

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN ONE ORGANIZATION:
EMPLOYEES' COMMUNICATION EXPECTATIONS AND PERSONAL VALUES

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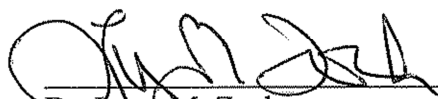
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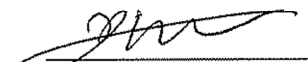
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Abstract

When successful, internal communication provides employees with an understanding about opportunities and threats, and develops employee awareness of their organization's priorities. In order to be successful it is important that organizations learn about employees' communication expectations and then attend to those communication needs. The scope of this study is to understand what type of information employees expect from their organization, how those expectations are related to their values, and whether the organization studied attended to those expectations. To achieve its results, this study used quantitative surveys conducted with employees in a regional chemical company. Findings of this research show that information about benefits and pay, information about policies and goals, and information about organizational changes are some of the types of information that employees expected to receive more often from this organization. The data obtained from the questionnaires also revealed a strong relationship between employees' communication expectations and their values. Future research must be conducted to understand what barriers to communication exist in this environment, and how they may affect communication satisfaction.

This work will provide scholars and public relations practitioners with valuable information about employees' values and employees' information needs. This study will be beneficial to increase awareness of employees' communication expectations, and by doing so it may facilitate the internal communication process within this and other organizations.

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Dedication

To Ana and Toinho, my parents, not only for the education provided, but also for all the love and support before and during this journey. Thank you for being an example and passing on to me a passion for education and continuous learning.

To my sister and brother, Natalia and Ricardo, who are so far away, but at the same time so close to me. Both of you have been my best cheerleaders.

To Thiago, who kept me working when I wanted to give up. Thank you for all the love and support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For years, corporate managers have focused solely on customer care, believing that these constituents are the most important stakeholder group an organization could have. More recently, they have begun to dedicate the same kind of attention to their own employees, by communicating better with them and recognizing that employees have more to do with the success of a business than practically any other constituency. Argenti (1999) explained such change by arguing that the environment today is more competitive and global than ever before: “these changes put pressure on today's employees and create the need for a more coordinated approach to employee communications” (p. 199).

The internal communication field began growing in the 1990s in the US, and spread thereafter to Europe, growing stronger in the new millennium. Factors such as globalization and economic crises brought with them permanent restructuring, downsizing, outsourcing, mergers, and acquisitions, which resulted in decreased trust among employees (Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2012). In order to keep employees in the loop about changes and other relevant business information, internal communication has developed as a critical role for organizations.

Internal communication is an area of study that is relevant to the contemporary practice of public relations. It has been consistently identified as a key area of communication practice, growing in importance (Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič & Moreno, 2010). In the academic literature employees are described as “an organization’s most important public” (Therkelsen & Fiebich, 2003, p. 120), and internal communication as the “first frontier in the battle for the customer” (Chong, 2007, p. 201) and an “important, challenging area” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 177). In addition, public relations practitioners see internal communicators as the group that affects the “ability of organizations to engage employees” (Kress, 2005, p. 30).

According to Welch (2012), internal communication supports organizational effectiveness because it contributes to positive internal relationships by allowing communication between senior managers and employees. When successful, internal communication provides employees understanding about opportunities and threats, and develops employee awareness of their organization's changing priorities. These aspects may influence whether the individual is engaged or not.

In fact, extensive research conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide in 2003, and again in 2005, found that companies that perform effective internal communication have a higher market premium, higher shareholder returns over five years, higher levels of employee engagement, and lower employee turnover than companies less effective at communication (Yates, 2006). Other research has also expressed that a key driver of employee engagement is internal communication (Baumruk, Gorman & Gorman, 2006; Hoover, 2005; Yates 2006) and that organizations that effectively communicate with employees experience higher levels of engagement (Baumruk et al., 2006; Debussy, Ewing, & Pitt, 2003; Yates, 2006).

However, although studies have been conducted in the internal communication field regarding communication processes, channels, and volume of communication, little scientific research has been conducted about employee needs for content, and no studies were found that connected internal communication, an employee's communication expectations, and personal values.

In order to answer the call for research in this area, the purpose of this work is to use Discrepancy Theory to understand what type of information employees expect from an organization, how those expectations are related to their values, and whether the organization studied attended to those expectations. Since studies have shown that potential benefits of

internal communication to organizations rely on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them, it is relevant that organizations understand employees' information needs, so they can meet employees' communication expectations.

The theory used in this study has its roots in the psychology field. It was chosen for the theoretical basis of this study because it attempts to explain the gap that can be experienced based on what an employee expects from the organization, and then how his or her organization attends to those expectations. The discrepancy theory also talks about how a person's values fit together with their expectations.

This study used quantitative surveys conducted with employees in a regional chemical company. This specific company was chosen because (1) according to the vice president they have need for research on their current internal communication; (2) this company does manufacturing, sales, warehousing, delivery and administration; and (3) the variety of jobs within the organization was needed for a better understanding of the data.

With the cooperation of the company's owner, questionnaires were distributed to all full-time employees and they were asked to participate in the survey. The questionnaire contained a number of multiple choice questions where employees were asked to reveal their opinion about statements related to internal communication, communication satisfaction, communication expectations, and personal values, answering how much they agreed or disagreed with a given statement.

