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Driving Employee Engagement through
Internal Communication; A Public Relations Perspective:
A Case Study of Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland

DESMOND P. CARROLL

M.A. in Public Relations with New Media
Cork Institute of Technology
2013



00159447



Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Chorcaí
Cork Institute of Technology

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme
of study leading to the award of
Master's Degree (MA) in Public Relations with New Media
is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic
purpose other than in partial fulfillment for that stated above.

**Driving Employee Engagement through Internal
Communication; A Public Relations Perspective: A
Case Study of Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland.**

Desmond P. Carroll

MA in Public Relations with New Media

Signed: *Desmond P. Carroll* (Student)
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September 2013

*Submitted to the Cork Institute of Technology in part fulfilment of the requirements for the
MA in Public Relations with New Media.*

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of:

Master's Degree (MA) in Public Relations with New Media

is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfillment for that stated above.

Signe (Student)

Date.....4th October, 2013.

Abstract

This study is concerned with the important role of internal communication (IC) as a driver of employee engagement and investigates how public relations (PR) might be best placed to advise on and oversee a system of managed or strategic communication within an organisation.

The literature reveals that a communications culture must pervade an organisation for effective communication to take place. Whilst early models leaned towards a predominant one-way transmission of communication, we are now witnessing a paradigm shift to a horizontal two-way system of communication and engagement.

The research methodology employed in this study was a qualitative case study which utilised focus groups and semi-structured interviews as a basis for primary data collection. A central theme examined growing evidence that organisations perform more efficiently and function more effectively where employees are engaged. Communication can help motivate, build trust, create shared identity and spur engagement. Using Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) as a case study, the study examined how internal communications could contribute to fostering a culture of listening and engagement in a large third level educational institution in Ireland.

Research findings conclude that employees in CIT want to be part of a communicative and participatory organisation which fosters engagement and consultation. There is substantial evidence to suggest that CIT could benefit from having a strategic internal communications function within the institute.

This study recommends that the management of the institute embrace strategic internal employee communications as a vital and effective means to engage employees. Internal communications, managed from the PR perspective of a two-way symmetrical dialogic model of engagement, can lead to the building of a communications culture to the benefit of the whole organisation. Researching and listening to employees provides the starting point.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Communication is a central and not a peripheral component of organizational effectiveness”

Alan J. Zaremba, 2003

This study is concerned with the role of managed strategic internal communications as a driver of employee engagement, in the organisational context of a third level institute of technology in Ireland, within the theory and practice of public relations.

1.0 Internal communication (IC) and public relations

Internal communication has become a growing specialist area inside the broader field of PR, where employees are regarded as a public or stakeholder group. It is argued by many PR scholars that: “Effective communication is seen as a vital component in engaging employees” (Tench & Yeomans, 2009, p. 319). Relationships develop through communication, while the successful functioning of most organisations is based on effective relationships among individuals and groups (Jones et al., 2004). Management of organisations need to understand what employees are thinking and feeling in order to create the right environment for these relationships to happen.

In the absence of structured employee communication the unofficial grapevine takes hold, and where there is a lack of communication, vacuums are created often resulting in distrust and speculation among employees (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010). Communication happens inside an organisation whether it is managed or not and engaging staff in the ‘bigger picture’ often requires a managed system of communication (Tench & Yeomans, 2009).

1.1 Organisational internal communications culture and employee engagement

While early models of IC focused on a predominant one-way transmission of messages with no regard for encouraging feedback, the modern approach has dramatically shifted to a more two-way dialogic conversational approach. This two-way approach is known in public relations as the 'excellence model of communication' and forms the basis for modern PR practice (Grunig, 1984). Communication can help motivate, build trust, create shared identity, spur engagement and increase morale. Two-way communication encourages input and feedback from all communicating sides. Direct face-to-face or interpersonal communication practices are the most valuable for fostering engagement. In fact, face-to-face is regarded as the richest medium and should be employed internally during times of communicating major changes, addressing crises or resolving conflicts. Effective and ongoing two-way communications are the building blocks for the foundation of communication cultures that foster listening and engagement.

1.2 Professional internal communication and management

Professional communicators must see themselves as internal experts on communication advising executives and managers on strategic internal communication. Organisations must put high priority on effective two-way communication which is at the centre of management-employee relations (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2005). Communication, in particular during times of change and uncertainty, helps employees cope and adjust to change.

Internal communication is about identifying and managing relationships between the organisation and its employees - the internal audience. IC contributes significantly in the development of effective corporate communications strategies and employee relations. The responsibility attached to the modern internal professional communicator is a strategic management function; one of building relationships and programs which foster trust, participation and employee empowerment.

1.1 Research objectives

As previously stated, IC is professionalism within PR that, despite receiving little attention in the academic arena to date, is evolving all the time into a distinct management function. The research objectives of this study are:

1. To examine how IC manifests itself within CIT and to determine its effectiveness in the organisational context of management-employee relations.
2. To ascertain if IC played a part in driving employee engagement and, if so, did it contribute to the development of a communications culture of listening and engagement.
3. To gauge employee sentiment and morale in relation to how information regarding strategic organisational change is communicated.
4. To explore ways of improving internal employee communication within the organisation and try to identify where the responsibility for strategic IC lies.

1.2 Research questions

Questions arising from the research objectives of this study involved, but are not limited to, the following topics or themes:

1. Internal Communications (IC) - How do employees in CIT communicate with other?

The first topic attempts to ascertain what are the methods and tools most frequently used within CIT to facilitate internal communications; for example, staff meetings, email, newsletters, memos, intranet, social media and interpersonal communication. It seeks to find out how employees share and receive information.

2. Organisation Culture - Are employees well-informed about changes in the organisation? Could management do more to keep employees more informed and up-to-date? Do employees feel that they have a voice?

Note: This question was changed for the management focus group to ask if management felt they had any influence in the direction and future changes of the organisation.

This second multi-faceted question invites discussion around exploring the communication culture that might exist within the institute (CIT); for example, is there any predominant method of communication and what are the institute's approaches to IC. The researcher tries to gauge employee sentiment toward the organisation.

3. Employee Engagement - Does CIT enable staff to perform well? Do employees feel that they give more than they get back from the organisation?

The third discussion attempted to examine the links between IC and employee engagement. The question tried to gauge if employees felt that they were valued by the organisation, and if there was a positive attitude amongst employees toward the organisation. It explores the so-called enablers of engagement and drivers of engagement; such as, involvement in decision making, employee voice and value of contributions along with opportunities for employees to develop (D Robinson, S Perryman, S Hayday, 2004).

4. Improving Internal Communications - How can IC be improved in CIT? Whose responsibility is IC? Who communicates change?

The focus of the final theme was finding possible ways to improve internal communication within the organisation and if possible, it tries to identify where the responsibility for IC may lie within the organisation.

1.3 Thesis structure

Chapter Two explores internal communication (IC) as a subject that resides within professional and academic public relations. Previously published literature is reviewed, examining some of the gaps, theories, perspectives, evidence and conclusions that have been put forward from that literature, in an attempt to identify links between IC and employee engagement. The subject of IC is viewed in the context of public relations as it investigates how and why public relations may be best placed to advise on organisational managed strategic communication.

Chapter Three describes the qualitative research methods and techniques employed in this study for the purpose of the collection, measurement and analysis of primary research data. It addresses any possible ethical issues that may be expected to arise out of conducting a study of this nature, such as confidentiality, anonymity and ethical standards.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the primary research carried out under the themed headings described in chapters two and three. Through the application of qualitative data analysis findings are presented in narrative form throughout.

Chapter Five discusses the critical analysis around the significance of the findings outlined in Chapter Four. Through the researcher's interpretation, it attempts to demonstrate the relationships, and describe where appropriate, the correlation of the research findings with theories, hypotheses and existing knowledge presented in the literature review (chapter two).

Chapter Six re-examines the research findings and conclusions based on the primary research carried out, and contextualised within the overall literature reviewed, in an attempt to add strength to what is already known in the field of study. Furthermore, the strengths and limitations of this thesis are considered with suggestions for further research proposed.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter explores internal communication (IC) as a subject that resides within the professional and academic realms of public relations. Through the examination of previously published material, it examines some of the gaps, theories, perspectives, evidence and conclusions that have been put forward in an attempt to identify links between IC and employee engagement viewed in the context of Public Relations. It looks at the concept of organisational culture in a theoretical framework for understanding internal communication processes where employees are regarded as a public or stakeholder group. The literature reviewed was specifically selected for relevance in relation to IC and employee engagement. This study investigates how and why public relations might be best placed in an organisation to advise on and oversee a system of managed strategic communication.

2.1 Public Relations (PR) and internal communication (IC)

Many PR scholars concur that, up to recently, relatively little academic attention has been dedicated to internal communication, even though it has become a growing ‘specialism’ inside the broader field of PR, where employees are regarded as a public or stakeholder group and where “effective communication is seen as a vital component in engaging employees”. In recent years, we are beginning to see a discussion emerge around a “more strategic internal communication role that has broadened the scope and complexity of the discipline” (cited in Tench & Yeomans, 2009, p. 319).

Despite its importance to practice, Forman and Argenti (2005) highlight the considerable gaps in internal communication theory and theorists have called for research on its mandates, scope and focus. Yeomans (2006) observes that “very little attention is paid to internal communications by public relations scholars yet it is viewed as part of an organisation’s strategic communication function” (p. 337).

Communication is one of the most dominant and important activities in organisations (Harris & Nelson, 2008). Fundamentally, relationships grow out of communication, and the functioning and survival of organisations is based on effective relationships among

individuals and groups (Jones et al., 2004). Gunning (2003) clearly sees “internal public relations”, sometimes referred to as “employee communications”, as a discipline which has grown in importance since the mid-1990s and where public relations strives to build and maintain “mutually beneficial relationships between managers and the employees on whom an organisation’s success depends” (p. 334). According to Pilkington (2004), organisations need to understand what employees are thinking and feeling and ensure that there are mechanisms in place for this relationship to happen. Internal communications is best placed to do this, acting in that ‘boundary spanning’ role between employer and employee.

As cited in Tench & Yeomans (2009, p. 318), Strauss and Hoffmann (2000) define internal communication as “the planned use of communication actions to systematically influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of current employees”. When PR professionals talk about internal communications they view employees as being both stakeholders as and as a public.

“Critical to the success of any organization are its employees. CEOs in organizations talk about employees as their ‘number one public’ and they try to create an ‘organizational culture’ that attracts and retains productive workers. This part of public relations is internal relations.” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2005, p. 9).

Gunning (2003) maintains that internal communications “is employee-focused – it deals with one internal public, namely staff. The purpose of internal public relations is to develop, encourage and promote internal communications among employees.” (p. 334). Its purpose is to generate a good flow of communications among all levels of staff. Gunning postulates that, in its absence, “unstructured employee communication, as a general rule is inclined to be emotive rather than factual. The unofficial grapevine, which operates in every organisation, is speedy, often inaccurate and prone to gossip, scandal and rumour” (p. 334). Communicating too little can create a vacuum often resulting in distrust and speculation (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010). As Tench & Yeomans (2009) reminds us that communication happens inside an organisation whether it is managed or not and engaging staff in the ‘bigger picture’ often requires a managed system of communication.

2.2 Organisational internal communication

Internal communication in the organisational context can be a complex and dynamic process. While early models tended to focus on a predominant one-way transmission of messages with little or no room for feedback, the modern approach has shifted to a more dialogue-based two-way approach. This two-way symmetrical approach, better known in public relations as the 'excellence model' is one of four models put forward by Grunig and Hunt and forms the basis for modern PR practice (1984). The other models are the press-agentry, public information and two-way asymmetrical.

In a 2008 article on '*Employee /Organizational Communications*', Berger describes the importance of basic communication processes, networks and channels and the importance of IC, and concludes by presenting his principles for effective communication. Internal communication can occur on an organisational level, group-level or interpersonal. Organisational-level communications concentrates on overarching matters such as the vision and mission of an organisation; its policies, initiatives and even performance. These tend to be formal communications and often follow a cascade approach where leaders at hierarchical levels communicate with their employees. Group-level communications occur in teams, units and employee resource or interest groups. The focus is on the sharing of information and on collaboration, discussion and task coordination, as well as problem solving and consensus building. Interpersonal or face-to-face communication between employees is a primary form of communication, and for years organisations have sought to develop the speaking, writing and presentation skills of leaders, managers and supervisors (D'Aprix, 2006).

