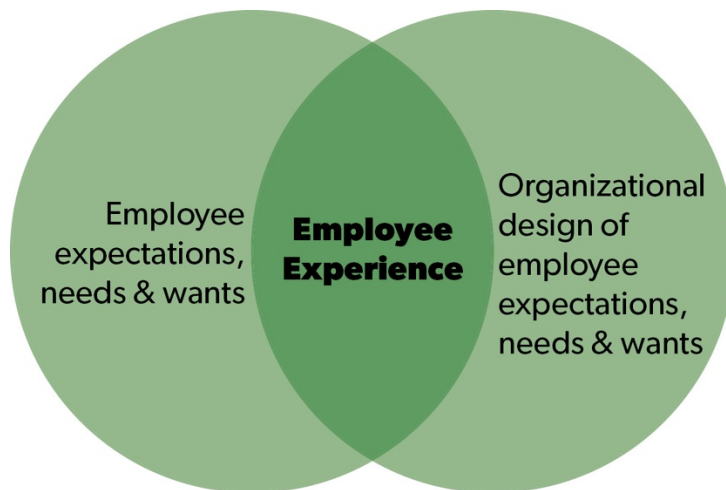


Figure 1: Employee Experience Design, “The intersection of employee expectations, needs, and wants and the organizational design of those expectations, needs and wants (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 8)

The ideal situation in an organization would be such in which the employee’s reality and organization’s design correlate with each other. “In other words the organization designs or does something and the employees perceive it in an intended way” (Morgan, 2017, 8).

Employee experience is affected by several different physical, technological and cultural factors in an organization, one of which are the human interactions with other members of the organization; the management, supervisors and colleagues. Communication, and the lack of it, are often mentioned by employees when they are asked about the most crucial development areas affecting their employee experiences. Employee communication is too often top-down type and can be based on only e-mails and other technological communication channels, which are not most ideal for creating true open dialogue in a workplace (Sweetsbot, 6). Communicating routinely and effectively with employees is connected to employee commitment, productivity, job performance and satisfaction and staying in the organization which are all dependent on positives employee experiences (Cornelissen, 2020, 176).

Ideally communications, as well as employee experiences in general, should be developed from down to up and offer the employees true possibilities for having their voices heard. Once employees feel being seen and listened to their engagement increases. Feedback coming from employees is valuable also from an organizational development perspective as the employees themselves always have the best first-hand information on customers, work tasks and the challenges and strengths in them, for example (Sweetsbot, 6). Their contribution to developing and deciding on important matters should be valued. Thus, the only way to successfully design employee experiences is to do it with them (Morgan 2017, 229-225).

It is important to realize that the employees are, in addition to being the most important stakeholder of the organization, the ones creating and generating ideas on communications and that they also make communications happen. They are the builders of employee brand of the organization, too. Therefore, communication could be described as a key piece in the puzzle of employee experiences (Deepa, Roy, 2018 , 9).

1.1 Case Organization

Description of the case company in appendix D.

1.1.1 Employee group of focus

This Master's thesis focuses on one specific employee group in Company X, whose experiences are being researched and developed. Of them the term employee group Y will be used throughout the thesis.

More details of the research group in appendix D.

1.2 Research objectives

Thus, this Master's thesis explores employee experiences from employee communications perspective. The aim is to understand what kind of employee communications positively contribute to the employee group Y's employee experiences and their current experiences regarding employee communications. It aims at identifying the existing strengths of employee communications and to understand how they could be taken advantage of in developing communications in order to enhance employee experiences of group Y.

Creating positive employee experiences is more simply said than done, but Company X has realized the value that lies in it and is now putting emphasize on understanding and enhancing their employee's experiences.

As it is not insignificant how employees feel at work, enhancing employee experiences is an extremely important responsibility act of an organization. As Kuvaja & Malmelin (2008) describe "the way an organization treats its employees is the most important matter in organizational responsibility" (Kuvaja, Malmelin, 2008, 32).

To be able to fulfil the plans regarding employee experiences it is important, for the supervisors, HR and communications professionals, and the management of Company X, to understand the current situation regarding employee group Y's experiences on communications from their own perspective, to understand the factors regarding employee communications that contribute positively to the feelings the employees of group Y experience during their days. Without that knowledge it is very difficult to design something that matches the needs and hopes of the employee group Y. Therefore Company X commissioned this Master's thesis.

The research is carried out by applying Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which is a positive philosophy and approach to organizational development based on strengths. It focuses on the organization's positive core and approaches problems from the other side. It emphasizes that organizations are living human systems (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 32) and focuses on the humanity in them. The concept will be explained in more detail in chapter 3.

1.3 Needs and benefits of the research for the commissioning organization

In autumn 2019 Company X carried out a survey which gathered data on employees attitudes on responsibility and on Company X's responsibility image. According to those results it indeed was necessary to focus on employee experiences and on employee

communications. Therefore this Master's thesis is very timely and necessary. In addition, other employee surveys carried out in Company X during 2019 and spring 2020 also indicated a similar need.

The results showed that well-being and coping at work are major development targets from the employee's perspective. Communications related aspects, that got somewhat weak ratings, among the staff of Company X, were transparency of communications, enjoyment of work and advancement and learning experiences at work. These results emphasize the importance of investigating the employee communications affecting employee experiences and the possibilities for enhancing them. The results of the surveys mentioned will be explained in more detail in chapter 6.1.

Hopefully the work will give insight on the role of employee communications in positive employee experience creation and on concrete suggestions of action that could be applied in employee communications in order to enhance the employee experiences of employee group Y. At its best it can help to focus on the most important employee experience related employee communicational aspects.

1.4 Research problem(s)

The earlier explained objectives are studied by answering the following research questions:

1. What kind of employee communications positively contribute to employee group Y's employee experiences?
 - 1.1. How does employee group Y experience employee communications today?
 - 1.2. What are the core strengths of employee communications currently and in what kind of situations they come alive?
 - 1.3. How could employee communications be developed, based on the strengths identified, in order to enhance the group Y's employee experiences?

1.5 Cover Matrix

The cover matrix illustrates how the theoretical framework of the research, the research questions and survey/interview questions are linked to each other. The purpose of the cover matrix is to clarify the combination between the research problem, theoretical framework and empiric.

Research question number	Research question	Communication Survey question (appendix 1)	Interview question (appendix 2)	Theoretical framework (chapter)	Findings (chapter)
1.	What kind of employee communications positively contribute to employee group Y's employee experiences?	8	1-14	2 & 3	7 & 8.1.
1.1.	How does employee group Y experience employee communications today?	1-8	2-5 & 8	3	6.1.-6.5. & 8.1.
1.2.	What are the core strengths of employee communications currently and in what kind of situations they come alive?	1-8	3-5 & 8	2, 3 & 4	6.2., 7.1., 7.4. & 8.1.
1.3.	How could employee communications developed in order enhance the group Y's employee experiences?		6-7 & 10-14	2, 3 & 4	7.2.-7.4. & 8.1.

The following chapters present the theoretical framework related to this Master's thesis (chapters 2-3) and the methodology by which the research was carried out (4-5). Thereafter the findings and suggestions for action are presented (chapters 6-7). The final chapter (8) concludes the process, summarizes answers to the research questions and discusses possible future development suggestions and the reliability and validity of this Master's thesis.

2 Employee Experience

The theoretical framework of this Master's thesis is constructed about Employee Experience (EX) theories, employee communication theories and theory on Appreciative Inquiry. The research project is carried out by utilizing these theories and the theoretical framework is to form a holistic view on the subject.

Next the concept of Employee Experience is explained in detail from a theoretical perspective, the employee experience environments are clarified, and the advantages of positive employee experiences, for the employees themselves and businesses, are briefly discussed.

2.1 EX – what is it?






Employee experiences are the perceptions that the employees create through all of the interactions and different touchpoints before, during and after their employment. It is the impression the organization leaves on its people that defines whether or not they come to work there and whether they stay or leave. Employee experience is about winning the hearts and minds of employees. It requires moving from efficiency driven processes to designing great employee experiences. In other words employee experience is a sum of the perceptions regarding all the things people feel, see and come across with as employees of an organisation. (Coene, 2018, Morgan, 2017, 6-10)

Employee Experience comes from a variety of factors, in which workplace communication and interactions with management, supervisors, teams and colleagues play a big role, as already mentioned. A big part of the employee experience is about how the employee experiences his/her own work and whether the goals of the job match his/her own - how meaningful and important they feel their job is. It also involves the aspects of working environment and tools as well as other technologies used in the organization. (Morgan, 2017, 56-57).

The salary, holidays, bonuses and different kinds of perks as well as possibilities to balance work and life naturally have an impact on employee experience too. However, if the organizational culture is not well-being, management practises are not respectful, communication in the organization is not open, or the working environment and technological solutions don't match the needs of employees, no money nor other benefits can eventually replace that (Bersin et al., 2017, 51-60).

The factors that contribute to a positive employee experience are meaningful work, supportive management, positive work environment, growth opportunities and trust in

leadership. Cross-organizational collaboration and communication are essential in enabling all of these. (Bersin et al., 2017, 55).

				
Meaningful work	Supportive Management	Positive work environment	Growth opportunity	Trust in leadership
Autonomy	Clear and transparent goals	Flexible work environment	Training and support on the job	Mission and purpose
Select to fit	Coaching	Humanistic Workplace	Facilitated talent mobility	Continuous investment in people
Small, empowered teams	Investment in development of managers	Culture of recognition	Self-directed dynamic learning	Transparency and honesty
Time for slack	Agile Performance Management	Fair, inclusive, diverse work environment	High-impact learning culture	Inspiration

Cross organizational collaboration and communication

Figure 2. Deloitte’s Simply Irresistible Organization™ model (adapted from Deloitte [2017] in Bersin et al., 2017, 55)

Often organizations use employee engagement and employee experience as synonyms even though, according to Morgan, (2017, 6) that is not actually correct. Employee engagement is more of a short-term adrenaline shot, as Morgan puts it (2017, 6) but employee experience is about long-term redesign of the organization – it is about focusing on the engine that drives the organization. In fact, positive employee experiences are the cause of employee engagement. Because once people feel good at their jobs they are much more likely to be engaged to the organization they work for than if they don’t feel good.

In order to successfully create positive employee experiences organizations must focus on employees’ own perceptions on the meaningfulness of their work and the possibilities to develop their competence, experiences of their work and skills being appreciated, the team spirit and team collaboration among the employees and interaction between management

and employees. Two-way interaction and listening to the employees is crucial in developing and maintaining positive employee experiences. However, it is always a moving target, meaning that it is never ready. Employee experience is an ongoing and never ending back-and-forth interaction between employees and the organization (Morgan, 2017, 177)

So simply put, putting emphasize on employee experiences means caring about the people working in the organization and their well-being at work in all levels at all times. Employee experience is a human experience at work (Bersin et al., 2017, 51-60).

2.2 Short history of Employee Experience

This chapter briefly explains how the ideology and practises in many organizations have developed from utility all the way to employee experiences.

Utility

Employer – employee relationships used to be quite straightforward in the past. Companies had vacancies that needed to be filled and people in turn needed money for paying their bills and for providing for their families and they happened to have some sort of skills that in best cases matched the needs of the organization so people tried to get that open position (Morgan, 2017, 3)

Utility was in the centre of the employment meaning that the employer offered necessary tools for doing the job, but that was about it. The question to be answered was “*What do the employees need to work?*” (Morgan, 2017, 4) Today, there are different kinds of perks and benefits that companies offer for their employees but that was not the case during the utility era, which still is reality in many organizations.

Productivity

“*What do employees need to work better and faster?*” was the question during productivity times that came after the utility era – and still is at productivity centred organizations today (Morgan, 2017, 4) Productivity is about optimizing the ways people work, creating detailed repeatable steps of working in order to maximize productivity and minimize the time used for it.

It is unfortunate that at the time there was no technology capable of doing those jobs, no robots for which the jobs would have been perfect for, so instead humans were used. There was not much focus on the people doing the jobs, on how they felt about their work

and perceived the employer. As long as they were productive, that was enough from the employers' perspective (Morgan, 2017, 6) .

Employee engagement

Employee engagement was the first step towards caring about the employees doing the jobs. It is about the realization of “*How can we make employees more happy so they perform better?*” (Morgan, 2017, 4). Even though the focus is more on the employee, than in utility or productivity centred organizations, it is still about productivity too. Employee engagement is important as, according to several studies, it does increase productivity, make people stick to their employers longer and make them feel better at their work. However, employee engagement is actually caused by good employee experience. Therefore, in order to make people truly committed and engaged to the organization, it is crucial to take care of their overall employee experiences in the first place (Morgan, 2017, 5).

Employee experience

“It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.” — Steve Jobs

Finally comes the employee experience. The shift from engagement to experience is now taking place in many organizations. The question here is “*How can we create a company where people want to show up vs. need to show up?*” (Morgan, 2017, 5)

The focus is on organizational culture, technology and working spaces. The aim is purposeful design and long-term solutions. Market leading organizations no longer focus solely on organizational culture and making people engaged but on employee experiences as a whole – they aim at being Experiential organizations (Morgan, 2017, 141). This means that different kinds of needs of different kinds of employees' are met in all phases of their career in the company. Because for employees, for people, work is a big part of their lives and has an impact on their well-being in emotional, social and physical levels.

Next chapter explains in more detail why organizations should invest in employee experiences.

2.3 Why to invest in Employee Experiences

Employee experiences are related to innovation, increased customer satisfaction, finding, hiring and keeping the best people, making work more engaging and improving the overall

performance of the organization (Morgan, 2017) and is also strongly connected to the employer brand, meaning that does or does the company not seem appealing to current and potential new employees.

As mentioned earlier, the competition for talent is ever growing (Morgan, 2017, xxii) and good employees should be taken care of as they can be difficult to replace. Providing an engaging experience will help organizations succeed in tracking and retaining skilled employees (Bersin et al., 2017, 54). It is crucial for employers to understand the daily lives of their employees and offer them what they need and wish for because as said, satisfied people commit more likely than people who feel their job and organization they work for are a daily burden. Ultimately it contributes to money coming in the company's account.

So putting effort on employee experiences does not only make people happier and more engaged at their work but it also has a direct impact on the business. It does affect the productivity and profitability of an organization. Why this happens is explained next.

Customer service and customer satisfaction go hand in hand, as it has been studied that the satisfaction of employees increases the satisfaction of customers. The way the organization interacts internally is easily reflected to the interactions outside the organization too. Thus, customer experience is strongly connected to employee experience because employees who are enthusiastic about their job and who enjoy their workplace are more motivated to produce better results (Vuori, 2018).

As an example, the former CEO of Southwest airlines, a company which is known for their philosophy in which employees are always put at the top of their priority list, Herb Kelleher has said that a company has to treat employees like customers because when they are treated right, they will treat the outside customers right. She has highlighted that that has been a powerful competitive weapon for Southwest Airlines. (Fortune Magazine [2011] in Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 239).

Customers, on the other hand, who receive better service oftentimes spent more money and are more loyal to the brand and people working and willing to work for the organization make effort to perform in a way that they'd get to keep their jobs or to get a job in that specific organization. In worst cases bad customer experiences can cost money to organizations as they are very likely to share their unpleasant experiences with other people who then avoid interacting with the company. (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 239).

Even by common sense it seems quite self-evident that the organizations that are being said good about and that have a respectful and caring employer brand are appealing to

people; potential customers and future employees. Therefore there is a direct relationship between employee experience and customer service (Morgan, 2017, 153).

Building an employer brand should always start from inside the company because best advertisement for an organization are its happy employees (Vuori, 2018). According to Morgan (2017, 154) admired and respected organizations are not only attractive to current and possible future employees but are also looked at as role models for other companies and people.

According to Morgan most innovative companies are much more often experiential organizations than not (Morgan, 2017, 153). When organizational culture, technologies used and physical environment are focused on and match the needs of employees, people are able to innovate in much more higher level. Organizations in which all of the three environments are in excellent condition, people are given the resources and possibilities to bring up their best ideas in their everyday work. From business aspect, “innovation is what leads to new products, services and partnerships that allow the organization to remain competitive” Morgan (Morgan, 2017, 152-153) says.

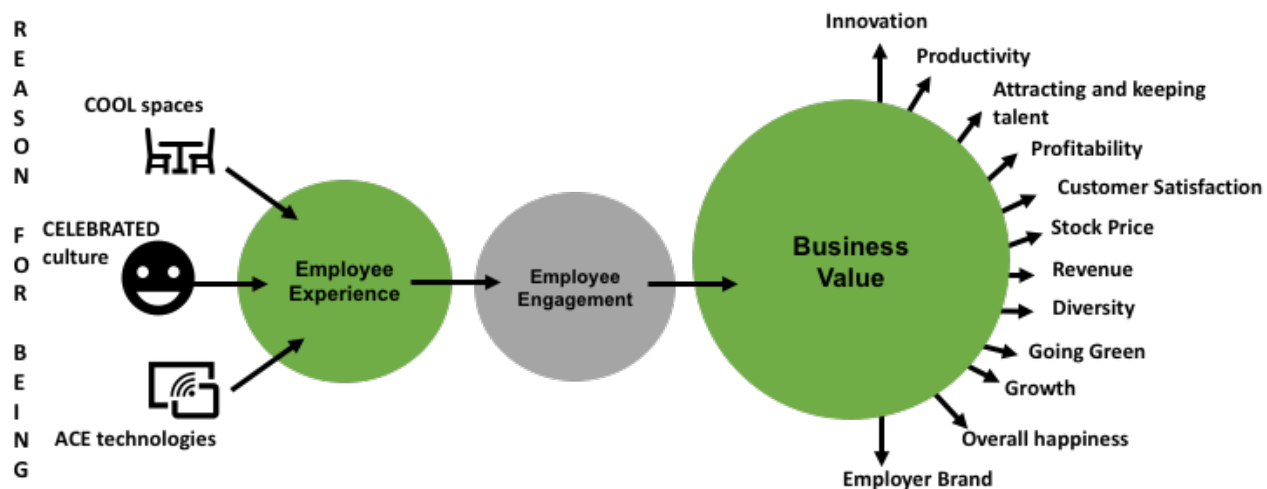


Figure 3. Employee Experience Business Outcomes (adapted from Morgan 2017, 164).

Next chapter explains the reason for being and the above mentioned three employee experience environments; cultural, technological and physical.

2.4 Reason for being

Reason for Being is described by Morgan “organizations that deliver amazing employee experiences transcend this basic concept of a mission statement by connecting what the organization does to the people that are actually affected.” (Morgan, 2017, 51-57).

Mission statements are to explain what the purpose of the organization is. They commonly are about making profit for stakeholders, being the market leader or delivering the best products, or something similar. Communicating these kind of sentences do tell what the organization is trying to do and what it aims at, but they don't do much to inspire employees or motivate them to action because they are too business centric. In order to create true Reasons for being they should be more human (Morgan, 2017, 51). The focus should be more on people, rather than business because employees need “reason for being”, meaning “why are we here and what is our purpose” in order to feel satisfied and in order to contribute to business success (Morgan, 2017, 51-52)

A New York times article “The incalculable value of finding a job you love” (Frank, 2016) said that the most important dimensions of job satisfaction is how one feels about one's employer's mission. According to Morgan (Morgan, 2017, 51-52) a great reason for being forces the organization to dream and aim big and it focuses on the impact of world and people, is not centred in financial gain, is something that is unattainable and that truly rallies employees.

