LOOKING BACK AND FORTH: EXAMINING COMMUNICATION PROCESSES IN A MARKETING RESEARCH ORGANISATION

by

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Abstract

Communication has been identified as an essential part of a successfully perpetuating system. In conjunction with systemic feedback processes, communication, by its very nature, plays an integral role in the way that the system operates and continues to survive. General systems theory sees communication and feedback as being understood within the context in which they appear as well as in the context of the larger system. This dissertation provides an examination of communication process within the system of a marketing research organisation. Particular attention was given to the departments within the organisation that oversee the research process as a whole. Since the organisation relies heavily on processes, systems and communication to effectively and successfully manage a research project, these aspects were examined from a systems theory perspective in order to identify areas of concern and to provide appropriate recommendations for improvement. The research design was qualitative, and data were collected by means of fourteen in-depth interviews conducted with relevant role players representing management and team members from three areas of expertise. Additional depth to the data was provided through triangulation, using conferences and observation of meetings as additional information sources. Through concept mapping and thematic analysis of the transcripts and other data, four main, interrelated themes relating to communication within the organisation emerged. These are (1) lack of vision, referring to a general and specific lack of a sense of a common goal; (2) inefficient communication processes that cause a gap between top management and other employees regarding decision making, and a lack of feedback and follow-through on expectations; (3) lack of team cohesion, creating a sense of isolation between teams, uncertainty about expectations, and a vagueness regarding roles and responsibilities; and lastly (4) skills and resource limitation, indicating a lack of training and supervision, and a lack of adherence to procedures. In order to improve communication and feedback processes, it is recommended that the organisation clearly communicates goals and objectives to employees; formalises project planning procedures; instates regular meetings that include all staff; implements sufficient and effective supervision and training; and applies a multirater evaluation and appraisal programme.

KEY TERMS

Communication, organisation, marketing research, general systems theory, organisational design, teams, feedback, communication and feedback processes, organisational culture, 360 degree feedback, performance appraisal.

Abstrak

Kommunikasie is al geïdentifiseer as 'n lewensbelangrike deel van die suksesvolle voortbestaan van enige stelsel. Die aard van kommunikasie speel, in samewerking met sistemiese terugvoeringsprosesse, 'n integrale rol in die manier waarop stelsels werk en bly voortbestaan. Volgense algemene stelselteorie word kommunikasie en terugvoering binne die konteks waarin hulle voorkom verstaan, asook binne die konteks van die breër stelsel. Hierdie dissertasie vorm 'n ondersoek na die kommunikasieproses vind plaas binne die stelsel van 'n bemarkingsnavorsingsorganisasie. Daar word in die besonder aandag gegee aan daardie afdelings binne die organisasie wat die navorsingsproses in die geheel oorsien. Aangesien die organisasie uiters afhanklik is van prosesse, stelsels en kommunikasie om 'n navorsingsprojek doeltreffend en suksesvol te kan bestuur, bekyk ons die huidige kommunikasie- en terugvoeringsprosesse binne die organisasie vanuit 'n sistemiese perspektief, ten einde areas van bekommer te kan identifiseer en gepaste aanbevelings tot verbetering te kan doen. Die navorsings ontwerp was kwalitiatiewe navorsing met in-diepte onderhoude as data insameling as metode. Veertien onderhoude was met relevante rolspelers gevoer, die in bestuursrolle so wel as span lede van drie areas van vakkennis. Om addisionele diepte aan die data te bring, is die beginsel van data insameling van verskeie bronne ingesluit (die sluit ander databronne soos vergaderings en konferensies in). Deur konsep uitwerking en tematiese analise van transkriberings en ander data kom daar vier onderling verwante hoof temas wat met kommunikasie binne die organisasie, verband hou, na vore. Hulle is (1) 'n gebrek aan visie, wat verwys na 'n algemene en spesifieke gevoel dat daar 'n gebrek aan 'n gemeenskaplike doel is; (2) ondoeltreffende kommunikasieprosesse, waar daar 'n gaping tussen topbestuur en ander werknemers waargeneem word wat betref besluitneming, asook 'n gebrek aan terugvoering en deurvoering ten opsigte van verwagtinge wat geskep is; (3) 'n gebrek aan spansamehang, waar daar ook waargeneem word dat spanne onderling van mekaar verwyderd voel en onseker is wat van hulle verwag word, tesame met verwarring wat betref hul begrip van hulle rolle en verantwoordelikhede; en ten slotte (4) beperkinge ten opsigte van vaardighede en hulpbronne, wat dui op 'n gebrek aan opleiding en toesig, en ook op die feit dat prosedures nie altyd gevolg word nie. Sodat kommunikasie- en terugvoeringsprosesse kan verbeter, word dit aanbeveel dat die organisasie duidelik die doelwitte aan werknemers kommunikeer; projek beplannings prosedures te formaliseer; gereelde vergaderings wat alle werknemers insluit, instel; voldoende en effektiewe supervisie en opleiding implementeer; en 'n veel-valueerder evaluasie en waardering program.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Communication has been identified as an essential part of a successfully perpetuating system (Hanson, 1995). The very nature of the communication, in conjunction with the feedback processes (whether these be positive, negative or nonexistent), play an integral role in the way that the system operates and perpetuates.

From a general systems theory perspective, Hanson (1995) believes that any direct communication needs to be seen and understood in both the context of the relationship within which it occurs and the context of the larger system. Therefore this study of communication processes is conducted within the system, namely, a marketing research organisation, and needs to be understood from within this context. The relationships between the relevant parts of the system (such as departments or units of the organisation) are the central elements under investigation as opposed to the individual parts themselves.

Apart from direct communication processes, indirect forms of communication deserve some attention. Theunissen (1998) describes informal communication networks in an organisation as being essential to the effective functioning of the organisation.

The communication networks in an organisation, both direct or formal and indirect or informal, are imperative for maximising feedback within the organisation. Communication facilitates the effective functioning of the feedback mechanisms within the organisation's environment.

Another factor which influences the functioning of organisations is the characteristics of individuals, and consequently this has received increasing attention in recent years (Mamman, 1996). Factors such as diversity have the potential to impinge on employee interaction. Since individual characteristics are very relevant to the present investigation, they will be discussed in terms of their influence on the communication processes within the organisation.

Group characteristics, which are as important as individual characteristics, will also be examined. Group characteristics and group dynamics contribute significantly to the effective functioning of the organisation.

This is particularly true of communication processes in groups (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002), rendering an examination of group communication particularly relevant to this study.

In terms of examining the organisation through a systemic lens, all possible contributing and influencing factors need to be identified and accounted for. Contextual issues like the structure of the organisation, the corporate climate, current employment conditions, existing appraisal systems and existing feedback systems have particular relevance to the communication process of the organisation.

Background and context

This study is situated in the context of a marketing research organisation. The organisation focuses on conducting customised research for their clients. The organisation forms part of a larger system, that of the marketing research environment.

Within the organisation are various divisions or departments which manage the major steps of the research process. These include a management team, research executives (REs), client service executives (CSEs) and a production department comprising data processors, coders and questionnaire writers. There are other integral departments which influence the functioning of each research project, for example, that of fieldwork or data collection.

For the purposes of this investigation the key role players in the research process will be focused on. These include the REs, CSEs, the Production department, as well as the top management team. The complex relationships existing between these key role players represent the core of each project and are often the means by which the project's success is measured. The focal point of this investigation will thus be on the communication and feedback processes between these key role players. The contributions of other departments will also be considered as possible factors that influence the communication and feedback processes of the relationships under investigation.

Lastly, in partial fulfilment of the MA (Research Psychology) degree, in the context of marketing research, I have been incorporated into this system. The possible influence and effect my presence (both as an employee and a participant observer for this investigation) might have on the results of this study will be duly

noted. I consider participant observation an advantage in this study because of the very nature of the topic of this dissertation.

Relevance

Considering the context of the organisation and the climate within which it is currently functioning, the relevance of this study lies in identifying stumbling blocks to the future success of the organisation. It is hoped that the results and recommendations of this investigation will provide valuable information towards establishing more effective, context-specific communication and feedback processes.

Furthermore the relevance of this investigation's results and recommendations may stretch to aiding in strategic planning for the organisation's management team. This in turn may lead to further changes to maximise communication processes and ensure the future successes of the organisation and its employees.

Lastly, findings pertaining to principles that promote effective communication processes may be applied further a field in other organisations, groups and teams .

Aim

The aim of this investigation is to describe how existing communication and feedback processes within an organisation can be improved to enhance individual and group performances, as well as the success of the organisation as a whole. The examination will cover the attitudes and perceptions of key role players in the organisation. Information gathered will shed light on the effectiveness of previous and existing communication and feedback processes and how they can be improved. The results may be applied to adapt or adopt as well as to sustain a more effective working environment on both an individual and organisational level.

Conclusion

As the communication processes in an organisation are an important component of the way that the organisation operates and perpetuates, the focus of this dissertation will be on the way that communication

currently occurs and how it can be improved. The goal of any living system is to create and sustain an environment which will aid in ensuring the survival and growth of that system (Shireman, 1999).

Firstly, in Chapter 2, the literature pertaining to communication is examined, particularly within an organisation. Types of communication, barriers to communication and organisational culture are investigated to understand their importance in the communication processes in an organisation.

Chapter 3 explores the relevance and applicability of a theoretical framework with which to approach the topic. The theoretical background discussed is that of systems theory, since it shows application in the area of processes and organisations. The various dynamics described in systems theory are investigated as they pertain to organisations, for example, organisational design and teamwork.

The literature pertaining to communication (chapter 2) and the theoretical framework with which to approach this investigation (chapter 3) are very much interrelated. Much of the literature review of the theoretical framework incorporates communication processes as they occur in an organisation. Similarly, the literature pertaining to communication in organisations stems from the systems theory framework that is employed for this study.

In the fourth chapter the research methodology of the study is set out. Qualitative research is presented as most selected methodology, and the various facets of data collection and analysis are described.

The results of the study are laid out in Chapter 5. Further details of the organisation under investigation and specifics related to sampling are provided. The data are analysed according to four broad concepts or themes which are identified and examined.

Lastly, Chapter 6 brings us to the summary of the findings. In this chapter the literature is reviewed and results are brought together within the framework of systems theory. In closing, conclusions and recommendations are made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW ON COMMUNICATION IN ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

An act of communication is tied to the relationship between two parts communicating rather than being connected to the two parts independently (Hanson, 1995). Furthermore, the social context within which communication occurs influences the communication (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). Both sets of authors emphasise the importance of the context within which communication occurs. Context provides a frame of reference for this relationship so that the meaning of the communication can be deferred. The concept of context and communication being more than the actual words spoken is supported by Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) as well as Osland, Kolb and Rubin (2001).

The ability to actively listen whilst communicating builds positive relationships, brings about positive change, reduces criticism and creates an open atmosphere in which growth can take place (Rogers in Osland et al., 2001). During active listening the following should be taken into consideration: listening for the total meaning, responding to feelings, and noting all cues (verbal and non-verbal).