This work will provide scholars with valuable research about employees' values and employees' information needs. For public relations practitioners, this work will be beneficial to better understand employee's communication expectations and by doing so it will hopefully facilitate the internal communication process within an organization.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Internal Communication

Definition

Scholars have defined communication as the exchange of information between a sender and a receiver where the message flows from one point to another, with the potential for feedback, and the communicators are linked together by channels (Kalla, 2005; Krone, Jablin & Putnam, 1987). From this perspective, internal communication could be conceptualized as the exchange of information within an organization. However, today, internal communication is understood as multidimensional and is much more than message exchange, information flow or providing information about people's work. It is also about relationships and creating a respectful atmosphere for all the people within the organization (Argenti, 2009).

Internal communication is seen from different perspectives. Cheney and Christensen (2001) defined it as “employee relations, statements of mission and organizational development” (p. 231). Using their definition, they suggested three levels of internal communication: day-to-day management (employee relations), strategic (mission) and project management (organizational development). Likewise, Kalla (2005) highlighted the multi-disciplinary interest in internal communication and defined “integrated internal communications” as “all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organization” (p. 304).

Cornelissen (2004) set out a simple tactical approach to internal communication focusing on methods: “all methods (internal newsletter, intranet) used by a firm to communicate with its employees” (p. 189). This view highlights the need to consider the media and, by implication, message content involved in internal communication. Welch and Jackson (2007) considered all of these definitions to understand internal communication as the strategic management of

interactions and relationships among internal stakeholders at all levels within organizations.

“Internal communication is furthermore a catalyst for organizations to reach their goals and objectives, as it enables them to effectively develop structure and culture” (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

The role of communicating internally

Internal communication is widely discussed under the various umbrellas of employee communication, organizational communication, business communication, and internal marketing. Similarly, responsibility for the conduct of such internal communication may sit within various established functions performed by communication, public relations, marketing or human resources professionals. These functions can be operated out of departments of marketing, corporate communications, human resources and the CEO’s office (Kitchen & Daly, 2002).

With this and other valuable research available, organizations have recently begun to view internal communication as not just the avenue of the monthly newsletter, but rather as a critical driver of success. Its various iterations – described by Theaker (2001) as “eras” – include those of entertaining (1940s), informing (1950s) and persuading (1960s) employees to, today, open communication within the organization (1980s to date). Today’s internal communication unit is focused on challenging and stimulating employees, managing change and gaining employee engagement and commitment (Tourish & Hargie, 1998; Smith, 2005; Yeomans, 2006).

The purpose has moved from controlling and directing people, through providing information and making announcements, to supporting the development of a flexible work environment which adapts to change, seeks improvement, shares knowledge, generates ideas,

and involves people in accomplishing strategic goals (Kennan & Hazleton, 2006; Smith, 2005; Tourish & Hargie, 1998).

According to Chalmers (2008), internal communication practitioners need to understand people in organizations and how to influence employee knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. They should be able to measure an organization's communications climate (L'Etang, 2008) and analyze the cultural, political, and relational dimensions present within their organizations (Conrad, 1994).

In order to better attend to the new requirements of internal communication, practitioners also needed to accommodate their duties in the area. Smythe (1996) identified several practical new roles for internal communication practitioners: (1) interpreter of ethics and facilitator of values – the communication role here is to understand the expectations and ethics with which the organization must be aligned; (2) integrator of the internal culture and external brand – an emerging communication role is to reconcile the thinking and the programs conceived by the inward- and outward-facing communication disciplines; (3) big picture context – this role is to use the channels and media of communication creatively to tell stories about new procedures, processes and products and to put them into the context of the vision in a way that both compels and motivates; (4) real-time communication and the transparency of decisions – here, the communication role is to be aware of what is going on in the organization and pass on the information; (5) the communication planner – this suggests the need for a new communication planning role, that of information broker, marrying the information needs of the audience with that of the information suppliers.

Research conducted by Chalmers (2008) also demonstrated that the competencies required for internal communication practitioners today indicate that the role has advanced and

become broader and more strategic. Internal communication's roles continue, nevertheless, to retain the requirement for expertise in tactical skills, and that portfolio has increased to include competencies related to technology as an important communication channel.

Although the literature highlights new roles for internal communication, it also states that practitioners still need to be able to use the traditional craft skills, design messages (Bambacas, & Patrickson, 2008), and be "innovative, entertaining and face-to-face" (Farrant, 2003, p. 85).

In order to successfully perform these news roles and effectively attend to employees' communication expectations, it is necessary that practitioners first understand employee information needs.

Employee information needs and preferences

Employees have expectations of communication tactics that influence their evaluations of internal communication (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010). Goldhaber, Porter, Yates, & Lesniak (1978) established that an employee's primary needs include, first, more information about personal, job-related matters, and then, information about organizational decision making and a greater opportunity to voice complaints and evaluate superiors. Research regarding employee preferences for quantity, channels, and types of information has also been recently conducted (Friedl & Verčič, 2011; White et al., 2010; Marques, 2010).

White, Vanc, and Stafford (2010) conducted 147 interviews in a large multi-campus university in the US and found that administrative decisions, budgets, personnel decisions, pending changes, goals, and future directions are some of the information wanted by employees, and that they value face-to-face communication, even though many employees mentioned that meetings are time-consuming.

Marques (2010) performed a qualitative study involving 20 subjects in the US; all were members of the workforce with at least five years of work experience in lower and middle management positions. The results revealed that to be successful, communication should be timely, clear, accurate, credible, pertinent, responsible, concise, professional, and sincere. In addition, the study showed that the message should be delivered in an appropriate format based on its content. Not every message is appropriate for email, but not every message requires face-to-face scenarios either. Although this study did not explore the content of the messages employees want, it provided a good insight into what kind of communication they expect.

A study by Friedl and Verčič (2011) assessed their expectations as well as employees' attitudes towards both existing internal media channels and new communication media. The authors noted that these employees would rather use traditional internal media despite a strong preference for social media in their private lives.