In an ideal world communications succeed in engaging employees in their work and the company's business goals and give employees a true sense of connectedness to the business and a common purpose for mutual benefit (Cornelissen, 2020, 236). For example the Reason for being of Starbucks goes “To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time.” (Morgan, 2017, 51-53).

According to Juholin (2013, 59-60) commitment and engagement of employees can happen once the basic function of the organization is commonly understood, the values, goals and purposes of the organization are known and people are aware of the future plans. The true success of the endeavour of the organization depends on whether or not people work together towards mutual goals and objectives or not. Effective employee communications are the chief means of achieving the success for which every business strives. Successful communications help in ensuring that people know what the common goal is and that they are motivated to work towards it (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 232). Thus, reason for being is the same as mission statements and sense making and they are created through communications.

Reason for being can be seen as an umbrella covering the three following employee experience environments explained next.

2.5 The three Employee Experience Environments

Different researchers have defined the construction of employee experience in slightly different ways. According to Morgan employee experience consists of three elements which are 1) cultural environment, 2) technological environment and 3) physical environment (Morgan, 2017, 56-57)

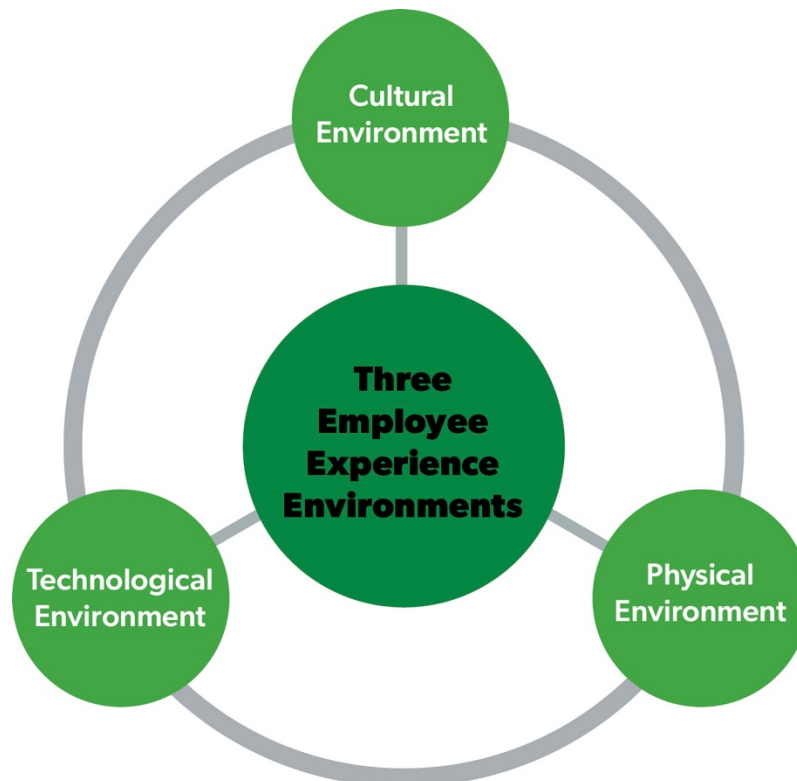


Figure 4. The three employee experience environments (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 57)

All these three environments together have an impact on employee experiences and all of them need to be in excellent condition in order to reach the status of a truly experiential organization.

2.5.1 Cultural environment

Cultural environment refers to the organizational culture. Organizational culture is not easy to define, it is something people sense and experience. It can take the form of butterflies in your stomach when you get excited and want to go to work or a uncomfortable gut feeling that tells you don't want to.

Organizational culture includes behaviours, attitudes, values and ways of operating in the organization. It involves stories, different rules and metaphors, “socially created through the communicative performances of organisational members” (Miller, 2015, 74-78).

According to Schein (2010), organisational culture becomes visible in behaviour. He defines it as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2010, 18).

Morgan (2010) describes cultural environment as the vibe of an organization and the actions that are taken to create that vibe or feeling. These include how employees are treated, what products and services are offered and how the employees get their jobs done, for example. Great employee experiences are dependent on Celebrated- culture attributes. (Morgan, 2017, 89-91) They are presented in the table below accompanied with the factors that they measure:

Table 1. CELEBRATED-culture attributes and what they measure (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 90-127)

CELEBRATED Culture	What it is about	What it measures
C	Company is viewed positively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational effectiveness around telling its story • Impact that the organization is having in the world around it • Employer branding • Pride
E	Everyone feels valued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee satisfaction with overall compensation • Whether employees feel like they are being listened to • Recognition and feeling valued
L	Legitimate sense of purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection and commitment to the company • Organization genuinely cares about employees • Personal and organizational value alignment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a cohesive and welcoming environment • Trust

E	Employees feel like they're part of a team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological safety and feeling like someone has your back • Communication and collaboration
B	Believes in diversity and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating an open and welcoming organization • Respect and appreciation for all employees (and people in general) • Psychological safety
R	Referrals come from employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether employees genuinely like working for the organization • Loyalty and commitment to the organization
A	Ability to learn new things and given resources to do so and advance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career progression and personal growth ability and opportunities • Understanding of employee motives internally and externally • Investment in people
T	Treats employees fairly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How employees are treated • Balanced and flexible approach to employee relationships
E	Executives and Managers are coaches and mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers invested in the success of employees • Having the right managers in place
D	Dedicated to employee health and wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to overall employee well-being • Taking care of employees

Organizational Behaviour

Organizational behaviour is worth explaining here as it is strongly connected to the organizational culture as well as on employee communications. Organizational behaviour is a study of what people do in an organisation and how that behaviour affects the organization's performance. Organizational behaviour is concerned with especially employment-related situations, it emphasizes behaviour as related to concerns such as jobs, work, absenteeism, employment turnover, productivity, human performance and management. The core topics are motivation, leader behaviour and power, interpersonal communication, group structure and processes, attitude development and perception, change process, conflict and negotiation and work design. (Robbins, Judge, 2016, 25)

Psychological safety

Another important aspect to be explained, which strongly affects employee experiences and is crucial in celebrated organizational culture, is psychological safety in an organization. It refers to a shared feeling among employees that it is safe to take interpersonal risks, to be oneself and to express one's own ideas and opinions openly. When organizational atmosphere is safe, the workplace is not afraid to take on the risks of interaction.

A psychologically safe workplace respects the competences of everyone and welcomes everyone's opinions. Making mistakes is OK and people know they will not be ridiculed by them. Psychological safety is also crucial in order to successfully carry out Appreciative Inquiry process and therefore it is an important aspect to highlight here.

2.5.2 Technological environment

The technological environment refers to the organizations' technical solutions such as applications, software, communication channels and forums, video conferencing tools, and billing tools. Any technologies used in getting jobs done are part of the technological environment. Even if the work itself is meaningful and the colleagues are wonderful, the ineffectiveness of technology can prevent people from doing their jobs and can at worst cases drive employees to change their employer (Morgan, 2017, 76-78).

As employee communication and interaction are in the centre of this Master's thesis and as technological environment is a big part in them, the technological environment is very important to be included in the research process. Also, there are several different communication channels and forums being used at Company X, the usability and satisfaction of which require further investigations.

According to Morgan (2017, 77-87) good employee experiences require ACE-technologies. Those attributes and the factors that they measure are presented in the table below:

Table 2. ACE-technologies attributes and what they measure (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 77-85)

ACE-technologies	What it is about	What it measures
A	Availability to everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to driving innovation, collaboration, and communication across the organization • Focus on enabling the organization as a whole • Technological adeptness
C	Consumer grade technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward-thinking approach to technology across the organization • Creating modern work experience • Enabling employees to be most effective and engaged in their jobs
E	Employee needs versus Business requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to enabling employees do their best work • Listening to the voice of the employee

2.5.3 Physical environment

The third environment is the Physical one, which includes working conditions, offices, interior design, ergonomic conditions and meals provided by the employer for example. Planning the best physical environment requires that the organization truly understands how and why employees do their work and plan the premises accordingly. For example, Google and Facebook are known for their stunning and inspiring workspaces and other conditions (Morgan, 2017, 59-61, 72, 75) in which people enjoy working.

Morgan describes that the attributes of physical environment are COOL physical spaces. They refer to; Chooses to bring in friends and visitors, Offers flexibility, Organization's values are reflected and Leverages multiple workspace options (Morgan, 2017, 59-75).

However, even though the physical environment plays an enormous role in creating positive employee experiences, it is ruled out in this Master's thesis research as it is not as strongly connected to the scope of the thesis as cultural and technological environment are.

Thus, all of these three environments and the 17 variables explained (CELEBRATED-culture, ACE-technologies and COOL-spaces) are crucial in employee experience creation. The better condition these three environments are in the better employee experiences can be.

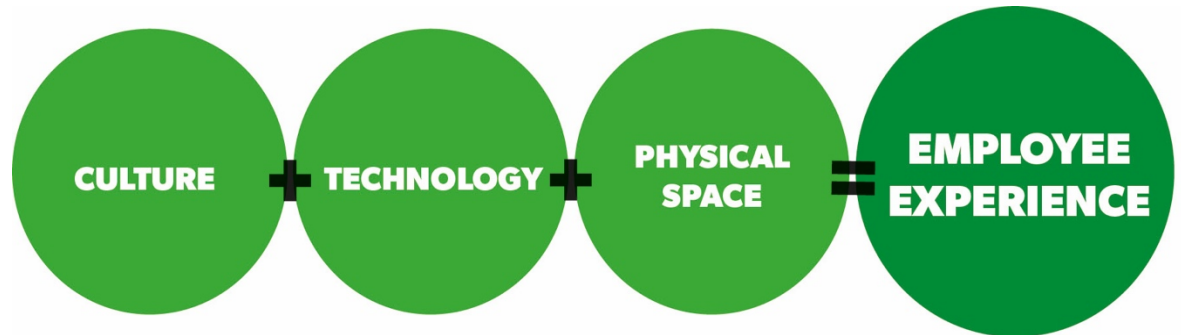


Figure 5. The employee experience equation (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 132)

However, it is important to understand what these variables really measure. For example offering consumer grade technology is not about being nice but it measures the commitment to empowering employees and driving innovation and collaboration. Feeling like a member of a team is not just about that the people get along well with each other, but about psychological safety, trust and communication. The idea is that the factors need to be understood more deeply than just on the first layer. (Morgan, 2017, 128, 132).

3 Employee Communication

Communication taking place in work places can be called, for example, internal communication, workplace communication, organizational interaction or employee communication. As the terms are so many, for clarity, one was chosen to be used throughout this Master's thesis and it is the last mentioned, employee communications. It refers to exchanging information and ideas within an organization, among all employees, communication practitioners, supervisors and the management, and could be characterised as the core area of corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2020, 176).

This chapter discusses what is employee communications and what is the linkage between employee communication and employee experience.

3.1 What is Employee Communications?

When employee communication is mentioned, people's thoughts often focus on the content, tools and channels of communication – on the most visible part of it (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 234). Employee communications indeed are, also, about all of those, about keeping employees aware of the purpose and vision of the organization, informed about what is going on in the company, what is coming and what is important as well as on information that is necessary in order to carry out their tasks, by using appropriate tools and channels (Deepa, Roy, 2018). Even though these things are very important, employee communications are also much more than that.

Employee communications are never only about the management or communication professionals informing employees about different matters, but actually about the the daily face-to-face interactions and dialogues and exchanges of information and ideas between supervisors and their employees and all other members of the organization. (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013). It can take place in person in offices and other premises of the organization, in digital corporate communication forums and through media, for example, and it can be formal or informal.

Conventional downward written communications such as memos, newsletters, intranets and reports are important in supporting to the "real" communications that take place in the workplaces. These things should repeat, support and reinforce the information that is exchanged between the members of the organization, the management and all employees. Top-down communications and command should never be the primary way of communicating to employees (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 235) because the individual needs for employees' autonomy, creativity and sociability might suffer (Cornelissen, 2020,

174) which decreases employee experiences. Instead, employee communications should be about interacting *with* the employees.

Communication is part of everyone's job description in an organization. Everyone communicates in their work in some way, thus they are all communicators. It is not a separate function assigned to solely the people with a "communications"-something job title (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 234). Communication is a work community skill which involves the readiness to develop one's own work and work community, which in communication terms means bringing ideas and suggestion to managers and colleagues awareness (Juholin, 2013, 195).

Upward communications involves information from the employees, about themselves, their tasks, about organizational practices and policies and about their ideas and wishes on what needs to be done and how it could be done in practice, that is sent up to the managers within the organization (Cornelissen, 2020, 178).

The basis of effective employee communications lies in appropriately enabling dialogue and positioning and linking face-to-face and written communications (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 235).

3.2 Purpose of Employee Communications

Well-functioning employee communications require openness, good team-spirit and relaxed atmosphere in which psychological safety is present. Secrecy and competition in turn prevent good employee communications (Juholin, 2013, 57).

The purpose of employee communications is to create and built sense of community and strengthen internal networks and enhance commitment to work and work community. They result from feelings of being valued and appreciated, experiences of autonomy in work, a positive image of the employer and engagement, sense of belongingness and being part of a team which enable flow state and good results (Juholin, 2013, 59).

Looking at the challenge through a lens of communications, management and employee communications need to help employees to connect by the following (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 253):

- offering opportunities and encouraging two-way dialogue;
- giving employees information first, before external stakeholders or media;
- actively engaging the employees in the business;
- communicating face-to-face always when possible;
- communicating same things internally and externally;
- focusing on actions, not just words;
- creating clear and relevant messages;

- communicating openly and frequently
- putting a human face on also senior leadership messages;
- building knowledge and excitement for the products that embody the brand of the business. (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 253).

3.3 Dialogue, voice, silence and participation

Two central areas of employee communication can be distinguished when it comes to communication and communication technologies in an organization: a) management communication and b) corporate information and communication systems (CICS). The first one refers to communications happening between managers and their direct subordinate employees, on the micro level, and is more often face-to-face and is connected to specific tasks or events of individual employees, whereas the latter one is about broadcasting information and corporate decisions and developments to all employees of an organization, on macro level. These two should complement each other and make sure that information flows horizontally and vertically in order to keep employees engaged, motivated and satisfied. (Cornelissen, 2020,176-177., Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017, 232-233).

The two should be able to provide relevant and specific information to employees in order to support them in their work and to build a work community with positive relationships between employees and to help employees identify with the organization (Cornelissen, 2020, 179) .

An optimal situation is such in which employee communications are of ongoing, two-way flow of relevant, timely information and insights between and among supervisors, employees, managers and company leadership; everyone in the organization. In an ideal situation all the levels, from cleaners to CEO's, of employees are respectfully treated due intelligent people and as valued contributors to decision making – everyone's is heard and their ideas asked about, openly welcomed and considered in the organization (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 233).

For responsible companies dialogue should be self-evident (Kuvaja, Malmelin, 2008, 87). This applies to both external stakeholders and internal ones, the employees. Filosopher Jurg n Habermas (2004) has created principles of ideal democratic dialogue which should apply also in organizational context. They are:

- everyone who is willing can participate in discussion;
- every party should have equal right to raise up themes to be dealt with;
- everyone can bring forth their own interests;
- No party dominates, manipulates, keeps secrets, betrays or misleads others;
- conversation is based on reasonable argumentation;

- the strongest party pay attention to the weaker ones as equal conversationalist. context. (Habermas [2004] in Kuvaja, Malmelin, 2008, 88).

As explained, employees want to have a say in important decision making and in shaping their work lives. Also organizations usually feel that the participation is desirable because they care about their employees and because of the engagement participation can produce. However, that does not happen too often in reality. Oftentimes the common belief is that managers know best about the organizational matters because the employees might not have as wide understanding of the organization and its matters as the managers do. Therefore the opinions of the employees might be considered out of date or irrelevant and therefore are not valued as much as they should. (Cornelissen, 2020, 183).

Once employees, who would have important insight to give, feel they are not listened to they remain silent. Because there is no point of speaking up if it is for nothing. Preventing employees from participating can result into valuable information being hidden. (Cornelissen, 2020, 184-185). Eventually this can lead to insufficient decisions that do not best serve the needs and wishes of employees because the decision makers did not have the necessary information from the employees when the decision was made.

Thus, it is the quality of communication what matters. Even if the communications in the organization are insufficient or inconsistent they are still communications. Lack of communication is communication too. This kind of behaviour can make employees feel like they are just cogs in the mechanism, that they don't matter as individuals and naturally employees can have a normal human reaction to such treatment – they disengage from the company, they don't feel connected to it and treat the job as no more than just a way to make money while they look for new opportunities (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 233).

Therefore dialogue is the key in successful employee communications. It is important to have effective forums for employee voice as the degree to which the organizations management communicates with employees and truly involves them in decision-making has a direct impact on their motivation and engagement to the organization (Cornelissen, 2020); which translates into their employee experiences.

3.4 Employee communications, engagement and employee experience

People are the engine of any organization, the heart of every business. As explained above, when talking about employee experiences, employee communication is the key ingredient in the soup. Without communication there are neither ways of creating reason

for being, identification to the organization nor organizational culture. Without working technologies, on the other hand, employee communication forums and ways of interaction are incomplete. Therefore, employee communications has a significant impact on organizational identification (Cornelissen, 2020, 180) and plays a key role in employee experiences.

According to Gambetti & Quigley (2013, 232) effective employee communications help ensure that people in the company are working towards shared goals by *engaging* them in the enterprise. But, as explained in chapter 3.1. employee engagement and employee experience are not the same thing, but positive employee engagement is caused by positive employee experiences and workplace communication is the connective tissue in them, helping developing and driving a common understanding of purpose and direction (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 232). In doing so they help define and shape a company's culture and future course (Welch, 2012, 248).

Studies have shown that downward communication can enhance organizational identification when it is perceived as adequate and reliable. Identification increases too when employees truly feel listened to. Hence, good employee communications are a combination of downward and upward communication in a way that employees are well informed about organization's future directions and current events and are also allowed to interact with management about their policies and, above all, where this two-way communication eventually has an impact on decisions made. Therefore employees should be provided with appropriate means to express their thoughts through upward communications and to influence their workplace and jobs. (Cornelissen, 2020, 180).

From Gambetti & Quigley's perspective (2013, 232) engagement requires personal connectivity to the company, its vision, mission and values, personal understanding and comprehension of the business, strong personal sense of purpose linked to that of the organization, having a personal role in the success of the organization, feelings of being respected (shown through word and actions) and in change situations providing them with timely and accurate information on the situation (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 232). All of these are same kind of attributes that positive employee experiences require which again highlights the connection of employee experience on employee engagement.