Berger extrapolates that formal communication is closely associated with a formal organisational structure and usually flows through officially recognised positions in line with the hierarchical structure of the organisation. Communication is transmitted in one direction and can usually be found in the form of newsletters, reports and magazines, while two-way communication encourages input and feedback from all communicating sides manifesting itself in, for example, forums, discussions and focus groups. In fact, in a study carried out by White, Vanc, & Stafford (2010) it was found that: "meetings, despite being acknowledged as time-consuming, were valued as a channel for feedback and providing face time with top managers" (p. 65).

Over the past 60 years or so, studies that attempted to measure the effectiveness of internal communication and which examined employee perceptions of internal communication flows, often conclude with evidence of employee dissatisfaction with both downward and upward communications (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006). Gunning (2003) affirms that “when you are dealing with internal communications, you are dealing horizontally - employee to employee communications. The purpose is to generate staff interest and develop a pride in the organisation, and to increase employee morale” (p. 335).

As Athal (2013) maintains direct face-to-face or interpersonal communication practices are the most valuable for fostering engagement. Face-to-face is regarded as the richest medium and should be employed internally during times of communicating major changes, addressing crises or resolving conflicts, or even to celebrate accomplishments. Good listening skills are essential among leaders in organisations and should be promoted and developed. Listening skills can reduce errors and misunderstanding and facilitate relationship building. After all, listening is the most used channel of communication and it consumes about half of all our communication time (Harris and Nelson, 2008).

A communication channel can be described as a medium through which messages are transmitted and received. Channels are usually categorised as print, electronic or interpersonal (face-to-face). New media and online technologies mean that electronic channels and especially Internet technologies are becoming increasingly more dominant. These include, amongst others, tools such as email, intranets and portals, blogs, instant messaging systems, wikis and podcasts.

Professional communicators must see themselves as internal experts on communication who serve as facilitators and counselors to executives and managers and provide strategic support for business plans. Communicators must also be organisational experts who possess knowledge of the organisation’s structures, challenges and objectives, along with an understanding of employee issues and needs (Berger, 2008).

Bove’e and Thill (2000) define internal communication as “the exchange of information and ideas within an organization” (p. 7). Cutlip, Center and Broom (2005) introduce the concepts of organisational communication and in particular organisation culture in providing a theoretical framework for understanding the internal

communication/relations processes within an organisation. No organisational relationships are as important as are those with employees (Cutlip et al., 1985). Stein (2006) evaluated the relationships between internal communication and organisation culture, concluding that a symbiotic relationship existed between the two, where communication influenced culture and culture influenced communication.

2.3 Organisational culture

“Organizational culture is the sum total of shared values, symbols, meanings, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that organize and integrate a group of people who work together” (Grunig, Grunig, Dozier, 2002, p 482). This section examines why organisational communication and culture are important concepts for internal relations. According to Cutlip, Center & Broom (2006): “Organisational culture is an important consideration because it has a significant impact on the model of public relations an organization practices and on the internal communications that follow” (p. 225).

Eisenberg and Riley (2001, p. 9) broadly describe two views of organisational culture: the first sees culture as something that can be influenced, shaped and managed to the liking of top management – “corporate culture” as “values or practices that account for an organisation’s success and that can be managed to produce better business outcomes”. The second view sees an organisation as a culture which is made up of subcultures formed from different networks and groups that make up the organisation – “organisational culture” (p. 9).

In their 2005 edition of *Effective Public Relations*, Cutlip, Center and Broom discuss why organisational communication and culture have become important concepts for internal relations providing a theoretical framework for understanding the internal communication processes within an organisation. “Organisations miss out on a sizeable share of their human resource potential because they do not put a high priority on effective, two-way communication – the foundation of management-employee relations and overall job performance” as cited in (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2005, p. 223). An organisation’s vision statement outlines the strategic targets and the overall future objectives of an organisation. Its mission statement helps employees set priorities and goals, so that all members of the organisation are “committed to achieving the mission specified in the statement” (p. 223).

“Senior leaders must be visible and open champions for internal communication. Visibility is the first and most basic form of non-verbal communication for leaders. The communication style of leaders should invite open, on-going and transparent discussion so that people are willing to voice their opinions and suggestions. The actions of leaders at all levels must match their words. This has everything to do with credibility and the extent to which employees will trust, commit to and follow leaders” (Berger, 2008).

Professionals and theorists alike argue that colleagues are an essential resource, perhaps even ambassadors for an organisation. They propose that successful communication with this crucial audience may help to motivate employees and give them a sense of pride in the organisation, thereby enhancing the prestige of the organisation itself. Cutlip et al. (1985) stress that no organisational relationships are as important as are those with employees. However, if they are to be effective, organisations must ensure that a communications culture pervades the entire organisation (Asif and Sargeant, 2000). Stein (2006) examined the relationships between internal communication and organisation culture. She found that a symbiotic relationship existed between the two and that communication influenced culture and vice versa.

There are some factors of excellence theory that can either facilitate or impede the conditions for the creation of a communication culture within organisations. These include for example, a participative culture where employees are empowered, a two-way system of communication and a less formal structure (Grunig, & Grunig, 2006). Sanchez (2006) claims, “how an organization conceives and manages communication does more to tell about its culture than any other single process element” (p. 40).

Seitel (2004) cited a Fortune magazine report in which the top 200 “most admired” companies spent more than half of their communication budgets on internal employee communications. Colvin (2006) tells us that the 100 “best companies” share the view that effective and ongoing two-way communications are the building blocks for employee motivation and organisational success. Rhee (2003) found in a comprehensive case study that employees who have positive relationships (high levels of commitment) with their organisations help develop positive relationships with the organisation’s publics.

Berger (2008) highlights some important factors in employee-public-organisation relationships. They include leaders' communication skills and behaviours, the extent and quality of interpersonal or face-to-face communication, listening skills as well as opportunities for engaging employees in dialogue and the involvement of leaders in PR activities.

In its November 2012 Melbourne Mandate, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management refers to the "communicative organisation" whose character and values DNA consists of three strands: Values, which refers to the set of values the organisation lives by and which guides its decisions and behaviour; Leadership, which is the responsibility of leaders to model the character and values of the organisation and beliefs on how it should operate, through decisions taken and the direction they set; and Culture: the processes, structures, collective behaviour and ways of working that are part of organisational life. These things affect the way people and groups interact with each other internally and are important factors in building a culture of listening and engagement (The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, 2012).

Cork Institute of Technology

2.4 Employees as stakeholders

Internal communication is an organisation's managed communication system where employees are regarded as public or stakeholder group (Tench & Yeomans, 2009). Cornelissen (2008) affirms that employees are crucial stakeholders in the survival of an organisation and highlights the need for organisations to communicate with their employees.

"Employee involvement and consultation has been given added weight through the 2002 European Union (EU) directive affecting employment law in Europe. Employees in Europe have information rights: a right to be informed about a business's economic situation; a right to be informed and consulted about employment prospects; and a right to be informed about decisions that are likely to lead to major changes in their workplace. All this presents a challenging role for internal communication management" (Tench & Yeomans, 2009, p. 320).

Freeman's (1984, p. 25) stakeholder approach defines stakeholders as: "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives."

Kennan and Hazleton (2006) refer to 'identification' or 'connectedness' amongst employees when examining IC, emphasising trust between management and employees as the necessary building blocks of internal relationship building. They affirm that employees are key stakeholders whose behavior and communication contribute to the corporate identity. Grunig asserts that if a system of two-way symmetrical communications is adopted then "open, trusting, and credible relationships with strategic employee constituencies [groups] will follow" (Grunig 1992, p. 559).

Dolphin (2005) looked at that the role of internal communications within the total communications strategy in UK firms and on the management of relationships between the organisation and its employees: the internal audience. His examination arrives at the conclusion that the organisational role of internal communications is to build and nourish employee relations. Few would disagree with Harris and Nelson's (2008) assertion that internal communication is: – An essential aspect of organizational change – "The key variable in almost all change efforts, diversity initiatives and motivation" (Harris and Nelson, p. 95). IC is about establishing trust, providing timely and reliable information and thereby contributing to general motivation, particularly in times of change and stress. Dolphin (2005) clearly regards internal communication with the internal audience as contributing significantly to a fully developed corporate communications strategy. It can be added though that: "In larger, more complex organisations, it is unlikely that employees will enjoy a personal relationship with the owner, managing director or person with overall responsibility for the running of the organisation. Yet people want to feel part of a 'human' rather than remote organisation" (Demos, Orange, MORI, 2004).

Communication during times of change and uncertainty helps employees cope with uncertainty and adjust to change. "Often, if employees know that a decision is still under consideration, their anxiety will be less than if they know nothing at all. This makes employees feel more connected to the organisation" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2009). Athal (2013) reports that a study on internal communications practices carried out by the International Association of Business Communication (IABC) reported that "direct face-to-face employee communication practices are most valuable for building

employee engagement and increasing productivity”. The research also inferred that the “power of positive productive relationships in the workplace” and “trust built from a foundation of effective communication practices” are critical to the success of organisations. Indeed Izzo and Withers (2000) and (D’Aprix, 2006) found that organisations with engaged employees were more productive than those organisations where employees were not engaged and found that engaged employees contribute discretionary efforts, which they otherwise may not (D’Aprix, 2006). Organisations need to develop the ability to communicate effectively by engaging with employees because internal communications happens continuously within organisations at all times (Nordin, Halib, & Ghazali, 2011).

2.5 Employee engagement

MacLeod and Clarke (2009) as cited by Ruck (2011) in their review of internal communications found some 50 definitions of employee engagement. As Ruck points out, this is hardly surprising when you consider that Edwards (2009, p. 4) reports that 472 different definitions of public relations were found between 1900 and 1976.

MacLeod and Clarke (2009, p. 9) arrive at their definition of employee engagement “as a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation’s goals and values and, are able at the same time, enhance their own sense of well-being”. Indeed, Ruck adds that it is worth noting that this definition is very close to what PR professionals understand to be the remit of internal communication.

From its extensive research carried out in 2004, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), one of the leading independent centres for research and evidence-based consultancy in employment and human resource policy and practice in the United Kingdom, defines engagement as: “A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee” (Robinson D, Perryman S, Hayday S, 2004); where “organisations must work to engage the employee, who in turn has a choice about the level of engagement to offer the employer” (D’Aprix, 2006).

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), in its 2010 report ‘*Creating an engaged workforce*’, considered some of the organisational issues that

contributed to, or inhibit, employee engagement. The report demonstrated the links between the way people are managed and employee attitudes and performance. The report findings concluded that, when employees were well-informed and had opportunities to feed their views upwards, a culture of employee engagement prevailed.

According to D'Aprix (2006), engaging employees more fully in their work is the most critical issue confronting organisations and he highlights the roles that professional communicators can play in helping build relationships; and where management engages in dialogue with employees rather than communicating at them. As Quirke (2008) surmises "engagement is the end to which internal communications is the means" (Tench & Yeomans, 2009, p. 319).

Izzo and Withers (2000) found that organisations with engaged and committed employees were more productive than those organisations where employees were not engaged. In fact, it can be conjectured that engaged employees contribute discretionary efforts, which they otherwise may not (D'Aprix, 2006). It is argued that employees have basic communication needs. These needs have been described as ranging from general information about the organisation to more specific information that allows employees to carry out their functions effectively. Other factors were: "clarity about their roles within the organisation, a clear company/organisation vision, information on workplace practices, opportunities to be involved and consulted, feedback on performance, access to training and development and access to communication channels" (Tench & Yeomans, 2009, p. 326).

Communication helps individuals and groups coordinate activities to achieve goals as well as playing an important role in the acculturation, decision-making, problem-solving and change-management processes. Communication can help motivate, build trust, create shared identity and spur engagement (Rajhans, 2012).

As defined by the IES in the UK, the characteristics of an engaged employee is one that believes in the organisation, works to make it better, understands business context and the 'bigger picture', is respectful to colleagues and generally is willing to 'go the extra mile'. As cited in (Athar, 2013), Shaffer (2007) agrees with this definition of engagement : as "a condition that exists when people are willing to go the extra mile to make their organisation successful because, in part, they passionately believe in the values and purpose of the organisation". One of the main findings from research is that

while feeling valued and involved is important, satisfaction with communication is a key driver. Encouraging employee participation in decision making builds loyalty and commitment in an organisation which, in turn, improves the overall climate for communication. It could also be maintained that participative decision making very often improves the quality of decisions. The recognition and celebration of achievements at all levels within an organisation helps build shared values and identity creating a distinctive organisational culture (Berger, 2008).