Woodall (2006) suggested employees prefer different media for different sorts of information. That study also observed that print communication seems to be losing preference to electronic forms of communication.

Kelleher (2001) found different internal communication preferences associated with different work roles; managers liked face-to-face communication best, and technicians preferred written communication. Stein (2006) identified a preference for face-to-face and email communication for establishing a sense of community in an organization.

After analyzing 12 different studies related to internal communication and engagement assessment, Ruck and Welch (2012) concluded that more research that encourages development of assessment instruments that include emphasis on content and employee needs is necessary. What emerged from their study was that the majority of assessments done were of processes,

channels, and volume of communication, and not employee needs for content. Similarly, Welch and Jackson (2007) argued that “research into employee preferences for channel and content of internal corporate communication is required to ensure it meets employees’ needs” (p. 187).

Discrepancy Theory

Discrepancy theory has been chosen for the theoretical basis of this study because it attempts to explain the gap that can be experienced by an employee between what that employee expects from the organization and how his or her organization attends to those expectations. Initially applied to job satisfaction, discrepancy theory defined employee satisfaction as being the difference between the outcomes a person seeks and the outcomes a person receives (King, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1988). A discrepancy existed when there was a gap between what the employee expected and what the employee then received from the organization. Employees have many predetermined ideas of how their organization should interact with them and communication may be one of those, so this theory can be used when examining internal communication and communication satisfaction. If their organization does not deliver their communication expectations, a discrepancy may be created.

In psychology research, discrepancy theory has been used since 1964 to study job satisfaction. According to Igalens and Roussel (1999), the theory incorporates contributions from two-factor theory (Herzberg, 1971; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), need theories (Alderfer, 1969; Maslow, 1943), intrinsic motivation theories (Deci, 1972, 1975; Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980), and equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965), hence its strength. In addition, Igalens and Roussel (1999) argued that in discrepancy theory the process of satisfaction corresponds to the degree of equivalence perceived by a person between what each aspect of

work should be and what it actually is. This evaluation depends on the individual's own needs, values, beliefs, expectations, aspirations, and desires (Igalens & Roussel, 1999).

Lawler (1973) described discrepancy theory as the result of the difference between an actual outcome a person received and some other expected outcome level. A comparison in which an actual outcome level was lower than an expected outcome level would result in dissatisfaction.

According to Lawler (1973), Katzell (1964) and Locke (1969) presented the two most completely developed discrepancy theory approaches to satisfaction. "Katzell sees satisfaction as the difference between an actual amount and some desired amount. He assumes that this difference should be divided by the desired amount of the outcome" (p. 67). Katzell's formula was most criticized because it assumed that getting more than the desired amount should produce less satisfaction than getting the desired amount. No literature testing this formula was found.

Locke (1969) argued that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are a function of the perceived discrepancy between what one wants from the job (value standard), and what one perceives one gets from the job. This comparison can produce both positive and negative discrepancies. Positive discrepancies are experienced when a perceived attribute is greater than the standard of comparison (when what is possessed is higher than what is perceived to be necessary or important). Negative discrepancies are experienced when the attribute level is less than the standard of comparison.

Kucel and Vilalta-Bufi (2013) wrote that Locke distinguished three elements affecting job satisfaction: (1) the worker's perception of some aspect of the job (not the objective description of it), (2) an implicit or explicit value standard (what one wants from the job), and (3)

a conscious or subconscious judgment of the relationship between one's perception(s) and one's value(s) (perceived discrepancy) (p. 31).

Another vital element in discrepancy theory as discussed by Locke (1969) is the intensity of values. The effect of a discrepancy relating to one's job satisfaction depends on the importance of the job characteristic for the individual (Kucel & Vilalta-Bufi, 2013). For instance, the effect of the internal communication process on job satisfaction will be larger for someone who puts more value on the way the organization communicates with its employees than for someone who considers it less important. Therefore, "satisfaction with some object or situation is a function not only of the amount of discrepancy between perception and value, but of the importance of that value to the individual" (Locke, 1969, p. 330).

Porter (1961), as discussed in Lawler (1973), also worked on measuring satisfaction by using discrepancy theory. Porter asked people how much of a given outcome there should be for their job and how much of a given outcome there actually was. Having these answers, he considered the difference between them to be a measure of satisfaction. This discrepancy approach differs from Locke's since it sees satisfaction as influenced not by how much a person wants but by how much he feels he should receive" (Lawler, 1973, p. 67).

More recently, Jiang and Klein (2002) used discrepancy theory to explain important aspects in the formation of turnover indicators for information system (IS) professionals. The theoretical framework provided a method to link the turnover indicator variables of intent to leave and career satisfaction to variables that reflect a gap between wants of employees and their perceptions of what they have in their jobs. The data collected by this study showed that to improve the turnover indicators, IS managers and human resource managers must find ways to

close the gap between what employees want and what they perceive they have in their current positions.

Tesch and Klein (2003) introduced a framework to investigate information system specialists' skill requirements from multiple stakeholder perspectives with the final purpose of increasing stakeholder commitment to system development projects. The results of this study provided evidence to support discrepancy theory in the skill arena for IS specialists. All the stakeholders studied demonstrated that with a positive gap of perception exceeding expectations, satisfaction is higher. The intent of discrepancy theory in this work was to establish a connection between individuals' satisfaction and their desires.

Kucel and Vilalta-Bufi (2013), examined the determinants of job satisfaction of Spanish university graduates. They based their analysis on Locke's discrepancy theory whereby job satisfaction depended on the subjective evaluation of the discrepancy between what one perceives he gets from the job and what he wants to obtain from it.