Walden, Jung & Westerman (2017) also studied the role of employee communications in engagement and commitment of employees. They carried out a study the goal of which was to advance a theory on the area of employee-organization-relationship (EOR's) by investigating the role of job engagement in EOR's and by developing a more thorough

understanding of how organizations create committed relationships with employees by communicating with them. (Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017, 73).

The results supported the hypotheses of the study which were; elements of employee communication, information-flow quality, information adequacy, and interaction supportiveness are all positively associated with engagement; that these three elements of employee communication are associate with organizational commitment and that engagement mediates the relationship between employee communication and organizational commitment (Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017, 81).

The conclusions of the study were that engagement-driving employee communication programs require open information flow throughout the organization and demonstrations that employees' voices are valued. When this happens, organizations are likely to have immersed employees in their work and are also likely to maintain lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with employees (Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017, 86). Thus, employee communications has provenly a direct impact on employee's engagement and commitment, which in turn is directly linked to employee experiences.

The role and emphasize of different communications vary depending on a situation and time being. In order to plan communications and evaluate its results and outcomes it is important to clarify how the audience understands communication and what goals and purposes they set for it (Juholin, 2013, 71).

4 Appreciative Inquiry – a Positive Approach to Change

This Master thesis is carried out ideologically and methodologically by Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Appreciative Inquiry is one type of action research in which employees are involved.

As the employee experience consists of perceptions of the relationship with the employing organization, the development of employee experience requires finding out the employee expectations, needs and desires (Morgan, 2017, 71), and in this case also the already existing strengths, that could be taken advantage of in development work.

This chapter explains what is meant by Appreciative Inquiry, how it is connected to organizational development, how it is used in practise and how and why it is in applied in this Master's thesis.

4.1 What is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a positive philosophy and approach to leadership development and organizational change based on strengths. Several other theories and methods concentrate on fixing existing problems, whereas Appreciative Inquiry concentrates on the so called "life giving forces" of an organization, aiming at transformation and the best possible future through these forces (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, 22).

Appreciative Inquiry aims at positively influencing for example team leadership, one-to-one management, organizational development and communications in the organization. It seeks to find answers to the question of "*What is right?*" instead of solely what is not. The standpoint of Appreciative Inquiry is that what the organization is looking for can be found within it (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 33-43).

The term "appreciative" emphasizes the idea that when something increases in value, it is appreciated. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the life giving forces that want to be increased. "Inquiry" refers to the process of seeking to understand through asking questions. (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011).

Thus, the idea in Appreciative Inquiry is to reinforce the already well functioning practices of an organization, instead of focusing on solely on problem solving. If the focus is too much on the things that are not well, organizations can quickly become problems to be solved instead of noticing and benefiting from the good that is in them (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999).

However, the idea is not to completely ignore all the organisation's problems either, as it would be somewhat naïve, but to approach them from a positive angle, from a positive

change core as Cooperrider and Whitney (1999, 6) put it. AI does in fact address challenges, issues, and conflict, too, but it does so by shifting the focus and language from one of deficits to one of hope and possibilities based on what has worked in the past. So AI solves problems by focusing on what to do more based on what has been successful in the past, which translates into understanding what to do less of what has not been working. (Preskill, Catsambas, 2006, 26-27).

The earlier mentioned positive core can be reached by using AI as change or development is initiated from every employees strengths, perceptions on positive aspects, stories, passions, hopes and dreams. The questions that help in achieving positive future are not the ones that accuse, find fault and condemn but the ones that create hope, motivation and energy (Preskill, Catsambas, 2006, 1). Appreciative Inquiry engages, motivates and values collaboration.

4.2 Appreciative Interview

Therefore, in the center of AI is the so called appreciative interview (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, 8), which can be for example a group interview or one-on-one dialogue, using questions related to high-point experiences, valuing the existing, and on what it is that gives life to the organization at its best. In practice this means asking appreciative questions, for example *“describe a time when you felt most energetic and engaged in your work in our organization”*. By a positive future prospect it is easier to find innovative solutions for solving difficult questions and, also, to deal with organizational criticism.

Based on the answers, the stories told, new propositions and development ideas and, finally, images of the organization and its possible future are created (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, 8-10). The importance of conversations is in the center of Appreciative Inquiry process.

The focus of Appreciative Inquiry is above all in the developing the work community and engaging employees in the overall development of the organization (Tienari, Sinivuori & Meriläinen, 2009). Therefore it is an excellent way for this Master’s thesis research for identifying the existing employee communicational strengths affecting employee experiences and designing their development further.

Table 3. Differences between most of the traditional research ideologies and appreciative inquiry (adapted from Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016).

Problem solving	Appreciative Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of causes • Leading with answers • Blame and division • Analysis of possible solutions • Top-down approach <p>= Fixing a problem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of what is working • Leading with questions • Ownership & collaboration • Envisioning what might be • Open conversation <p>= Leveraging the positive</p>
<p>Basic assumption “<i>An organization is a problem to be solved</i>”</p> <p>Example of a change agenda: Tackling poor staff attendance and high turnover</p>	<p>Basic assumption “<i>An organization is a mystery to be embraced</i>”</p> <p>Example of a change agenda: Creating a happy and rewarding place to work</p>

So, Appreciative Inquiry is not about negativity and criticism, but there are appreciative discovering, dreaming, designing and destiny (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999) in its’ core. These D-phases are explained in detail next.

4.3 D- phases of Appreciative Inquiry

Different researchers have named the steps describing each phase of Appreciative Inquiry process in different ways, however they all are content-wise similar to each other. Preskill and Catsambas (2006,15-26) call the steps four I’s; Inquire, Imagine, Innovate and Implement. The most popular ones are the four D’s of Cooperrider (Preskill, Catsambas, 2006, 15) which are discovery, dream, design and destiny. However, there could be one more D added in the beginning which is define (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 47-59). Throughout this Master’s thesis the terms of four D’s are used.

4.3.1 Define

This sets the grounds for the following official four steps of Appreciative Inquiry – it refers to defining the purpose and goal of the Appreciative Inquiry. Defining is about what Cooperrider & Whitney (1999, 77) call choosing an *affirmative topic of choice* or *Topic of Inquiry* as Preskill and Catsambas (2006, 15) name it Organization’s agenda regarding different actions depend on the AI topics.

The AI topics are formed into questions that set the basis for the appreciative discovery interviews. “*They serve as seeds for the dreams phrase and as arenas for crafting design propositions and taking action in the destiny phase*”, as Cooperrider & Whitney say (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, 7).

Defining in the case of this Master’s thesis was about identifying the need for the project and deciding on the topic, which is what kind of employee communications positively contribute to group Y’s employee experiences, what are the existing strengths, in what situations they come alive and how should communications be developed in order to enhance employee group Y’s employee experiences.

4.3.2 Discovery (Inquire)

First official phase is discovery, which refers to the fact that there are positive cores in every organization that need to be discovered. The organization would not exist if there was nothing positive in it. In the discovery phase the point is to investigate organizational successes by asking questions focused on strengths, achievements, values and qualities. It is about identifying the best of what has been and what is and about discovering the unique qualities that the organization has in e.g. its leadership, history or reasons for being, which have contributed to its life and success (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, 49).

In the case of this Master’s thesis e.g.: Finding out what the existing strengths are - What do we do here that promotes good employee experiences in the current situation? What are the most satisfying communicational practices?

The next Dream-phase uses stories and insights discovered through the discovery- phase (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999). The idea is to find learnings that can be applied in the future.

4.3.3 Dream (Imagine)

In the second phase participants visualize the ideal and positive future, related to the current strengths. It is literally about dreaming of what could be. According to Lewis et al. (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, 55) dreaming seeks to create a positive belief of the future through the discovery of the past successes and current strengths.

Positive psychology based researches have shown that talk affects behavior and outcomes. Positive external use of language reflects inner dialogue that everyone has and affecting the way people talk can have an impact on whether they feel helpless or positive about the future. Encouraging people to talk about their positive experiences and dreams

AI contributes to people feeling more hopeful and optimistic about the future (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, 54).

In the case of this Master's thesis e.g.: Imagining how good the situation could be - What could be done so that the employee communications would more positively contribute to employee experiences?

4.3.4 Design (Innovate)

After the positive change core has been identified and the visualization of the ideal future has been done the third step is to plan what next – the future is designed. The point is to come up with development action ideas in order to achieve the visualized future from the previous Dream step.

The design is usually written as if the situation already existed and phrases such as “We always communicate respectfully with each other” rather than “We aim at communicating respectfully with each other.” The outcome should be statements that express how the organization will be (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 59).

In the case of this Master's thesis e.g.: Deciding how good the situation should be - What will be done in reality to create more positive employee experiences and optimize satisfaction on employee communications?

4.3.5 Destiny (Implement)

Destiny phase is the last one of four D's. It is the conclusion phase. It is the time for hands on and hard work, because the organization starts to take actions in order to meet the visualized ideal future. It is about deciding on the concrete actions and committing to what will be.

However, the Destiny- phase is not technically a part of this Master's thesis. The research covers the steps of discovery, dream and design - the focus is on identifying the strengths and on creating development ideas and suggestions in order to make the Destiny-phase possible for Company X. That final phase is for the organization to make happen, to put the designed Destiny into practice.

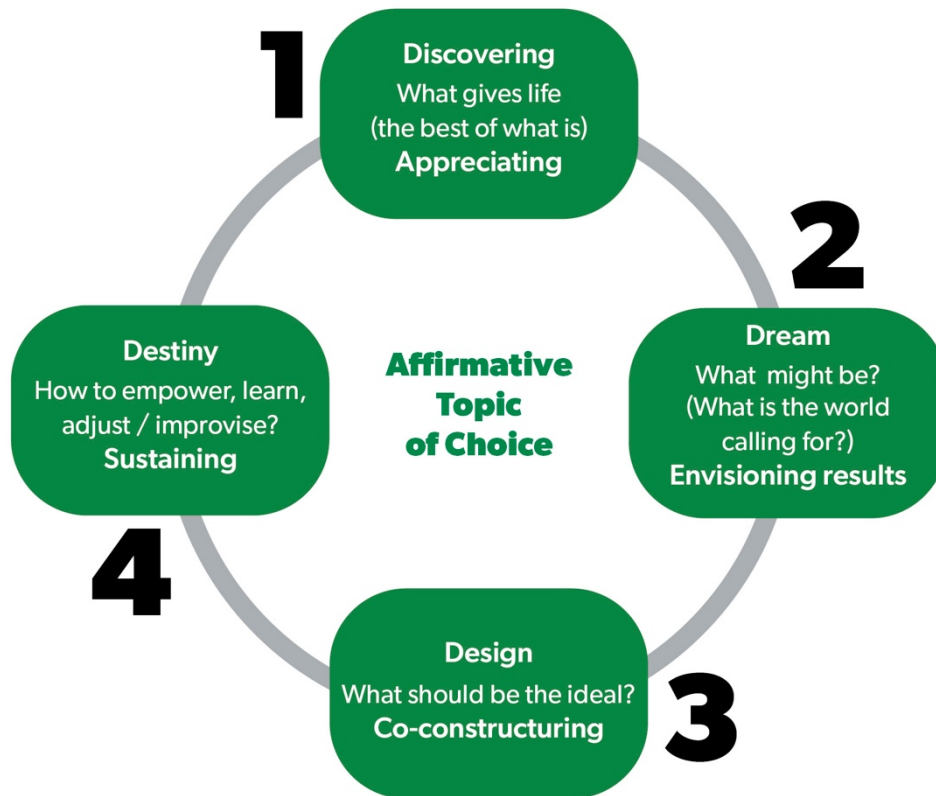


Figure 6. Appreciative Inquiry 4 D- cycle (adapted from Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, 6)

The idea in Appreciative Inquiry process in this Master’s thesis is to first together identify the factors of employee communications that create positive employee experiences. This stage is followed by an outline of what the company could be like if the named strengths were used on a larger scale. Determining the ideal situation helps setting up the objectives for the future and clarifies to goal which is being reached.

4.4 Why Appreciative Inquiry was chosen for this Master’s thesis

Focusing on the positive core can have a positive overall impact on the organizational culture, as a method it can change the way people think. Therefore it is a suitable method for this Master’s thesis process as the traditional way of thinking has been more problem-oriented than optimistic in Company X. Asking appreciative questions directs people’s thinking into more positive way and, thus, can enhance the acceptance of and development taking place in the organization.

Appreciative Inquiry approach is based on unleashing people’s creativity, knowledge, and spirit towards a common purpose (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, 2) – in the case of this Master’s thesis towards optimal employee communications in order to enhance employee

experiences. It does that by filling two huge holes that many other change efforts miss. AI intelligently involves people in changing their workplaces and communities.

“Creating a collective sense of purpose, sharing information traditionally known only to a few, valuing what people have to contribute, and inviting them to participate in meaningful ways positively affects outcomes. In other words, informed, engaged people can produce dramatic results” (Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, 2).

Employee experience is human and organizations focusing on employee experience raise humanity in the centre of everything they do. Organizations as-machine has been the traditional way of thinking about the nature of organizations – in such thinking the beliefs are that organizational change is motivated and produced by problem solving, naming problems, instructions, criticism and fear. Emotions are seen as something problematic and the organizations are not understood as living human systems – in which there are individuals with their personal experiences. (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 14-22).

Appreciative Inquiry, instead, raises up the humanity in organizations, which is the point in developing employee experiences. AI’s perspective is that people are what make up the organization, organizations are a human phenomenon (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 23). The human patterns of interest in AI are of belief, communication, sense making, and emotion (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 25) which go hand in hand with the principles of employee experience.

It is also possible that finding out the best of an organization and finding a way to strengthen it, shall enhance the competitive advantage of a company: it helps a company to concentrate on its core competences.

Therefore Appreciative Inquiry and Employee Experiences are a perfect match and AI approach was chosen to be applied in this Master’s thesis. The exact application of the ideology in this Master’s thesis is explained in more detail in the following chapter 6.3.

5 Conducting the Empirical Case Study

The data collected in this Master's thesis is partly quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (questionnaire and interviews).

This chapter explains how the data was collected. The findings and suggestions for action are explained in chapters 7 and 8.

5.1 Desk study

As the defining phase of AI aims at creating an understanding of the employees' environment, the role of the desk study was to make the researcher aware of the situation at the starting point. The idea in the case of this Master's thesis was to get familiar with the data and information that already had been collected internally. This available data was also beneficial in understanding what are the areas that might need further investigation in this Master's thesis. This data was benefited from when defining the final research questions and when planning the survey questions. The data analysed was of Employee satisfaction-questionnaires and the Responsibility questionnaire from autumn 2019.

In autumn 2019 Company X carried out a responsibility survey which gathered data on employees' attitudes on responsibility. The results showed that there is a need for putting emphasize on employee experiences as well-being and coping at work were a major development targets from the employee's perspective. The transparency of communication, enjoyment and development at work also got weak percentages among the staff of Company X.

The Employee satisfaction-questionnaire responses also showed that the overall satisfaction of the group Y is somewhat low and they could be more willing to recommend Company X as an employer.

However, the desk research did not offer a wide perspective or deep understanding on the current situation regarding employee communications and therefore getting more insight on that was important to be included in this Master's thesis.

5.2 Questionnaire

A Webropol questionnaire regarding experiences on communications (appendix A), was primarily carried out in order to understand how the employee group Y experiences the employee communications today.

The goal was also to see what matters could be characterised as strengths regarding employee communications and to take advantage of the answers in planning the AI based interview questions, which aimed at answering the other research questions. The survey also included one AI-based open question which was to give data to the research question of what are the strengths of employee communications currently and in what kind of situations they come alive.

Company X carries out the Employee satisfaction-questionnaires four times a year. By coincidence, by the time the survey of this Master's thesis was about to be sent it was also time for carrying out the Employee satisfaction-questionnaire. Thus, the survey of this Master's thesis was included in the end of the Employee satisfaction-questionnaire.

The questions of the communications questionnaire were designed with the support of Company X's HR and Communications. Testing the data collection questions before full-scale research, so called piloting, is often recommended. For this research, a pilot group of 10 people, who were the colleagues of the researcher, was used in order to test the research instrument, the questionnaire and to see if the data it produces is in line with the research questions. The piloting was successful, and no major changes were required to the questionnaire. The pilot group's answers were deleted before it was sent out to the research group, as they obviously could not be used in the full-scale research.

The survey questions were designed using the theoretical framework on Employee Experience and Employee Communications as well as based on the needs and wishes of Company X. The connection can be seen in the Cover Matrix in chapter 1.5. The survey did not specifically follow the guidelines of AI, but the claims and questions were formed by using positive sentences. Claims such as *"Interaction with my manager is respectful and supportive"* and *"Executives value my professionalism and contribution to Company X's success"* were asked. However, as said, the open question included in the survey was an AI based question; *"You have certainly had both good and less pleasant experiences and encounters along your career at Company X. Think about a positive occasion where you felt dialogue was genuine or the information flow was particularly effective. What happened in practice then, and what were the things that influenced your experience?"*

After final approval the questionnaire was opened and send to the employee group Y on 16 March 2020 and it closed on 31 March 2020, which gave them about two weeks of time to participate. The participants first answered the Employee satisfaction-questionnaire, which has just two questions measuring their willingness to recommend Company X as an employer and their overall feeling as an employee. Thereafter the respondents could choose if they'd like to additionally answer to the survey of this

Master's. The Employee satisfaction-questions got 275 responses in total. Of them 171 respondents additionally answered the questionnaire of this Master's thesis. There are about one thousand employees in group Y, thus the percentage of respondents was 17,6% of the entire employee population. 41 respondents shared their experiences in the open question of the questionnaire. The employee satisfaction answers gave useful insight from employee experience perspective and the current situation also for this Thesis. Therefore it was actually very useful to combine these two questionnaires. The results of the questionnaire are explained in chapter 6.

The participants were told about the Master's thesis and the idea of it in advance on their weekly newsletter. They were encouraged to participate and asked to contact the researcher by filling up a contact detail sheet or by emailing the researcher directly in case they would like to take part in the interviews too. As a small additional motivational factor was a lottery of five sets of two movie tickets for everyone who participated the survey and gave their contact details – they filled up a separate contact information sheet so that the answers of the survey could not be connected with the lottery participants. Also, a positive thing for was that two people expressed their willingness to participate in the interviews even before the survey had been sent to them.

Even though a survey can provide necessary and good answers and contribute to development ideas too, it is not as thorough as interviews in which the participants are able to share their stories by speaking (Preskill, Catsambas, 2006, 96). Most of the questions in the questionnaire were close-ended and respondents often do not write very lengthy answers to open questions either. Therefore the appreciative interviews are an essential part of this research. They give a deeper understanding of the subject. Also, in order to be able to answer research questions 1, 1.2. and 1.3. and to enable the Appreciative Inquiry process, interviews needed to be carried out.

5.3 Appreciative Inquiry based semi-structured interviews

"It is not the answer that enlightens, but the question." – Eugene Ionesco (Preskill, Catsambas, 2006, 75)

At the heart of Appreciative Inquiry is the power of appreciative questions. The appreciative interviews are the soul of the AI process and getting the questions right is very essential (Preskill, Catsambas, 2006, 75), yet not very easy. The research questions were sought to be answered by partly Appreciative Inquiry 4D-model based semi-structured, or focused interviews, which were planned and carried out based on the data gotten from the questionnaire.