2.6 Senior management support for internal communications

Ruck (2013) observes that employees expect senior managers to tell them about strategic plans, especially if it affects their job security. He speculates that: “if you give employees the opportunity to express their views it could provide a tidal wave of interesting ideas. Senior managers can’t talk to everyone, maybe not if it is a really big organisation, but they could talk to a lot more than they do” (Ruck, Exploring Internal Communication, 2013).

Leadership in internal communication is pro-actively putting dialogue with employees on the strategic agenda. It is internal communication activism (Gregory, 2013). “An organization’s most important relationships are those with employees at all levels. The terms *internal publics* and *employee publics* refer to both managers and the people being supervised. These publics represent an organization’s greatest asset – its people” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006, p. 223).

IC is about establishing trust, providing timely and reliable information, and thereby contributing to general motivation, particularly in times of change and stress. Dolphin (2005) emphasised the role internal communication plays, identifying management of relationships between the organisation and its employees, the internal audience, as a significant contributing factor in the development of effective corporate communications strategy and employee relations. There is a strong correlation between supportive interpersonal communication from senior management and employees developing trusting attitudes (Jo and Shim, 2005).

Organisations must put a high priority on effective, two-way communication which is the foundation of management-employee relations and the basis for a participative organisational culture which seeks input from employees and other stakeholder groups and which allows for thorough analysis of decisions and policies. This type of culture is organic and allows those at lower levels within the organisation to have a voice in management decision making (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2005).

2.7 Internal communications measurement

According to Berger (2008), there is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates how effective internal communication helps increase employee job satisfaction and morale. It can also contribute to an increase in productivity, commitment, trust and learning; and, can help improve the overall communication climate within an organisation. Measurement is a key ingredient to successful communication in any organisation. Although public relations and communications professionals agree that measurement is crucial there are few guidelines or standards with regards to how to measure. Consequently, many measurement practices are ultimately tactical in nature as opposed to being strategic and ongoing (Williams, 2008).

Gay et al. (2005) do suggest a number of approaches professional communicators use to measure the return on investment of their work such as staff surveys and focus groups for specific communication projects. Berger (2008) observes that culture-changing initiatives and major change can be measured by a reduced cycle time during which the change takes place. Noble (1994), as cited in (Watson & Noble, 2007, p. 21) points out that: "evaluation as a means of assessing communications effectiveness is nothing new". It is about evaluating outcomes of programmes and is research-based; evaluation is proactive and forward looking and justifies public relations programmes (Watson & Noble, 2007).

Before embarking on a measurement and/or evaluation strategy, what needs to be measured must first be established. These may be the channels of communication being measured to see if they are working, the content employees are receiving, and determining if the information they are getting is what they want and need. How timely, relevant, honest, accurate and consistent the information/communication is, and if the tone of right voice for the message and for the intended audience is being used.

The *CIPR (November, 2012) Inside Measurement Panel* developed a 'Measurement Matrix' that examines questions inside an organisation, such as: responses provided to comments and suggestions, levels at which people get involved in change management and contribute to decision-making and whether communication can help increase engagement. The matrix attempts to measure employees' trust in the organisation and if employees identify with organisational strategy and values. The approach is fundamentally research based. It includes content analysis and interviews and focus groups as ways of measuring effectiveness of IC channels and content and surveys to evaluate employee sentiment and engagement (see Appendix D).

The World Public Relations Forum (2012) regards the ability to develop metrics to evaluate and improve the contribution of relationships and communication strategies to the achievement of organisational goals as key to measuring the overall effectiveness of professional internal communications.

2.8 Professional internal communications

Kennan & Hazleton (2006) align internal communications with specialist public relations, suggesting that internal communication has long been a struggle between the needs and desires of managers and those of employees. They see the role of professional internal communicators as having evolved from the role of the technician who carried out the directives of executives, and as information producers and distributors, into a function of advocacy and advisory in strategic decision making. The responsibility attached to the modern internal professional communicator is one of building relationships and programs which foster trust, participation and empowerment. They help their organisations create a strong foundation for success in a dynamic world through the building of cultures for communication that are conducive to open, transparent, authentic two-way communications and conversations.

Expounding the principles of professional internal communications, Berger (2008), believes that for professional communicators to provide strategic support to management, it is imperative that they must see themselves as internal experts on communication equipped with "superior knowledge of the organisation's structures, challenges and objectives" and an understanding of employee issues. Gunning (2003)

suggests that for successful and effective “structured employee/internal communications” a “skilled communications manager” (p. 335) is needed at board level and argues that the primary form of communication should be done face-to-face, stressing the importance of interpersonal communication. Dolphin (2005) investigates whether the corporate communicator has become a strategic information manager, who operates at the strategic level while trying to determine whether a separate functional area is charged with managing internal communications.

The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, which is the confederation of the world’s major PR and communication management associations and institutions, representing 160,000 practitioners and academics around the world, describes the mandate of public relations: “to build and sustain strong relationships between an organisation and its publics”. In its 2010 Stockholm Accord it affirms the value of public relations and communications professionals in management, governance, sustainability, and internal and external communication. At the 2012 World Public Relations Forum in Melbourne, Australia it presented a new mandate for public relations and communication management. This new mandate challenges public relations and communication professionals to build organisation cultures of listening and engagement; whilst helping an organisation understand its character and responsibility in order to have meaningful engagement with its stakeholders, and by recommending the most appropriate communication channels, content and tone. The ability to develop accountability metrics to evaluate and improve the contribution of relationships and communication strategies to the achievement of organisational goals is key to measuring the overall effectiveness of professional internal communications.

Professional communicators must see themselves as internal experts on communication who serve as facilitators and advisors to managers and provide strategic advice. Internal communicators must possess expert knowledge of the organisation, its practices and structures, as well as its challenges and objectives, and above all an understanding of employee issues and needs (Berger, 2008). “The coordination and mediation necessary for dealing with employees today put the public relations staff, with its communication knowledge and skills, square in the middle of managing internal relationships” (Cutlip, S; Center, A; Broom, G, 2006).

2.9 Conclusion

Despite its recognised importance to an organisation's strategic communication function, and as Yeomans (2006) points out, up to now little attention had been paid to the academic study of internal employee communications. Indeed, much of the literature available is written from a consultancy perspective rather than an academic one (Pilkington, 2010). Whilst early models leaned towards a predominant one-way transmission of communication we are now witnessing a paradigm shift from what Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006) describe as the downward and upward model, to what Colvin (2006), Grunig (1992) and Ruck (2010) refer to as a horizontal, two-way system of communication and engagement. And, as Asif and Sargeant (2000) infer, a communications culture must pervade the organization for effective communication to take place.

There is growing evidence that organisations perform more efficiently and function more effectively when employees are consulted and engaged. The IES in the UK defines engagement as “a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee”. This, according to Tench & Yeomans presents a challenging role for internal communications management. Kennan & Hazleton (2006) refer call it “specialist public relations”. The Global Alliance for Public Relations, in its 2012 Melbourne Mandate, makes reference to the “communicative organization” underlining “how people and groups interact with each other internally as important factors in building a culture of listening and engagement”. The importance of interpersonal or face-to-face communication is paramount when we speak of employee engagement. There is a strong relationship between supportive interpersonal communication from management and employees developing trusting attitudes (Jo and Shim, 2005). As cited in (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010), according to Daft & Lengel (1986) interpersonal communication is a richer communication vehicle.

Even though email is regarded as an efficient mechanism for information exchange, studies have found that “the preference is for face-to-face, interpersonal and dialogic interactions” (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010). These central topics form the basis for the research carried out in this study. The methods of research and analysis that were employed to investigate these topics are outlined in Chapter Three (Research Methods).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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3.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the methods used in this study in order to try to answer the question: Can strategic planned internal communications from a public relations perspective drive employee engagement in the organisational context of Cork Institute of Technology? It analyses and explains why qualitative research methods were selected to gather data and how focus groups and interviews were carried out, as well as detailing the techniques used in the data analysis.

Any possible ethical issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and ethical standards that may be expected to arise out of conducting a study of this nature are addressed. Trusted research methods and techniques were adopted which helped form the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. Academic honesty and integrity, informed consent and confidentiality, as well as acknowledgement of all sources were adhered to throughout the research.

A qualitative case study approach was selected as the method of investigation. The aim is to compare, contrast, analyse and assess employees, in the organizational context of a third level higher educational institution (Cork Institute of Technology), in order to ascertain whether or not the hypothesis holds true; that strategic internal/employee communications can effectively drive employee engagement within the organisation.

According to Yin (1984) case studies can be defined as empirical inquiries that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Robson (2011) describes a case study as research design that focuses on studying single or small number of cases, for example, an institution and typically uses more than one method of data collection.

For the purpose of this study, data was collected from two sample groups within the organisation by means of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. By examining both groups, within-group analysis and cross-case analysis was carried out on the data collected which is presented later in this thesis in narrative form. Reliability and

validity were addressed through the process of triangulation. Triangulation is defined as “a multi-method approach, using different methods in order to focus on the research topic from different viewpoints and to produce a multi-faceted set of data” (University of Southern California, 2012)”. Reliability refers to the ability to reproduce the same results each time that a particular research method is used, whilst validity centres around whether or not the data reflects the reality and truth. The researcher must bear in mind the notion of *reflexivity* regarding his own self-awareness and self-reflection in relation to any potential biases and predispositions in the organisational context, as these may possibly affect the research processes and conclusions.

Follow-up interviews were carried out with purposely selected participants, one from each group. This allows for the the validity of the study to be increased and strengthened through the process of data triangulation. Thurmond (2001, p. 254), as cited in Olsen (2004), describes the benefits of triangulation as “increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem”.

3.1 Qualitative research

It is generally accepted that there are two approaches to social research – qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research tends to be associated with words or narrative and description as the unit of analysis while with quantitative research the focus is typically on numbers as the unit of analysis. However, in practice, these assumptions often associated with the two approaches can overlap and both approaches may be combined (Denscombe, 2003).

Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand social phenomena within the context of the participants' perspectives and experiences and the methods used are more flexible, responsive, and open to contextual interpretation than in quantitative research. Quantitative methods typically involve the use of inventories and questionnaires that result in numerical data to draw conclusions (Merriam, 2002).

Qualitative approaches can record participants' feelings, thoughts, experiences and perceptions about a question as opposed to measurements or statistics more associated

with quantitative research methods. The concern is to study naturally occurring phenomena without interference, applying a design that is flexible and where the researcher may interact with the participants.

3.2 Case study as a research strategy

As previously mentioned, the principle research strategy chosen was the qualitative case study approach. Case studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1984); and focus on studying single or small number of cases, for example an institution, and typically use multiple methods of data collection (Robson, 2011). The focus tends to be on one instance, or at most a few, of a particular phenomenon providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes that occur within that actual instance (Denscombe, 2003).

Case studies are generally used as in-depth analysis of a specific research problem rather than a sweeping statistical survey and can be utilised to narrow down broad fields of research into manageable and easily researchable samples. The approach is very useful. It allows complex issues to be interpreted and understood through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships, through the application of a variety of methodologies and sources. As Denscombe (2003) points out, the 'case' is something that already exists and is not artificial; therefore it has a natural setting. Yin (1994) agrees, stressing that the case is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Case studies can add weight to existing knowledge and research, as well as extending and expanding upon existing theories.

Limitations to the methods used must be taken into account when evaluating the overall findings of a study using the case study approach, for example, when the use of a single or small sample offers little basis for generalisation of findings to a wider population of people, places, or things. As well as this, the researcher's interpretation of the findings could potentially be biased owing to the intense exposure to the case being studied (University of Southern California, 2012).

Denscombe (2003) argues that the participants being researched might behave differently from normal, conscious of the fact that they are in some way being observed or under the microscope.

The case study, however, was specifically selected as the research method for this study. Case studies allow for depth of study through multiple sources rather than just one research method, focusing on the particular rather than the general and relationships and processes in a natural setting, as opposed to outcomes and end-products.

3.3 Research methods and techniques

In order to address the main questions the research has set out, data needs to be collected. Reflective and exploratory qualitative research methods are designed and employed (Davies, 2007). For the most part, words (text) or narrative effectively form the most part of qualitative data and are, according to Robson (1995) “a speciality of humans and their organizations” and therefore, to arrive at trustworthy answers, the analysis has to treat the evidence in a fair and unbiased way.