Thus the literature contains three different discrepancy approaches: one looks at what people want, the second at what people feel they should receive, and the third at what people expect to receive. For the purpose of this thesis research the third approach is being used.

Values

As noted earlier, the intensity of values is a relevant element in discrepancy theory. The satisfaction with some situation is a function not only of the amount of discrepancy between perception and value, but also of the importance of that value to the individual (Locke, 1969). In general, values are socially-oriented, multidimensional conceptions of desirable end-states that uniquely influence behavior and attitudes (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987).

Values are intangible; what is seen are the ways through which values manifest themselves (e.g., in opinions, attitudes, preferences, desires, fears, etc.). Values can be personal, professional, organizational, or societal. Although they are interrelated, the influence among them differs. Values also provide the foundation for the purpose and goals of an organization. They silently orient hundreds of decisions made at all levels of the organization every day (Posner, 2010).

Values have been defined in different ways. According to Rokeach (1968), “values have to do with modes of conduct and end-states of evidence” (p. 550). This means that a person has a strong belief about what he or she believes is socially preferable to alternate styles of conduct. Additionally, a value is a standard we employ to justify behavior, and that tells us how to act and what to want.

Bilsky and Schwartz (1994) defined values as “cognitive representations of the important human goals or motivations about which people must communicate in order to coordinate their behavior” (p. 164). The content that differentiates one value from another is the type of motivation or goal that it represents.

Rokeach (1968) proposed two kinds of values: instrumental and terminal. Terminal values are the ultimate things the person wants to achieve through his or her behavior (e.g., a comfortable life, a world at peace, equality), it tends to be more intangible and static. While instrumental values are types of behavior (e.g., honesty, helpfulness), and they are usually more concrete (Argandoña, 2003). The relationship between instrumental and terminal values is that instrumental values represent behaviors that facilitate the attainment of terminal values.

A value system is “a hierarchical arrangements of values, a rank-ordering of values along a continuum of relative importance” (Rokeach, 1968, p. 551). Once embraced, values play an

executive role in personality and organizational culture, serving as criteria for making decisions and setting priorities (Hultman, 2005). Using focus groups, Brummette and Zoch (2010) studied values from the perspective of individuals within our society. The focus groups they conducted showed that participants had value-driven expectations for the organization they chose to do business with.

Likewise, many researchers concluded that values somehow influence a person's decision-making behaviors. Becker and Conner (1981) focused on values related to mass media usage. They studied the use of television, newspapers and magazines and concluded that although media usage is also related to demographics and education, values are much more of a causal factor than education.

Kropp, Lavack, and Silvera (2005) cited values as predictors in more than 20 studies that related to different consumer situations, including food, tourism, and car purchases. Orth and Kahle (2008) examined the influence of values on wine brand choices. On the basis of a consumer sample, the authors concluded that individual values influence which brand benefits consumers desire in wine.

The studies mentioned so far focused on how personal values influence consumers' behaviors, or mass media use. This thesis studies how values are related to employees' communication expectations by using several items on the questionnaire that represent personal values.

Research Questions

From this review of the literature, the following research questions and hypothesis were developed:

RQ1: Are employees satisfied with the communication they are receiving at their organization?

RQ2: What kinds of information do employees expect to receive, and how often do they expect to receive them?

H1: An individual's values are related to his or her expectations about the communication they should be receiving from the organization.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Population

This study used a census sample method to administer quantitative questionnaires to all full-time employees (N = 90) at multiple locations of a privately owned chemical company with locations in Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 64 years with different education levels (high school, bachelor's, master's).

This population was chosen because the nature of the study calls for an examination of employee perceptions of internal communication at an organization, and since this specific company does manufacturing, sales, warehousing, delivery and administration, and employs people in a variety of positions, it was a good fit for the focus of the study.

The researcher elected to include no demographic items in the survey instrument to ensure respondent anonymity. In terms of the anonymity of individual company locations, data obtained from all locations were aggregated into one large data set.

Research Design

A quantitative survey (see Appendix) was used because it is objective in nature and requires the variables under consideration to be measured and presented systematically.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 Likert scale questions in which employees were asked to reveal their opinions about statements related to internal communication, communication satisfaction, communication expectations, and personal values, answering how much they agreed or disagreed with a given statement. One open-ended question was also included.

The instrument was segregated into three parts. The first part contained the open-ended question that gave employees the opportunity to give their opinion about the communication process at their workplace. In addition, the first part also contained a series of statements about

communication satisfaction. Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with different types of information received in their workplace. This first section was based on the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire developed by Downs and Hazen (1977) and is discussed below.

In the second part of the instrument respondents were asked to rate how often they expected to be communicated with about certain types of information. In the third and final part of the survey, respondents were asked to carefully read and then rate a list of personal values.

Communication satisfaction and Communication expectations

The first two parts of the instrument measured communication satisfaction and came from the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) proposed by Downs and Hazen (1977). The CSQ was developed to gain an impression of the way employees evaluate an organization's communication system. The questionnaire focuses on employees' attitudes and judgments of many communicative practices, as these perceptions will influence the behavior of employees in an organization.

Zwijze-Koning and de Jong (2007) evaluated the Downs and Hazen instrument and concluded that "the CSQ is an appropriate instrument for determining what employees consider important communication issues within their organization" (p. 278).

In developing the questionnaire for this study, the researcher decided to use the first part of the CSQ that is focused on different communicative topics that deal with satisfaction with communication and different types of information. This section was chosen because it covered a relevant group of different types of information applicable to the workplace.