The literature as it relates to communication within an organisation is discussed in this chapter. The communication process, types of communication as well as barriers and challenges to the communication process are explored. Also examined are various concepts related to the present study. These include organisational culture, evaluation and appraisal programmes and how these influence the communication and feedback processes within an organisation.

Communication and feedback processes within an organisation

Drafke and Kossen (2002) describe communication as one of the most basic components of an organisation. Despite its importance, blockages and bypasses are inevitable and often necessary, especially in a changing work environment (Guffey, 2001). Such a pronounced ongoing transformation process shows a growing need for effective and efficient communication skills (O'Hair, O'Rourke & O'Hair, 2001). Guffey (2001) believe that changes in work environments are necessary for the survival and success of organisations. The following changes in business trends underline this importance (Guffey, 2001, p. 3):

- Flattened management hierarchies

- More participatory management

- Increased emphasis on self-directed work and project teams

- Heightened global competition

- Innovative communication technologies

- New work environments

- Focus on information and knowledge as corporate assets.

Effective business communication skills are essential for the growth of individuals (in terms of career) as well as for businesses (in terms of revenue and market share) (O'Hair et al., 2001). Improved self-presentation skills (creating a positive impression), opportunities for promotion, increased satisfaction and increased productivity are just some of the positive consequences of effective communication skills in organisations.

Successful communication is characterised by Sypher (1997) as occurring when communication of changes occurs early, openly and where employee participation is encouraged. Sypher (1997) also mentions the following as imperative for successful communication: timely, accurate and relevant information and the use of a variety of media (although the appropriate media for the information is also important). It is crucial that a strong yet flexible communication infrastructure exists within which managers constantly reinforce the value of the communication, and that there is ongoing effort (by managers and employees alike) to integrate all departments/divisions into the communication infrastructure.

The next section examines this infrastructure as a process, and sees how it functions in an organisational setting.

The communication process

There are perhaps as many definitive communication process models as there are definitions for communication. Hanson's (1995) definition of communication as the "exchange of information" (p. 91) is relevant here. Early models of the process of communication developed from telecommunications systems consisting of an information source (sender), the channel and the destination (receiver), together with noise as the interference factor (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). Later on a feedback loop was added. Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) provide an extension of this model, namely, the systems model (see Figure 1).

Firstly Sender A decides to communicate with Receiver B in order to achieve a certain goal. Sender A then takes into account B's background and their shared background and chooses a communication strategy and medium. A then encodes a message (in other words A structures it in a certain way so as to achieve his or her goal) and sends it to B using the chosen medium. B decodes and interprets the message in the context of his or her own background and that of A's. A evaluates the feedback so as to ascertain whether the message has been effective.
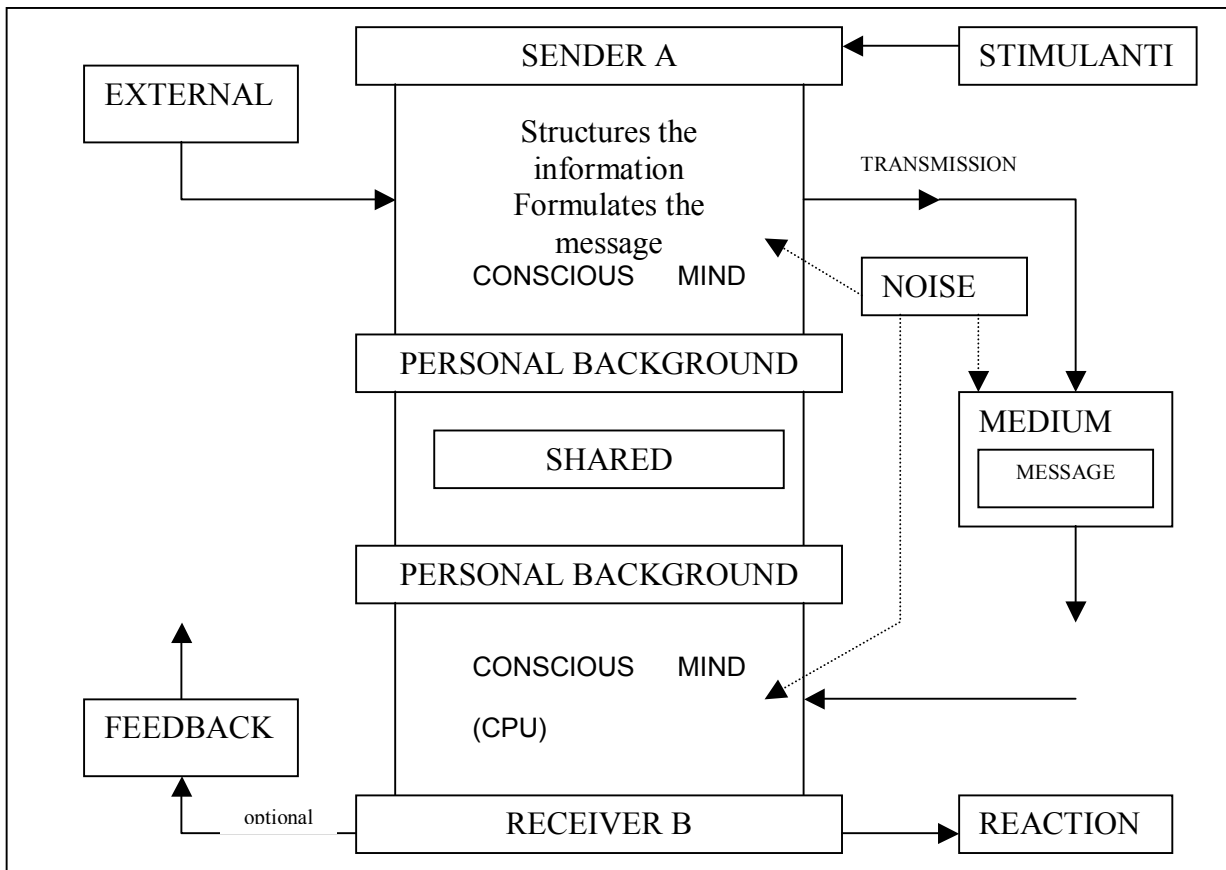
Figure 1: Systems model of communication (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002, p. 20)

Hartley and Bruckmann (2002, p. 20) identify certain important features of communication in their model:

♦ The meaning of the message is not exclusively the message itself, but the meaning is rather constituted by the receiver using their own background as a context for meaning.

♦ Because the backgrounds of the sender and the receiver may differ the meaning inferred may differ from the meaning intended.

♦ Good feedback is essential in determining the message's effectiveness.

♦ If there is a greater common background, less information will be needed to encode the message.

Although relevant and applicable to the present study, Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) identify certain gaps in the model. Social and cultural backgrounds should also be taken into account. The systems model is also a useful starting point for a model where the nature of the meaning of the communication is understood as being transactional rather than the meaning being a given. As mentioned previously, the systems model is more concerned with relationships (or a process of transacting) than with the idea of a one-way flow of meaning. As a result Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) investigate further the contextual nature of communication. Some of these will be discussed further on.

The sharing of information has a certain binding quality (Theunissen, 1998). As it improves the feeling of belonging and trust amongst employees, the sharing of information increases the communication climate within the organisation. The converse is also true – poorer communication leads to ineffective sharing of information.

The next section investigates different types of communication in the organisational context.

Types of communication

Following on the above discussion, it is appropriate to attend now to the various levels or types of communication within organisations. There are three basic levels of communication within any organisation.

Aamodt (1999) describes *upward communication* as the communication channels where messages flow from employees to managers. The importance of this type of communication has traditionally been viewed from the perspective of management and organisation; however, Green and Knippen (1999) focus on a shift in the responsibility of upward communication from management to employee. The definition of upward

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feedback from the employee's perspective results in the following: "Employees communicate upward to (1) understand managers, (2) work with managers, (3) ask managers, and (4) help managers" (Green & Knippen, 1999, p. 4). This shift in focus means that employees, who traditionally do not possess the necessary skills on *what* and *how* to communicate effectively, are now faced with a dilemma. Unfortunately the authors do not elaborate on this idea of employees traditionally possessing or not possessing the necessary communication skills to engage in this kind of communication.

Green and Knippen (1999) further explore the *what* and *how* of upward communication and focus on how employees can benefit and even be empowered by using appropriate media and communication skills to understand, work with, ask and help managers. One of the factors influencing upward communication is the communication culture and climate that management creates within the organisation. If there is an open atmosphere and upward communication is encouraged, both managers and employees will benefit, as both would feel empowered.

Downward communication involves communication channels where messages flow from managers to employees (O'Hair et al., 2001). Distortion of information is not uncommon where messages are vague, unclear and hurriedly prepared. Information is distorted as it flows from senior management to middle managers to employees. A related factor affecting downward communication is information overload. Such an overload may result in stress and poor productivity (O'Hair et al., 2001). Too little information may have the same effect. Theunissen (1998) suggests that the less management communicates the more power it believes it has due to a perception that they know more than the employees. The contrary may also be true in many organisations.

All of this highlights the importance of sending the right message at the appropriate time to the necessary people and including the correct content. If downwards communication, especially concerning certain crucial issues such as retrenchments, is not encouraged in an organisation, the trust employees have in management may be compromised, and may lead to negative gossip and rumours.

A third channel of communication is that of *horizontal communication.* Here the messages flow within the same hierarchical levels of an organisation (O'Hair et al., 2001). The functions of this type of communication range from problem solving and task coordination to morale boosting and conflict resolution. Once again, one of the factors influencing the horizontal communication within an organisation is the atmosphere

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managers create around communication, and whether communication is encouraged, discouraged or not addressed.

Informal messages, gossip, rumours and "the grapevine" are also levels of communication which can occur between and on any level within the organisation. These are naturally occurring channels and employees (or managers) may use them if the formal channels are inconvenient, inaccessible or dangerous (O'Hair et al., 2001). Grapevines should not be discouraged as they serve an important information carrying function. They should, however, be monitored by managers by staying abreast of dynamics at work, so that incorrect information is not carried through. Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) comment that if management feels that it can communicate its message in a way that evades the grapevine, then it is mistaking the effective use of the communication process.

Barriers and challenges to the communication process in organisations form the focus of the following section.

Communication barriers and challenges

O'Hair et al. (2001) identify the following challenges facing communication in organisations:

♦ *Information management*: as mentioned above, the dynamic nature of business and information requires organisations to constantly review their communication processes. Such processes would specifically include communication technology, for example, software packages creating links and networks between employees. The vital link between technology and its use as an information management tool is knowing how to use technology as a means of communication (O'Hair et al., 2001).

♦ *Cultural diversity*: although not easy, communicating effectively within a diverse and dynamic context is crucial for the success of many organisations. The marketing research industry can be described as a dynamic and diverse context since each client and each project presents its own unique challenges.

♦ *Globalisation*: together with the ability to manage diversity (as mentioned above), operating in n international business community poses an important challenge for any organisation looking to expand in their field.