There were eventually 24 volunteers, of whom 8 were interviewed. The interviewees were selected by a lottery. Each of the interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. In order to produce as productive insight as possible all of the interviews were transcribed, by general transcription style, resulting into 40 pages of written material. Thereafter the transcriptions were read through many times and underlined with different colours that helped the researcher categorize similarities. A concept map was also drawn in order to visualize the material for the researcher and to see the big picture.

However, once the empiric of this Master's thesis was being planned the idea was to carry out interviews which would include only AI-based questions. Yet, the situation changed dramatically during the process of this Master's thesis due to the terrifying events taking place in the World during spring 2020 once Covid-19 spread around the globe. Corona virus had an impact on everything, also on Company X, including the employees work situations and employee experiences. As appreciative questions are of the type that only seek to find out what it is that gives life to the system (organization), about the good, the real and beautiful in organizational life and the focus is on what is working, or what is positive about a specific experience or possible future (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 68-69) the researcher felt that it was necessary to additionally include some non-AI questions in the interviews as well in order to respect the situation at hand and in order to structure the interviews best possible way in these new circumstances.

Another reason for including some not appreciative questions into the interviews were the results of the survey, which are explained in detail in chapter 7, that needed further investigations and were difficult to be asked about only appreciatively. Still, all of the questions were formed by phrasing them positively, in order to maintain a positive atmosphere the interviews and tackle too problem-solution-focused conversations (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 51), even though they were not all strictly appreciative questions.

Thus, all of this eventually resulted in an interview protocol which was a mix of appreciative questions and positively phrased non-AI questions, the focus of which was still on experiences, hopes and dreams for the future that follow the D-phases of Appreciative Inquiry. For example "*Why doesn't this part of communications work?*" was not asked, but instead "*It seems that you could be more satisfied with this part of communications. How should it be organized instead in order to it make it better?*" was. This is not uncommon, as there are examples of previous studies where it has been proven that one does not need to employ the full AI process, nor even ask many appreciative questions to benefit from an application of Appreciative Inquiry for gathering

important and useful information. It is possible that even one appreciative question in an evaluation might change the entire evaluation experience. (Preskill, Catsambas, 2006, 75, 85).

Also, due to Corona virus the methodology for carrying out the interviews changed as people were advised not to meet each other physically. The idea first had been to carry out interviews face-to-face with the participants and in addition the researcher was originally planning on visiting the local teams' work premises, to spend time there in order to get to talk to more people and to interview them spontaneously. However, for the before mentioned reasons all of the interviews needed to be carried out virtually by Microsoft Teams.

The interviews were semi-structured which chosen as a method as it gives room to interviewee's stories and interpretations. It allows people's free speech, although pre-determined themes of the interview are discussed with all the interviewee's. It is typical for semi-structured interview that the subject areas or themes are decided before hand, but the exact order, amount and exact phrasing of the questions vary depending on each of the interviewees' stories and answers. The themes focused on were the same in each of the interviews carried out in this Master's thesis too, but all of the questions were not the same. Examples of interview questions used can be found in appendix B.

The themes in the interviews were on employee communications related things that positively contribute to employee experiences of the employee group Y, on positive past experiences, on the hopes and dreams regarding communications and on what could be done in reality, in practise, in order to develop communications in a way that would enhance their employee experiences. The main goal of the interviews was to be able to propose future action steps based on the design-phase of the 4D-model so that the organization can take the fourth one, the destiny.

6 Questionnaire findings – Current experiences on employee communications

The questionnaire was primarily carried out in order to answer research question number 1.1. How does employee group Y experience the employee communications today? Secondly the goal was to see what matters might be raised up positively could be characterized as strengths, giving insight to for the research question number 1.2. What are the core strengths of employee communications currently and in what kinds of situations they come alive? In this chapter the questionnaire (see appendix A) findings regarding current experiences on employee communications that both positively and negatively affect employee experiences, will be explained.

The questionnaire dealt with the employee experience related attributes of CELEBRATED-culture and ACE-technologies (explained in chapters 2.5.1. and 2.5.2.) , connected to employee communications.

According to the results of the questionnaire the way communications are experienced by employee group Y requires improvement. However, the results of the questionnaire also gave insight on what seem to be the existing employee experience related communicational strengths.

The strengths lie in cultural employee experience environment, in interaction among local teams and colleagues and in feelings of belongingness in the team as well as in supportive and empathetic supervisory work. Own supervisor got positive feedback, as well as colleagues in the organization, when it comes to positive experiences.

6.1 Level of satisfaction and willingness to recommend employer

As the Master´s thesis survey was conducted together with the Employee satisfaction-survey those results are mentioned here. One important dimension in cultural employee experience environment is that that referrals come from employees, which tells whether the employees genuinely like working in the organization or not and how loyal and committed they are to the organization. (Morgan, 2017, 112-114). These attributes are measured by the Employee satisfaction-questionnaires at Company X.

Based on the Employee satisfaction responses it is evident that the overall employee experiences of employee group Y are not very positive as only 2% described their current feeling “very satisfied” and 26% “satisfied”, whereas 40% were “dissatisfied” and 32% “very dissatisfied.”

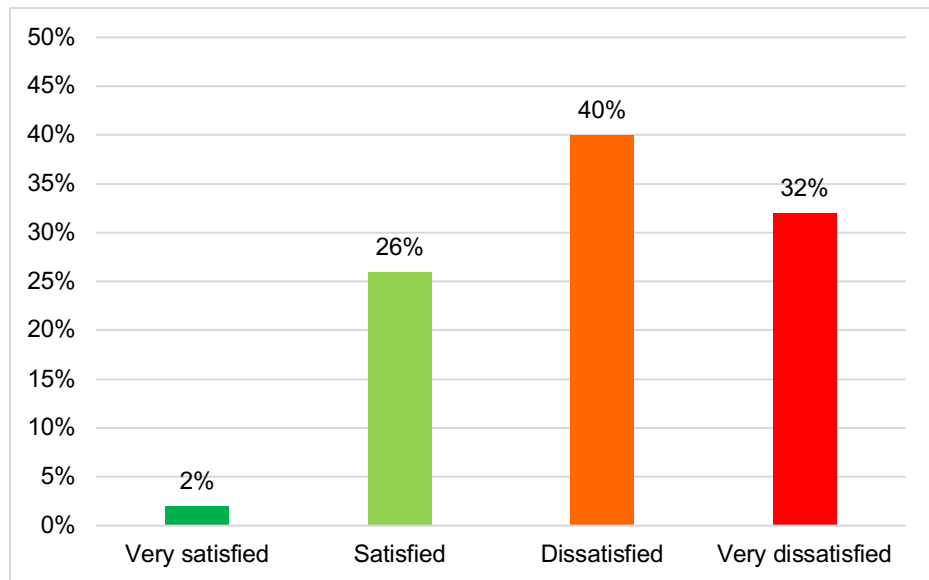


Figure 7. Employee satisfaction-question, Which of the following describes your feelings lately?

A bit over half of the respondents also reported that they would not recommend Company X as an employer as 28% somewhat disagreed and 28 % strongly disagreed with “I would be ready to recommend our company as an employer.” However, a positive aspect is that 34% somewhat agreed and 10% completely agreed.

These results again indicate that there is a flagrant need for improvement of the employee experiences of group Y. Next the results of the communications questionnaire are explained in more detail.

6.2 Good team spirit, emphatic and supportive supervisory work

All of the scaled questions in the questionnaire were scaled by 1-4:

1. Strongly agree
2. Somewhat agree
3. Somewhat disagree
4. Strongly disagree

The survey findings showed that, based on majority of the respondents experiences, the employee communications that are positively linked to employee experiences take place in micro level of cultural environment, in the work community, in teams and between supervisors and employees. They are connected to experiences of being part of the local team, having respectful and supportive interaction with own supervisors, and feeling valued by having ones’ voice heard in the work community. These are all important parts of employee experience creation through cultural environment.

These were all above average (2.5, marked with a black line in figure 6. below).

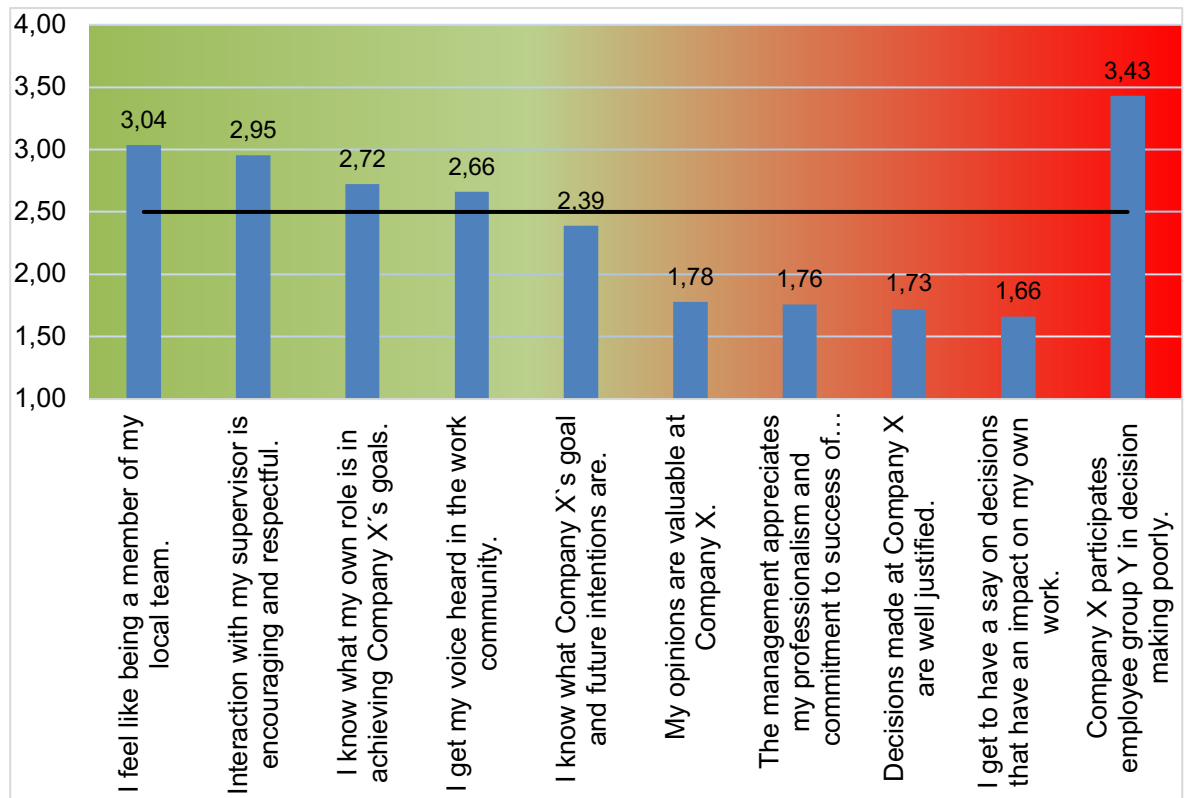


Figure 8. Answer the following based on your own experiences.

It was also a positive finding that majority of the employees of group Y say they know what their own role is in reaching Company X's future goals, 18% strongly agreed and 48% somewhat agreed. This is related to having a legitimate sense of purpose, which means employees are able to connect their own work with the reason of existence of the organization (Morgan, 2017, 102-103). Having a legitimate sense of purpose is important because employees need context, to understand what their role is in larger picture. It can enhance the feelings of their job being meaningful and their dedication to their work. (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 240).

However, what the goals and future intentions, meaning vision and mission, of Company X are were less clear to the respondents. Rest of the results of this question will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.3.

Then the respondents were asked how much they agree or disagree with different positive claims regarding the interaction in their work community. The answers are on the positive side, above average, on each of the following: Respectful and appreciative to others, Human, Encouraging to discussion, meaning everyone can express their opinion, Open, Honest and Positive. This indicates that majority of the respondents experience the interaction in the work community more positively than negatively. The only claim that was

more on the negative side, a bit below average, was about interaction being inspiring (2,4).

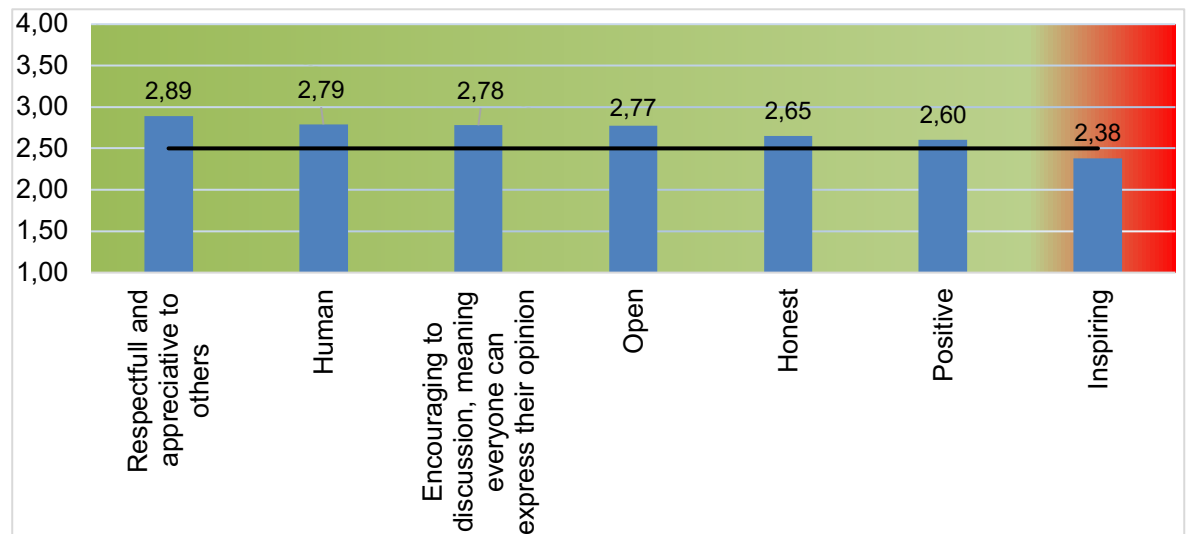


Figure 9. Interaction in my work community is...

The results indicate that there is a somewhat cohesive and welcoming environment where trust and psychological safety is present and where employees feel valued, when it comes to micro level at Company X. The communications in work communities, among colleagues and supervisors, considered open, respectful, safe, honest, human and positive are important in positive employee experience creation by being able to feel like part of a team and being included as well as feeling like supervisors act as supportive coaches. (Morgan, 2017, 107-112, 122-123). Answers to the open question also resonate with this result.

In the open question the respondents were asked to think about a positive occasion where they felt dialogue was genuine or the information flow was particularly effective. They were asked to tell what happened in practice then, and what were the things that influenced their experience. The aim was to give insight for the research question “1.1. What are the core strengths of employee communications currently and in what kind of situations they come alive?”.

The stories recalled also positively highlighted supervisors and their actions, especially in situations where employees have had struggles in their personal lives and which supervisors have dealt with empathically and in a way that has helped the employees to balance work and other parts of life. This goes hand in hand with Morgan’s (2017) employee experience research which indicated that in order to make employees feel fairly treated understanding personal circumstances and situations, knowing employees as humans, not just employees, and being empathetic are the keys. Open two-way dialogue

with supervisors was also described. These are essential parts of cultural environment of employee experiences. (Morgan, 2017, 121).

In my experience dialogue was good when there were challenges in my personal life, I felt that my supervisor took care of my situation very well";²

Recently I discussed about my vacations with my supervisor and we agreed on specific procedures and contacts, as a result things clarified and got organized. A small example of a daily matter and of a personal experience with a supervisor, that had an impact on well-being and motivation at work.³

My supervisor held a personal discussion and thereafter took care of an issue that was raised up. ⁴

However, it needs to be mentioned too that some respondents described a positive situation from the past with previous supervisors and said that that is no longer the case in current situation.

Positive occasions the respondents recalled also included interaction with colleagues and other employees as well as team and group events which were considered as good ways to interact, communicate and share ideas, lack of which they currently suffer from. It seems that simple daily conversations and small helpful things done to each other among employees are perceived as something positively contributing to employee experiences currently.

Group trainings are good. In those we speak about important things as well as about things going beyond the boundaries of the matter at hand. There is no room for

² Koin että vuoropuhelu oli hyvää kun henkilökohtaisessa elämässä oli haasteita niin koen että esimieheni huomioi tilanteeni erinomaisesti

³ Taannoin keskustelin lomistani lähiesimieheni kanssa ja sovimme toimintatavoista ja kontaktoinneista, jonka seurauksena asiat selkiintyivät ja järjestyivät. Pieni esimerkki arkisesta asiasta ja henkilökohtaisesta kokemuksesta lähiesimiehen kanssa, jolla oli vaikutusta työhyvinvointiin ja -motivaatioon.

⁴ Esimies piti kehityskeskustelun ja sen jälkeen korjasi esille nousseen ongelman.

speculation when we can discuss and ask clarifying questions. This option is not available in online trainings.⁵

Hence, it could be said that, according to the survey results, employee communications that are positively experienced mostly happen in micro level because communication there is often experienced as honest, open, appreciative, and empathetic, but above all interactive. The employee group Y experiences communications being good when they can participate, have a say on things and that they are truly listened to, their worries are truly understood and taken care of. Also small talk and easy-going discussions in the work community have a positive impact on the employee experiences of employee group Y. These things explained come alive in cultural micro level, but not as much on macro level.

6.3 Need for participation and interaction in macro level

Whereas communication and interaction in teams, among colleagues and own supervisors seems to be experienced quite positively, the communication and interaction on corporation level, between the management and employees, on the other hand is quite the opposite (see figure 9). The goal of this Master's thesis is to focus on strengths, but these weaknesses are also discussed here because they relate to the research question regarding the current experiences on employee communications and because the suggestions of action formed in the interviews are related to them.

A typical structure in many organizations is the pyramid where information, decision making and power flow from the top down (Morgan, 2017, 97) and there is not much two-way interaction between the management and employees. This seems to be the case, according to the experiences of the employee group Y, and it has a negative impact on their employee experiences.

The results showed that (see figure 9) CELEBRATED-culture attributes are not very well fulfilled on macro level as majority of the employees of group Y don't feel like the organization participates them in decision making and that their opinions are not considered valuable in important decision making in the organization. Majority of the respondents also experience that they are not able to have a say on decisions that have

⁵ Ryhmäkoulutukset ovat hyviä, niissä puhutaan paljon aiheesta ja aiheen vierestä. Asioihin ei jää tulkinnanvaraa, kun voidaan keskustella kysyä tarkentavia kysymyksiä. Tätä mahdollisuutta ei verkkokoulutuksissa ole.

an impact on their own work, that the Management does not appreciate their professionalism and commitment to Company X's success and that decisions made at Company X are not well justified. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the organization participating employee group Y poorly in decision making. This question was included as the only negatively phrased one.