The second part of the survey measured employees' communication expectations and had the same list of types of information used in the first section. Because the researcher is

comparing communication satisfaction and communication expectation using the same list was appropriate. The second section of the instrument asked how often employees would expect to be communicated with about different types of information (see Appendix). The reliability for each variable was tested. Communication satisfaction obtained an alpha of .955, and communication expectation had an alpha of .990.

Values

The final part of the instrument is measured with a list of terminal values proposed by Brummette and Zoch (2010). These values were obtained from focus groups conducted to identify specific end state values that should be associated with any legitimate organization. According to their study, “any actions to deviate from these terminal values ultimately threaten an organization’s legitimacy” (p. 14). They identified six values: competence, efficiency, accountability, fairness, caring, and trustworthiness. The reliability for this variable was tested and obtained an alpha of .864.

Procedures

This thesis used quantitative research methods. In order to validate the questions, the instrument was pre-tested with a sample of undergraduate students (N=94) who had work experience, and obtained a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.956 with that pretest. This coefficient proved to be an excellent indicator of the instrument's internal coherence reliability.

The questionnaires were distributed in four different locations of the chemical company between March 10th and March 14th of 2014. Prior to this period of time, the communication between the researcher and the employees was conducted through the company’s vice president, who emailed his employees a solicitation form provided by the researcher approximately two weeks before the research was conducted.

On the days in which the research was conducted, the researcher provided participants with a consent form that had a detailed explanation of the study, its potential risks and benefits. Respondents who agreed to participate in the study signed the consent form, and at this point the signed consent forms were separated from the survey instrument to ensure the anonymity of the respondents.

After indicating their consent to participate in the study, participants were given a questionnaire composed of 31 items. Respondents were able to complete the survey in approximately 20 to 25 minutes. After completing the survey, participants handed it in to the researcher. Respondents were not provided with any type of incentive for their participation in the study.

Paper surveys were used because of the various education level of the respondents, some of whom were not familiar with completing online surveys. Additionally, some employees didn't have access to a computer or the Internet during work hours. The questionnaire was distributed during working hours, with the consent of the vice president, in order to increase participation among employees.

Data Analysis

The data from the survey responses were input into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and included the raw data along with variable and value labels. The researcher received a total of 51 responses, which makes the response rate 56%, more than half of the total population.

Descriptive statistics were generated for each of the 30 individual questions. These descriptive statistics included the mean scores for each question, as well as the frequency distributions for each response.

A factor analysis was conducted within the third and final part of the survey (personal values) and a two-factor solution emerged. The analysis revealed the variables of interpersonal factor (accountable, caring, and competent) and ethical factor (fair and trustworthy). Finally, a Pearson correlation test was used to determine the response to the hypothesis for this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

Research Question 1

Are employees satisfied with the communication they are receiving at their organization?

The first research question addressed communication satisfaction, and how satisfied employees are with the communication they receive from their organization. This question was answered through the analysis of the first part of the questionnaire. The communication satisfaction portion of the survey contained 12 questions in which numerical responses ranged from one (very dissatisfied) to five (very satisfied). Means were calculated for each item. Taking the mean of the mean scores of the dimensions of communication satisfaction resulted in the overall communication satisfaction score.

Overall, employees in this study are minimally satisfied with the communication they receive from their organization ($M=3.1$). Table 4.1 displays the scores for the 12 dimensions for communication satisfaction.

The highest scored dimensions were “information about the requirements of my job” ($M=3.45$; $SD=1.390$), “information about our organization’s financial standing” ($M=3.29$, $SD=1.724$), “information about accomplishments and/or failures of the organization” ($M=3.29$, $SD=1.847$) and “information about my progress in my job” ($M=3.24$, $SD=1.142$).

The lowest scored dimensions were “information about recognition of my efforts” ($M=2.90$, $SD=1.345$), “information about changes in our organization” ($M=2.90$, $SD=1.578$), “information about benefits and pay” ($M=2.94$, $SD=1.778$), and “information about how I’m being evaluated” ($M=2.96$, $SD=1.216$).

Table 4.1: Communication Satisfaction Dimensions

<u>Information received</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Information about the requirements of my job	3.45	1.390
Information about our organization’s financial standing	3.29	1.724
Information about accomplishments and/or failures of the organization	3.29	1.847
Information about your progress in your job	3.24	1.142
Information about departmental policies and goals	3.16	1.271
Information about how my job compare with others	3.14	1.059
Information about organizational policies and goals	3.06	1.139
Information about how problems related to my job are being handled	3.02	1.516
Information about how I am being evaluated	2.96	1.216
Information about benefits and pay	2.94	1.778
Information about recognition of my efforts	2.90	1.345
Information about changes in our organization	2.90	1.578

Research Question 2

What kinds of information do employees expect to receive, and how often do they expect to receive them?

The second research question addressed employees’ communication expectations and how often employees would like to receive different kinds of information. The second part of the survey included 11 questions in which numerical responses ranged from one (never) to five (always). Means were calculated for each item and the highest and lowest numbers are shown

below. Table 4.2 displays the scores for the 11 dimensions for employees' communication expectation.

Table 4.2: Employees' Communication Expectation

<u>Information expected</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Information about benefits and pay	4.35	2.897
Information about changes in our organization	4.27	2.736
Information about departmental policies and goals	4.18	2.488
Information about how I am being evaluated	4.12	2.414
Information about organizational policies and goals	4.10	2.138
Information about my job description	4.08	2.675
Information about accomplishments and/or failures of the organization	4.02	3.197
Information about my progress in my job	3.82	1.841
Information about our organization's financial standing	3.82	3.141
Information about how my job compare with others	3.55	2.436
Information about recognition of my efforts	3.51	2.053

The types of communication employees from this chemical company expect to receive most of the time to always are: “information about benefits and pay” ($M=4.35$, $SD=2.897$), “information about changes in our organization” ($M=4.27$, $SD=2.736$) and “information about departmental policies and goals” ($M=4.18$, $SD=2.488$).