♦ *Technology*: more so now than ever, technology influences communication (O'Hair et al., 2001). Again, anyone who wants to keep pace with dynamic markets should have the skill of communicating through

various media. If one looks at E-Commerce and the way that the Internet has influenced the manner in which organisations market themselves, O'Hair et al. (2001) mention that such technology in fact shapes the way we communicate. For example, Maguire (in O'Hair et al., 2001) mentions that a survey done in 1998 estimates the number of global Internet users at 63 million, while the South African Advertising Research Foundation (2005) measured the Internet access in a four-week period at 5.9% of the total South African population.

♦ *Ethics*: despite prevailing attitudes that condone unethical behaviour (and communication), O'Hair et al. (2001) indicate that ethical communication is not only morally the correct choice but can also contribute to the profitability of the organisation. Some of the reasons cited for unethical communications include "pressure to produce results; observing and imitating poor role models and ignoring ethical behaviour in the interest of profits" (O'Hair et al., 2001, p. 16).

There are several barriers that hamper effective communication (O'Hair et al., 2001):

Mismanaged information refers to information overload, inadequate information and poor quality information. Overcoming information overload or inadequate information may be achieved when the receiver of the information is aware of the need to evaluate the information received, make a judgement on what is relevant or follow up by asking questions.

Inadequate communication skills often do not take the reader into account. By examining the organisation, grammar, style and overall appearance of the communication (be it oral or written), organisations can identify problem areas relating to poor communication skills.

Communication media include memoranda, e-mails, speeches, conversations, telephone calls and faxes. *Inappropriate communication media* may result in communication being less efficient and effective in conveying the message so that the receiver is either not receptive to it or unable to understand the message. For example, e-mail is highly effective for direct messages, but less effective in instances where non-verbal cues (such as reaction to a policy change) may provide valuable information.

This brings us to feedback, one of the most critical components of the communication process. It is only through feedback that the sender knows that the message was received and understood. A *lack of feedback*

occurs for many reasons, including time constraints or friction between the two parties, and often causes a delay in achieving goals. Section 2.4 discusses feedback in greater detail.

Communication anxiety is the fear and stress associated with communication in certain situations, for example, reprimanding employees, delegating tasks, or conducting a performance appraisal. The ability to recognise and handle this anxiety is important as messages sent may not be received as they were intended, and miscommunication may occur purely as a result of the anxiety of the sender.

A marketing research organisation is built around the research process. As such, information flows from one phase to the next. In light of the preceding discussion, one can infer the importance communication plays in relaying this information in an effective and efficient way. Sending the right message at the right time to the right individuals is of utmost importance for a project to meet the needs of the client as they have been specified. Barriers to communication processes, inappropriate communication, inadequate communication skills, and mismanagement of information should thus be monitored, since these issues may inadvertently lead to the failure of a project in achieving its objectives.

This section examined communication as a process, various types of communication as well as barriers and challenges to communication facing organisations. From here various concepts that could influence the communication and feedback processes within an organisation are explored.

Culture of an organisation

The first concept examined is that of organisational culture. One way of interpreting the word "culture" in the context of this study is to consider the national culture of the country in which the organisation finds itself (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). Defining culture is in itself a complex task, and falls outside the scope of this study. Suffice to say that organisations are becoming more "multicultural" in two ways, firstly in terms of the demographic profiles of their employees, as well as the way in which they communicate with customers from different cultures, including internationally. As mentioned previously, the rapid growth rate of organisations in a country as diverse as South Africa demands that organisations be more aware of the influence of different cultures on the organisation's communication process.

Further to the above descriptions, Scott (2003) describes organisational culture not only as something an organisation has, but also as something an organisation is. In the first sense organisational culture is referred to as an informally agreed upon set of values, beliefs and norms that often form the context within which the organisation functions. The second sense describes the employment situation in which individuals find themselves.

One reason why corporate atmospheres seldom develop as management wishes is that management communicates and makes decisions without consulting all key stakeholders (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). The responsibility for taking into account the diverse cultures, ideas and meanings of all key stakeholders lies with management. Company policies, training and employee relations should be considered in light of the diverse cultures an organisation may have. Overcoming potential problems is imperative for an effective communication process. Guffey (2001, p. 15-16) provides the following suggestions on effective communication in a diverse workplace:

- Understand the value of differences.
- Do not expect conformity.
- Create zero tolerance for bias and stereotypes.
- Practice focused, thoughtful and open-minded listening.
- Invite, use and give feedback.
- Make fewer assumptions.
- Learn about your cultural self.
- Seek common ground.

The concept of an "organisation's culture" is only a few decades old (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002), but communication remains a central concern for initiatives aiming to improve the culture within an organisation. Communication is expressed through the organisation's culture and the content of communication messages reflects certain cultural practices. Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) warn, however, that attempting to define organisational culture as a mere backdrop to the organisation is too simplistic in trying to fully comprehend the extent of its influence on communication within the organisation. To reiterate, Sypher (1997) mentions that culture goes beyond something that an organisation has; rather, it is closer to something that an organisation is.

Culture has the following important consequences (Clampitt, 2001):

♦ Culture affects an organisation's bottom line or marginal income.

♦ Culture influences the way in which organisations approach and solve problems.

♦ Culture influences how an organisation handles change.

♦ Culture has a crucial influence on employee motivation.

The way in which an organisation's culture affects communication within the organisation is summarised in the following points (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002):

♦ Management's attitude and values together with the organisation's vision and values should be at the core of the organisation's culture. If not, conflict in terms of communicating core values to employees may arise.

♦ Simultaneously maintaining control and encouraging initiatives is a fine balance. Employees need to be aware of the balance between control and initiative and as such management needs to communicate clearly and effectively. Edwards and Ewen (1996) suggest that there have been changes in organisations' culture in that we are seeing more participatory leadership. As such communication process will be influenced through the encouragement of effective upward and downward communication.

♦ Communicating an organisation's processes (be they physical, social or professional) to all key stakeholders in a clear, unambiguous manner is imperative for avoiding conflict within an organisation.

♦ The physical, political and economic environments within which the organisation operates also exerts an influence on the manner in which key stakeholders communicate.

An open environment in which information flows freely and managers empower people and instil trust, creates a sense of ownership among employees to the extent that they feel responsible for the organisation (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). It may only take one broken promise to destroy this sense of ownership. Organisational goals and objectives should also be shared with everyone in the organisation to encourage such a sense of ownership. Although there are varying opinions on whether every employee should have a say in what the goals should be (Scott, 2003), Drafke and Kossen (2002) propose that, in order for the

organisation's vision to be successful, everyone must share in it. Groups working towards a specific goal are more successful than those without goals (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002).

The interaction of the influences discussed above, and the way in which their combination influences communication within the organisation, should be considered in improving organisational functioning. These factors do not exist independently and the influence they have as a whole should be taken into account.

Three hundred and sixty degree feedback

The second concept influencing the communication and feedback processes in an organisation is evaluation, and the implementation of the results of evaluations. As such, Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) propose that one of the important developments in the communication process model is the addition of feedback.

Hanson (1995, p. 58) defines feedback as "the ability of a system to reintroduce output as input". Hanson goes on to say that since feedback is part of a process (of communication), it can lead to either positive feedback (a change occurs) or negative feedback (no change occurs). Feedback thus drives a system and creates continuity. Feedback forms an integral part of the communication process in that it ensures the ongoing existence and perpetuation of a system (Hanson, 1995; O'Hair et al., 2001).

It is through feedback that senders know that their message was received and understood (Cook & Hunsaker, 2001; O'Hair et al., 2001). A lack of feedback therefore creates a barrier in the communication process. To provide a practical example of this concept of feedback and its relevance in organisations, Green and Knippen (1999) mention that in one study on feedback, 64% of employees identify "good communication and feedback" as what they expected most from their managers.

In light of the changes in organisational structures and systems, Edwards and Ewen (1996) suggest that a 360 degree feedback process and policy offers the necessary support for these changes. This support would occur especially in the areas of working in teams and evaluation of performance, as both of these areas rely on a structure and system in place, as well as feedback.

The concept of 360 degree feedback is not a new one (Baum, 2002; DuBrin, 2002). DuBrin (2002) describes a 360 degree survey as a formal evaluation of a person based on information from those working for them and with them. Forming this idea of a holistic form of feedback or assessment, Edwards and Ewen (1996) describe various levels of feedback. The way the feedback is collected is via written assessment forms where employees answer questions relating to performance. The first level mentioned is called *1 degree*, and entails self-assessment and/or supervisory assessment. Edwards and Ewen caution users here, as the interpretation of these assessments could be inflated due to self-bias and could be less accurate.

A second level, termed *90 degrees*, is that of colleague assessment, where the information is considered more reliable, valid and accurate since there is no self-bias, although personal biases could affect the assessments. This information may, however, not be sufficient as there may not be enough staff members on the same level. Differences in experience and education may also affect the views on a person's abilities.

On the next level, *180 degrees* or upward feedback/assessment, the team members evaluate the team leader or employer. Safeguards are needed here to ensure anonymity to prevent fear of retaliation and so to elicit reliable evaluations (Osland et al., 2001). This level not only encourages feedback on a direct team leader but also on superiors two or three levels upwards. If this is done, the evaluations should be viewed in combination with other sources.

Lastly, Edwards and Ewen (1996) describe *360 degrees* feedback, which assumes that there are other sources which influence an employee and could provide valuable assessments. Such sources could include external customers and team members from other teams.

Edwards and Ewen (1996) provide some guidelines to practically apply these principles and bear in mind possible limitations. In order to improve credibility in the assessments, one should include as many respondents as possible. Time, budget and technology could be a help or a hindrance in the execution of such a feedback mechanism. Evaluations should be kept to a reasonable length but not at the expense of reliability. Companies could implement their own system of feedback without external consultation, and technology is available to assist in hard copy or electronic tools. It is suggested that automated or electronic systems provide better anonymity and cost less in terms of paper and administration.

In addition, Edwards and Ewen (1996) suggest that the administration, collation and scoring of the feedback should not be given to an employee or assistant as another work task, but that managers remain actively involved in these processes. Administration could be made easier by using a simplistic method of scoring, as well as an electronic system.

An approach such as 360 degree feedback has been described by managers and employees as efficient and effective (DuBrin, 2002; Edwards & Ewen, 1996). This process is considered appropriate for organisations with flatter structures and those that make use of work teams. The results of a 360 degree evaluation can be utilised in an employee's personal performance appraisal.

Performance appraisals and feedback

The third concept influencing communication and feedback processes in an organisation, and related to the concept of evaluation described above, is that of appraisal and feeding information back to employees. Performance appraisals are described as a source of feedback on an employee's performance and accomplishments, and are often used as a base for personal growth (Osland et al., 2001). In a team environment such individual appraisals may not be sufficient to get a holistic perspective on performance and feedback should include other sources. Osland et al. (2001) discuss the relevance and importance of multirater feedback methods, especially with regards to team environments.

Osland et al. (2001) state that there is no standard 360 degree evaluation method, and advise that each organisation administer and develop their own. For example, an organisation may choose to allow input from the entire team on what evaluation criteria to include in the assessment; who would get to see the results; and the choice of a mechanism to ensure that action is taken on the feedback received.