Table 4. Answer the following based on your own experiences.

	Completely agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Completely disagree
I know what Company X's goal and future intentions are.	6,4 %	46,8%	26,3%	20,5 %
My opinions are valuable at Company X.	2,3 %	13,5%	43,9 %	40,3 %
The management appreciates my professionalism and commitment to Company X's success.	3,5 %	16,5 %	32,3 %	47,7 %
Decisions made at Company X are well justified.	0 %	11,10 %	50,3%	38,60 %
I get to have a say on decisions that have an impact on my own work.	1,8 %	11,2 %	38,2 %	48,8%
Company X participates employee group Y in decision making poorly.	59,7 %	27,5 %	9,3 %	3,5 %

These results are somewhat worrying. According to different studies dignity is very important. People want to be respected for the skills and knowledge they bring to the job, they want to feel as valued contributors in order to engage and commit, experience the work positively. (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 238). However, the lack of this is unfortunately common as Deloitte's study showed; only 14 percent of companies believe their internal processes for collaboration and decision making are working well (Bersin et al., 2017, 54).

The somewhat negative feelings of employee group Y (which were revealed in the Employee satisfaction-questionnaire) are most likely partly due to the many CELEBRATED- culture attributes not being fulfilled, such as treating employees fairly and feeling valued. Because majority of the respondents feel like they are not being listened to, the organization does not genuinely care about them, the environment is considered unwelcoming, they are not being respected and appreciated as employees in the organization on macro level, it makes them dissatisfied (Morgan, 2017, 97-99, 126).

Respondents also used the platform of the open question as an open feedback forum, even though that was not the idea of the question. Some of the stories were about experiences that the employees are not valued.

Some positive memories recalled from the past were about the employee group Y being included in decision making which had positively contributed to their feeling of the management having the employees back and that their contribution was valued. One story explained how a work team, that included employees from group Y, had been established in order to prevent impractical decisions being put into practise. Being included in decision making means giving everyone a fair opportunity, listening to all employees and respecting and appreciating everyone as valued contributors (Morgan, 2017, 99, 121) which are essential in employee experience creation.

One respondent described a positive memory about one of the Company X managers whose behaviour positively contributed to his/her feeling of being respected and listened to. Recalling such memory shows another example on how the management can show the employees that they are valued and how important it is.

After discussing with X at the end of last year, it seemed that she has a genuine desire to listen to the employees and develop things based on the views of the people in the field. Good!⁶

6.4 Complex communication technology, information coming from every direction

The communication channels are of the technological environment of employee experience, the ACE- attributes. There are several different information channels and forums being used by the group Y, which are all meant for different things, the usability of which was asked about as well as the information flow they provide. Company X's communications in general were also asked about.

The results showed that the amount of communication channels are considered too many and that the needed information is not easily accessible as 49% of the respondents said

⁶ X kanssa viime vuoden loppupuolella keskusteltuani hänestä välittyi aito halu kuunnella työntekijöitä ja kehittää asioita kentän näkemysten perusteella. Hyvä!

they somewhat disagree with necessary information at work being easily accessible and 24% strongly disagreed whereas 24% somewhat agreed and 3% strongly agreed.

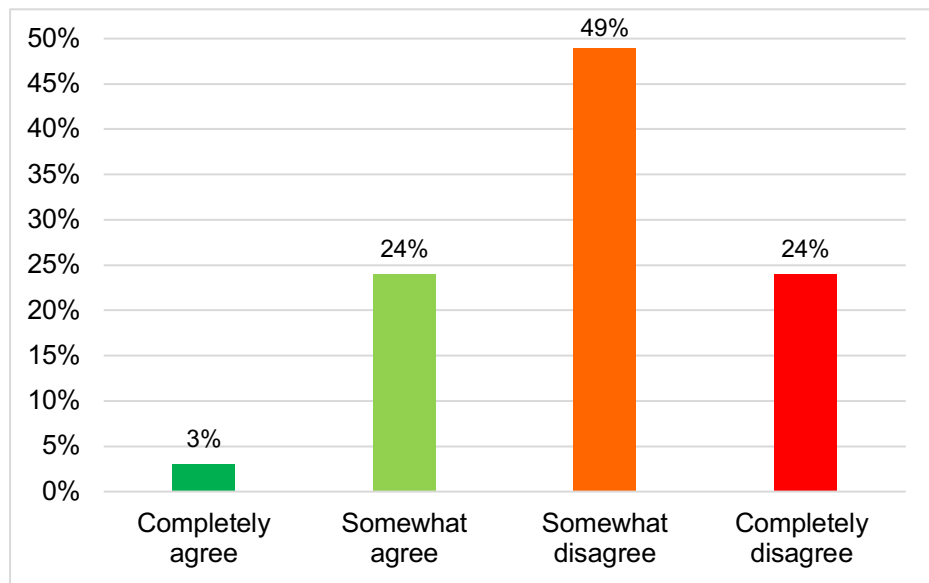


Figure 10. The information I need for my job is easily accessible to me.

The results also showed that the communication technology used in the employee group Y's work needs clarification as development as the channels were experienced as handy to use, clear, essential information providing, sufficient or meeting the needs of employee group Y by less than half of the respondents. This shows how the communication technology used is neither of such consumer grade technology that would enable employee group Y to be most effective in their work nor most engaged in their jobs which are essential attributes of technological employee experience environment (Morgan, 2017, 82-83). This can prevent employer from creating a modern workspace in which technology would positively contribute to employee experiences (Morgan, 2017, 83-85). However, there was a lot of dispersion in the answers and all of the claims also got positive responses as can be seen in the table below.

Table 5. Communication channels used...

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Enable smooth work	2,9 %	44,4 %	42,10 %	10,5 %
Meet the needs of employee group Y	7 %	41,5 %	39,8 %	11,7 %
Are handy to use	3,5 %	29,2 %	41 %	26,3 %
Are clear	3,5 %	34,7%	41,8 %	20 %
Are up to date	8,7 %	46,8 %	32,10 %	12,3 %

Provide essential information	6,5%	42,3 %	38,2%	13 %
Are sufficient	6,4 %	42,7 %	38,6 %	12,3 %
Are too many	62 %	27,5%	9,3 %	1,2 %

The last one of the claims, which was the only negative characteristic, showed that majority of the employee group Y consider the communication channels being too many as 69% completely agreed and 27% somewhat agreed. It is possible that the channels seem required and well-functioning from the organizations perspective, however it is evident they do not match the needs of the employees who use them the way they should. The employee needs versus business requirements need to be in line in order to create good employee experiences by technological environment (Morgan, 2017, 84-85).

The respondents were asked to choose maximum three channels they consider the ones that best provide the needed information. The results showed that face-to-face interactions with colleagues and other members of the organization (chosen by 70%), e-mail (chosen by 63%) and electronic bulletin board, which offers information on safety instructions and changes, (chosen by 53%) are considered as the channels that best provide needed information. Both own supervisor and trade union's workplace steward were selected by 22% of the respondents. The least best considered channels were internal social media (4%), intranet (6%) and employee group Y's weekly newsletter (9%).

In addition the media (newsletters and internet), coffee table conversations at the workplace as well as WhatsApp-message groups were mentioned by several respondents as the ones best information providing channels in the open answer section. Physical bulletin board was mentioned by two people.

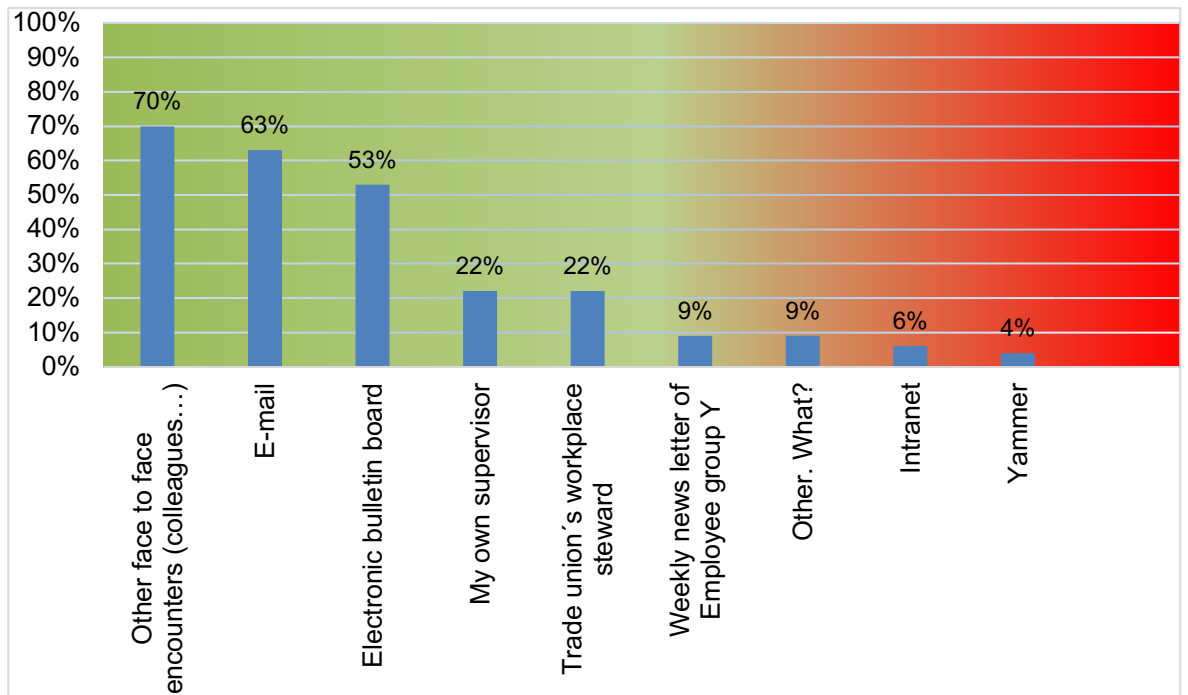


Figure 11. From which information and interaction channels you best get the information you need. Choose maximum three alternatives.

As mentioned, some respondents also shared their general thoughts in the open question. In those responses the complexity of too many communication channels and lack of adequate information flow was raised up too;

Information flow has not worked. Everything has to be found out by myself.⁷

The positive claims concerning Company X's employee communications were mostly below average too and the amount of communications seems to be experienced as too much. Interactive, honest, clear, interesting, timely, up to date and consistent were all below average. Only current reached the average.

⁷ tiedon kulku ei ole ollut toimivaa. kaikki pitää itse selvittää

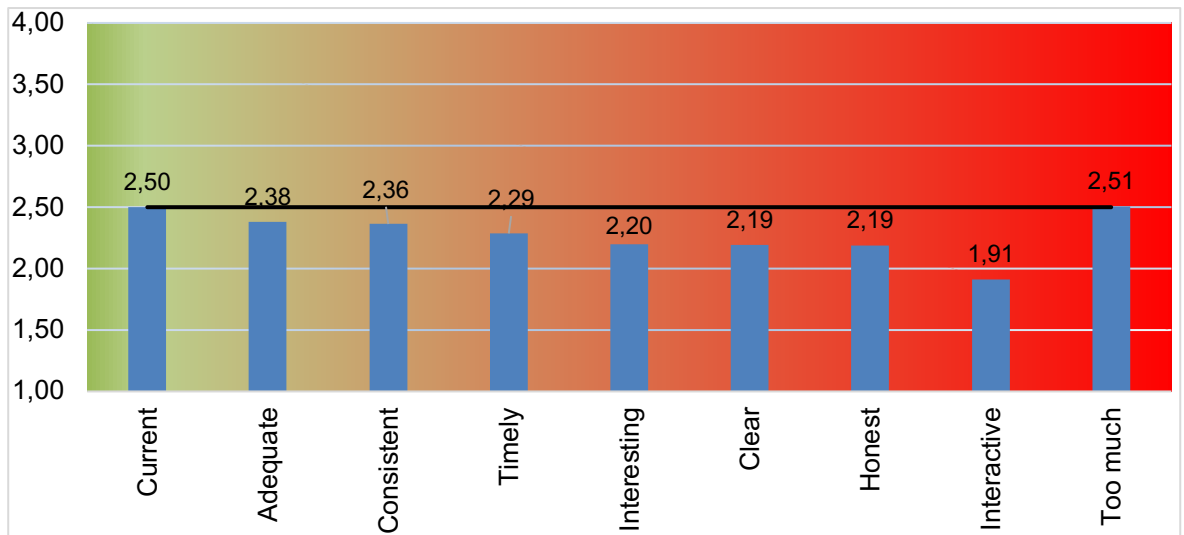


Figure 12. The communications of Company X is...

This is also a negative employee experience related matter because, according to Gambetti and Quigley (2013, 235-236), the bare requirements for effective employee communications that should be fulfilled are relevance to the employees, timeliness, consistency of messages, consistency between managers words and actions, commitment of the management to and an understanding of employees (their unique challenges and their reality), fair and honest. (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 235-236)

The overall rating of Company X's communications divided opinions somewhat 50/50 as can be seen below.

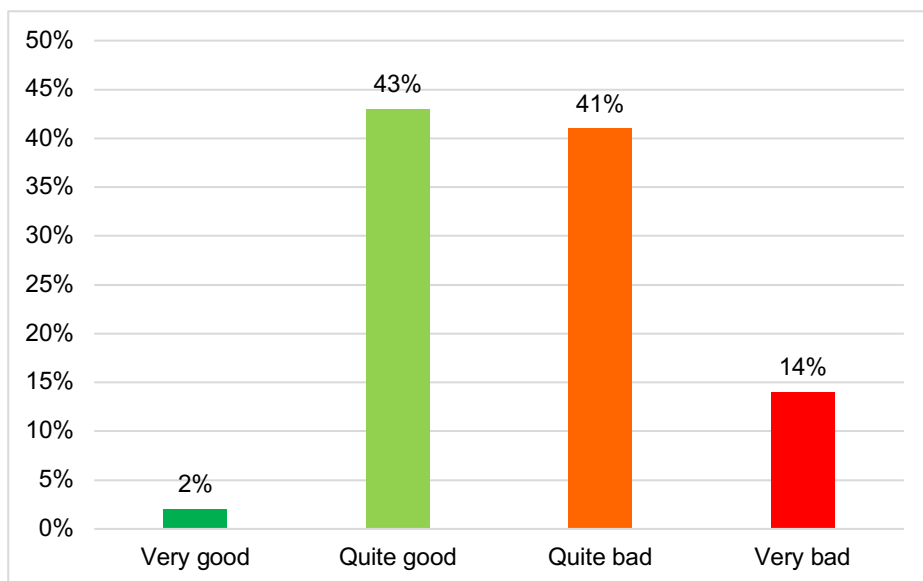


Figure 13. Which overall rating would you give to Company X's communications?

6.5 Summary of the questionnaire findings

As a summary, according to the survey results, employee communications that are positively experienced (cultural environment) mostly happen in work communities, between colleagues and supervisors, because communication there is often experienced as honest, open, appreciative, and empathetic, but above all interactive. The employee group Y experiences communications being good when they can participate, have a say on things and that they are truly listened to, their worries are truly understood and taken care of. Also small talk and easy-going discussions in the work community have a positive impact on the employee experiences of the employee group Y. The best supervisors really care about their employees. Positive memories the respondents recalled were often related to personal life and work life balancing which their supervisors help to make possible.

These things explained come alive in cultural micro level, but not as much on macro level because the factors that enhance positive employee experiences are not realized in communication between the management and employee group Y according to majority of the respondents.

The employee communications of Company X in general is considered somewhat fragmented and too complex and the communication channels need clarification and development, from the employee group Y's point of view. As the information necessary in daily work is not considered easily accessible it indicates that the communication channels and practises used are not of such consumer grade technology that enables employees to be most effective and engaged in their jobs which in turn decreases positive employee experiences (Morgan, 2017, 83). There are too many channels and their roles are not clear. This complexity currently affects negatively the employee experiences of group Y. The communications should also be experienced consistent, timely, clear and honest by more employees of group Y than currently.

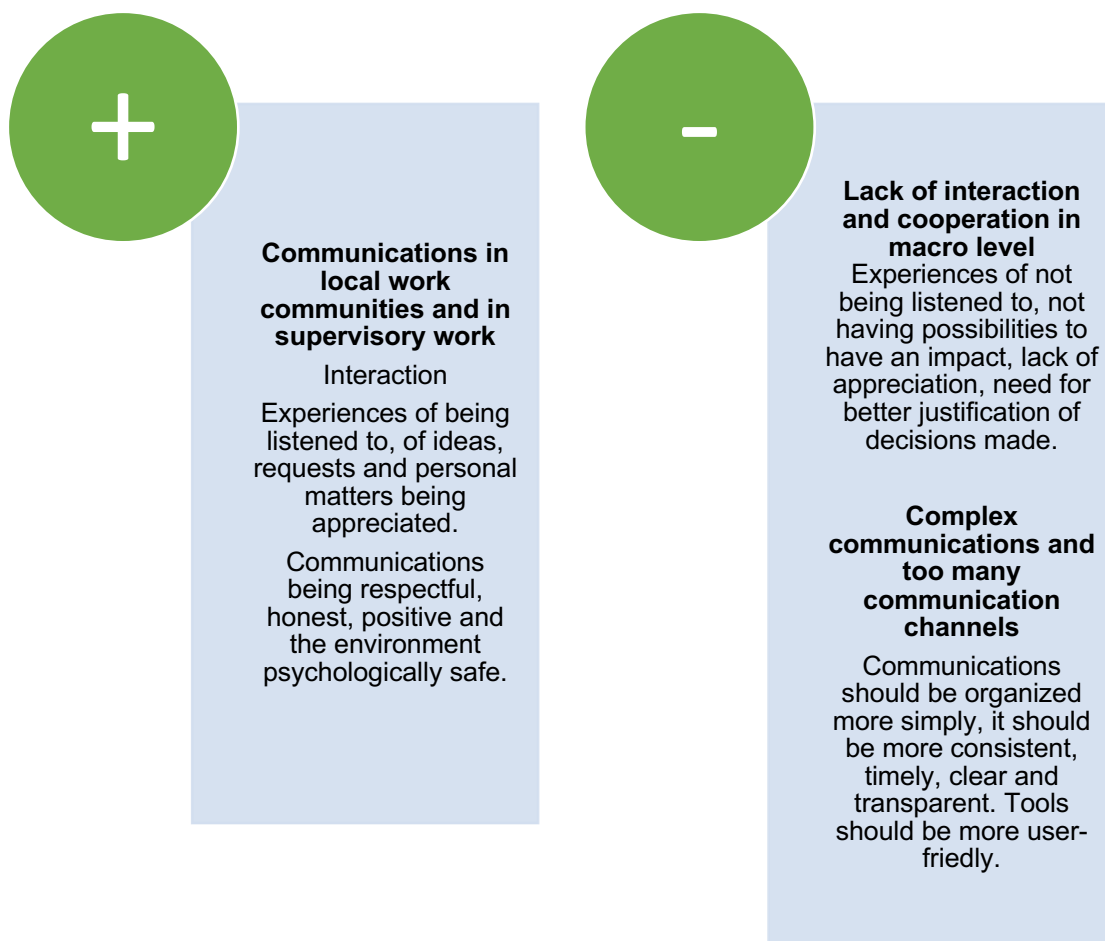


Figure 14. Summary of the questionnaire results, the employee group Y's current experiences on employee communications affecting their employee experiences both positively and negatively.