The types of information they would like to receive sometimes are “information about others” ($M=3.51$, $SD=2.053$), “information about how my job compare with others” ($M=3.55$, $SD=2.436$) and “information about your progress in your job” ($M=3.82$, $SD=1.841$).

Hypothesis 1

An individual's values are related to his or her expectations about the communication they should be receiving from the organization.

This hypothesis was supported by the results of this study. Hypothesis one addressed how values are related to the employee's expectation about the communication they should be receiving from the organization. The final section of the survey contained a list of six terminal values in which respondents were asked to indicate how important these values were to them on a scale of one (not at all important) to five (very important).

To determine if the hypothesis is supported, first, a principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was conducted with the final section of the survey. A criterion for retaining items on a factor was the 60/40 rule that says that for the loading to be considered significant it must load with at least .60 on one factor and not more than .40 on any other factor (McCroskey & Young, 1979). This eliminated one of the six items from the survey. The exploratory factor analyses of the five remaining items in the final section led to the items loading on two factors. See Table 4.3 for the factor analysis numerical results. The analysis revealed the variables of:

- *Interpersonal factor.* This factor includes the values of being accountable, caring, and competent, and is related to the relationship the employees would like to have with the organization. These respondents expect from the organization the same treatment they receive from people.

- *Ethical factor.* This factor includes the values of fairness and trustworthiness, and is related to the organization’s behavior. Employees would like the organization to be just with them; to have ethical attitudes towards its employees.

Table 4.3: Factor Analysis of Values

<u>Item</u>	<u>Factor Loadings</u>	
	<u>Factor 1 - Interpersonal</u>	<u>Factor 2- Ethical</u>
Accountable	.875	
Caring	.850	
Competent	.812	
Fair		.885
Trustworthy		.914

Second, a Pearson’s correlation was conducted to detect any significant relationships between the two factors and the variables from the second part of the survey. Some very interesting results were determined. A positive relationship between the ethical factor and an individual’s expectations about the communication they should be receiving from the organization was found, $r(49) = .52, p < .01$. Also, a positive relationship between the interpersonal factor and an individual’s expectations about the communication they should be receiving from the organization was determined, $r(49) = .44, p < .01$.

The results also indicated that the employees who responded to the survey are minimally satisfied with their jobs ($M=3.29, SD=1.137$). However, responses to the open-ended question about employees’ perceptions of their organizational communication process were not favorable.

This question asked employees to indicate how the communication associated with their jobs could be changed in any way to make them more satisfied. The answers provided the researcher with more detailed and specific information related to the employees' perceptions, concerns, and feelings about the communication process and the organization in general.

Many employees reported that there is a lack of appreciation from their managers and supervisors for performing their activities or going "above and beyond". Comments also revealed the desire for more attention directed towards team meetings and information related to the company goals. Some employees revealed that communication among upper management, middle management, and staff should happen more often, as should regular feedback. Other employees commented that they would like to feel more like "a part of the company", that not knowing anything "is very discouraging".

Chapter 5: Discussion

Communication satisfaction and employees' communication expectations

The scope of this thesis was to use Discrepancy Theory to understand what type of information employees expect from their organization, how those expectations are related to their values, and whether the organization studied attended to those expectations. This theory defined employee satisfaction as being the difference between the outcomes a person seeks and the outcomes a person receives (King, Lahiff & Hatfield, 1988). Therefore, if the organization studied did not deliver employees' communication expectations, a discrepancy may be created.

When applying the theory to this research, the findings suggested that employees in the organization studied were minimally satisfied with the overall communication they received, and that their expectations were also minimally met. In fact, the means showed that employees were almost indifferent about the communication they received. Thus, overall no major discrepancies were created. However, when looking at each individual type of information, some negative discrepancies were identified. For instance, 92% of the employees who took the survey expect to receive "information about changes in our organization" in a timeframe of sometimes, most of the time or always, and only 11% were satisfied with the amount of information received about this particular topic. Similarly, 90% of the participants expect to receive "information about benefits and pay" and only 34% were satisfied with the amount of information received. To improve the communication process, and attend to employees' expectations, the organization studied must find ways to close the gap between what employees expect and what they receive.

Some internal communication practices can be applied to this context to facilitate closing those gaps. As described by Smythe (1996), it is important that practitioners look at the big picture context and use their channels and media of communication creatively to tell stories

about new procedures, processes and products. In addition, as noticed in Marques (2010), to be successful the communication should be timely, clear, accurate, credible, pertinent, responsible, concise, professional and sincere. This demands that the organization develop a clear understanding of which types of information are most valued by employees, as well as the quantity and quality of information these individuals require to perform their jobs well. Only then can the organization design and implement an effective and efficient internal communication system capable of meeting employees' communication needs and expectations.

The results that showed the surveyed employees expect to receive information about changes in the organization, benefits and pay, and organizational and departmental goals are consistent with previous research (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010) that concluded that information about administrative decisions, personnel decisions, pending changes, goals, and future directions are some of employees' communication needs. These findings have implications for both the Human Resources (HR) department and practitioners. It is important that HR and internal communication department cooperate, since one has the type of information the other needs to communicate. If the units work as a team and collaborate with each other, the information flow within the organization will most likely run more smoothly.

Findings of this thesis also answered the call for research (Welch & Jackson, 2007) into what types of content employees would like to receive from the organization. Although these results are only applied to one organization, it is a good starting point for future research in the area.