When evaluations are complete Osland et al. (2001) suggest that follow-up sessions be held to look for any improvement. Daniels (1994) believes that although feedback is important, without follow-up and reinforcement of the behaviour related to the feedback, improvements cannot be sustained.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed how communication takes place within a context, and how important it is that the intended message is received and understood within this context. Possible barriers and challenges to various communication channels in an organisation were identified. The concept of evaluation, assessment or feedback was seen as being a critical component in the communication processes. Three hundred and sixty degree feedback is one method of providing evaluation that is particularly applicable to team structures. Such feedback or evaluation should not, however, be done for the sake of formality, but should be seen as an instrument in helping an organisation achieve its goals and objectives. In the following chapter a theoretical framework from which to view these dicussions, is examined.

CHAPTER 3

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION PROCESSES IN ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter the importance of the context within which organisational communication occurs was discussed. Communication as a process, different kinds of communication as well as the challenges facing organisations in relation to communication, were also examined. The concept of the culture of an organisation was explored in terms of how it influences communication processes, and literature relating to a multirater evaluation programme such as 360 degree feedback was discussed. From this point, in the context of the broader study, it is necessary to view these discussions in light of a theoretical framework.

Let us look at the necessity of a theoretical framework in which to ground research. Kelly (1999b) suggests that a researcher only has to gain from drawing upon a theory in itself, as well as a description or interpretation when interpreting data. To understand the relationship between theory and contextual understanding he refers to Pike who used the term *emic* to "signify an approach to understanding from within a cultural system"; *etic* to "refer to outside perspectives, and specifically the use of theory in understanding phenomena"; and furthermore *derived etics* which "attempts to pull knowledge from both etic and emic approaches" (Kelly, 1999b, p. 404-405). It seems thus that the use of a theoretical framework in conjunction with research data provides advantages from both perspectives. A theoretical framework provides a frame of reference for data collection, analysis and interpretation.

This chapter discusses such a theoretical framework, and considers how it applies to the current investigation.

Systems theory as a framework for present study

Systems theory allows for but does not prescribe assumptions (Hanson, 1995). As such, this framework allows the present study to focus on an investigation within a specific context where no prior suppositions are made. The point of departure is therefore nonsummativity, which states that a phenomena exhibits characteristics when parts are put together, but does not display these in those parts on their own. Hanson

(1995) further explains that a systems approach seeks to understand a phenomenon rather than to explain causal relationships in a linear manner. The context within which a phenomenon occurs is central in understanding behaviour. An important process described by systems theory is that of feedback, referring to the ability of a system to "reintroduce output as input" (Hanson, 1995, p. 58). This feedback and cybernetics (the system's ability to steer itself) is what provides an understanding of how the system behaves. Hanson defines positive feedback as that which leads to change in the system and negative feedback as that which maintains the stability or status quo of the system.

Systems theory as it applies to organisations

Spector (2000) examines different theories on organisations from an industrial and organisational perspective and how these find relevance in psychology. These theories examine characteristics of organisations, their structure or design, relationships amongst employees and interactions between employees and technology. The next section will examine four of these theories.

The first theory, *bureaucracy,* is concerned with the traditional "hierarchical" structure of an organisation that has been favoured over the past century (Spector, 2000). Although such structures appear to be inefficient by later standards, at the time it was an improvement on the disorganised manner in which organisations were generally structured. This theory brought structure, rules and order in terms of management and organisational structure.

The second theory, a human relations theory set forth by McGregor in 1960 called *Theory X/Theory Y*, looks more closely at the interaction between manager and subordinate (Spector, 2000). McGregor believes that a manager's role is to address organisation's needs rather than directing work, where subordinates are encouraged towards autonomy and development. Spector (2000) points out that the principles of Theory X/Theory Y are not unrelated to the concept of autonomous work teams that manage themselves.

A third theory in which the concept of autonomous work teams was developed is the *sociotechnical systems theory*. This theory examines organisations through the relationship between employees and technology in the context of the organisation's environment (Spector, 2000). Two principles stand out in this theory. "Joint optimisation" refers to social and technological systems being designed to fit together. For example, the

successful introduction of computers into the workplace necessitates that the technology be easy to learn and use and that employees are given support and training in learning to use computers.

The second principle, that of "unit control of variances", refers to who handles problems when they arise. The principle supports the notion that any variances from routine work, for example customer complaints or a machine breaking down, should be handled by the employee that encounters them. For example, employees using computers should be able to solve the easier problems they encounter. This approach frees up the managers or team leaders to focus on more pressing issues, and enhances employee self-efficacy and skills. As such, managers in autonomous work teams fulfil more of a support/counselling and facilitation role.

Spector (2000) is of the opinion that sociotechnical systems theory will become more widely used due to organisations downsizing to autonomous work teams. Research in Britain indicates that the unit control principle has positive effects on productivity (Spector, 2000).

The fourth theory comes from the natural sciences, where Katz and Kahn (in Spector, 2000) suggest that organisations are a type of *open system*. Ten characteristics of organisations as open systems are outlined:

1. Organisations require energy. As such, resources are needed and people are employed.
2. Organisations convert energy in the form of a product or service.
3. Organisations produce an output from the converted energy by selling a product/service to customers.
4. Organisations have regular events. For example, employees are paid on a monthly basis, or work is structured into day and night shifts.
5. In order to survive and avoid a kind of "entropy" the organisation needs to be efficient in converting energy and producing outputs. In this context entropy refers to the inability to convert energy into outputs, or a state of disorder (Scott, 2003).
6. In addition, the organisation needs to acquire information from its environment. Sources of information include feedback from internal employees and external customers on the products/services produced.
7. To maintain homeostasis (defined by Reber, 1995, as to keep in a regular state), the organisation needs to maintain certain conditions, for example, employ a sufficient number of employees, have working equipment, use accountants, etcetera.
8. As organisations grow and become more complex, functions need to become specialised.

9. As functions become more specialised, a need for changes in organisational design (in terms of integration) emerges, for example, additional supervisors.

10. The principle of equifinality applies to successful organisations. Hanson (1995, p. 64) describes equifinality as "the idea that when you act on a system, a number of different stimuli can lead to the same result". This principle supports the notion that there are various effective methods to operate and structure organisations to achieve successful results.

McGregor's Theory X/Theory Y appears to be prescriptive rather than descriptive (as is the open system theory) of organisational operation (Spector, 2000). Although the four theories described above are distinct in many ways, there are commonalities, such as the autonomous work teams mentioned in both Theory X/Theory Y and sociotechnical theory.

As this study focussing on processes that occur between systems and how these dynamics contribute to the ongoing nature of the organisation, there arises a need to identify a theoretical framework that imposes no beginning assumptions, but rather assumes a point of nonsummativity, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Hanson, 1995). General systems theory provides such a broad theoretical framework, and takes into account the importance of context, which will be expanded on throughout this discussion. The general systems theory looks further than initial effects to how these effects are handled and how this ongoing process brings about changes in the system. Strati (2000), in his discussion of organisational research, points out that in defining an organisation, it is more the concept of an organisation as a process (or system) than a structure or function or environment that is important. General systems theory also incorporates concepts from the abovementioned open systems theory as well as principles from the sociotechnical systems theory.

Viewing organisations as systems is not a new idea. For many years companies have sought to drive business growth whilst safeguarding the organisational environment (Shireman, 1999). The systems approach to business satisfies both the business and organisational environment issues. In order for this to occur, Bill Coors (in Shireman, 1999) mentions three systems principles as basic to good business and organisational environmental sustainability:

1. All businesses are living systems, and by definition should be designed so that they can evolve and adapt.

2. All waste is lost profit. By eliminating waste (of physical resources, time, etc), businesses create more value.

3. By closing the loop, namely, feeding information on waste back to the organisation, it learns to reduce waste.

Organisational design

In order to understand organisations from a systems theory perspective, it is relevant to explore how an organisation would arrange, design and organise itself in the context of the activities that they perform.

Osland et al. (2001) show that organisations cannot operate optimally if they are not appropriately designed. A new century has brought about a constant pursuit of a competitive advantage in many organisations, and with this organisations need to constantly review their organisational design (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002; Nadler & Tushman, 1999). Although the organisation faces much change in its design, Nadler and Tushman (1999) believe that there are four fundamental principles that are relevant to the latest designs:

1. The industry's environment impacts on the organisation's design.

2. Strategic objectives drive the organisational design. This concept is illustrated through the model of an organisation as an open system. Essentially the organisation receives input and transforms it into output of various kinds. To achieve peak performance the organisation requires each internal component (the informal arrangements, the formal organisation, the people and the work) to work together optimally, driven by the strategic objectives.

3. Strategy and organisational design have a reciprocal relationship, where each element works in coordination with the others.

4. The difficulties of organisational design will remain. For example, the question remains of how best to group people, processes, operations and their unit strategies while maintaining their link to the greater organisation. The dilemma lies in encouraging divergence and cohesion simultaneously.

Together with newly identified strategic imperatives for organisational design, Nadler and Tushman (1999) provide a view of challenges and competencies that organisations would need to consider for their design:

1. Organisations need to be configured in such a way that there is constant and acute awareness of any impending changes. This involves, amongst other things, speeding up decision-making processes and the time it takes to implement changes. It is important for future leaders to

understand that this does not imply that things need to be done in the same way, only faster, but that things will need to be done differently.

2. Structural design divergence refers to an organisational structure which comprises various business units each with its own unique design and strategies. The challenge lies in aligning these business units with minimal linkages to maximise each unit's performance, yet leveraging joint interests and various focal points. The importance of the differentiation and integration of systems becomes evident here.

3. Promoting organisational modularity indicates that organisations can no longer take the necessary time to create and implement a new design. The fact that organisational strategies are dynamic and constantly under review to keep the organisation on the competitive edge gives rise to a more modular design. This kind of design allows organisations to streamline the design-change process.

4. Due to fragmenting markets, organisations are required to deliver a more customised service or product. To achieve this organisations are focusing on a variability of services and products rather than taking a "one size fits all" approach.

5. To encourage competitive innovation organisations are required to design structures, systems and procedures that guide research and development in proactive and creative ways.

6. Taking the above new design principles into account, the effective management of internal conflict is increasingly important.

7. Since business units differentiate yet maintain integration at the same time, organisational coherence may have to be found at the organisational identity level and not at the business unit level. Dominant cultural norms in the organisation will contribute more to the organisational cohesion than formal structures.

8. Considering this high degree of complexity in the organisation's design, appropriate leadership is called for. The executive management team will need to manage these paradoxes and complexities, and will be required to be the key agents to manage the organisation. This team will need to be more effective than any one person could be as a Chief Executive Officer.

Influence of organisational design on individuals and systems

The human systems theorist Barry Oshry provides us with a theory on how individuals and groups in an organisation are affected by the organisation's structure or design (Sales, 2002). Oshry focuses on the ways in which the systemic dynamics of the organisation's design affects individuals and groups, and how these

systemic forces impact the organisation at various points. If gone unnoticed these forces limit the unit's effectiveness and the work satisfaction of individuals.