7 Appreciative Interview results and Suggestions for Action

In this chapter the Discoveries and Dreams along with the Designed suggestions for action constructed during the appreciative interviews (see appendix B) are explained.

The idea in Appreciative Inquiry is to create a positive belief in the future through the discovery of past successes and existing positive aspects (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 55). Because it was discovered by the questionnaire that existing strengths seem to lie in cultural environment of employee experiences in micro level, in interaction among local teams, among colleagues and in managerial work, the interviews carried out were planned by focusing on these aspects particularly in order to understand what happens in reality when these strengths take place and how they could be taken advantage of in larger scale in employee communications.

The interviewees also talked about information flow and dialogue, also from employee experience's technological environment aspect, when dreaming and designing suggestions for action. This was good as the results of the survey showed a need for investigating these further and as it was an aspect which Company X was interested in knowing more about.

The interviews gave more insight on what are the communications related matters that positively contribute to the employee group Y's employee experiences during their workdays and in what kinds of situations they happen (Discovery), what kinds of things the employee group Y includes in imaginary best case scenarios and what they wish for when it comes to communications (Dream). The interviews resulted into a summary on how employee communications could be developed in order to enhance the employee group Y's employee experiences by taking example of the strengths identified (Design).

Especially the communications that happen in the daily work of the employee group Y are very significant in their employee experience formation – these include communication on details and changes regarding their on-going and upcoming work shifts. Work and safety instructions and changes in them are especially important to them. The information brakes happening during the employee group Y's work days, inadequacies in the information flow and too many and complex communication channels, which are connected to both cultural and technological environments of employee experiences, as well as one-way type of communication, were talked about by all of the interviewees – these things did not exist in the dreamt situations regarding communications.

7.1 Discovery of Core Strengths

The goal of discovering was to find out what are the strengths of employee communications currently and in what kinds of situations they come alive.

7.1.1 Supportive atmosphere in local teams

The atmosphere and interaction in local work communities and between colleagues works well based on the appreciative interviews. The interviewees were from all around Finland yet their stories were very similar to each other, which indicates that this seems to be the case in general, it is not just one location's strength. The interaction in local work communities was described as forthright, respectful and supportive, spiced with some humor. The employee group Y seems to experience that they can share all kinds of different matters with their colleagues and that they can lean on each other when it comes to safety or other significant matters. These are about trust, psychological safety, feelings of someone having your back, about cohesive and welcoming environment, true open communication and collaboration which are essential cultural elements in creating positive employee experiences (Morgan, 2017, 99-111).

These things come alive in basic everyday work – when they meet each other spontaneously they greet, wish each other good work days, chat and joke. They make sure they leave the equipment in a way that is safe for the next colleague and sometimes leave each other message notes, for example. These are small examples of things that contribute to creating a nice atmosphere. They are also in a habit of helping each other out, by doing simple helpful things to each other such as preparing needed equipment for the colleague in the end of their shifts. This is nonverbal communication which the interviewees feel communicates that we are together working towards common goal, we are on the same boat. They have a very strong feeling of being “in this together” within their local teams which is an important part of positive employee experiences (Morgan, 2017, 107-109).

Many of the employees of group Y also seem to spend time with each other in their free time which naturally strengthens their bond and helps in knowing each other personally. When they succeed in something together they might for example celebrate it with each other by sending supportive messages in WhatsApp-groups too. This kind of mutual cheering is an example of communications that enhances their feelings of being part of the team and the legitimate sense of purpose.

7.1.2 Exemplary supervisors

Employee communication is not solely about transferring a message from up to bottom but about dialogue, about two-way flow of information, ideas and points of view and in this physical interaction often works best. Personal (face-to-face) communication is the most effective interactive form of communication that allows instant feedback and prompt checking for understanding (Cowan, 2017, 27, 82).

This kind of interaction, feedback and reasoning of decisions, is what the employees of group Y emphasized a lot as an important employee experience related matter when it comes to cultural environment. According to Cornelissen (2020) "The degree to which managers communicate with their employees and involve them in decision-making has a direct impact on the employee's morale and commitment to the organization" (Cornelissen, 2020, 176).

Communications with supervisors seems to be experienced positively by majority of the employee group Y according to the interviews. One interviewee said that, in his opinion, it has been a strength throughout the times that the supervisors have been able to create good team spirit in work communities at Company X. Communications with them was described as interaction that is simple, honest and straight-forward, but also humorous. There is not much hierarchy, but mutual respect for one another regardless of job titles. Managers and executives being more like coaches and mentors in this way is one essential part of positive employee experience formation when it comes to culture (Morgan, 2017, 122-123).

The interviewees described that communication with the best supervisors is employee experience enhancing because they feel there is true open dialogue in which both parties opinions are valued and the employees needs and wishes are heard. This is because many of the supervisors usually, both physically and emotionally, leave their doors open and welcome everyone in whenever they have something they want to discuss. They ask for opinion, truly listen and then take necessary action. The best ones also usually treat all of the employees fairly, so that they are all in the same line. The employees of group Y also appreciate the supervisors that trust and empower them in their work because it too positively contributes to their employee experiences by making their work feel meaningful and giving them a sense of autonomy (Bersin et al., 2017, 55).

These are connected to employee experience's cultural environment attributes of feeling valued (having employee's voices heard, recognizing employees for the work they do),

believing in diversity and inclusion (creating an open and welcoming environment, psychological safety) (Morgan, 2017, 95-122).

I must say that at least we do have a supervisor, who has gotten good reviews in polls too, that is very good. He contacts me straight-forwardly, when I have told him something in personal discussions, that are work related, we don't have to argue on personal level, just matters argue. With him we have always nicely come to a conclusion by having a conversation. He also contacts me nicely and asks fairly. And also gives responsibility, that you can take care of this yourself, there is no point of him acting as a middleman. ⁸

The interviewees described they feel their supervisors keep their promises. When they promise to find out or do something they most often do so and let the person know directly and personally when there is an answer to be given. Difficult matters can also be raised up when necessary and they are acted upon accordingly. However it was also mentioned that the supervisors should have more authority in decision making so that they would not so often have to ask for permission or opinions from above which is often time consuming and that perhaps the supervisors could be more proactive and approach their employees more themselves.

At least that the supervisor listens to me until I finish. And if I have something I want to say, my opinion is valued. That OK, if there is something that needs to be taken care of then usually they also are taken care of. If my supervisor says he is going to take care of something I can trust that he will. I think that is a big important thing in this. ⁹

Also an positive employee experience related aspect discovered was that many of the supervisors truly know their employees and the best ones really understand what their work is in reality. Knowing the team is essential in enabling well-functioning employee

⁸ Täytyy sanoa, et meil ainakin tällä hetkellä oma esimies, joka kyselyissäkin on saanut hyvät arvostelut, ni on tosi hyvä esimies. Hän ottaa reilusti yhteyttä, niin ku oon kertonut kehityskeskustelussa ottanut esille, et jos on jotain työasioita ni mein ei tarvii niiku henkilökohtaisella tasolla riidellä, vaan asiat riitelee. Hänen kanssa ku on kaikista asioista keskusteltu, ni on tosi hyvästi päästy sit sopimukseen. Ka myös ottaa hyvästi yhteyttä ja kysyy reilusti. Ja taas antaa vastuutakin, et hoida ite tää asia, et suotta hän siinä on välikätenä.

⁹ Ainakin se, että esimies kuuntelee asiat loppuun asti. Ja jos mulla on jotain sanomista, ni sitä arvostetaan sitä mielipidettä. Että niiku OK näin ja jos on jotain hoidettavaa, ni ne asiat yleensä on kans hoidettu. Et jos esimies sanoo, et hän hoitaa ni siihen voi sit kans luottaa, et hän hoitaa sen. Musta se on kans iso tärkeä asia tässä.

communications between supervisors and employees (Gambetti, Quigley, 2013, 239) and have an enormous role in positive employee experience creation (Morgan, 2017, 120-121). It positively contributes to the feelings of being able to trust the supervisors and being treated fairly. This is because the supervisors can then better place themselves into the shoes of the employees and use that as an advantage in contributing to decision making that has an effect on the employees. Additionally it can increase the level of respect.

It is important to take time in order to get to know what the employees in the firm really do. It is the easiest way to get the respect of the employees. It does not take much in the end, but it shows that I care about what your work consists of. ¹⁰

The supervisors ways to communicate got positive feedback also because they it is most often done face-to-face or by calling by phone. It does not feel faceless and emotionless but human because there is a chance to ask defining questions and to get reasoning for different things. This was emphasized as something that enhances the feelings of employee group Y during work days. The technological solutions and applications were described too general and harsh for personal communication, especially as there is so little physical contact with other people during the employee's shifts.

...whether it is positive or negative feedback, but it is personal and not just a sketchy answer in the email. Or a question which I have asked earlier and when I come to work and my supervisor sees me he/she comes up to me and calls out that hey I have an answer to your question. That type of personal interaction. I feel my own supervisor is such that he/she calls a lot and is in contact that way. Often sends me a message and asks me to come over when I get to work. Rather than just sending an email. ¹¹

¹⁰ On tärkeä ottaa aikaa, et pääset tutustumaan siihen mitä työntekijät siel firmassa tekee. Helpoin tapa saada henkilöstön arvostus. Se ei loppujen lopuksi paljoa vaadi, mut ku osoittaa että minua kiinnostaa mitä tämä sinun työsi pitää sisällään.

¹¹ On se sitten negatiivista tai positiivista palautetta, mut ku se on henkilökohtaista, eikä semmonen ylimalkainen vastaus sähköpostissa tai joku kysymys, mitä mä oon kysynyt vaikka aikaisemmin ja ku mä tuun töihin ja esimies näkee, niin se tulee huikkaamaan, että hei mulla ois vastaus sun kysymykseen. Eli siis sellainen henkilökohtainen vuorovaikutus. Koen, että oma esimieheni on semmonen, et soittaa paljon ja on sillain yhteydessä. Usein laittaa mieluummin viestin, että kun tuut töihin ni tuu poikkeamaan. Mieluummin, kun et tulis sähköpostissa joku vastaus.

The supervisors were described to have good sense of situation, meaning that they oftentimes give small recognitions for a job well done, such as lunch tickets, which communicates that the employees are appreciated for the work they do. They also encourage and support the employees of group Y who are willing to learn and advance on their career which are important in positive employee experiences through supervisors investing in the success of employees and having the right managers in place (Morgan, 2017, 115, 122).

Positive feedback positively contributes to employee experiences of the employee group Y, however they don't generally get much of it.

Next it was thought about what a perfect world situation would be like if these strengths were used in larger scale, as well as other dreams regarding communications.

7.2 Dreaming of ideal employee communications

In the dream phase interviewees were asked to use the strengths that already exist in micro level when dreaming about the ideal situation regarding employee communications in larger scale, because the idea in dreaming is to build on what the employees have discovered about the organization when it succeeds, to project this into their wishes, hopes and aspirations for the organization's future (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 55) The interviewees were asked, for example, to imagine that if anything was possible by a swing of a magic wand, what kind of were employee communications then or what would be their three wishes for employee communications in order to make it perfect.

The dreams of the interviewees were about quite simple things, regarding both the cultural and technological environment of employee experiences, and the dreaming often turned into talking about wishes and suggestions for concrete actions. Based on the interviews the following wrap-up of dreams and wishes was drawn.

7.2.1 More interaction and participation instead of one-way announcements

Because the way dialogue and interaction happens in micro level has a positive impact on the employee experiences of employee group Y it was no surprise that the dreams of the interviewees were often about true interaction across the organization horizontally and vertically, in which the opinions, concerns and insight of employee group Y are valued, frequently asked about and the actions and decisions are made accordingly.

According to studies organizations that ask, acknowledge and act on the ideas and feedback gotten from the employees, transparently and in a reasonable timeframe, are the ones that best succeed in creating positive employee experiences (Morgan, 2017, 97-

98). Transparency and honesty are also connected to being able to trust the management (Bersin et al., 2017, 51).

The employees of group Y wish they would be able to participate more in development projects and in decision making, especially in matters that have an impact on their own daily work, about well-functioning feedback protocols which would connect the voice of the employees to the decisions that the organization makes (Morgan, 2017, 239). This is natural and is connected to people's need for autonomy in their work (Bersin et al., 2017, 51).

The interaction and cooperation was particularly emphasized when it comes to communication about instructions regarding work and safety, which are very relevant to the employee group Y but they are not involved in designing them. It often happens that the instructions change constantly and there is no explanation on why they change. The employees of group Y wish this would be differently because it negatively influences their employee experiences.

The interviewees described that in dream situations the reasons behind the changes in rules and instructions would be better explained and justified or even better the employees themselves would be allowed to read and comment on the new instructions and practices, before they are launched, and that all of the instructions could actually be followed in practice. This is not the case currently as the safety instructions for example don't always seem to take into consideration all of the practical and technical aspects, such as the differences equipment, in order to be able to follow them. This results into confusion, frustration and prevents the acceptance of the instructions as the interviewees said. The following comment explains why it would be important to include explanations and to be participated:

And oftentimes, for example, we get a new rule regarding safety which then gets a correction, and then correction's correction and correction's correction's correction, so it feels like it is a living organism itself. Because it never gets justified and explained but just keeps changing and changing and as it is not discussed about, it ends up being bad in a certain way, even though it has a good aim, it becomes bad.¹²

¹² Ja sit niin ku esim. turvallisuudessa usein meille tulee joku sääntö, johonka tulee korjaus ja korjauksen korjaus ja korjauksen korjauksen korjaus, ni se on tavallaan se semmonen niin ku et se

These are strongly connected to all cultural employee experience attributes, to being recognized for the work they do, to being part of a team (in larger scale), to believing in diversity and inclusion, to having their voices heard as well as in having a sense of purpose (Morgan, 2017, 98-111). They also wish that new instruction would be informed about in certain times, quarterly for example, not popping up in the system constantly as the case is at the moment.

Messages should be very clear and there could be a short reasoning, for example if there is a change situation, that why is this done. At least I miss that, that when I see a message it would include an explanation in the end that why things are done this way. They don't need to be in-depth but some sort of reasoning. ¹³

...often the explanation (on decisions and changes) requires, that I would get the chance to comment it somewhere. Exactly the interaction talked about earlier. For example, if I get a message, it would be great if it included an explanation and then there would be a separate way or forum to comment on it. That would enhance internalizing the information.¹⁴

Even though majority of the employee group Y experiences the communications good in their work community, the minus side is that they experience they don't get to see each other enough and therefore miss having more contact with each other. They imagined how good it would be if the possibilities for interaction were more.

on jo melkein semmonen elävä organismi itsessään. Ku siihen ei tule ikinä perusteluita vaan se päätös vaan muuttuu ja muuttuu, eikä siitä keskustella niin tulee siitä sellanen huono asia määrättyllä tavalla, vaikka sillä pyritään hyvään, ni tulee huono.

¹³ Viestien pitäisi olla hyvin selkeitä ja voisi olla lyhyt perustelu, jos on vaikka joku muutostilanne tai miksi näin tehdään. Ainakin mä kaipaen semmosta, et ku näkee viestin, ni ois mahtavaa, jos lopuksi ois selitys, et miksi näin tehdään. Ei kauheen syvällisesti tarviis, mut kuitenkin et jotain perusteluja.

¹⁴ ...usein vaatii perustelu myös sen, että minäkin saisin kommentoida sitä asiaa johonkin. Just se vuorovaikutteisuus mistä puhuttiin. Et jos ajatellaan vaikka, et mulle tulis viesti ni siinä ois perustelut samalla ja sit ois vielä erikseen en viestin kommentointimahdollisuus tai ketju. Ni se vois parantaa sitä sisäistämistä

They wish there would be more of mutual gatherings in which they could meet face-to-face which used to be the case in the past and which many of them recalled in their positive memories. They experience that valuable silent information is often missed because they don't have many opportunities to meet and share their thoughts and experiences also due to the nature of their work. Thus, they also dreamed that their shifts would not be as tight as they are currently which would give them more time to interact and have discussions about important matters.

Teams (Microsoft) could be used well. At the same time we get valuable silent information. Because different kind of things occur in our work, different kinds of problem situations, so in those class room events someone always told an occasion and then others commented that "hey I had almost a similar one, how did you solve the problem? You get good information right away, which cannot be found from papers."¹⁵

The interviewees also dreamt that the management (and other people who make decisions) would have a better and deeper understanding of the employee group Y's reality, of what their job is in daily basis, the way their supervisors often do and which enhances their employee experiences. This is connected to being known more as people, not only as job functions also in the organizational level and is crucial in making employees feel fairly treated (Morgan, 2017, 120-121).

Therefore informal conversations and discussions should be organized more frequently in which not only the professional things would be discussed but also the hopes, and dreams and aspirations of the employee group Y would be heard. This is also supported by previous research, according to Morgan (2017, 239) such open and candid discussions give important understanding of the employee's perspective and help the managers and executives to better design and make decisions that have an impact on the employees work.

¹⁵ Teams voitais ottaa ihan hyvin. Sit samal tulee sitä kallisarvoista hiljaista tietoa. Kun meille sattuu töissä erilaisia juttuja, erialisia ongelmatilanteita, niin niissä luokkatilaisuuksissa aina joku kertoi jonkun tapauksen ja heti muut kommentoi et hei mulla oli melkein samanlainen, et miten sä ratkaisit sen ongelman. Heti tulee hyvää tietoo, mitä ei papereissa oo.

7.2.2 Information regarding on-going and up-coming work shifts

One of the biggest employee communications challenge that seems to exist is that the most necessary information, that the employee group Y needs in order to well carry out their shifts does not commonly reach them the way it should. The communications about them should be prompt and adequate. The employees of group Y dreamt that the necessary information and changes regarding their work would not be in bits and pieces difficultly accessible but would be given to them, by using simple forums, in the beginning of their shift at latest. In urgent matters especially a simple phone call would be the best one, instead of electronic channels, because it makes sure the information reaches the employee and gives him/her the opportunity to ask possible additional questions. This dream is connected to both technological and cultural employee experience environments.

Many of the interviewees described how in dream situations they would come to work relaxed and confident, knowing that they are 100% sure of the important matters concerning their shift at hand and that if there are changes to come, they will for sure be informed about them. The shift would go smoothly without hurry, hassle, continuous information searching, and without talking on the phone in order to ask things that they should already be aware of. This uncertainty, lack of necessary information and constant calling around frustrates and negatively affects their employee experiences at the moment. They also dreamt that they could take their time in the beginning and at the end of the shift to read important messages and to go through relevant changes regarding their shifts.