Communication expectations and personal values

A strong positive relationship between employees' communication expectations and personal values was found. The researcher believes this is the first time that such a link has been

reported in the academic literature. It confirms not only the hypothesis of this study, but also supports Locke's (1969) idea that expectations are related to the importance of values to the individual. The data collected by this study showed that an employee from this organization, who thinks that the values of accountability, caring, competence, fairness and trustworthiness are very important, would have high communication expectations.

Based on Rokeach's (1968) research that claims values are a standard we employ to justify behavior, and from these results, the researcher can posit that employees who perceive one or more of these values as important will be more interested in being communicated with about different types of information in the workplace. Having these values will justify why the employee expects to receive information about certain kinds of things.

The findings from the factor analysis, as well as the answers from the open-ended question, revealed that the employees from this company would like to receive from the organization the same treatment they receive from people, such as friends and family. The researcher believes that the reason these factors emerged is because employees look at their organization the same way they look at people. They don't want the organization to let them down. The relationship they would like to have with the organization is almost an interpersonal relationship. Additionally, ethical behaviors are also valued as very important by employees. They would like the organization to be honest with them so they can build a long lasting relationship and a sense of community. This sense of community, as studied by Stein (2006), can be established with face-to-face and email communication.

When looking at the factor loadings from the factor analysis (see table 4.3), the value "accountable" was highly associated with the factor "interpersonal." From this finding the researcher can assume that the employees from this organization expect the

company to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner that involves employees.

The value “trustworthy” had a high association with the factor “ethical,” demonstrating again the transparency that employees expected from this organization. An ethical behavior can potentially build the trust the employees would like to have in the organization they work for, and this trust may facilitate relationships between and within the organization.

Job satisfaction and communication satisfaction

The results from this thesis indicated that the employees who responded to the survey are minimally satisfied with their jobs ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.137$). Since the standard deviation provides some idea about the distribution of scores around the mean, the low standard deviation indicates that the data points tend to be very close to the mean. Therefore, in this organization, the majority of employees who responded to the survey have the same level of satisfaction about their jobs, which ranged between indifferent and satisfied.

This research also revealed that employees are minimally satisfied with the overall communication they are receiving from this organization ($M = 3.1$). So, to detect any significant relationship between these two variables, a Pearson’s correlation was conducted. A positive and strong relationship between job satisfaction and communication satisfaction was found, $r(50) = .69$, $p < .01$.

With this result the researcher can assume that a more effective and successful communication process would increase the level of job satisfaction these employees presented.

Recommendations

With the data obtained from this research and based on literature of internal communication listed in this thesis, the organization studied, as well as other companies with this

same structure, could design an internal communication plan that benefit their communication practices and consequently the success of the organization.

Organizations that want to improve their internal communication processes and would like to influence employee knowledge, attitudes and behaviors should consider taking the following actions:

- *Establish two-way communication channels that facilitate employee input into decisions.*

The findings showed that employees would like to be more involved with the organization. This involvement can be accomplished by encouraging more face-to-face communication, such as team meetings, and opportunities for staff to work together. Different kinds of meetings can be promoted: weekly or bi-weekly departmental team meetings, in which all employees should be invited for information sharing, updating, and assigning tasks; all-staff “Big Picture” meetings, once a year with all the employees to help them understand the organization’s departmental goals and how their work fits into the big picture. These initiatives should increase the sense of community and interpersonal relationships within the organization.

- *Provide managers with better tools and training so they can participate more actively in the communication process.* Since managers are closest to daily operations, they are able to have a better understanding of day-to-day activities. First, it is important that managers receive a summary of employees’ communication needs to ensure they are aware of the support internal communications can offer. Second, it is relevant that leaders understand the importance of communicating well with their subordinates and be trained to do so. Thus, training will hopefully help managers communicate with their teams more effectively. This should cover ways to encourage discussion and how to run team

meetings and present information.

- *Create feedback opportunities.* Both the results from the open-ended question and multiple-choice questions revealed that employees would like to be recognized for their efforts and expect to receive positive or negative feedback about the job they perform. Most of the time, employees have important operational information that can help to make the organization more successful in achieving its goals. This information can be obtained through feedback. So the development of a feedback program that ensures a two-way flow of information between staff and management would be helpful in any organization.
- *Offer more options of channels and technologies to facilitate communication.* Different communication channels are appropriate for different kinds of information and achieve different objectives. Therefore, it is vital to choose the communication channel that best fits the nature of the communication. It is important to consider that organizations have a variety of job positions so it is also critical that the method of communication chosen is appropriate and acceptable to the targeted employees. (1) For employees who don't work with computers on a daily basis the use of Bulletin Boards is recommended. This channel is primarily a source for routine news and upcoming events. This medium can also be used to display vision and value statements to remind employees where the organization and their own departments are headed, and by what values this will be accomplished. Lunchrooms, water coolers, lobbies and common areas are ideal locations for bulletin boards. (2) Digital and/or print newsletters, to attend both employees who work with computers and those who do not, in or out of the office can be used as a team builder and as a news source. It can profile employees and offices or departments and can feature

initiatives in all areas of the organization. It may help to build team spirit and provides informal recognition. When it is in paper, it allows the employee to take it home and share with the family. (3) An Intranet, for employees who work with computers, can also be introduced to the organization, if it does not already exist. This channel is a private Internet and provides information that is routine or operationally important. In this platform the organization can post information about benefits and pay, and videos clips explaining policies and goals. Overall, this is an online space where the organization can interact with its employees by sharing organizational and departmental information. (4) News Bulletins are a channel that can easily be sent through email or posted on the bulletin boards, depending on the necessity. It is used to ensure that employees learn departmental or organizational news before they hear it through the media.