With the awareness of the influence of organisational design on individuals at various points in the system, the effects of how each level is structured also exerts an influence on the management of these levels. In simplistic terms, the strategy for managing information at leadership or top management level is " specialisation", where competition arises over which business unit should have highest priority. At the team member level "solidarity and differentiation" are used to deal with the vulnerable aspects of being in a system where others make the decisions that affect them without obtaining their input. At team leader level "silos" are created between teams, and dealing with top management and team member issues with each other all lead team leaders to become alienated from one another.

Oshry (in Sales, 2002) mentions various negative consequences of the dispersal of these team leaders:

- Top management has to deal with more issues from team members since team leaders have not been able to attend to them.

- Team members feel more vulnerable because team leaders do not mediate effectively.

- Customers get mixed signals as it appears that individuals are not working together as a team and not communicating effectively.

- Interpersonal distances increase between team leaders due to little contact and constant disappointments.

- Team leaders appear as though they always have something better to do.

- Team leaders are often hired, fired or moved without due consideration to consequences for the team and for the system as a whole.

As a result team leaders are viewed as incompetent, indecisive and unreliable. As a solution to these issues, Oshry (in Sales, 2002) proposes a principle of integration, where team leaders are encouraged to communicate more with one another, to meet to identify and address issues at hand without top management or other team members present. Top management should support this independent move and team leaders should in turn give constant feedback on progress to top management, to ensure alignment with the organisation's strategies. Research conducted by Oshry (in Sales, 2002) indicates that top management reports being relieved of the day-to-day operational issues, thus rendering it able to focus

more on strategic issues. Oshry provides examples of businesses that have had successful results where integration has been implemented (Sales, 2002). Examples mentioned include Microsoft and Hewlett Packard where senior executives have been relieved of operational activities in order to concentrate on strategic issues at hand.

Sales (2002) comments that a high level of confidence is needed to bring all stakeholders at multiple points in the organisations teams and systems together for strategic visioning and problem solving. Yet such a move brings about an interactive process that transcends any system boundaries. However, he warns that it can be short-lived if there is no commitment to learning activities that bring team members insight into the forces and dynamics that influence the system they are part of. Without these insights these interactive processes seem to merely perpetuate cynicism amongst team members.

Polanyi (2002) supports this in his statement that "Future Search is a large-group, participatory planning process aimed at building common directions for action on complex social and organisational issues" (Polanyi, 2002, p. 358). Building common directions is achieved through encouraging members to take joint responsibility for issues. However, Polanyi (2002) warns that we should distinguish between the different claims made by individuals (objective, personal, subjective and normative) and ways to deal with these claims. These claims differ in intention and each claim should be interpreted accordingly. For example, objective claims are verifiable whereas personal or subjective claims are based on perceptions. Encouraging all team members to participate in discussions of issues could potentially compound an issue by examining it in the context of the various claims that are made.

The cellular organisation

Organisational structures or designs exist due to the need for order, direction, decision-making and coordination (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). With the changing demands of markets we have seen the forms or designs of organisations adapt to these forces (Miles, Snow, Mathews, Miles & Coleman Jr, 1997). Organisations historically focused their design on delivering standardised services/products, after which they move towards a higher level of customisation. Currently, organisations focus on continuous innovation. As such organisational designs have moved from hierarchical structures, to networks, to the present "cell". Miles et al. (1997) suggest that the cellular form has come about from organisations having to adapt to increasing complexities and competition within markets and business environments. They expect the

organisation to rely on a design of self-organising groups working towards common objectives and strategies.

The cellular organisation is made up of cells within cells, or systems within systems. These cells can operate alone, and can also interact with other cells. Again the systemic principles of independence and interdependence are seen. At this point the concept of nonsummativity (where the system as a whole is greater than the individual cells together) should be kept in mind.

Some of the characteristics of the cellular form are (Miles et al., 1997):

- Each cell has an entrepreneurial responsibility to the organisation as a whole.
- Customers can be outside the organisation or they can be other cells.
- Each cell requires the skills to generate its own business.
- Each cell should be able to continually assess and reorganise itself to keep in line with the overall organisation's strategy. This involves having skills to link with other cells/systems and skills to manage its own activities.
- Reward for successful results impacts on the motivation and achievements of individuals and cells.

Miles et al. (1997) believe the cellular organisation adds value beyond assets and knowledge. It does this through being able to create and utilise knowledge, for example, by combining cells for a specific solution. The cellular form lends itself to sharing explicit and tacit knowledge, more so than that of networks, where mechanisms for sharing knowledge must be put into place. As such, a cellular organisation continuously draws on internal knowledge to strengthen itself.

Although Miles et al. (1997) believe more and more organisations will move to using some or all of the cellular organisation's principles, there remain challenges. Firstly, leaders must be willing to invest in human capability beyond that of education and training. A risk is taken when investment in training is done to meet future needs where return on these investments cannot always be predicted. Although the idea of investment in human capital is not new (Miles et al., 1997), it is fast becoming a necessity rather than an option.

Another challenge facing cellular organisations is to allow a level of self-organisation and management within cells. Some organisations may view this risk as being too high. Furthermore, the traditional reward and recognition mechanisms may not be adequate for organisation members, and incentives such as a longer term ownership and profit-sharing may need to be considered.

Edwards and Ewen (1996), Guffey (2001) and Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) add that organisations are adopting a flatter structure in moving away from the traditional pyramid or hierarchical structure. This increasing reliance on networking, customisation, innovation, self-directed team-focused work structures (autonomous work teams) and a systemic perspective has profound implications for the way organisations will be managed and indeed, how communication processes will be affected. Making sure that all subsystems work together towards a common goal is no easy task, since each would have its own unique operational objectives. The style of management used to ensure cooperation between subsystems and teams will have to be less directive.

Taking the positive aspects and the relative risks involved, Miles et al. (1997) believe that organisations adopting some or all principles of the cellular design will continue to be business leaders, as they are leading the evolutionary process of organisational design. One aspect of this process is the use of teams and how these have been incorporated into the organisational environment.

Teams

The literature suggests that self-managing teams in the workplace are becoming the preferred management practice of organisations that require flexibility, adaptation and using resources to the fullest (Daniels, 1994; Unsworth & West, 2000; Wageman, 1997). Because teams are managing themselves and taking responsibility for monitoring performance, the advantages include enhancing the organisation's customer relations, increasing learning and employees' commitment to the organisation. Unsworth and West (2002) mention that teams can help increase productivity, and have a positive influence on efficiency and quality.

However, Wageman (1997) points out that the implementation of such teams does not always result in the effective teams as described above, especially in organisations that have had long histories of traditional hierarchical structures where decision making lies with management. Unsworth and West (2000) also

mention that process losses can occur with teamwork in that there can be coordination problems and motivational difficulties.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, team work is also affected by the context and interactions that exist within the organisation. Such contextual influences include reward and recognition, level of support and assistance, the organisational climate, level of competition and extent of environmental uncertainty (Unsworth & West, 2000). Cultural issues also exert an influence on team performance, and it seems that the definition of "team" changes across cultures. Contextual issues have been identified as a powerful factor in team effectiveness (Unsworth & West, 2000).

Wageman (1997) identifies seven factors that are likely to be found in effective self-managed teams and which are absent in ineffective teams:

1. Having a clear, simple and specific sense of direction.

2. Having tasks that demand that members work together to accomplish a task.

3. Having rewards for team excellence, in addition to individual or mixed rewards.

4. Having the necessary resources readily available to accomplish assigned tasks, for example, sufficient office space, meeting rooms, computers and so on.

5. The team (and not the leader) has decision-making rights over the team's strategies.

6. Setting performance goals that are in line with the organisation's objectives.

7. Having informal team rules that promote strategic thinking where there is an awareness of the environment, an ability to detect problems and an ability to develop new and better ways of working.

Furthermore, Unsworth and West (2000) mention the following work characteristics as being strongly present in effective teams:

- High degree of autonomy

- Wide variety of tasks

- Task is considered significant to the team and the organisation

- Task represents a broader task

- High level of feedback on completion of the task

In support of this, Cordery (in Unsworth & West, 2000) identifies the following reasons for the success of self-managed (autonomous) teams:

- Decisions are made quicker.

- Decisions are often more innovative.

- Opportunities for further learning are created in teams.

- Team members experience increased self-efficacy.

- Job characteristics are related to factors such as motivation and job satisfaction.

Although an absence of formal leadership is a fundamental aspect of the autonomous team's design, the existence of a leadership process is important. Although much literature exists on the topic, two basic areas emerge when looking at how to move teams towards effective self-management. The first area concerns team composition, and the second concerns the way in which the team leader interacts with or coaches the team (Wageman, 1997). In her research into these two areas, Wageman (1997) sought to identify critical factors on which to focus in trying to achieve effective self-managing teams. Her research shows that the quality of a team's design has a greater impact on its level of self-management than coaching. Figure 3.6 below illustrates this finding:
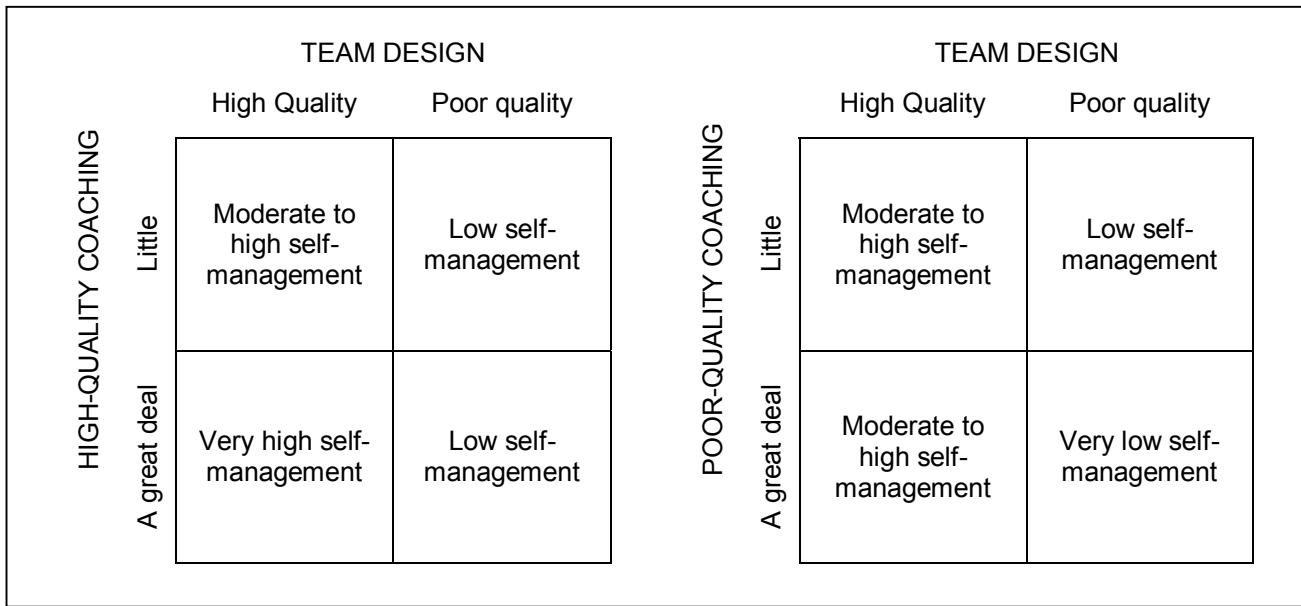
TEAM DESIGN		
	High Quality	Poor quality
HIGH-QUALITY COACHING — Little	Moderate to high self-management	Low self-management
HIGH-QUALITY COACHING — A great deal	Very high self-management	Low self-management

TEAM DESIGN		
	High Quality	Poor quality
POOR-QUALITY COACHING — Little	Moderate to high self-management	Low self-management
POOR-QUALITY COACHING — A great deal	Moderate to high self-management	Very low self-management

Figure 3.6. How team design and quality of coaching affect team self-management (Wageman, 1997, p. 54).