The following comment explained what the situation is like at the moment and why the dream of better information flow regarding on-going and up-coming work shifts is so common:

..and then the poorest information, but the most important one that we have, that is in the worst condition are the changes regarding the ongoing shifts, they flow extremely badly. Things that are known a day in advance do not reach the employee and are really relevant. They are important to be done during the shift, but if you do

not get that information in a certain way.. I'd love to get a phone call, that "Hey this kind of change in your tomorrows shift is made".¹⁶

The interviewees also described how in dream situations they would not need to act as a middleman delivering information to other employees, that should not be of their concern and that takes a lot of their time and focus from tasks they feel are more important, because currently this is the case.

The following dreams are also much related to the information flow before, during and after work shifts.

7.2.3 Simple solutions, targeted and easily accessible information

"Although we view technology as something that lives in a separate nonhuman bucket, technology has a palpable impact on the organization – it's what we use to communicate, collaborate and to actually get our jobs done. If the tools break down, then everything else around them, including the human relationships, also breaks down". (Morgan, 2017, 77).

In dream situations the currently valid information is very easily accessible for the employee group Y. At the moment it is not clear which information is the latest and most relevant one and where it can be found, which is due to the constant changes and the big amount of information coming from different channels.

The technological solutions, the communication channels used, are experienced being too many and too complicated. They should also allow more interaction and instant feedback possibilities – the employees could for example comment on a received message by voice messages. There are an electronic bulletin board, Intranet, internal social media, employee group Y's weekly newsletter, instruction book, different applications and e-mail

¹⁶ Ja sitten se kaikista köyhin informaatio, mutta kaikista tärkein mitä meillä on, mikä on niinku kaikista huonoimmalla tolalla tällä hetkellä, on se, että jos mulla on käynnissä oleva työvuoro, ni ne sitä koskevat muutokset, ne liikkuu ihan äärettömän huonosti. Ennakoon päivää aikaisemmin tiedettävät asiat ei saavuta työntekijää ja ne on tosi merkityksellisiä. Ne on tärkeitä tehdä sen työvuoron aikana, mut jos sä et saa sitä informaatiota määrättyllä tavalla.. Ni sen mä mieluusti saisin ihan puhelinsoitolla, että "Hei sun huomiosessa työvuorossa teen tämmösen muutoksen".

and additionally WhatsApp- groups, for example, that the employee group Y uses in their work.

The interviewees explained they would like to get all the information regarding changes and details in their work shifts by simple phone call or at least a text message – they wish it would not just appear in the system silently and require themselves to go search for it because they often are not aware of the fact that a change has been made. Therefore they wish the information would always be delivered to them personally in order to them carry out their shifts smoothly and confidently.

We have efficient electronic systems today, so wouldn't it somehow be able to automatically give that information, that this (a matter regarding a work shift) has been changed. It would tell the employee right away. So, something like that. I don't know which IT solutions would really work and what the barriers are.¹⁷

The experience of the employee group Y is that Information keeps on coming to different channels and the relevant messages drown into the ocean of messages. It oftentimes happens that something important is heard in a coffee-table discussion from colleagues weeks later. The interviewees did specifically name certain channels which they would prefer but wish it would be clear, to everyone, that in which channel is which information and they would be used coherently throughout the organization, and they would not need to search for it.

The constant information searching (mentioned in chapter 7.2.2.) the employee group Y experiences in their work also seems to be related to the fact that the channels and their roles are not clear. They dreamt that the channels would be more connected to each other some way which would make the big picture more understandable and simple. One interviewee gave a concrete dream example of this; when electronic bulletin board (which would be better organized) informs about a safety change, then a link to internal social media (or another interactive solution) would be linked to it for the employee group Y to ask and comment it and then they would also receive an answer quickly. Another

¹⁷ Meillä on kuitenkin nykyään tehokkaat sähköiset järjestelmät, niin eikö se pystyis jotenkin automaattisesti jo tulemaan se tieto, kun vaikka tämmönen (asia työvuoroon liittyen) on muutettu. Et se ilmoittais samantien sille työntekijälle sen. Että..jotain tämmösiä. En tiedä mitkä IT-ratkaisut olisivat oikeasti toimivia ja mitä esteitä on.

interviewee dreamed that he could leave a voice message, asking or commenting information, because it would be quick and easily done during a shift.

In addition to the communications being more prompt and adequate employees of group Y wish the messages regarding changes and other relevant operating information, would be more targeted to the people that they are relevant to. This information should be targeted because employees working for example in eastern Finland do not need information on Northern Finland's matters during their workdays but the information comes to them too. All this information could still be available for everyone, but it should be categorized in the system by working areas. Thus, the amount of information is big and it is not easy to find info that is most relevant to you.

This same applies to earlier mentioned Electronic bulletin board. It, however, is considered a somewhat good channel for safety information in general, but it is not as user friendly as it could be. It is experienced as quite slow and complex. The interviewees mentioned that the information there should also be better categorized for the employee group Y and there should additionally be a "search button", which seems to be missing at the moment. The employees of group Y described how they are bound to log into different systems, to read and find information and there is no time allocated in their shifts for doing it. Therefore information is often missed.

One more technology related dream many of the interviewees mentioned was bringing back the former information screens they used to have in their work premises. The screens were experienced as good information channels because they easily caught everyone's eye in the beginning of the shift. Another important aspect mentioned was that when the information can be read on a screen in a coffee break room where there are often other employees present, it creates a good situation for discussing the information which helps in internalizing and remembering it. They mentioned that such screens are still in use in other departments and units of the Company X and felt a bit neglected because they no longer have them but know their peers still do. Availability to everyone is one of the three important attributes in ACE-technologies of employee experiences (Morgan, 2017, 78-81).

The usefulness of communication channels in information distribution are in the heart of the effort to make information flow more effective in an organization. Information accuracy, possession of required skills to access the channels and supportive information technology systems are very important components of effective information management and communication. Therefore it is evident that the complexity of the channels needs to be solved together with the people who use them in their daily work.

Thus, one of the most commonly described dream was that there would be very simple, user-friendly channels, or just one simple channel, through which relevant announcements and information, which is needed in order to run the shifts smoothly, would be gotten. The channel(s) should also provide a way for interaction as a common dream was that they would allow the employees of group Y to ask questions and comment instantly on the information they get and that the replies would be gotten quickly as well.

7.2.4 More transparent employee communications

The interviewees dreamt about more transparent communications in general. One interviewee said that better transparency would make everything make more sense for the employees because they would better understand the big picture. Several of the interviewees used different surveys as an example; the employees of group Y are often asked about different things by questionnaires and surveys but eventually the results are not opened to them clearly and they feel unaware of what are the actions that will follow the results of the questionnaires or are there even any actions taken. They wondered what is the point of participating if they never again here from the survey they answered to or only receive an e-mail thanking for their participation. One of them mentioned that it makes them suspect that the results were negative in such way that they are deliberately not transparently told about. According to the interviewee it would be lovely if the results were discussed openly regardless of the nature of the outcomes. However, this does not only mean telling that the results were negative, for example, but going through the results together and discussing in detail why it is so and what will happen next.

So it seems that there actually are good attempts for interaction from the organization because they do ask for feedback and opinion, but the system is incomplete. According to Morgan (2017, 98) this is quite common, that there are many organizations that, with good intentions, ask employees about their ideas and points of view but then don't do anything with them really or at least don't let the employees know what were the actions that took place. From the employee's perspective it is pretty much the same as not asking for feedback or opinions at all and is strongly connected to the feelings of being respected and valued. The employees of group Y wish to be kept informed and involved also after answering the questionnaires, throughout the process, in order to positively contribute to employee experiences – the results could be told about in the weekly newsletter for example and then discussed in more depth via Microsoft Teams or face-to-face.

Thus it is important to in addition to asking, to let the people know about the acknowledged insight and the actions that will follow (in a reasonable time frame) based

on the feedback and opinions gotten from the employees, in this case employee group Y (Morgan, 2017, 98).

As a summary, the biggest dreams that came up are that the employee group Y would be more involved in the organization meaning that they would get to participate in decision making more and in designing and commenting the content of for example instructions that are used in their daily work, because at the moment they feel decisions are made anonymously by people who don't have all the needed information. They also dream that information flow, before and during their shifts, would be such that enables them to carry out their shifts smoothly without uncertainty and hassle and that the channels and tools used in their daily work would be simple and user-friendly, designed to match the needs and daily reality of the employee group Y better. They also wish for more transparent communications which would help them better see the big picture and to connect themselves to the organizations goals and values.

Thus, the dreams and wishes regarding employee communications are mostly connected to:

- **Turning the mindset and communication practices into two-way interaction;**
 - o participating employee group Y in decision making and development work;
 - o understanding the needs and wishes of the employee group Y better;
 - o making communications more transparent;
 - o offering more possibilities for encounters;
- **Prompt information regarding on-going and up-coming shifts;**
- **Functionality and accessibility of communication channels;**
 - o simplicity and organization of information channels roles.

These are the aspects that should primarily be focused on in order to develop employee communications in a way that would positively contribute to the employee experiences of employee group Y.

7.3 Designing concrete suggestions for action

The designing is concerned with making decisions about the actions that should be taken to support the dreams coming into reality (Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016, 57). Based on the discussions, the discovered strengths, dreams and wishes during them, a few concrete suggestions for action were designed and they are presented next. The suggestions focus on the things that seemed to be the most important ones to employee group Y, however much more that could be developed came up during the research (see chapter 8).

Interaction is the covering theme in all of the designed suggestions for action as it is the key to better employee communications that can positively contribute to the employee experiences of employee group Y.

We deploy participating feedback processes and mechanisms

As explained before, engagement-driving employee communication programs require open information flow throughout the organization and demonstrations that employees' voices are valued (Walden, Jung & Westerman, 2017). This means that people can comment, offer their input and ideas and ask questions and that the actions taken take the insight into consideration. It is essential for the employees in order to understand and accept changes for example.

Therefore the suggestion is that an interactive feedback loop of work and safety instructions is established. The team that designs the content of the instructions should be based on needs and opportunities of the employees, not in organizational charts (Morgan, 2017, 106-107). As one interviewee said:

...well it would be the interaction with the people who design them and with the people in the field. I mean, just like, because I am certain that the employees would have a lot to give. That where would we see that something could work better.. so maybe that kind of interaction. Whoever they are who decide on things. That kind of broader interaction on those things. At least I don't belong to those people who are asked about anything at all. I guess they take advantage of the employee group Y's input somewhere, I don't know who they are. But, however, broader interaction.¹⁸

This interactive feedback loop would be a technical overview in which the employees are participated in the validation of the instructions. This could be carried out by gathering the

¹⁸ ...no se vuorovaikutus niiden ihmisten kanssa, jotka niitä suunnittelee ja kentän kanssa. Siis, että ihan niin ku että.. koska oon varma, että työntekijöillä on varmasti annettavaa. Että missä kohtaa me nähtäis, et joku muu asia vois toimia paremmin tai.. että ehkä semmonen kunnon vuorovaikutus. Mitä ne nyt sitten on ne porukat sitten, jotka päättää. Semmonen laajempi vuorovaiktuus kumminkin niistä asioista. Minä en ainakaan kuulu niihin ihmisiin joilta kysytään yhtään mitään. Kai niissä nyt joitain työntekijöitä ryhmästä Y käytetään jossain, en sit tiä ketä ne on. Mut silleen laajemmin vuorovaikutusta.

people either physically or via Teams for example. In practice this requires that the process owner dedicates to the development of the work and safety instruction process, a group of employees from group Y, who get to read, comment and give feedback on the instructions, is selected. Modifications on the instructions are done according to their points of view and experience. This would not only make the instructions themselves more clear and understandable for the people who use them as well as possible to be followed in practice but would also enhance the employee experiences of employee group Y because it makes their everyday work easier and because they get to participate in something that is very important in their work. Then again once a need for a change is noticed, the loop goes back to the beginning.

Because the feelings of being part of local teams and being heard and valued by the supervisors enhances the employee experiences of the employee group Y, it would be important to contribute to such experiences on the macro level too. Therefore this kind of upward feedback mechanism should be used, in order to express the opinions and ideas, in other matters too that are related to the everyday work of employee group Y. Without this kind of bridge there is no employee experience really (Morgan, 2017, 239).

The interviewees also innovated that, for clarity, the instructions could be launched in certain times, such as every three months with explanations what and why has changed , instead of them appearing in the system constantly.

We integrate design thinking into employee experience development

Long-term results require systematic development of employee experiences and operating practises in the centre of which is employee understanding, which means seeing the world through the eyes of the employees. It is essential to study, to listen to, and to learn what employees are doing every day and discover new ways to simplify work and improve productivity, performance, and engagement through this understanding (Bersin et al., 2017). Employees expect both better designed experiences but also new models of delivery. In a world where employees can manage much of their lives on a handful of smartphone apps, they expect every element of their employee experience, from work to development to rewards, to be accessible and easy to use on their mobile devices (Morgan, 2017, 55). According to Morgan (2017, 84-85) technology needs to fulfill the needs of the employees rather than just the business requirements, in order to positively contribute to employee experiences.

It is clear the employee group Y does not experience the communication tools and mechanism being functional and information easily accessible at the moment. The roles of

different channels is experienced somewhat unclear too. It is necessary to understand the employee's preferences regarding the media's used in order to use them efficiently. Beneficial employee communication relies on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats that are useful and acceptable to them and the communication tools too should not be just one-way-type. (Welch, 2012).

The perceptions of employee group Y are that the earlier existed analogue channels have too much been digitalized and that the people who use the solutions in their daily work have not been able to well enough express their needs regarding them. They think that the focus on the process has been too much only on individual channels and software, which has led to mixed quality and usability of electronic communication channels.

Therefore service design thinking should be integrated into employee experience development at Company X. Embracing design thinking is one of the cores in developing workforce solutions that will be useful and compelling to employees (Bersin et al., 2017, 58). It could also enhance the experienced feelings of transparency. IT, HR, Communications and the management would get valuable insight on how they can better enable and empower employee group Y in their day-to-day work.

The suggestion innovated with the interviewees is that a service design based project is established the aim of which is to design communication solutions (both the technological aspect and the daily practices) that serve the needs of the employee group Y best. Employees are the ones who do the actual work and therefore it is important that they can have a say in the types of technologies that they use (Morgan 2017, 79). In addition to the employees of group Y the project participants should consist of HR, communications and ICT specialists, and other employees who use the channels in their daily work. It would increase the understanding of the organization on what the employee's really want, what problems and challenges they face at work and vice versa. This type of service design processes already exists for the applications used by the customers of the organization which could be used as a benchmark for doing it internally.

In practice it would mean that the employee group Y (1) provides feedback for the organization continuously, then the organization (the team involved in the process) tries to extract as much insight as possible from the feedback gotten from employees (2), then the organization actually designs something according to the feedback and analysis (3) – if the lesson is that people are unhappy with a communication channel's usability, then what is the solution – this section should be done in sprints and iterations quickly, then the solution is launched (4) and employees are participated as they start using it (5). Then the loop goes back to the beginning. (Morgan 2017, 177-183).

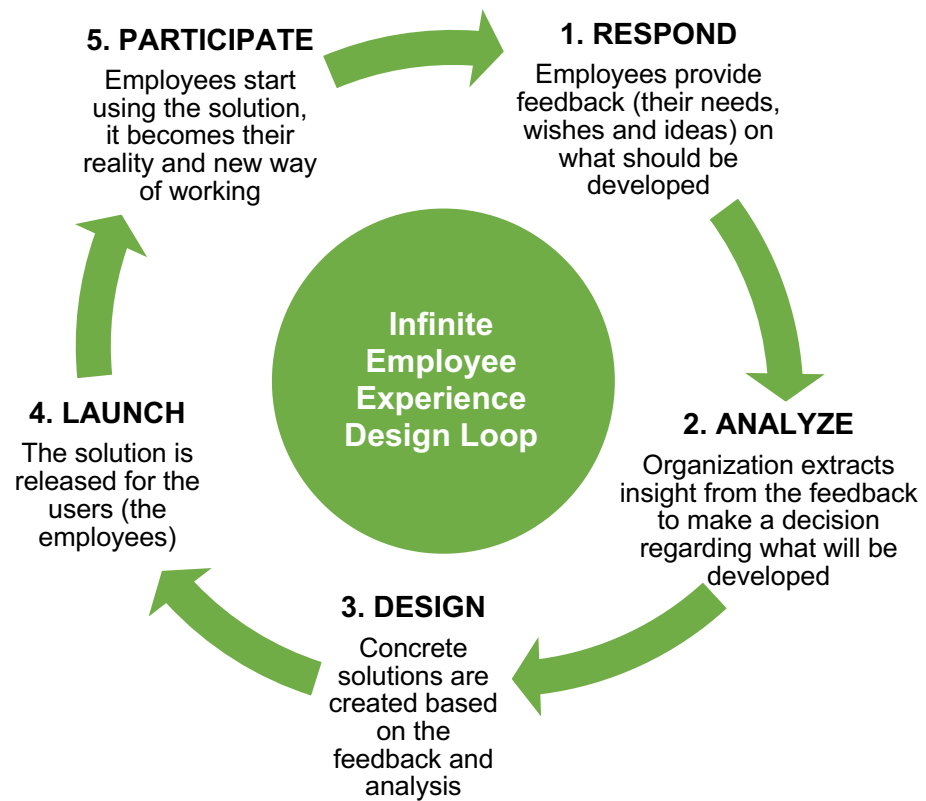


Figure 15. Infinite Employee Experience Design Loop with the Employee group Y (adapted from Morgan 2017, 178)

What supports this suggestion is that the ideology of Appreciative Inquiry does not fall far from design thinking and the interviewees gave positive feedback on this way of developing things.

Other suggestions for actions

In addition some smaller specific wishes that could be carried out in order to enhance the employee experiences of employee group Y came up.

The individuals who don't have the means or skills to access communication channels during their workdays should not be forgotten in employee communication, even if it is only a very small proportion of them. Therefore the information screens (see chapter 7.3) should be taken back into use in the work premises. The experience of the employee group Y was that the screens were taken away without asking whether or not the employees need them. The screens could provide for example relevant intranet content, as well targeted relevant information regarding the operating area. However, the employee group Y should be asked what information they think would be most suitable to be placed in the screens, instead of deciding on it without asking them.

As mentioned, more interaction possibilities should be organized for the employee group Y, both physically and via Teams for example in which current topics and also matter off the topic could be discussed together with each other as well as with the management. Company X annually organizes road shows in which they visit the employees in different cities and those are experienced as very good opportunities to ask and share information and to get reasonings for different matters according to both the questionnaire and the interviews. Similar events are wished to be organized more frequently because it would enhance the employee experiences of the employee group Y as their work is quite lonely and they don't get to share experiences and ideas with colleagues and other employees in the organization as much as they would like and need to. Electronic study materials which are used a lot currently do not serve the needs of the employees in the best possible way because they don't offer a possibility for instant feedback, questioning and other comments

7.4 Wrap up of the Appreciative Interviews

The interviews were long and colorful and it was not simple to sum up the results. There were discussions on strengths as well as weaknesses, dreams, hopes and concrete actions that should take place. The overall atmosphere in the interviews was positive even though it was evident that the employees of group Y are not too satisfied with the communication practices currently.