The population consists of the employees of the main Bishopstown campus of Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), a third level institution in the southwest of Ireland. The Bishopstown campus consists of around 700 fulltime and 150 part-time employees ranging from academic staff to administrative, technical and support. The researcher selected a purposive sample, “one that is selected based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study” (About.com, 2012). Two research methods were employed in order to collect primary research data - focus group and semi-structured interviews.

3.3.1 Research method 1: Focus groups

The first research method used was the focus group. Focus groups are easy-to-set-up small roundtable discussion groups usually charged with examining specific topics or problems. When properly designed and executed they can produce a lot of useful and rich qualitative information. Focus groups are guided by moderators who keep the discussion flowing and to collect and report the results (Education.com). Focus groups can, if managed effectively, provide valuable insights into how people think and provide a richer understanding of the phenomena being studied. Focus groups can be a

useful way to explore attitudes on non-sensitive topics and can elicit contributions from people who possibly may be reluctant to offer up their real opinions in a different setting (Denscombe, 2003).

Another benefit of focus groups is that they are relatively inexpensive to run when compared to other research methods, for example, interviewing several research participants who may be located in other cities or locations. Focus groups are usually held at one location and could be described as group interviews with typically around six to eight participants. Group interaction and non-verbal communication are also primary benefits that focus groups afford the researcher.

Samples were purposely selected from the population - Cork Institute of Technology. One group consisted of eight employees in management roles and the other group consisted of seven employees in non-management positions. In order to achieve balance of representation, gender, age and diversification of job roles formed a crucial part of the rationale when deciding who the potential group participants would be.

The focus of the research centered on four themed questions. The first topic surrounded internal communications where the researcher attempted to invite discussion about the subject in relation to the most commonly used methods and tools of communication utilised within the organisation, for example staff meetings, email, newsletters, memos, intranet, social media, interpersonal communication et cetera. It sought to find out how employees received and shared information.

The second theme addressed organisational culture with the focus on exploring the communication culture that might exist within the institute. It attempted to ascertain the type of sentiment toward the organisation and whether or not IC was a factor in how an organisational culture may have evolved. It asked if employees felt that they were well-informed about changes in the organisation and whether or not management could do more to keep employees more informed and up-to-date on important events such as change management.

Note: This question was changed for the management focus group to ask if management felt they had a direct influence in the direction and future changes of the organisation.

The third discussion attempted to examine the links between IC and employee engagement. The question tried to gauge if employees felt that they were valued by the organisation, and if there was a positive attitude amongst employees toward the organisation. It explores the so-called enablers of engagement as described by the Institute of Employment Studies in the United Kingdom, namely: strategic communication, feedback, research and manager and team communication. The drivers of engagement; such as, involvement in decision making, employee voice and value of contributions along with opportunities for employees to develop are examined (D Robinson, S Perryman, S Hayday, 2004).

The final topical question was directed towards finding possible ways of improving internal communications within the organisation and at same time attempting to identify if responsibility for IC lies with any specific function.

3.3.2 Conducting the focus groups

Two focus groups were designed and organised to take place on site at the Bishopstown campus in Cork city. Participants were first asked informally, either in person or over the telephone, if they would be interested in taking part in the study. These potential participants were then subsequently formally invited by letter attached to an email which described the main themes that would be discussed at the focus group, along with the logistical arrangements such as date, location, time and so on.

A quiet comfortable room was arranged at a central location on the campus that could accommodate six to eight people. A pre-prepared agenda including a list of issues to be discussed was formulated and distributed amongst the group. Details regarding the format of the session were provided at the outset and issues surrounding consent and confidentiality were explained. Each participant was asked to read and sign an informed consent form that was counter-signed by the researcher.

Some guiding principles that helped establish some norms around the management of the group were handed out to all participants. These included for instance, that only one person speaks at a time and that an effort should be made to avoid side conversations at all times. The importance of hearing everyone's ideas and opinions was stressed bearing

in mind that were no right or wrong answers to questions, just ideas, experiences and opinions, which are all valuable. It was also highlighted to participants that it would be essential to listen to all sides of an issue, both the positive and the negative, and for women's and men's ideas to be equally represented and respected (Robson, A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers, 1995).

Participants were asked to introduce themselves and name tags were provided. People were invited to speak in turn with questions asked being open and neutral (Webcredible, 2012). Potential problems that could arise, for example where one participant may try to dominate the session would be addressed. Disagreements and debates should be managed carefully with the moderator/researcher remaining consistently neutral.

At the start of the sessions a Microsoft Power (MS) Point presentation was given by the researcher that provided the background information in relation to the thesis topic, as well as the objectives of the research. Four main themes which would form the basis for subsequent discussions are outlined in the presentation.

Participants were asked to think about an issue for a couple of minutes and write down their responses. In addition to taking notes, group sessions were recorded so that they could be transcribed afterwards for analysis. Participants were encouraged to expand or build upon responses. Responses were listened to one by one and the main themes that emerged were noted on a whiteboard and discussed. This provided the researcher with rich qualitative data for analysis.

3.3.3 Research method 2: Semi-structured individual interviews

The second research method employed was the one-to-one semi-structured interview. Robson (2011) describes interviews as 'conversation with a purpose'. The decision to conduct interviews was taken having listened back to the recordings of the focus group sessions and where it was felt that certain topics that had emerged from the discussions could be expanded upon. Interviews can provide the researcher with valuable information that other types of data collection, such as questionnaires or surveys, may not produce. This is primarily because the interview affords the researcher (interviewer) the space to elaborate on responses where appropriate, taking into account observations

on non-verbal signs of communication such as gestures, body language, hesitations, pauses and intonation (Kane and O'Reilly-De Brún, 2001).

Ethically, the interviewer should, at all times, remain completely neutral and refrain from engaging in any type of behaviour that might influence respondents' answers. With semi-structured interviews, although the interviewer has a clear list of questions, answers are open-ended and there is more of an emphasis on the interviewee elaborating on points of interest. The interviewer can be flexible with the order in which the topics for discussion are considered. This approach will in most cases lead to in-depth investigations, especially where personal accounts of experiences and feelings are explored (Denscombe, 2003).

It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that interviewees are fully aware of the interview process, the research objectives and why the research is being conducted. An informed consent form, similar to the one used when conducting the focus groups, was used and signed by both the participant and the interviewer.

In the particular instance where a case study is being carried out within an organisation where both the interviewer and interviewee are employees of the organisation, anonymity and confidentiality are absolutely crucial. The identity of the participant/interviewee must be kept secure in order to avoid any potential third party interpretation of proceedings. This is also relevant with regards the recording of the interview and any notes taken that might reveal identities. Consent to be recorded is sought with an agreement between both parties that anything that is said off the record should stay off the record. This is important as it establishes a certain level of trust so that the interview may proceed.

With semi-structured interviews there is a pre-determined focus on the side of the interviewer. A clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered are set out (Denscombe, 2003). The flexibility to change, or even modify the order and composition of questions depending on how the 'conversation' is developing is afforded. When this occurs it could be argued that the interview has transformed into a sort of unstructured interview (Robson, 2011). Unstructured interviews usually follow the format of the interviewer introducing a topic and where the interviewee follows

his/her own train of thought into developing the idea from a personal perspective. This naturally can lead to the emergence of unexpected lines of enquiry during the interview (Grix, 2010).

The researcher carried out open-ended interviews with two purposely selected employees, one from the management group and the other from the non-management group. As stated earlier, interviews are beneficial not least because the questioning can be adapted to the answers of the person being interviewed (Purdue Online Writing Lab, 2012).

A check list was used to guide interviewees during the process, thus ensuring uniformity and consistency of the data collected. Questions were structured around the main research themes defined earlier in the section about focus groups. This helped to keep the focus on the central hypothesis being investigated while at the same time addressing the validity of the research methodology. An interview guide to follow during interviews was drawn up which added structure to the process, as well as helping meet repeatability criteria. The interviews were recorded using two electronic devices, a zoom recorder and the Voice Recorder App on a Samsung smart phone which helped to make sure that complete and accurate transcripts were produced.

3.4 Ethical issues

As the participants in the study were employees of CIT, anonymity and confidentiality had to be respected at all times. Identities were removed from the data using pseudonyms to break the link between data and identifiable individuals (Robson, 2011). All personal information such as name, job title, department and gender are kept confidential and safe and will not be shared with anyone except with the research supervisors, and only where appropriate. The data gathered is only used for the purposes originally specified and will not be kept any longer than necessary.

Individuals must agree to take part in the research voluntarily and are assured that there are no consequences for refusing to answer any questions. All participants are informed regarding the purpose of the research and why they are being asked to participate, as well as how much time input will be sought from each participant. An informed consent

form is signed before the research begins both by the participant and the researcher. The researcher must act solely in the capacity of a researcher, fulfilling the role to the highest ethical standards respecting the rights and dignity of all participants.

3.5 Analysing and evaluating data

In order to handle the expected large quantity of data a MS Excel workbook template was created. This allowed for the storage, cataloguing, as well as the sorting and retrieval of the data for analysis. Notes collected during the focus group sessions and interviews were also documented in a systematic way following the structure of the themed questions. This allowed for the data to be “sorted in many different ways to expose or create new insights and will deliberately look for conflicting data to disconfirm the analysis” (Soy, 1997). Data was tabulated and recombined with cross-checks of facts conducted to address the original propositions of the research study. By use of the MS Excel spreadsheets, the data is readily available for subsequent reinterpretation and analysis.

As well as having the audio recordings which supply the research with direct quotations and statements, note taking can be used to record feelings and intuitive hunches, as well as recording personal testimonies and illustrations. They may warn of impending bias because of the detailed exposure of the client to special attention, or give an early signal that a pattern is emerging (Robson, 2011).

The two sample groups were treated as individual case studies with each case conclusions contributing to the whole study. This allowed the researcher to draw upon data that originated from two samples yet representative of a larger sample and a smaller sample. Within-case analysis was the first analysis technique employed on the data. Each group’s response data was treated as a separate case. This allows unique patterns within the data to be identified. Responses were categorised and the data examined for within-group similarities and differences. Cross-case analysis followed where both cases were examined, categorising the similarities, the patterns and differences in the research data.

Reliability and validity were determined by the use of multiple sources of information and through the process of triangulation. **Triangulation**, defined as: “a multi-method or pluralistic approach, using different methods in order to focus on the research topic from different viewpoints and to produce a multi-faceted set of data” (University of Southern California, 2012), is used to check the validity of findings from any one method”.

Data triangulation involves using different *sources* of information in order to increase the validity of a study. Validity, in qualitative research, refers to whether the findings of a study are true and certain, in the sense that research findings accurately reflect the situation, and that research findings are supported by the evidence. Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2012). Patton (2002) cautions that it is a common misconception that the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches. In fact, such inconsistencies may be likely given the relative strengths of different approaches. In Patton’s opinion, such inconsistencies should not be seen as weakening the evidence, but should be viewed as an opportunity to unearth more profound meaning in the data.

To summarise, triangulation allowed the results from focus groups and interviews to be compared in order to see if similar results or patterns were emerging, and if so, whether or not the conclusions from each of the methods were the same. Should this be the case, then we can say that validity has been established.

3.6 Advantages of ‘triangulation’

The benefits of triangulation include: “increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem” (Thurmond, 2001, p. 254). These benefits largely result from the diversity and quantity of data that can be used for analysis. Therefore, it can be concluded that by adopting interviews as well as focus groups as methods of primary research, depth was added to the results that would not have been possible using a single-strategy study, thereby also increasing the validity and utility of the findings. Triangulation is a useful

tool to use in qualitative research and when applied can deepen the researcher's understanding of the issues being investigated, as well as maximizing confidence in the findings of the study.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explained why a qualitative case study approach – an empirical inquiry that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1984) - was preferred in order to address the research questions put forward in this study: that strategic internal/employee communications can effectively drive employee engagement within the organisational context of Cork Institute of Technology.

Qualitative research methods were employed through conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews. These methods tend to be more flexible, responsive, and open to contextual interpretation than in quantitative research methods. Qualitative approaches can record participants' feelings, thoughts, experiences and perceptions about a question as opposed to measurements or statistics more associated with quantitative research methods. The techniques used in the subsequent analysis of the data collected have been outlined and the results will be presented in narrative form in chapters four, five and six. It has explained how reliability and validity were determined by the use of multiple sources of information and through the process of data triangulation.