Figure 3.6 explains that despite good-quality coaching, teams were more effective if their design was of a good quality.

Although an absence of formal leadership aspect of the autonomous team's design, leadership or facilitation is nonetheless needed in group situations. Through exercising control a team leader can successfully facilitate a group discussion. However, when facilitation is shared amongst team members the discussion is more active and participative, while order is still maintained. No matter who holds the role of facilitator, however, the need for facilitation and leadership of communication processes remains.

Unsworth and West (2000) discuss the importance and influence of team cohesiveness, decision making and team climate in building successful teams. Of significance to the current study, communication processes are described as "the glue that holds the team together" (Unsworth & West, 2000, p. 338). Computer technology is having an increasing effect on communication in organisations, and in turn, on the communication process within a team (Unsworth & West, 2000). A tool that has shown to be valuable in the communication process is voicemail. Its benefits lie in the coordination of tasks, whereas previous methods (like leaving written notes when both team members were not available simultaneously) presented hurdles. Video or telephone conferencing is a tool which has proven ineffective in team communication processes

(Unsworth & West, 2000). Due to interpersonal dynamics this tool does not seem to be an adequate substitute for face-to-face meetings.

Despite the advantages of applying team structures in organisations, Daniels (1994) questions the assumption that autonomous work teams have performance benefits, to the extent that he says they may even create more problems than benefits. In his readings Daniels (1994) suggests that much of the conceptualising around the effectiveness of autonomous work groups is theoretical, and that a team approach is not always the better solution over individual structures. This author further mentions that "teamwork is always appropriate and desirable" whereas "[a] formal team structure… is not always necessary" (Daniels, 1994, p. 133).

The change from individual work to team work relies heavily on the team leader(s) to change human behaviour in behavioural terms. This is perhaps the point of failure of implementing teamwork in some instances, in that the change occurs in behaviours and not in roles. For example, a supervisor would move from managing people to coaching people. Often this change is not defined specifically in terms of behaviour or practical implementation. Daniels (1994) mentions the following three aspects as barriers to team success:

1. When rewards and recognitions are still largely based on individual performance rather than team performance once the change has been made from individual work to team work. This in turn affects motivation to work together.

2. When appraisal and performance systems do not consider team issues.

3. When organisational structures encourage internal competition - this hampers team effectiveness.

In summary Daniels (1994) believes that teams should earn their decision-making capacities and that greater responsibilities should be given to teams when they are ready for them. It seems that a successful team is one that is developed systematically and not created and left on its own. Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) support this in saying that the success of an organisation can depend on the extent of teamwork it uses.

Putting organisational design theories together

Although the focus of this study rests on the systems theory principles of organisation structure, incorporating open systems, cells and teams, Drafke and Kossen (2002) believe that hierarchical structures still have their uses. An organisation can aim towards a systemic design but can incorporate useful principles of hierarchical structures, especially in cases where hierarchies aid in coordinating large companies, and in the unity of command principle (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). This principle states that each employee should only have one manager to avoid confusion and miscommunication. To link this back to our systemic design consisting of cells, each member in a large organisation forms part of a cell, which in turn forms part of larger cells. Each cell should ideally have only one leader.

Dividing the work into specialised areas (and hence dividing employees into specialised cells) increases efficiency (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). Such a divisional design increases expertise, allows for large projects and decreases time spent on projects.

Drafke and Kossen (2002) also outline the principle of span of control, which guides the number of people leaders have in their cells. Factors affecting the span of control, and in turn the organisation's design, include:

1. Work autonomy (members needing little or no supervision)
2. Exceptions to the rules (infrequent events)
3. Group coordination (teamwork is needed for the cell to function and perform its tasks)
4. Worker dispersion (physical distance between members)
5. Task similarity (degree to which tasks members perform are alike)
6. Worker reassignment (the frequency of members being grouped and regrouped)
7. Leader planning (the amount of planning, strategy creating and scheduling a leader must perform)
8. Leader capabilities (experience, education, seniority and proficiency)

An organisational chart or organogram is often used to visually depict the organisation's structure or design. From this chart many of the aforementioned principles of design can be deduced (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). For example, the number of levels is indicative of a tall or flat structure, and the lines drawn between cells (or members) indicate a command structure as well as coordination. Span of control can also be determined from where leaders are distributed and how much emphasis is placed on control.

An important principle in organisational design is the style in which the organisation is departmentalised or arranged. Drafke and Kossen (2002) highlight some of the traditional and newest styles:

Functional organisations (see Figure 3.1) form groups (or cells) by grouping similar activities or tasks together. This is one of the most common methods. Such styles are useful when uniformity is needed. Major advantages include efficiency, minimal duplication, uniform policy and communication of tasks. A disadvantage of this style could include individual cell leaders having little knowledge of other cells. This can be overcome by rotating leaders, although this in itself has other interpersonal and practical effects between leaders and members.

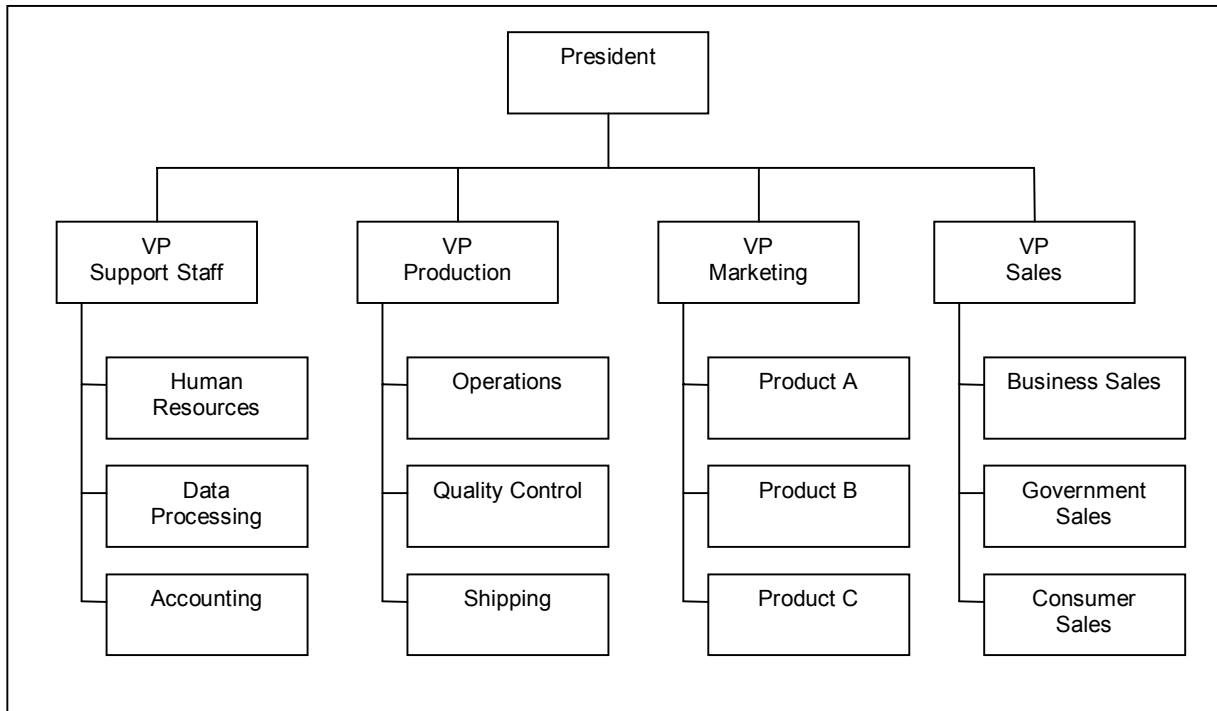*Figure 3.1. A functional organisation (Drafke & Kossen, 2002, p. 156)*

Geographic organisations (see Figure 3.2) are arranged by physical proximity to customers, for example, similar cells can be found in each province in a country. Although this style helps in coordinating tasks in each region, work is often duplicated.
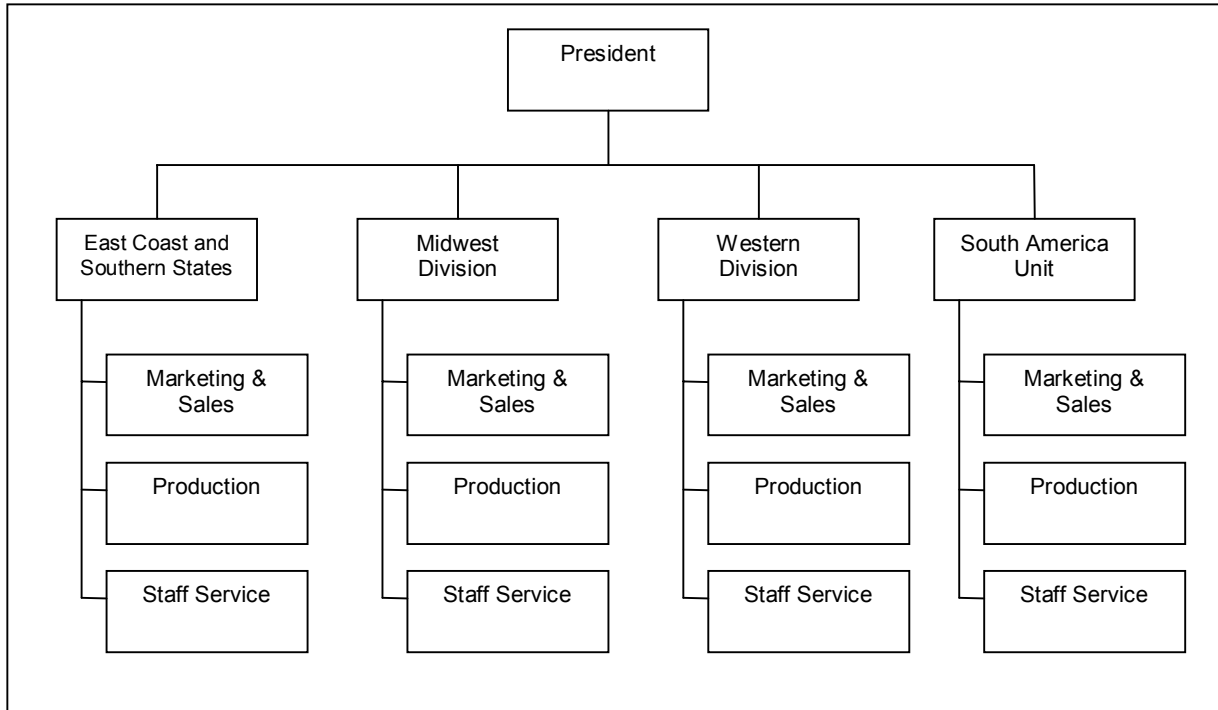
Figure 3.2. A geographic organisation (Drafke & Kossen, 2002, p. 157)