Good internal communication is necessary to support the development of the organization and its employees. Findings of this thesis revealed that employees are interested in learning more about the organization they work at, as well as their departments. While attempting to meet employees' communication needs, internal communication can provide staff with an understanding of institutional objectives and their purpose, so employees can participate in the process of achieving them. Most of the information employees need is functional information that will facilitate employees performing their job efficiently and effectively.

The strong relationship between communication expectations and personal values causes the researcher to posit that in addition to the practical aspect, there are deeper roles of internal communications. These roles can include: developing and maintaining a sense of community and interrelation amongst staff; giving employees a sense of they are part of the organization; developing a culture of recognition of success and achievement, thus improving motivation.

Limitations and future research

Because this was a study conducted in a single and small chemical organization, this thesis is limited in its generalizability to other types of organizations. However, this study provides a great deal of important information that can be used by the organization studied. In addition its organizational structure of multiple sites, and the variety of jobs within the organization (manufacturing, sales, warehousing, delivery and administration) characterize it as being similar in nature to a number of corporations in today's marketplace. Consequently, some of the conclusions drawn from this study could help build some insight into the practice of internal communication in other similarly structured organizations. Therefore, it is possible that similar studies could be patterned after this one and implemented in other types of organizations having multiple sites and with a variety of jobs within the organization.

Another limitation identified relates to the methodology used for this project. The use of paper surveys might not reach employees who don't work in the office, such as the salesman and drivers. Therefore, combining paper and online surveys could have increased the response rate.

Even though a 56% response rate was achieved, limitations in data interpretation still exist. It is very likely that not all employees were aware of the study – especially those who don't work at a particular site, such as salesman and drivers. Cases of employees who had no interest, or lacked the time to complete it must also be considered. It is also possible that employees chose not to participate in this study because of a concern about their answers somehow being identified.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the researcher elected to include no demographic items in the survey instrument to ensure respondent anonymity. For future research, it is important to include in the instrument information such as level of education and office

location in order to obtain a more detailed data. Also, by learning employees' education level and office location it would be easier for the employer to identify employees' communication needs and direct communication efforts to the right location.

In the future investigations such as this should take place with a larger sample of employees in order to further observe employees' communication expectations and the relationship of those expectations with their values. Further research should also be conducted to identify what channels employees are most likely to use in the workplace in order to better attend to employees' needs and preferences. Studies regarding internal communication and communication satisfaction should also be conducted to investigate what barriers to communication exist in this environment, and how they may affect communication satisfaction.

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Appendix

Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire

Most of us assume that the quality and amount of communication in our jobs contribute to both our job satisfaction and our productivity. Through this study we hope to find out how satisfied you are with communication practices in your job and what suggestions you have for improving them. We appreciate you taking time to complete the questionnaire. It should take 20 to 25 minutes. Your answers are completely confidential so be as frank as you wish. This is not a test – your opinion is the only right answer. Do not sign your name; we do not want to know who you are. The answers will be combined into groups for reporting purposes.

1. How satisfied are you with your job? (Circle or highlight the number that best describes your level of satisfaction)

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

2. If the communication associated with your job could be changed in any way to make you more satisfied, please indicate how:

A. Listed below are several kinds of information often associated with a person's job. Please indicate how satisfied you are with the amount you receive of each kind of information by circling/highlighting the appropriate number.

3. Information about my progress in my job

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

4. Information about organizational policies and goals

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

5. Information about how my job compares with others

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

6. Information about how I am being evaluated

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

7. Recognition of my efforts

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

8. Information about departmental policies and goals

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

9. Information about the requirements of my job

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

10. Information about changes in our organization

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

11. Reports on how problems related to my job are being handled

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

12. Information about benefits and pay

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

13. Information about our organization's financial standing

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

14. Information about accomplishments and/or failures of the organization

1 Very dissatisfied 2 Dissatisfied 3 Indifferent 4 Satisfied 5 Very Satisfied

B. On a scale from never to always, please indicate how often you would like to be communicated with about the following topics:

15. Your progress in your job

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

16. Recognition of your efforts

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

17. Information about organizational policies and goals

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

18. Information about how my job compares with others

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

19. Information about how I am being evaluated

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

20. Information about departmental policies and goals

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

21. Information about my job description

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

22. Information about changes in our organization

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

23. Information about benefits and pay

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

24. Information about our organization’s financial standing

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

25. Information about accomplishments and/or failures of the organization

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Most of the time 5 Always

On the following section is a list of values in alphabetical order. Each value is accompanied by a short description and scale. Your goal is to use the rankings provided to indicate each value’s importance in your own life. Study the list and think of how much each value may act as a guiding principle in your life.

*A. One a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how important these values are **to you** by circling the appropriate number.*

1. Accountable (Accepting responsibility by demonstrating a willingness to explain your actions and mistakes to others)

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important Somewhat important Neither important nor unimportant Important Very Important

2. Caring (Carefully considering the needs of others)

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important Somewhat important Neither important nor unimportant Important Very Important

3. Competent (Being able to successfully do something (within your job or your life) you feel is important in your life)

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important Somewhat important Neither important nor unimportant Important Very Important

4. Efficient (Resourceful use of time and effort)

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all important Somewhat important Neither important nor unimportant Important Very Important

5. Fair (Being committed to the just treatment of others)

1 Not at all important	2 Somewhat important	3 Neither important nor unimportant	4 Important	5 Very Important
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6. Trustworthy (Building lasting relationships with others)

1 Not at all important	2 Somewhat important	3 Neither important nor unimportant	4 Important	5 Very Important
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