In order to visualize the summary of this Master's thesis's AI processes already existing strengths, dreams and designed actions a "Workday of dreams-map" (appendix C), was created. It summarizes the employee group Y's employee experience enhancing communicational points, the moments that matter, and can be used as a reminding guideline poster for Company X's HR, the management, communications and all employees.

The idea of it bases on an example of a design thinking process, which was turned into actionable results by creating employee's "moments that matter" (Deloitte [2017] in Bersin et al., 2017). Instead of thinking of a traditional employee life cycle it is more valuable to focus on the moments that matter or moments of impact from the employees point of view which allow personalizing the employee experiences. The idea is that the employer understands what are the ongoing moments that matter in the daily lives of their employees (such as continued relationship of an employee with a manager or the organization) and created moments (events, mutual gatherings). (Morgan, 2017, 201-203). These "moments" can be developed as personal statements, such as "enabling me to be successful in a new role," "reinforcing my impact through feedback and

development,” and “knowing where I stand and that my perspectives are valued.” Through these “moments,” creating simpler, integrated, employee focused processes and tools is possible. (Bersin et al., 2017, 57-58). It was a good and fun way to sum up the insight gotten from this Master’s thesis.

8 Conclusions

In this final chapter the answers to the research questions are once more summarized, validity and reliability of the study as well as future research suggestions are discussed. Finally the personal learning is reflected.

8.1 Answers to the research questions

Appreciative Inquiry as the chosen method for carrying out this research was successful because it well provided answers to the research questions. The following table answers the research questions by briefly summarizing the findings that are gone through in more detail discussing with theory in chapters 6 and 7. The visualized summary can be seen in the “Work day of dreams-picture” (see appendix 3).

Table 6. Answers to the research questions in brief.

Research question number	Research question	Answers based on the research
1.	What kind of employee communications positively contribute to the employee experiences of employee group Y?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employee communications that positively contribute to the employee group Y’s employee experiences are open, transparent and, most of all, interactive and participating. Everyone’s opinions are heard, valued and taken advantage of in decision making and in development work. - Daily communication is conducted using simple user-friendly channels (that match the needs of employee group Y) coherently. Personal communication, e.g. face-to-face or a phone-call, is best when it comes to urgent matters such as information on details and changes in their shifts. - Proactive communications – meaning that the employee group Y doesn’t need to search for needed information from various channels during their shifts but the important information would be offered to them directly and would be organized in a targeted way in the electronic systems (apps and channels).
1.1.	How do they experience employee communications today?	<p>Positive: Communications in local work communities and in supervisory work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communications is interactive - Experiences of being listened to, of ideas, requests and personal matters being appreciated. - Communications are respectful, honest, positive and the environment psychologically safe.

		<p>Requires improvement: Need for more interaction and cooperation in macro level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiences are that the employee group Y is not being listened to, not having possibilities to have an impact as much as they would like to. Need for more appreciation and need for better justification of decisions made is also experienced. - Experiences of not having enough encounters and possibilities to discuss with each other and with the management. <p>Requires improvement: Complex communications and too many communication channels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information coming from every direction constantly, difficult to filter and find the most relevant information. - Communications should be organized more simply, it is currently experienced too fragmented. It should be more consistent, timely, clear and transparent. Tools are not as user-friendly as they are wished to be.
1.2.	What are the core strengths of employee communications currently and in what kind of situations they come alive?	<p>Supportive atmosphere and good team-spirit in local teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interaction is forthright, respectful and supportive, spiced with some humor. All kinds of matters can be shared matters with colleagues and it is possible to lean on each other when it comes to safety or other significant matters. These are about trust, psychological safety, feelings of someone having your back, about cohesive and welcoming environment, true open communication and collaboration. - These come alive in basic everyday work – greeting, wishing each other good work days, chatting and joking. Leaving the equipment in a way that is safe for the next colleague and doing helpful things to each other self-imposed. <p>Exemplary supervisors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiences of being understood, listened to and cared about. These come alive in e.g. discussions and encounters with best supervisors, because they ask, listen and take action accordingly. They leave their doors open both physically and emotionally. - Keeping promises, really knowing their employees and teams and understanding the reality of their everyday work, supporting in learning and advancing on career.
1.3.	How could employee communications be developed in order to enhance the employee	<p>Change of the mindset and communication practices into more two-way interaction;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participating employee group Y in decision making and development work; - understanding the needs and wishes of them better; - making communications more transparent; - offering more possibilities to encounters

	<p>experiences of employee group Y?</p>	<p>Prompt and adequate information regarding on-going and up-coming shifts;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all the necessary information and changes in the awareness of the employees latest when their shift begins, changes that come up need to be informed personally and straight-away. <p>Functionality and accessibility of information processes and communication channels;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simplicity and organization of information processes and information channels roles. <p>In practise: developing and deploying participating feedback processes and mechanisms especially for safety and work instructions and by integrating design thinking into employee experience development and taking advantage of that in communications development. Also by organizing more possibilities to meet and discuss (see chapter 7.3. for more detailed explanations).</p>
--	---	---

8.2 Validity and reliability of this Master's thesis

One limitation regarding This Master's thesis research is that it only studies one employee group of one organization and therefore the findings cannot be applied as such to other departments or companies. This is not only because of the limited research group but also because of the nature of employee experiences, which are always different for different employees (Morgan 2017, 177). The findings, however, are in line with previous research which explain the attributes in culture and technology that have an impact on employee experiences (see e.g. Morgan 2017, 77-124) and the most important elements of employee communications (see e.g. Walden, Jung & Westerman 2017, 1-18).

However, this Master's thesis can provide a benchmark case for other departments at Company X as well as other organizations that wish to understand what kinds of strengths exist within the organization and what kinds of needs and wishes their employees have and that would like to apply Appreciative Inquiry in doing so. Thus, this Master's thesis provides an example of an option where the standing point of organizational development bases in positive psychology instead of focusing solely on issues.

It is likely that in case this Master's thesis questionnaire was carried out again the results would be similar. The amount of respondents in the survey was about 17,6% of the entire population which means that 171 people answered the questionnaire of the 970 that received it. By using confidence level of 95% and 7% margin of error, the the amount of

respondents fulfilled the sample size requirements because the ideal sample size (amount of respondents) would be minimum 164.

The amount of interviewees were only 8 even though there are a lot of employees of the group Y in the company X, thus there is a possibility that some important points of view might not have been included in this Master's thesis. Also, there is always a possibility that certain type of people selected for the interviews, for example perhaps the most dissatisfied people did not volunteer for the interviews and more satisfied did which could have an impact on the overall conclusions drawn. However, the stories told regarding peak experiences in the past, current experiences on communications in micro and macro level and the dreams and wishes were very much in line with each other regardless of their city and working area, the age, different duties and tasks of the employees who were interviewed.

One more limitation worth mentioning here is that the research project was carried out from an external consultant role because I am not an employee of Company X and have not worked in cooperation with the employee group Y, or Company X's communications or HR before. Due to Corona virus I was also unable to visit the premises of the organization in order to get more familiar with the operating environment and communication systems of employee group Y. Therefore I might not have been as fully aware of all relevant important matters as could have been in case I was working in the organization simultaneously while doing this Master's thesis.

8.3 Discussion on recommendations for future

A lot of different ideas came up during the research on what could be beneficial to be investigated in the future.

It seems that the vision and mission of Company X are not as clear to the employee group Y as they should be (see table 4). It indicated that less than half of the respondents have internalized the true reason for being, the purpose of Company X, and therefore it would be both interesting and important to understand how the mission and vision could be better integrated to the daily work of the employee group Y in order to rally them in their work. Communications and HR should investigate how these things could be better communicated and made into reality because understanding the true reason for being is the covering umbrella above the three employee experience environments (Morgan 2017, 49, 51) which means that in order to truly create great employee experiences the starting point is that people understand why we are here, what are we doing and aiming at and what is each one of our role in achieving these goals.

Communications with many of the supervisors is experienced positively according to the results, of both the survey and the interviews. The best supervisors are interested, they do listen, acknowledge and take necessary action too. However, despite of this the experiences of the employee group Y are that the management does not hear them or participate them into decision making in the organization, even when it comes to things that are relevant to their every-day work. Therefore it would be important to study that what kind of bottle necks there are and what are the reasons behind them in order to understand why the messages seem to not being heard or valued in the organization more widely. Typically supervisors help in delivering messages from bottom to up but for some reason it seems that in the case of employee group Y their voices are not heard in a level they would like to and that would enhance their employee experiences.

In addition to using service design internally for employees it is advised to take advantage of the ideology of Appreciative Inquiry in organizational development also in other projects in the future. In Appreciative Inquiry empathy towards employees is increased and inviting employees to participate in an Appreciative Inquiry based research communicates to them that their opinions are valued. Once the employees know that employer is genuinely interested in their feelings and thoughts, in order to design something for them specifically, it positively contributes to employee experiences. By AI the concrete future steps are created together – because as mentioned earlier the only way to successfully design employee experiences is to do it with them (Morgan 2017, 229-225). Asking appreciative questions can also direct people's thinking into more positive way and, thus, enhance the acceptance of and development taking place in the organization.

In the future the communications questionnaire should be carried out again in order to see whether or not the actions designed have had an impact on the experiences regarding employee communications.

8.4 Reflection on personal learning

This research has positively contributed to my personal learning in many different levels. During this research I have gained a lot of valuable new knowledge on employee experience formation, on communications role in it and on positive psychology based organizational development, Appreciative Inquiry. I have gotten deep understanding of theories concerning employee experiences, employee communications, well-being organizations, organizational culture and many other that are related to this Master's thesis. I have also developed quite good skills in designing practices in an organization in order to enhance employee experiences.

My skills and competencies also in for example in project management, planning and carrying out development work and interviews have significantly grown. I have also developed my skills in connecting scientific theories and practice. Most of all I have gained skills in planning an Appreciative Inquiry process and utilizing it in organizational development, which I will most definitely take advantage of in the future.

The most valuable learning gained during this research concerns me personally. I have long known I am fascinated by employee well-being related matters, social interaction, communication, positive psychology, organizational learning and motivation, just to mention a few. Understanding how to make organizations better places to work at for its employees has always excited me deeply and as this study was so closely related to my personal interests it confirmed my feelings regarding my future career aspirations. They are definitely related to developing organizations where everyone can feel good, to designing great employee experiences and to employee communications.

This thesis was my second but the first one done in this big scale. In my personal opinion the project was successful. However, as my knowledge and insight on the topics have naturally increased during the process I now know how the research could have been carried out even better. Reflecting to the past I would prepare and schedule some parts of the research differently if I were to start it now. I would also narrow down the scope and focus of the thesis a lot. Looking back now it seems that the topic was too wide and it would have been more beneficial to focus on a more detailed subject.

The most challenging part for me was to keep the common thread and cohesion between all parts of this Master's thesis. During the process it often felt like everything was clear in my mind but it was difficult to put it in writing which sometimes resulted into too complex chapters that needed to be corrected a few times in order to make a clear connection. This is probably due to my way of thinking, a flow of thought which is not always linear. I get ideas and see connections, get immediately excited and write them down on different post-it papers all over our home for example, which clearly is not the best way to keep order when creating scientific thesis work. It was also challenging to align Appreciative Inquiry in practice with the employee experience and employee communications theories however very satisfying when it was successfully done.

The feedback gotten from Company X was very positive. The thesis was considered very comprehensive. It gave the organization a confirmation of some of the things they had thought would be important to be focused on as well as new insight for development for the future. The recommendations for action in will be taken advantage of and the

theoretical knowledge and methods (Appreciative Inquiry) will be applied also in the future at the organization as they further develop their employee's experiences.

As I followed discussions in media on employee experience and read current releases on the subject throughout this Master's thesis project I understood how current the topic of my thesis is which contributed to my feelings of doing something that actually matters and that the skills and knowledge gained during this project will be necessary in the future.

Resources:

- Bersin, J., Flynn, J., Mazor, A. & Melián, V. 2017, *Rewriting the rules for the digital age*, HAB Press Limited, Toronto.
- Coene, S. 2018, "Employee Experience and Design Thinking", *HR Trend Institute*, .
- Cooperrider, D. & Whitney, D. 1999, "Appreciative Inquiry, Collaborating For Change", *Women's Health Issues*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 3-7.
- Cornelissen, J.P. 2020, *Corporate communication : guide to theory and practice*, 6th edition edn, SAGE Publication Ltd, London.
- Cowan, D. 2017, *Strategic internal communication : how to build employee engagement and performance*, Second edition edn, Kogan Page, London, United Kingdom.
- Deepa, R. & Roy, A. 2018, *Driving Employee Experience: The Critical Role of Internal Communications*.
- Frank, R. 2016, *The Incalculable Value of Finding a Job You Love*. The New York Times.
- Gambetti, R. & Quigley, S.P. 2013, *Managing corporate communication : a cross-cultural approach*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke ; New York, NY.
- Juholin, E. 2013, *Communicare! : kasva viestinnän ammattilaiseksi*, Management Institute of Finland, Helsinki.
- Kuvaja, S. & Malmelin, K. 2008, *Vastuullinen yritysviestintä : kilpailuetua vuoropuhelusta*, Edita, Helsinki.
- Lewis, S., Passmore, J. & Cantore, S. 2016, *Appreciative inquiry for change management : using AI to facilitate organizational development*, Second edition edn, Kogan Page, London.
- Miller, K. 2015, *Organizational communication : approaches and processes*, 7th ed edn, Cengage Learning, Stamford, CT.
- Morgan, J. 2017, *The employee experience advantage : how to win the war for talent by giving employees the workspaces they want, the tools they need, and a culture they can celebrate*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, Hoboken, New Jersey.
- Preskill, H.S. & Catsambas, T.T. 2006, *Reframing evaluation through appreciative inquiry*, Sage, Thousand Oaks (CA).
- Robbins, S.P. & Judge, T.A. 2016, *Essentials of organizational behavior*, 13th ed., Global ed edn, Pearson Education, Harlow.
- Schein, E.H. 2010, *Organizational culture and leadership*, 4th ed edn, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Sweetsbot *Onnistuneen työntekijäkokemuksen peruspilarit*.
- Tienari, J., Sinivuori, E. & Meriläinen, S. 2009, *Johtaminen ja organisointi globaalissa taloudessa*, WSOYpro, Helsinki.

Vuori, K. 2018, *Hyvä työntekijäkokemus hyödyttää koko organisaatiota*.

Walden, J., Jung, E.H. & Westerman, C.Y.K. 2017, "Employee communication, job engagement, and organizational commitment: A study of members of the Millennial Generation", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, vol. 29, no. 2-3, pp. 73-89.

Watkins, J.M., Mohr, B.J. & Kelly, R. 2011, *Appreciative inquiry : change at the speed of imagination*, 2nd ed edn, Pfeiffer, San Francisco.

Welch, M. 2012, "Appropriateness and acceptability: Employee perspectives of internal communication", *Public Relations Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 246-254.

Yohn, D.L. 2018, Jan 2,-last update, *2018 Will Be the Year of Employee Experience*. Available: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deniselyohn/2018/01/02/2018-will-be-the-year-of-employee-experience/> [2020, Feb 20,]

List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Employee Experience Design, “The intersection of employee expectations, needs, and wants and the organizational design of those expectations, needs and wants (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 8)	4
Figure 3. Deloitte’s Simply Irresistible Organization™ model (adapted from Deloitte [2017] in Bersin et al., 2017, 55)	10
Figure 4. Employee Experience Business Outcomes (adapted from Morgan 2017, 164)..	14
Figure 5. The three employee experience environments (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 57)	16
Figure 6. The employee experience equation (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 132).....	21
Figure 7. Appreciative Inquiry 4 D- cycle (adapted from Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, 6)..	33
Figure 8. Employee satisfaction-question, Which of the following describes your feelings lately?.....	41
Figure 9. Answer the following based on your own experiences.	42
Figure 10. Interaction in my work community is... ..	43
Figure 11. The information I need for my job is easily accessible to me.	48
Figure 12. From which information and interaction channels you best get the information you need. Choose maximum three alternatives.....	50
Figure 13. The communications of Company X is.....	51
Figure 14. Which overall rating would you give to Company X’s communications?.....	51
Figure 15. Summary of the questionnaire results, the employee group Y’s current experiences on employee communications affecting their employee experiences both positively and negatively.	53
Figure 16. Infinite Employee Experience Design Loop with the Employee group Y (adapted from Morgan 2017, 178)	72
Table 1. CELEBRATED-culture attributes and what they measure (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 90-127).....	17
Table 2. ACE-technologies attributes and what they measure (adapted from Morgan, 2017, 77-85).....	20
Table 3. Differences between most of the traditional research ideologies and appreciative inquiry (adapted from Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, Lewis, Passmore & Cantore, 2016). ..	29
Table 4. Answer the following based on your own experiences.	46
Table 5. Communication channels used... ..	48
Table 6. Answers to the research questions in brief.	75

List of Appendices

Appendix A

Webropol questionnaire about experiences on communications (in Finnish)

Appendix B

Examples of interview questions used in semi-structured Appreciative Interviews.

Appendix C

A visualized summary on Appreciative Inquiry findings: Work day of dreams-picture (elements of positive employee experiences of employee group Y)

Appendix D

Case Company description

Appendix A.

Confidential.

Appendix B

The amount, order and exact phrasing of the questions varied depending on each of the interviewees' stories and answers.

Examples of questions used, both Appreciative questions and non AI-questions.

The original questions were in Finnish.

Discovery, Dream & Design

Own local team, work community & supervisory work

1. Think back on your career at Company X. What kind of memories have stayed in your mind as particularly positive?
 - a. What was it that contributed to your experiences?
2. What kind of work days are good and positive to you?
 - a. What is it that contributes to these experiences?
 - b. Tell me more about...
3. What kind of communications during your work days positively influences your feelings?
4. Tell me what in your work community works well and is nice?
 - a. How do you tell each other about important matters?
5. How does your supervisor positively contribute to your experiences?
 - a. What is it that makes the dialogue between you and him/her is so well functioning?
6. Now think about a work community of your dreams in which information flow would be perfect. Describe it to me.
7. What do you think could be done in practice in order to make that dream into reality?

Discovery, Dream & Design

8. According to the questionnaire the best information providing channels are electronic bulletin board and email. What do you think makes these channels good?
 - a. How could they be better?
9. Through which channels would you rather receive important information from?
10. What do you think is the best way for you to get your voice heard?
11. What things you think are important to be understood and considered when communicating with employee group Y?

- 12.** Now imagine that anything was possible just like that, by a swing of a magic wand, what would be your three wishes for the communications/what kind of situation in communications would be perfect for you?
- 13.** What do you think should be done in practice so that the situation would be as close to that as possible?
- 14.** Please now sum up that what are the things regarding communications that should be enhanced in order to positively contribute to the employee experiences of employee group Y? What should be focused on specifically?

Appendix C

Confidential.

Appendix D.

Confidential.