Customer organisations (see Figure 3.3) are coordinated by customers, especially in industries where customer service is intense. Although a close relationship with customers can be fostered with this style, duplication of effort across cells is found, and each member of each cell needs to be familiar with all the organisation's services or products.
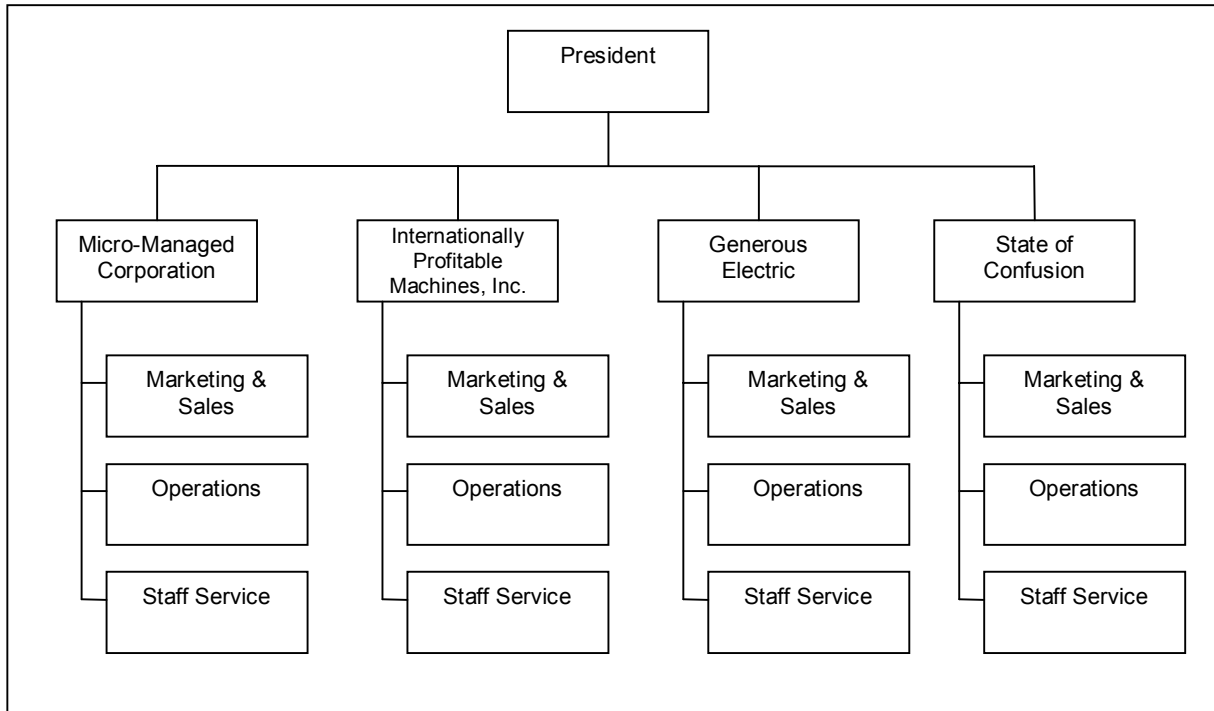
Figure 3.3. A customer organisation (Drafke & Kossen, 2002, p. 158)

Product organisations (Figure 3.4) arrange all cells by product knowledge. Specialisation is an advantage yet duplication of effort is found. Also, providing a uniform appearance to the customer with consistent services may be difficult due to a number of members being in contact with one customer.
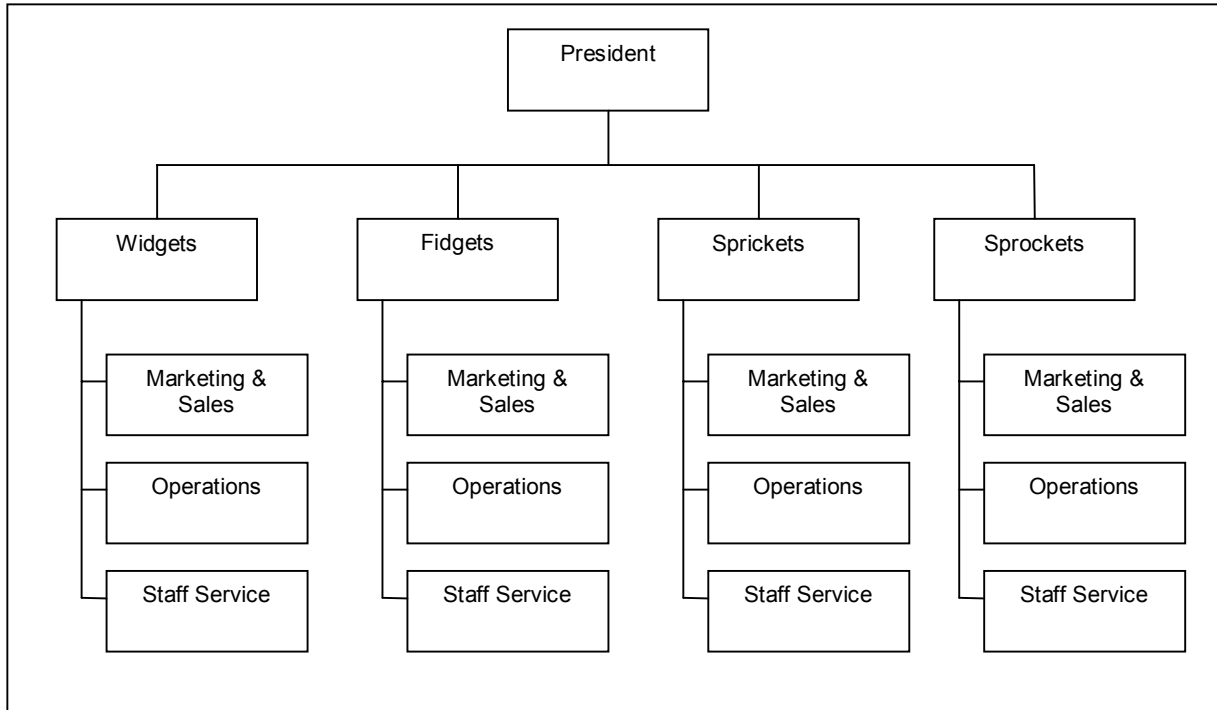

Figure 3.4. A product organisation (Drafke & Kossen, 2002, p. 159)

A recent organisational style is **matrix organisations** (see Figure 3.5), where the organisation consists of functional groups and cross-functional project teams. Briefly, a matrix structure assigns individuals to functions and projects. Since various functions or departments are involved in each project, potential problems can be identified and dealt with earlier. This serves as an advantage of matrix designs, but in order to avoid conflict between different functions, everyone in the organisation must accept the design and decide to work together. Another advantage is that projects have a limited time span, meaning that the work changes regularly and employees have the opportunity to work with different individuals. This could also potentially be a disadvantage if employees see the change as unsettling.

	Finance	Marketing	Sales	Research & development	Production	Distribution
New Product #101	Freda	Max	Sandra	Renee and Dave	Pete	
Growth Product #99	Francisco	Melissa and Mark	Sam, Sunanda, Sid		Paula and Pat	Dan
Established Product #1			Sophie, Sang Lee		Pete, Patrice	Dawn, Don, Denise, Denny

Figure 3.5. A portion of a matrix organisation (Drafke & Kossen, 2002, p. 159)

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the relevance of systems theory to the marketing research environment that provides the context of this study. Systems theory concerns itself with processes and systems operating within a context. A marketing research organisation functions around processes, specifically, the lifespan of a marketing research project. Indeed, the organisation's design is often formed on the basis of functions representing the various phases of the research process. Furthermore, for a research project to be deemed successful, each phase must build upon the previous phase. Only once the project is complete can the value of the project as a whole be seen, and the significance of each individual phase be evident. Further details of the design of the organisation under investigation are provided in Chapter 5.

This chapter examined the way organisational design influences the internal communication of organisations, as well as how the structure of an organisation influences the manner in which an organisation functions as a system. The way in which teams, cells and systems are positioned relative to one another allows for or constricts communication channels. In addition, the extent to which communication

within the organisation is successful depends on its structures, systems, cells and teams and how they are arranged, what channels exist between them and the internal environment created by the organisational design. The following chapter considers the research methodology adopted to investigate these communication processes.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The process of selecting an appropriate and applicable methodology for this study resulted in the use of qualitative methodology techniques. Hanson (1995, p. 6) says that "because meaning is subjective, answers and issues are particular to the meaning group where they originate." Qualitative methodology lends itself to research from a systemic perspective in that it describes the context within which the study takes place and believes in the impact of the context on the outcome. Furthermore, Willig (2001) describes qualitative research as being interested in meaning and how people make sense of and experience their environments.

This chapter addresses the relevant research design and techniques adopted in this study, and describes the sampled organisation and the relevant data collected. The method of analysis is also discussed. The method selected is concept formation, employing a concept mapping technique in order to form concepts and themes.

Research design and techniques

In order to come to a decision on whether to make use of quantitative versus qualitative research designs, Neuman (1997) describes six characteristics of qualitative research to use as a starting point:

1. Emphasis on social context in analysis

2. Valuable use of the case study method in qualitative data collection

3. Recognition and awareness of the researcher's human influence

4. The use of grounded theory to keep data collection and analysis open

5. Importance of process and sequence

6. First and second order interpretation of the experiences of the respondents

He further describes quantitative methodology as a data condenser, whereas qualitative methodology is a data enhancer. Through enhancement it is possible to see the important and influencing factors clearly. Since there is no focus on cause and effect relationships in qualitative research (Neuman, 1997; Willig 2001), the ability to enhance data and see the key aspects in a clearer way provides for a richer process of data analysis.

Detecting processes and consequential developments plays an important role in collecting data in a qualitative way (Neuman, 1997). Seeing events in the context of an ongoing process and placing them on a sequential time line is important for contextualising and interpreting the results of this study. As an example in the present study, the way that certain decisions or communications affect perceptions later on should be seen as sequential, related events.

Many qualitative research methodologies are said to be unsuitable for generalisation of research findings (Stake, 2000; Willig, 2001). The very nature of qualitative research, however, allows for the researcher to provide findings within the specific context and not to generalise results to other contexts.