This chapter has also addressed any potential ethical issues that may have arisen when research of this nature is carried out, such as academic honesty and integrity as well as the safeguarding and acknowledgement of all sources referenced or employed during the course of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

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4.0 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to present the findings of the primary research carried out under the themed headings described in chapters two and three. Qualitative research data analysis tends to be a continuous and iterative process where the researcher reflects on the data in order to produce findings. Using CIT as a case study, the purpose of the study is to examine how internal communications might contribute to fostering a culture of listening and engagement in a large third level educational institution.

The outcomes of the findings which were gathered through the execution of focus groups and interviews, methods which are qualitative in nature, are presented in narrative form throughout the chapter. As data may be of a sensitive nature, due regard to confidentiality and anonymity is addressed at all times with the identity of participants removed. As previously pointed out, all personal information such as name, job title, department and gender are removed from the data as they are confidential. Such details are not to be disclosed to anyone except the research supervisors and only where necessary.

4.1 Internal Communications (IC) within the organisation

The objective of this question concentrated on learning about the most frequently used methods and tools, for example: email, staff meetings, telephone, newsletters, memos, intranet, social media, and interpersonal or face-to-face communication, that employees in CIT used to communicate with one another in order to carry out their jobs. In other words, how do employees transmit, receive or share information in the workplace (the Bishopstown campus of CIT).

There was a unanimous consensus among all participants that there was a disproportionate reliance on electronic mail (email) as the main communication tool utilised by employees within the institute. It was agreed by both focus groups that it “probably constituted around 80 per cent of all communication” between staff on

campus. Email was described as “not being the right medium” for communicating certain types of messages, for example announcements of major strategic significance, as “the importance of a message, when you take out tone, body language and so on, it is said that you are left with about seven per cent of the message”. Another participant pointed out that “there is no common understanding what email is for”. Another concern was that it (email) could be “seen as abrupt, for example, if you are in a hurry, messages and tone may be misconstrued”.

Both groups repeatedly suggested that staff should have guidance on the proper use of email and when it was appropriate to use, and when not to use it. There are circumstances and situations when the “dependence on...I sent you an email” is not sufficient. “We don’t have a common strategy. We have all the tools and facilities but no guidelines as to what is appropriate and when or how best to use them. What is CIT’s approach to internal communication? ”. This question was posed by participants on several occasions during the course of the focus groups.

A second way in which communication happened was via the telephone, and increasingly more often these days the use of mobile phones for reasons of convenience and speed. “I am surprised by the amount of communication that is done by mobile phone, I do not have an issue with it, maybe it is the department I am in, but there is a preference for the phone over email for example”.

However, despite the dominance of email, it started to emerge early on during the research that the preferred method of communication amongst employees leaned towards interpersonal or face-to-face communication; and it was generally agreed that this included meetings, both formal staff meetings and informal staff room conversations. “People do prefer face-to-face communication and feel more valued, the suggestion of an open forum where employees could air their views is ‘a good idea’. People would feel more valued. You can’t beat face-to-face”.

Other prevalent forms of communicating that were noted from the discussions were the use of letters, both formal and informal, and the possible emergence of social media tools as a means to communicate internally - most notably Twitter and LinkedIn - were mentioned as new ways of interacting with colleagues.

In terms of everyday communication, it was found that informal meetings were used to discuss work related matters and were commonplace. This was especially true in the case of the management group who revealed that a considerable deal happens informally: “we have regular coffee and a lot happens informally. Some people say that we don’t have enough meetings”.

There were participants in both the management and non-management groups who believed that interpersonal relationships were diminishing throughout the organisation, and as one participant remarked: “there was a time when you would know 90 per cent of the people working here, that’s no longer the case. People don’t even meet each other”. Another participant qualified this by adding that “even though we (employees) are essentially “still social animals, there is a lack of human interaction because of physical distances”.

4.2 Organisation culture and change management

This particular theme focused on investigating whether employees felt that an organisational culture might exist in Cork Institute of Technology. “Organizational culture is the sum total of shared values, symbols, meanings, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that organize and integrate a group of people who work together” (Grunig, Larissa A., Grunig, James E., Dozier, David M., 2002, p 482). The central question attempted to gauge the feelings amongst participants to see if they considered that as employees they were well-informed about strategic changes in the organisation? Could management do more to keep employees more informed and up-to-date? And, did managers feel that they had an input or a voice into the direction of the organisation?

It was generally agreed by all group members that email pervades as the overarching mechanism that employees used to communicate. In particular, and in line with this culture of email as the most commonly used channel, it was found that top management relied on it to communicate with staff and this was seen as “a flat way of making announcements, whether they are announcements regarding achievements or communications regarding change.” This was regarded by several participants as a “failure in the communication mechanism that leads to poor attitudes amongst employees”. There was even a call for top management “to be more open”.

There was a comparison made with how public sector organisations may differ from private sector organisations when organisational culture was discussed. Several participants had experience of working in both the private and public sectors and there was a general feeling that “things are run entirely different in the private sector where profit is the bottom line, in which case there has to be engagement (between management and staff) or it (the business or the operation) doesn't function properly.”

Participants identified physical distances; the way the institute was divided into several different locations or campuses, each with multiple departments and sections, as a possible factor that had contributed to the development of a “culture of staying away from each other rather than one of coming together” and engagement.

4.3 Communicating change

A major issue amongst employees at present is the planned merger with another institute of technology (IT Tralee). The Munster Technological University (MTU) designation is a large-scale strategic change that poses considerable challenges to employees and management alike. It is a move that poses potential threats to employee stability, satisfaction and morale. When the issue of communicating change was addressed the general feeling was that major announcements, such as those that have the potential to affect a significant impact on the majority of employees, that it was surprising that “so little communication is taking place on the matter”. This had led to “significant confusion”. And, when communications were received they tended to be transmitted in the form of emails and as “one-way announcements”. These announcements (emails) generally “only happened once or twice a year” and it was felt that emails “lacked personal touch”.

It was highlighted that “misinformation and rumours take over when there is no clear communication on strategically important matters” for example, the MTU designation. “It is not often that we get good communication from the top down”. There was consensus that, at a strategic level, there was considerable uncertainty surrounding “the direction of the college, and the ambitions of the institute” and that more communication was needed by employees on such proceedings.

A member of the management group drew attention to the fact that:

“People ask questions and there are not enough answers coming back. Even if they (top management) have no answers it would be better to just tell people (that they have no answers). Rumours start and it is all confusion because of lack of proper communication and consultation”.

Another participant from management remarked that: “we are senior managers and we have no information to talk with our staff with” while another added that “the problem, we all feel is there has been no communication about this!” Whilst it was acknowledged that: “change can happen very quickly, without much staff involvement and, it may have gotten us where we are today. However, it hasn’t been a process of engagement”. The feeling among managers was that “it’s a good idea to consult” as “none of us (management) have been involved”.

The need for guidelines on communication was reasserted:

“Definitely it is right that we have guidelines how we communicate. There is also a gap around what we communicate. We are getting questions from our staff around the MTU for example but none of us can really answer. If there was some mechanism to start feeding information out for example, a cascading scenario, this would be better than ‘communicating the wrong stuff’, which is worse than not communicating at all”.

It was felt that when top management communicate change that there had to be face-to-face engagement so that questions could be answered regarding the changes in a two-way dialogic conversation. One way that was identified to do this was that Heads of School could be informed. This would then allow them to engage with their staff so that the information can cascade down and at the same time encourage feedback that could be directed back up.

4.4 Assessing employee engagement

The question here is central to the study. It attempts to find out if employees have a positive attitude toward the organisation and how employees view the organisation, how they feel about their jobs, as well as if how they go about performing their roles is in some way connected to internal communications. Participants were also asked if they thought their opinions at work counted and if they had opportunities to learn and grow.

Amongst the management group, the initial signals tended to be quite negative with the feeling that “in the last ten years the attitude is less positive than it used to be” with participants saying that “staff are not involved” (in the strategic decision making processes) and that there had been a corrosion of a “collegial approach” in the last number of years. The feeling that there has been a “lessening of morale” was reiterated.

There were mixed feelings regarding whether or not CIT was regarded as a good environment in which to work. Amongst some participants there was a general perception that the organisation was a “community that enables people” and that “staff perform well despite everything”. However, there was a need for “proper consultation and engagement” on certain matters that would “provide for better solutions and decision making”. These needs regarding opportunities to be involved and consulted and access to communication channels are referred to by Tench & Yeomans in their studies (2009).

It was agreed that: a “lack of appreciation and understanding around what other schools and departments do” prevailed and this was the result of “the absence of communication” or where “communication channels are closed” and there is a void of inter-departmental communications. Despite the apparent negativity however, CIT was regarded as a “friendly place, with great cooperation across certain areas”; but as an entity “the institute isn't doing anything strategically to encourage a caring community”. Rajhans (2012) reminds us that communication can help motivate, build trust, create shared identity and spur engagement.

Staff training and development was described as being “very accessible and encouraged” throughout the institute and that this was viewed as “bringing positivity”. It helped engage staff. The subject of rewards and recognition was discussed with some participants feeling that: “people give more than what they get back” from the organisation. It was suggested, and argued, that this may be largely attributed to the fact that CIT is a public sector organisation and, that in terms of financial rewards, there was no mechanism or flexibility to reward performance of employees with monetary incentives.

This was compared with the private sector where, for example: “In a multinational company you are made feel that you are central to everything, an important cog in the

wheel upon which everything depends. Management really need to get that message across". Several participants spoke of the need of employees to be acknowledged for doing good work, saying that at times "everyone needs a pat on the back" and that "acknowledgement would go a long way". Berger (2008) informs us that recognition and celebration of achievements at all levels within an organisation helps build shared values and identity creating a distinctive organisational culture.

In CIT, recognition was often received "informally, over a cup of coffee". The PMDS (Performance Management and Development System) that had been partially implemented several years ago was mentioned as a formal recognition incentive. However, despite attempts to introduce the program, it had never been successfully implemented and, therefore, there was no official mechanism in place for rewarding employees. Performance management reviews were common in some departments but non-existent in other functional areas of the institute. Some sections or departments reviewed staff performance every three months while other areas never reviewed employees at all.

Asked whether effective communication was seen as a vital component in engaging employees, one participant remarked:

"Definitely, employees feel that their opinion is valued whether it's from senior management or your line manager wants you on board. I suppose better communication would probably help and be an effective change management tool. There's a lot of flux at the moment, there's a lot change and a lot of fear. But definitely communication would help".

We have to come up with tools and mechanisms for this to happen. Dolphin (2005) identified the role internal communication offers the management of relationships between the organisation and its employees, and as a significant contributing factor in the development of effective corporate communications strategy and employee relations.

It was felt that: "people would say that their opinions do not seem to count because most (people) feel that they have never been given an opportunity to give their opinion. The idea of the town hall meetings was discussed and supported:

“There has to be face-to-face when you communicate change so that people can ask questions and management can answer them. People worry that when you give it (the change) to them, it is given as a *fait accompli* (when there has not been a process of engagement and consultation). In multinationals ‘town halls’ are quite common; you do not look for consensus but you do look for consultation. You should be communicating the proposed change first of all, and then you should seek as broad a stakeholder input as possible. Then, when that has been decided, communicate the change (major announcements)”.

This would agree with Cutlip, Center, & Broom (2005), that organisations must put a high priority on effective two-way communication which is the foundation of management-employee relations. The participative organisational culture seeks input from employees and other stakeholder groups. This allows for thorough analysis of decisions and policies, enabling those employees at lower levels within the organisation to have a voice in management decision making (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2005).

4.5 Improving internal communications

The final topic of discussion focused on generating a conversation around trying to identify potential ways in which internal communications could be improved in Cork Institute of Technology. It also tried to identify whether IC is the responsibility of any one section or area within the organisation.

The idea of a “forum where employees could question top management” was consistently a theme that was discussed as a way to keep staff informed on top level decisions and strategies: “if there was a scheduled forum every month – a sort of ‘question time’ for managers.” It was felt that there was “a need to know more about what other sections in CIT are doing and that this could help build a positive attitude (toward the organisation)”.

Even though it was agreed that information and communication regarding “strategic thinking” should be pushed out:

“It would be nice to know what people in the Crawford College (constituent college of CIT) are planning strategically. I am not saying that I should in any way be involved; I just think that the owners of the

strategies should be communicating them internally.
The lack of information makes people feel alienated”.

Another medium that was given a lot of airtime was the mention of a staff newsletter or magazine. A newsletter could contain things like “photos of retirees, new staff members, employee of the month and so on”. Although humor was regarded by some participants to be an essential aspect in any staff publication, it was countered with a suggestion that any newsletter “must be serious enough to reflect the nature of the business”. A staff newsletter would help spread and share knowledge about all the different activities that went on within the organisation as a whole: “there is no understanding amongst staff regarding the levels of engagement CIT is having with departments (on the inside) and industry (on the outside). A newsletter would help inform.”

There was a lot of discussion about the positive effects of staff meetings. Indeed, it was found that although, as a general rule, meetings did take place at certain levels, “they don’t take place often enough”. It was agreed that “people should be trained on how to hold meetings.” Certain areas were considered to be better than others: “I find that in one area communication is really good, and in another area not so good”. Staff training and development was seen as a positive thing by all group members that should be encouraged and supported.

In relation to the responsibility of having meetings: “the management of the Institute need to decide (provide direction) that School meetings need to happen for example once a month, which would afford the chance for academic staff to have a voice (in the strategic direction of the organisation)”. The collection of feedback was regarded as important but there was no consistency across the institute: “there are many meetings but feedback would be better within certain units”.

Focus groups were acknowledged as a rich medium and as a means to research employees and gather feedback regarding important issues: “I like the idea of focus groups, it is good to have a discussion. I know there may be resource issues but I think that when you are involved you get the chance to hear other views as well”.

4.6 Conclusion

Through the application of qualitative data analysis, a continuous and iterative process, findings were presented in this chapter. Data and feedback from the focus groups and interviews was examined in the context of CIT (the case study) to gauge how internal /employee communication manifests itself within the organisation. It describes how IC might be a factor that lends itself toward the development of employee engagement and contribute to a communicative participatory culture of listening and engagement, in a large third level educational institution.

The findings analysed the most common and prevalent types of communication methods used in CIT among staff to communicate and share information. They highlight an over reliance on the use of email, especially in relation to communications from top management to management and staff. There was a negative perception around the use of email as a means to communicate information regarding major change and strategic importance. It was felt that information, whether in the form of major announcement or ones of strategic significance, were delivered as one-way messages “with little or no scope for employee feedback or engagement”.

Interpersonal or face-to-face communication, between top management and management and management and employees, is generally regarded as the “preferred approach” to internal communication. It was found that there had been a “lessening of morale in recent years and that interpersonal communication had diminished”. The physical expansion of the institute was noted as being a possible factor in this development. A newsletter was proposed as a means of engaging employees at an employee to employee level and a way to keep up-to-date with what was happening around the institute with regards new appointments, retirements, departmental initiatives and so on; but not necessarily as a medium to communicate strategic communications. The idea of a forum where employees could question top management was suggested as a possible method of engaging and consulting staff on important strategic issues concerning the direction of the institute. This would help keep staff more informed and up-to-date on matters that might have a major impact on their working lives.

In the next chapter (Chapter Five), a critical analysis of the findings are contextualised and synthesised under the themed headings described in the Literature Review (chapter

two) and Research Methods (chapter three), and presented in the format as a discussion and analysis. The significance of the research findings is examined through the researcher's own interpretation of the data gathered to form the basis of the chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

1.0 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to present the critical analysis of the primary research carried out under the themed headings described in the literature review (chapter two) and Research Methods (chapter three). Through the researcher's interpretation, it attempts to demonstrate the relationships, and describe where appropriate, the correlation of the research findings with theories, hypotheses that may emerge during the research and existing knowledge presented in the literature review. Qualitative research data analysis tends to be a continuous and iterative process where the researcher reflects on the data in order to produce findings. A discussion around the significance of the research findings where the researcher describes his interpretation of the data gathered forms the basis of this chapter.

The primary research data that was collected by means of focus groups and semi-structured interviews was divided into two sets: one extracted from Sample A (management) and the other from Sample B (non-management). As explained earlier in the paper, due regard to confidentiality and anonymity is addressed at all times and the identities of participants are removed. Following within-case and cross-case analysis, the data is presented as a single set. The discussion is examined both in the context of the literature reviewed and the methodologies of the study which are interrogated to verify or establish their validity and reliability.

1.1 Methods of internal communications (IC) in CIT

In order to understand how IC works we must ascertain what the most commonly used methods of communication are, for example - email, staff meetings, telephone, newsletters, memos, intranet, social media, and interpersonal or face-to-face communication. It emerged very early on during the research that email was the most prevalent method used to communicate almost everything internally both from the top down from management and between employees. It is the main communication method used by top management to deliver important strategic information and is used for the

exchange of information from employee to employee. This finding was expected and agrees with what White, Vanc, & Stafford (2010) illustrate as an effective mechanism for communication exchange in large organisations. One of the main reasons for this is that email is quick and it can reach a large target audience instantaneously. However, there tends to be an underlying assumption that people have received the message or communication, and that they have processed it. We have learned that this may not always be the case and, as a result this generates negativity around the use of email “not being the right medium” of communication regarding strategically important information.

As Berger (2008) illustrated, and as it was discovered during the course of this study, internal communication occurs at different levels: on an organisational level, group-level and at an interpersonal level between individual employees. Email is generally regarded as being an effective tool for most everyday task-related functional communications. However, when used to deliver messages of strategic major importance and organisational change it is seen as being rather impersonal: “People do prefer face to face communication and feel more valued, giving the option of the open forum where employees could air their views. People would feel more valued. You can’t beat face to face”. This agrees with White, Vanc, & Stafford (2010) who reported findings from studies that there was a preference for “interpersonal and dialogic interactions” for the exchange of information among employees.

In terms of making major announcements email tends to be one-way and offers little or no room for employees to respond or engage, as it is one-to-many communication. This study has found that there is a tangible level of dissatisfaction among employees with this downward approach to communicating change and major announcements. This would agree with what Cutlip, Center & Broom (2006) found when they examined perceptions of internal communication flows within organisations. It is also affirmed by Gunning (2003) and Grunig (1992) and Ruck (2010) that a two-way system of communication and engagement is preferred over top-down one-way communication.

1.2 Face-to-face/interpersonal communication

One of the main findings of this study postulates that employees prefer face-to-face or interpersonal communication at organisational, group and employee to employee levels. D'Aprix (2006) reminds us that historically the focus was on ensuring that interpersonal communication was encouraged in organisations as the primary method of communicating. The results of this research reveal that face-to-face communication has diminished in CIT. Employees are stating un-equivocally that they want more meetings in order to be informed of major changes, and when strategically important announcements are being communicated. Face-to-face interpersonal communication is preferred over blanket emails. Meetings were described as having a positive effect as they bring people together and as Demos, Orange & MORI (2004) highlight: "people want to feel part of a 'human' rather than a remote organisation".

Participants called for a type of forum to be set up where top management could inform employees about important strategic issues and, at the same time, answer questions through engaging in a dialogic two-way process of communication. This would concur with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical approach to effective communication, better known in Public Relations as the 'excellence model' and which forms the basis for modern PR practice. It also aligns with Bove'e and Thill's (2000) definition of internal communication as "the exchange of information and ideas within an organization". In the modern workplace, and which has been confirmed by the feedback from the research carried out in this case study of CIT, employees want to have a voice. They seek to engage with management. There is desire to be informed and employees feel that they have a right to be informed about decisions that are likely to lead to major changes; and, which have the potential to impact on them personally. This notion is supported by the EU in its 2002 directive affecting employment law in Europe and as acknowledged by Tench & Yeomans (2009, p. 320).

1.3 Information vacuums and rumour

In situations where no managed system of communication exists, rumours often develop and can result in a lot of mis-information which, as we have learned from the research,

can be “worse than no information”. Gunning (2003) highlights how rumour is “inclined to be emotive rather than factual” and that “the unofficial grapevine, which operates in every organisation, is speedy, often inaccurate and prone to gossip, scandal and rumour” (p. 334). White, Vanc, & Stafford (2010) stressed that “communicating too little can create a vacuum often resulting in distrust and speculation”.

Employees in CIT want to be informed and management want to be consulted on issues of strategic importance. Tench & Yeomans (2009) tell us that: “all this presents a challenging role for internal communication management”.

This would suggest that, in order to eliminate or at least limit rumour and misinformation, communication needs to be managed, and it needs to be timely and accurate. Open two-way symmetrical communication is regarded as the optimum and preferred method by employees leading to what Grunig (1992) describes as “open, trusting, and credible relationships with strategic employee constituencies [groups] will follow” (p. 559).

1.4 Meetings as a form of interpersonal communication

Meetings, both formal departmental or informal employee to employee meetings, were identified as a frequent and valuable form of communication amongst staff members. This again reiterates the preference for face-to-face dialogic communication over electronic means such as email. As one participant declared: “people do prefer face to face communication and people feel more valued (by its use)”. The idea of an open forum where employees could air their views was suggested as an example of how two-way communication could happen. “People would feel more valued. You can’t beat face to face (communication)”.

Athal (2013) found that direct face-to-face communication was the richest medium and that interpersonal communication practices are the most valuable for fostering engagement. Interpersonal methods of communication should be employed internally during times of communicating major changes, addressing crises or resolving conflicts; or, even to celebrate accomplishments. Whereas email may be a faster method to reach many people, the value of meetings cannot be understated. This is exactly what White,

Vanc, & Stafford (2010) maintained when they examined how two-way communication encourages input and feedback from all communicating sides. This can happen throughout the organisation, for example through the use of forums, group discussions and focus groups. In fact, in their study White, Vanc, & Stafford (2010), concluded that “meetings, despite being acknowledged as time-consuming, were valued as a channel for feedback and providing face time with top managers” (p. 65). This study asserts that forums and group discussions could be a worthwhile form of communication and engagement in CIT, a notion which was repeatedly endorsed during the focus groups.

1.5 Other methods of communication

Another method of communication that was identified from the focus groups and interviews included letters, both formal and informal and which are still used in CIT for correspondence. This is especially true regarding the use of formal letters. The nature of the business and the fact that CIT is a public sector organisation demands that certain protocols be followed and officialdom be adhered to. Berger (2008) refers to this when he demonstrated how formal communication is closely associated with a formal organisational structure. In general, the use of letters is limited to official formal communication from government departments in the form of memos, directives, and circulars. Internally in CIT, letters are used also for formal employee communications, for example regarding employee contractual or legal matters.

Mobile phone is another principal method of communication among staff. Communication by telephone, despite being an electrical channel, is regarded as interpersonal communication as it involves two or more people engaging in a dialogic conversation. It is less formal than email and requires a two-way engagement. It could be deduced that mobile phones are commonly used amongst staff to communicate with each other because it is a quick, convenient and personal way to engage. Almost every staff member has a mobile phone these days and you do not have to wait for a reply as is the case with email.

Social media, as a tool for communicating internally, was touched upon briefly but was not discussed in any great detail and therefore has not been considered under the scope

of this study. Most notably Twitter and LinkedIn were mentioned as new ways of interacting with colleagues within the institute. In CIT, it appears that social media is used on in a social context among some employees but there is reluctance on the part of staff to embrace it as a method of formal communication or where work-related matters are concerned.

1.6 Internal communication and employee morale

The results of the research carried out exposes an unexpected low level of morale among staff concerning the issue of internal communication. In particular, employees feel they are not informed regarding strategic decisions that may affect them directly, and that potentially, could have a significant impact in their futures. Gunning (2003) pointed out that, along with generating staff interest and pride in the organisation, the purpose of internal or employee communication is to increase employee morale” (p. 335). It can be implied from the feedback obtained via the focus groups and the subsequent interviews - which triangulate the data collected - that the lack of communication regarding major strategic changes may have contributed to a lessening of morale among employees in CIT.

It was stated that “when information did come it came in the form of one-way announcements”. From the results collected, it can be inferred that employees at all levels within CIT seek a system of communication exchange where there are opportunities for them to be heard and where a culture of listening and engagement exists. In its 2012 Melbourne Mandate, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management refers to the “communicative organisation” where two-way communication is critical in the building of a culture of listening and engagement.

During the research employees compared organisations in the public and private sectors pointing out how the bottom line had a direct influence on how information flows within organisations or corporations operating in the private sector. It could be argued that in organisations which are not profit-driven a different communications culture might prevail and engaging staff in “the bigger picture” may not be regarded as important or critical to the organisation’s success, as it would be in the private sector. Cutlip, Center, & Broom (2005) argue that employees are “critical to the success of any

organisation”, where CEOs try to create an “organizational culture” that attracts and retains productive workers in what they refer to as part of public relations practice known as “internal relations” (p. 9).

1.7 The communicative organisation

Central to this study was the attempt to gauge the feelings amongst participants to see if they considered that, as employees, they were well-informed about strategic changes affecting the institute. The questions posed also challenged participants to consider whether they felt a certain type of communication culture existed in CIT.

As discussed previously, the predominant use of email was described as “a flat way of making announcements, whether they are achievements or announcements regarding change”. Even though a certain amount of negativity was expected around the use of email as a tool or mechanism to inform employees on matters of significant organisational change, it was still surprising to see the extremely high level of negativity around it. Email is perceived by employees to “lack personal touch”.

In order for relationships to develop within organisations, a communication culture needs to prevail and should run through the fabric of the organisation. As Asif and Sargeant (2000) explain: “organisations must ensure that a communications culture pervades the entire organization”. Employees in CIT want to be part of a communicative and participatory organisation. It was highlighted during the course of the focus groups that in order to sustain healthy relationships between management and employees, due consideration should be given to communicating effectively with staff. Good communication, through proper engagement and consultation, can help increase morale amongst employees and this can only be a positive development within an organisation. Jones et al. (2004) stress how relationships grow out of communication and the functioning and survival of organisations is founded on effective relationships among individuals and groups.

Participants pointed out that a contributing factor to the emergence of a perceived culture of dis-engagement may be due to the physical size of the institute. CIT is geographically spread out across a large main campus and between several constituent schools and colleges. Although, it is realistically feasible that physical distances

between schools and departments could be a factor, the findings would indicate that internal communication also seems to be a factor. CIT has never carried out an employee attitude or engagement survey. It appears from the results of this study that top management may not understand employee attitudes and sentiments. According to Pilkington (2004), organisations need to understand what employees are thinking and feeling and ensure that there are mechanisms in place for this to happen. Pilkington proposed that internal communications is best placed to do this, acting in that 'boundary spanning' role between employer and employee.

This certainly adds weight to what public relations, and in particular internal communications professionals, have consistently argued: that, in order to engage staff, communication inside an organisation requires a managed system of communication (Tench & Yeomans, 2009). Cutlip, Center and Broom (2005) highlighted the need for organisations to "put a high priority on effective, two-way communication – the foundation of management-employee relations and overall job performance" (p. 223). Communication happens all the time in CIT and, it can be argued, that if improved and managed, it could be used to foster a culture of listening and engagement. Its importance for the effective functioning of organisations cannot be understated; a point which Harris & Nelson (2008) stressed when they ascertained that communication dominates organisations.

1.8 IC as a driver of employee engagement

Studies have shown that engaging employees is the most critical issue confronting organisations. Professional communicators can play a leading role in helping build relationships where management engages in dialogue with employees rather than communicating at them (D'Aprix 2006). This study has attempted to find out if employees have a positive attitude toward the organisation (CIT). The research has tried to ascertain how employees feel about their jobs and to examine if a relationship might exist between how they go about their roles is connected in some way to internal communications.

This topic was examined in the context of the drivers of employee engagement provided by the CIPD (2010) - the links between the way people are managed, employee attitudes

and performance. The CIPD study concluded that, where opportunities for employees to feed their views upwards existed, and where a workforce was well-informed about what is going on within an organisation, that these were the main drivers of employee engagement.

There is no doubt that the subject of communicating an impending major change in the MTU designation emerged as the most critical issue at the moment for CIT employees. The reason for this is that the outcomes of any strategic decisions made, could potentially affect almost every employee in the organisation in some way. This is not surprising as it would constitute a major strategic and directional change resulting in the merger of two institutes of technology (CIT and IT Tralee) forming one technological university. Employees, both at management and non-management level, felt that they had not been involved enough in the process, nor had they been satisfactorily engaged as much as they would have liked to up to now. Participants spoke of the “need for proper consultation and engagement” on certain matters that would “provide for better solutions and decision making”.

The evidence from responses gathered during the research would strongly suggest that there is negativity among staff regarding how internal communications is managed. Rajhans (2012) asserts that communication helps individuals and groups coordinate activities and to achieve goals. It also plays an important role in the acculturation, decision-making, problem-solving and change-management processes of an organisation. Communication can help motivate, build trust, create shared identity and spur engagement (Rajhans, 2012). This would suggest that, without effective communication within an organisation - whether it is top-down from management to employee or horizontally from employee to employee - a vacuum can exist which can breathe negativity and uncertainty throughout the organisation. This supports the theory put forward by White, Vanc, & Stafford (2010) around the unofficial grapevine sprouting and flourishing as a result of too little information being made available. This is significant, as Asif and Sargeant (2000) infer, a communications culture must pervade the organisation for effective communication to take place. It would appear that the conditions that allow for this type of culture are not prevalent in CIT. This would pose a significant challenge to the management of the institute to invest in an internal

communications strategy that would lead to the evolvement of the organisation where a communications culture existed.

The structure of the institute was described as “are pre-defined within a hierarchical structure”. Berger (2008) extrapolates that formal communication is closely aligned with a formal organisational structure where communication usually flows through officially recognised positions in line with the hierarchical structure of the organisation. It has been indicated that top-down internal communication in CIT is transmitted in one direction, which is what Berger expanded upon in his work on organisational culture (2008).

Despite the apparent vacuum that exists surrounding the lack of dissemination of strategically important information, CIT is regarded as a good place to work and one where a “community that enables” people is felt to exist. However, there is a broad consensus that a need for “proper consultation and engagement” on “certain strategically important matters” would “provide for better solutions and decision making”. This is what Strauss and Hoffmann (2000), as cited in Tench & Yeomans (2009, p. 318) emphasise about internal communication when they refer to “the planned use of communication actions to systematically influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of current employees”.

Participants spoke about how little interaction there was between departments or different areas on campus and that there was a perceived “lack of appreciation and understanding what other schools and departments do” throughout the institute. Moreover, it could be argued here that this situation may occur in the absence of a managed system and where mechanisms are in place for communication to happen. Tench & Yeomans (2009) put IC at the centre of an organisation’s managed communication system. Grunig highlighted how two-way symmetrical communication leads to relationship building with strategic employee groups within an organisation (Grunig 1992, p. 559).

Staff training was discussed during the research and it was regarded by several participants as a way of bringing about positivity as it helped to engage staff through group interpersonal relations. By attending training courses employees can get to know other employees and this can foster relationships across different functional areas. Tench & Yeomans (2009, p. 326) identified access to information on training and

development as a “basic need of employees as they seek clarity about their roles within the organization as well as opportunities to be involved and consulted”.

1.9 Organising internal communications

The absence of a staff newsletter or magazine was repeatedly highlighted by participants during the research. Staff newsletters are useful for keeping people informed regarding general information about employees. Newsletters can keep people up-to-date regarding new starters, retirements, promotions, new policies and procedures, staff events and so on. However, they are not ideal for communicating strategic messages from top management as they could be regarded as too informal. Apart from one or two sporadic departmental newsletters, there is no recognised CIT newsletter published at present. And moreover, there is no ownership of a newsletter or any form of regularly published information with an employee audience in the institute. This is something that should be invested in by management as a tool to keep staff up-to-date regarding various types of news and information. As research has shown, effective IC, if managed, can play a huge role in fostering and maintaining relationships between management and employees.

Some theorists, for example Dolphin (2005), support the idea that the role of a corporate communicator has become a strategic information manager, and have tried to determine whether a separate functional area charged with managing internal communications should be considered. Gunning (2003) argues that effective “structured employee/internal communications” requires a “skilled communications manager” (p. 335) and that this is needed at board level. It can be deduced that IC can play an important role within an organisation and, in particular, large physically dispersed organisms such as CIT where employees in one area may not be aware of what is happening in another area. The argument for a newsletter is a worthy one. It would help inform employees about what is happening on the ground in terms of appointments, promotions, retirements and events and so on and at the same time nourishing relations between employees. This is what Dolphin (2005) discovered also when he examined the management of relationships between the organisation and its employees and the role of internal communications within the total communications strategy in UK firms. In fact,

Kennan & Hazleton (2006) align internal communications with specialist public relations. They connect the role of professional internal communicators with the responsibility of building relationships and programs which foster trust, participation and empowerment. Crucial to achieving this is the building of cultures for communication that are conducive to open, transparent, authentic two-way communications and conversations.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has explained, through the researcher's interpretation of the findings in chapter four, and analysed within the context of chapters two and three, how IC can play an important role within the overall management function of a large organisation such as CIT.

The results put forward in this study have provided evidence and support for the preference for meetings and interpersonal communication over other forms of communication, such as email. Meetings and open forums are regarded by employees as the richest methods for the dissemination of important information to employees. This chapter has highlighted how a communication culture, one where a two-way system of communication and engagement is preferred so that relationships can develop. It has explained how a communications culture must pervade the entire organisation for this to happen. The research carried out has found that two-way communication encourages input and feedback from all communicating sides. In situations where no managed system of communication exists, rumours often develop and this can result in a lot of mis-information and uncertainty. The need for management to embrace the idea of putting in place the mechanisms for effective IC to take place is strongly suggested.

IC has been examined as a powerful means that, if managed effectively, can help foster trusting relationships between the organisation and its employees. This can be achieved through the building of a culture for communication that is conducive to open, transparent, authentic two-way communications and conversations. Employees in CIT want to be part of a communicative and participatory organisation, one which fosters engagement and consultation. These are the necessary conditions which can help towards the creation of a culture of listening and engagement which can contribute to

increase employee morale. There is a need for some strategic thinking on the role IC can play within CIT. As cited in Nordin, Halib, & Ghazali (2011), Zaremba (2003) remarks that: "Communication is a central and not a peripheral component of organizational effectiveness". Pilkington (2004) pointed out that organisations need to ensure that there are mechanisms in place for relationships to develop. As stated earlier, internal communications is best placed to do this, acting in that 'boundary spanning' role between employer and employee. There is substantial evidence to suggest that CIT could benefit from investing in a strategic internal communications function within the institute and one which is founded on a culture of listening and engagement.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Drawing conclusions

In this final chapter, the main findings of the research are re-examined in the context of the original research questions postulated. Conclusions are summarised based on the findings of the primary research carried out and contextualised within the overall literature reviewed in an attempt to add strength to what is already known in the field of employee internal communications.

Furthermore, the strengths and limitations of this thesis are considered, and suggestions for further research into IC in the organisational context are put forward. The chapter concludes with **FIVE** recommendations regarding how CIT might move forward to put in place a managed system of communication that would be of mutual benefit both for employees and the organisation itself. It recommends that the management of the institute embrace strategic internal employee communications as a vital and effective means to engage employees. Internal communications, managed from the PR perspective of a two-way symmetrical dialogic model of engagement, can lead to the building of a communications culture to the benefit of the whole organisation.

6.1 General Conclusions

Conclusion 1 – Endorsement and implementation of IC strategy by management

The management of the institute should embrace and invest in strategic internal employee communications as a pivotal and effective means to engage employees.

Conclusion 2 – Employees prefer for face-to-face communication

Although an institute of technology may have the most up-to-date communications technologies at its disposal, at the end of the day employees are human beings who prefer dialogic face-to-face or interpersonal communication.

Conclusion 3 – Employees have a need to be informed about major strategic changes

The evidence gathered illustrates that staff morale deflates when employees feel that they are not informed, consulted or engaged concerning matters of strategic importance and change.

Conclusion 4 – Guidelines on best practice methods of communication

There is a need to establish guidelines on the use of the different mediums of communication and when and how to use them. This is especially true in relation to the use of email. Participants expressed a need for training on how to run meetings and embraced the idea of regular focus groups as a means of internal communication and consultation.

6.2 Limitations of this study

In terms of doing a case study, it could be argued that a single case may not be the basis to establish reliability or to generalise the findings to a wider population of people or places. As this study involved selecting participants from one campus only (Bishopstown), albeit the largest component of the institute as a whole, it may not be representative of the entire organisation. Another limiting factor could be that not all grades, departments, functions and job titles were represented in the samples selected. However, this is never going to be possible in an organisation where there are over 200 job titles and over 60 different departments and functional areas.

Although the researcher remained neutral at all times during the research, when either conducting the focus groups or interviews, there is always the risk that “intense exposure to study of the case may bias a researcher's interpretation of the findings” (University of Southern California, 2012). As well as this, the researcher's interpretation can only apply to the individual case i.e. CIT Bishopstown campus, and cannot be generalised.

Another limitation, relevant in the context of collecting primary data from the samples, was that during the summer months the academic staff of the institute were on annual leave. The researcher had thought about carrying out an institute-wide online survey of staff. However, this was not feasible during the summer months as over half the institute's staff would have been absent. The researcher believes that an employee survey on internal communications, which if conducted, could have strengthened the data findings detailed and analysed in chapter four of this study.

6.3 Further studies/research

Further research into the topic of IC could involve expanding the scope of the current research presented in this thesis to involve other campuses and constituent colleges of CIT. This might result in a more generalisation of findings and conclusions.

Internal communications in CIT could be compared and contrasted with IC in other Institutes of Technology and/or other third level universities and colleges in Ireland. It could be examined in the context of employee engagement and/or under such themes as organisational culture and internal relations.

A further study recommended would be to look more specifically at the role Public Relations might play in internal employee communications and employee relations. PR and IC could be examined in the context of a separate department or distinct functional area of management, for example in a third level educational institution.

Another opportunity for further research might involve looking more closely at the values of interpersonal communication in the context of IC and PR practice in third level educational institutions or in another public sector organisation.

6.4 Introduction to recommendations

It has been surmised that better informed employees are more satisfied and tend to be more engaged and involved in organisations. The value of effective communication at all levels within an organisation cannot be overstated. There are multiple benefits to be reaped by having the environment and tools in place that will allow for effective internal communications to take place.

Employees have basic information needs and, as internal stakeholders, should have a chance to voice opinions and concerns regarding issues that directly affect them. Therefore, important consideration should be given to making sure that the correct conditions exist so that an environment can flourish where communications is leveraged to increase employee morale and engagement. Relationships grow out of engagement and this can only be regarded as a positive development in any organisation.

6.5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Strategic internal communications function at management level

CIT management to establish, and invest in, a strategic internal/employee communications function by early 2014 charged with implementing an IC plan targeted at engaging employees.

Recommendation 2: Open forums for communicating change and other important strategic decisions

Open forums, in which employees can voice their views and, where management can answer questions, should be set up once or twice each year by management.

Recommendation 3: Regular meetings and information cascading

Regular meetings should take place between top management and Heads of School, Heads of Department and Central Services Managers to inform on major strategic issues. Heads of School, Heads of Department and Central Services Managers to meet with staff to cascade information downwards to employees and encourage feedback.

Recommendation 4: Re-introduction of a staff newsletter

A staff newsletter which can provide employees with information about what is happening at different levels of the organisation and, thereby nourishing relations between employees should be re-introduced immediately. As much employee input as possible should be sought, including employee success stories, updates on events throughout the institute and so on.

Recommendation 5: Regular employee research to be carried out

CIT, through the strategic internal communications function, should carry out regular research once or twice a year into employee attitudes on internal communications and engagement. This research is to gauge employee opinion and sentiment as well as to generate feedback on important issues that affect staff and the strategic direction of the institute.

6.6 Overall conclusion

During times of organisational change, how information is delivered to employees is of paramount importance. Since we have seen that one-directional top-down communication can create elements and perceptions of anxiety, suspicion and uncertainty, open communication and a mechanism that allows for a two-way dialogic process to prevail other methods is recommended.

Employees want to feel part of a participatory and communicative organisation where they can offer constructive feedback and where their opinions seem to matter. The research carried out has found that two-way communication encourages input and feedback from all communicating sides. Face-to-face communication is still the richest medium and best way that management can reach and engage employees. And, regular communication creates a sense of stability throughout the organisation.

Employees in CIT expressed their desire to be part of a communicative and participatory organisation. Through a managed system of IC, one which fosters dialogic engagement and consultation, CIT can create a communications culture of listening and engagement. This, as explained in detail throughout this study, would be of great benefit

to both employees and the organisation itself. “Communication is a central and not a peripheral component of organizational effectiveness” Zaremba (2003).

6.7 Reflective paragraph

On a personal level, the MA in Public Relations with New Media is one of the most fulfilling things I have done in my life to date. The experience has given me a whole new confidence in my own ability, as well as a new set of skills and knowledge that I did not possess before embarking on this journey. It has also opened up the world of research to me which I really didn't fully understand before. It is a science in itself and I must say I thoroughly enjoyed conducting the focus groups and interviews as part of the primary research.

To me, the most important aspect to PR is about the management and maintenance of relationships between publics through communication. After all, the ‘publics’ we speak about are people. Organisations are made up of people and it is the effective communication between people that ties the fabric of an organisation together.

“Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life”.

Brian Tracy

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

From: Des Carroll

Sent: 04 June 2013 09:57

To: *****

Subject: MA in Public Relations with New Media 2013 - Internal Communications Focus Group

Dear *****,

You may remember our recent discussion when I mentioned to you that I am completing a **Masters in Public Relations with New Media** here in CIT.

As part of my research for my thesis I will run two employee **focus groups** - one management and the other non-management with participants from the Institute.

The title of my **thesis** will be, generally speaking: '**Driving Employee Engagement through Internal Communications: a Public Relations perspective**'.

The Institute of Employment Studies in the UK defines 'employee engagement' as '*a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to nurture, maintain and grow engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.*'

Using CIT in a **case study** analysis, the general research themed questions will focus around:

- Internal Communications in the organisational context
- 'Employee engagement' and the drivers of 'employee engagement'
- Can effective strategic internal communications, in the Public Relations context of two-way symmetrical communication, influence employee engagement and help the organisation achieve its objectives?

The **non-management focus group** session is scheduled to take place from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon on **Thursday 13 June** in the **boardroom** in the **Tourism and Hospitality** building.

I would be delighted and most grateful if you could attend confirming to me by **email** by **Thursday 6th June** next.

Please be assured that this data collection exercise is for research purposes only and will be treated with absolute confidentiality. Thanking you, Des

APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in Focus Group Study

Master of Arts in Public Relations with New Media

Researcher: Des Carroll

Venue: Boardroom, Tourism and Hospitality Building, Bishopstown Campus, CIT.

Date: Monday, 17-Jun-2013

I understand that this research is being carried out for a Thesis being completed by Des Carroll as part of his taught Masters in Public Relations with New Media at CIT.

The purpose of the group discussion and the nature of the questions have been explained to me.

I consent to take part in a focus group about internal communications and employee engagement in action research/case study of Cork Institute of Technology.

I also consent to being audio-recorded during this focus group discussion. I have been assured that the audio files will be kept confidential and secure.

None of my experiences or thoughts will be shared with anyone by the researcher prior to all identifying information being removed. My participation is voluntary and I understand that I am free to leave the group at any time.

Please Print Your Name

Date

Please Sign Your Name

Researcher Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Master of Arts in Public Relations with New Media

Focus Group Questions

Researcher: Des Carroll

Venue: Boardroom, Tourism and Hospitality Building, Bishopstown Campus, CIT.

Date: Thursday, 13-Jun-2013

Internal Communications (IC)

How do you think employees in CIT communicate with other?

What are the methods and tools e.g. Staff meetings, email, newsletters, memos, intranet, social media, interpersonal communication etc. How often and is it enough? How do employees share information?

Organisation Culture

Are employees well-informed about changes in the organisation? Could management do more to keep employees more informed and up-to-date? Give words to describe.

Do you feel that you have a voice?

Note: Added for management focus group - As managers do you feel you have an input into the direction of the organisation?

Employee Engagement

Does the organisation enable staff to perform well? Do you feel that employees have a positive attitude toward the organisation?

Do employees know what is expected of them at work? Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person? Is there someone at work who encourages your development?

Do you feel you give more than you get back from the organisation?

Enablers and Drivers of Employee Engagement: Strategic Communication, Feedback, Research and Manager and Team Communication; OTHERS?

At work, do your opinions seem to count? In the last six months, has someone at work talked about your progress? In the last year, have you had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

Improving Internal Communications

How could IC be improved? Whose responsibility is IC? How much time is spent on employee feedback?

Who communicates change?

APPENDIX D

Consent to Participate in Interview

Master of Arts in Public Relations with New Media

Researcher: Des Carroll

Venue: Bishopstown Campus, CIT.

Date: Thursday, 08-Aug-2013

I understand that this research is being carried out as part of a Master's thesis being completed by Des Carroll in Public Relations with New Media at Cork Institute of Technology (CIT).

The purpose of the interview and the nature of the questions have been explained to me.

I consent to take part in an interview about internal communications and employee engagement in a case study of CIT.

I also consent to being audio-recorded during this interview. The researcher has given his assurance that the audio files will be kept confidential, anonymous and secure.

None of my experiences or thoughts will be shared with anyone by the researcher prior to all identifying information being removed. My participation is voluntary and I understand that I am free to leave the interview at any time.

Please Print Your Name

Date

Please Sign Your Name

Researcher Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions: Semi-structured interview Master of Arts in Public Relations with New Media

Researcher: Des Carroll

Venue: Bishopstown Campus, CIT.

Date: Thursday, 8 August, 2013

1. Are you as an employee up to date what is happening at a strategic level within the organisation?
2. Who communicates change? Is internal communication the responsibility of a certain department or office?
3. What is the best way that senior management could use to communicate change to employees?
4. Effective communication is seen as a vital component in engaging employees. Would you agree?
5. Should there be a formal recognition program? Who should operate/own it?
6. At work, do your opinions seem to count? How much time is spent on employee feedback?
7. How could IC be improved? Whose responsibility is IC?
8. Do you think that regular staff surveys could be conducted to get feedback from employees about their needs and feelings?

CIPR Inside Communication Measurement Matrix

Why measure? Internal communication is measured to: Establish the value of practice for organisational reputation and success | Generate insights that inform professional practice | Support insightful business decisions | Check progress against plans | Assess overall efficacy.

Outputs	What to measure	Questionnaire	How to measure	Other forms of research
Outcomes	<p>Channels: are they working? How effective are your newsletters, magazines, intranet, social media channels, e-mail briefings, conferences, "town hall" type meetings, team meetings, project meetings and 1:1s? Is the channel appropriate for the content?</p> <p>Content: are employees getting the information they want and need? Is communication timely, relevant, accurate and consistent? Is the tone of voice right? Is it open? Is it honest? What are employees interested in?</p> <p>Conversations: are people communicating effectively? How well do leaders, senior managers, middle managers, line managers and colleagues communicate, both formally and informally?</p> <p>Voice: are there adequate opportunities for people to have a say? How seriously is employee voice treated? Are responses provided to comments and suggestions? Can people get involved in change management and contribute to decisions that support innovation and influence business outcomes?</p> <p>Sentiment: what do employees think and feel about the organisation? Is communication helping to increase engagement? Are leaders and managers trusted? Do people identify with organisational strategy and values? Are they advocates?</p> <p>Behaviour: has employee behaviour been influenced by communication? How has it influenced their decisions or behaviour? Are they working more safely, talking more knowledgeably with customers?</p> <p>Return on investment (ROI): Have the benefits been identified? Can you isolate other factors affecting financial returns?</p>	<p>Access, usefulness, frequency, volume, preferences.</p> <p>How well and how often information is provided. Message recall (for example, using marketing-style analysis). Interest and information levels by topic.</p> <p>Frequency that people communicate at the level expected.</p> <p>Frequency of opportunities, frequency and quality of responses made to expressed voice.</p> <p>Understanding and belief in strategy and plans. Perceived organisational support.</p> <p>Why did behaviour change, what influenced the employee's decision?</p> <p>Were the benefits realised?</p>	<p>Content analysis. Ease of reading. Interviews.</p> <p>Content analysis. Interviews.</p> <p>Content analysis. Interviews. Network analysis.</p> <p>Interviews. Content analysis (for example, comments in blogs). Focus groups.</p> <p>Interviews. Focus groups. Online communities.</p> <p>Pilot or control groups (purposeful or accidental). Network analysis.</p> <p>Cost (time and resources used), direct return (savings made or profit generated) in a specified time.</p>	

Fundamental principles of measurement

- Best practice goes beyond the inclusion of a few communication questions in an annual employee engagement survey.
- Research is part of everyday practice used to establish SMART communication objectives that are output and outcome based.
- linked to organisational objectives that enhance reputation.
- Regular and real-time reporting that includes going beyond basic data is used to find insights from deep analysis.
- Benchmarking helps to put results into context.

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INSIDE