Relevance of in-depth interviews as a method of data collection

Kvale (1996) believes that research interviews are basic human interactions where conversations describe experiences and the world from the respondent's perspective. Interviews appear to be the basic tool for any qualitative researcher, and have structure and purpose. Interviews aim to gather detailed information related to a specific topic, and as such are formed in a specific way. Kvale indicates that there is a move away from pure observation towards understanding contexts through conversations with respondents where they themselves conceptualise their lived world. Neuman (1997) also indicates the importance of context in understanding social realities. Hanson (1995) complements this by further describing the context as being viewed as a whole and not just as a sum of its parts. As this study also exhibits an interpretive approach in analysis (working with data that is interrelated and that cannot be broken into units in isolation), data collected would lose its meaning if the interrelated information was broken into bits (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

In-depth, personal face-to-face interviews with respondents were deemed to be the most applicable and appropriate method of collecting information for this study. This conclusion is based on the qualitative nature of the study, the context and the perceptions of the respondents, which are important for describing the context of the study.

Before going into detail about the interview as data collection method, it is appropriate at this stage to briefly mention gatekeepers and seeking permission to conduct research, especially in an organisational setting.

Seeking permission and gaining consent from stakeholders, gatekeepers and participants is especially important for willing participation and for avoiding the potential negative influences that forced participation could bring (Neuman, 1997). In the present study the management of a marketing research organisation was approached to obtain such permission. Important in gaining consent is the explanation of the initial purpose of the research (in this case, completion of dissertation), as well as the usefulness of the results for the organisation. Furthermore, when interview appointments are set with respondents the objectives and broad discussion items are mentioned, and consent received. More details on ethical considerations are covered further on in this chapter.

Planning the interview involves a decision on how structured the interview should be (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). Willig (2001) mentions that semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research as data can be analysed in various ways, and they are logistically easier to arrange than other forms of data collection, since the respondents and their schedules can be more easily accommodated. The semi-structured interview allows the researcher and respondent to explore aspects of experiences and feelings that a structured sequence of questions may not evoke. However, to maintain focus on research objectives, the researcher should have a carefully constructed guide or agenda handy during the interview. Since this study examines experiences, a semi-structured approach is followed, where a list of key ideas and areas of concern is developed and utilised as a guide throughout the interview.

A researcher must be aware of linguistic considerations, where the meaning of what a respondent says is influenced by the way in which they say it (Willig, 2001). Equally, a researcher needs to take cognisance of the possible influence of a respondent's age, gender, ethnicity, and/or culture on the interview situation. As such, the rapport an interviewer establishes with the respondent during the interview influences the trust respondents place in the researcher, and can thus ultimately enhance or detract from the quality, reliability and validity of the information gathered (Neuman, 1997).

Since appointments are set with respondents prior to the interview, the interview commences with a brief summary of what the study entails as well as a reminder of confidentiality. The respondent's permission to tape record the interview is also received. Although the interviewer should be familiar with the interview guide, it is important that the interview follow a logical flow, more like a conversation than sequential answers to questions (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). At the end of the interview the respondent is also given a chance to make any further comments.

To ensure that the interview is not unduly disturbed a mutually agreed upon time is set with each respondent. A sufficient amount of time is allocated so that respondents are able to give their undivided attention (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999), and a neutral venue (where no bias may arise due to territorial feelings, for example, a general meeting room) is allocated so that the respondent and researcher feel comfortable.

In order to facilitate the interview dynamic and prevent the interviewer and respondent from being distracted with detailed note taking during the interview, each interview is tape recorded (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). This allows for a full record of the interview for transcription and analysis later in the research process. As will be elaborated on further, Hanson (1995) emphasises the usefulness of the interviewer recording personal impressions. As such, limited note taking, as well as key ideas or concepts that occur to the interviewer during the interview are also taken. As soon as possible after the interview is completed interviewers should also make notes on their impressions, interesting points, and ideas arising from the interview (Hanson, 1995; Henning, 2004). Many of these impressions would be lost if the analysis relied solely on the recordings (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

A more detailed description of the sample is discussed in Chapter 5.

Participant observation

The concept of collecting data from various sources is termed triangulation (Henning, 2004; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The aim is to understand the area under study as richly as possible through various perspectives. In addition to collecting information through personal interviews, participant observation thus provides a richer perspective for the researcher. Strati (2000) mentions that qualitative research usually comprises participant observation, in-depth interviews and other sources of information, and seldom only observation or interviews. Due to a focus on studying the context in its natural form (in line with a systemic approach), participant observation allows the researcher to become fully involved in the setting.

Willig (2001, p. 25) outlines features of observation that must be considered when this type of data collection is used:

- The extent to which the observation is made known, or is covert

- The extent to which it is systematic or standardised

- Whether it takes place in a natural setting

- Whether the researcher actually partakes in the activities observed

- How much of the observation is reflexive (self-observation)

In qualitative research there are many opportunities for the researcher's presence and influence to affect the research. As discussed in Chapter 3, systems theory includes the researcher's presence and influence as part of the research. Getting to know the phenomenon under study without unnecessarily disturbing the context is as important as becoming a natural part of the context (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). To achieve this, the researcher enters the context in an open, transparent manner. As part of this study, the researcher acknowledges the influence personal observation and participation may have on the results. Although some positivists view the involvement, and possible influence, of the researcher in the setting under investigation as a distortion in the research, Hoyle, Harris and Judd (2002) believe that the more a researcher is immersed in the setting, the less it is likely to distort the research.

Another data collection method that contributes to triangulation is for researchers to record their personal impressions throughout the research process. Hanson (1995) believes in including emotional impressions in observation records, as this has importance for meaning. In the current investigation this would include the researcher noting her observations of events, as well as her impressions, such as feelings of insecurity and the like.

In the present study, observation takes a structured and an unstructured form. Structured observation entails, amongst others, participation in arranged meetings and examination of minute-taking; as well as participation in workshops and conferences held. Unstructured observation includes observation of unplanned events or situations and interactions.

One method of communication organisations use to communicate internally is meetings and workshops (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2002). Observations of meetings thus form an important part in understanding the communication strategies of the organisation. In the present study two kinds of meetings are observed, both occurring once a week. The first meeting constitutes a production status meeting where, amongst other items, current work is discussed, and upcoming work is scheduled. The second is a department-specific

meeting where project managers discuss workloads and any applicable difficulties being experienced. These meetings were closely observed for a period of approximately two months, during which the personal in-depth interviews were also conducted.

Data collected from these meetings include minutes and more detailed notes (taken for the purpose of this research) on the dynamics within the meeting, specifically relating to the manner in which the meeting participants communicated about solving problems, as well as their communication strategies in general. The researcher's impressions of these dynamics were also recorded in the context of each meeting. The main objective of gathering this data was to contextualise the responses received in the in-depth interviews.

From these theoretical and data collection assumptions, it is necessary to look at the accuracy of such research. Since the notions of reliability and validity carry great importance in social research (Denscombe, 2000), attention is given to these constructs in the following section.

Reliability

Reliability refers to whether or not the research process is consistent and does not misrepresent the findings (Denscombe, 2002; Neuman, 1997). In short, research is considered reliable if it produces the same results on various occasions, in other words that the findings are consistent. In essence, reliable methods are those that can be repeated in the same context and emerge with similar results.

This notion of consistency is important as it indicates that the findings are due to the context studied, and not due to the research method or instruments used. As such, the research method and process should remain consistent in order to proceed with confidence knowing that the findings are reliable. Although qualitative researchers place less emphasis on the principle of reliability since they are more concerned with the investigation of unique phenomena, they still place importance on the proper application of the research methods in terms of their execution.

Although reliability as a quantitative methodology construct is difficult to apply to qualitative methods as they do not place as much emphasis on quantifying phenomenon, the ideas of consistency and neutrality are important in this case. One method to check for reliability, mentioned by Denscombe (2002), is checking for internal consistency within the data produced. Internal consistency refers to whether the data fit together in a

consistent way (Neuman, 1997). In the context of the present study, the differences in data from various settings, namely, the in-depth interviews, conferences and internal meetings, will be considered.

As mentioned previously, researchers' awareness of their own influence on the research process is important in achieving consistency and neutrality. From a holistic perspective, however, the researcher's personal impressions are an important consideration in analysis (Hanson, 1995). Hanson describes this impression data as useful in detecting dimensions that could otherwise not be seen through conventional observations.

Validity

The second notion of accuracy is validity. Validity refers to how accurately the questions are asked, data collected, and findings given (Denscombe, 2002). One could say that validity asks whether the findings accurately answer the research questions posed. This credibility refers to the traditional concept of internal validity (De Vos, Strydom, Fouchè & Delport, 2002). In terms of external validity or transferability, it has already been mentioned that due to the qualitative nature of this study and the context-specific nature of data and its collection, generalisation is not of paramount importance, nor is it part of the research objectives. However, due to the use of multiple sources of data, or triangulation, this study's transferability is increased (De Vos et al., 2002).

Hanson (1995), from a general systems theory perspective, says that validity can be enhanced if there is a greater focus on context, rather than deriving the significance of data through its ability to generalise results. If a phenomenon is seen as contextual we are closer to being sure that we are measuring what we think we are measuring; in other words, validity is enhanced. In the present study the focus is on behaviour within context, rather than on the ability to generalise results.

Quality assurance

Due to their active involvement in the research itself, the opinion of the qualitative researcher is by its very nature subjective (Willig, 2001). The criteria according to which quantitative research is evaluated is not necessarily applicable to qualitative research. Willig (2001) outlines some criteria that may be used to

evaluate qualitative research, and mentions that the criteria used should be compatible with the theoretical framework of the research. Those that are applicable to the present study are listed below:

1. Fit: the analysis produced should fit the data collected through clear and comprehensive description of the data and analysis.

2. Theory should be integrated with the analysis.

3. Reflexivity: the subjective role of the researcher needs to be acknowledged.

4. Activities undertaken throughout the research process should be documented.

5. Researchers should show awareness of and sensitivity to respondents' interpretations and difference/similarity to the researcher.

6. Transferability: the researcher should report the context of the study in detail to give users a basis for comparison. This also refers to the detailed description of the sample.

7. Triangulation and credibility checks should be used to provide the researcher with opportunities to account for interpretations in analysis.

In order to evaluate the present study the above criteria are applied as follows: the researcher's influence is acknowledged, documentation is taken throughout the process from multiple sources, and the context of the study has been made central to the data collection and analysis.

In summary Willig (2001, p. 144) says that

good practice in qualitative research requires the systematic and clear presentation of analyses, which are demonstrably grounded in the data and which pay attention to reflexivity issues. In addition, such work is characterised by an awareness of its contextual and theoretical specificity and the limitations which this imposes upon its relevance and applicability.

A description of the analysis of the results of the present study is presented later in this chapter.

Sampling

The question of sample size or the concept of "having enough data" is one each researcher faces. Some points to consider include the concepts of validity and reliability (discussed earlier on) and how the sample size could influence these, the extent to which the sample units are homogenous (or similar), and the level of detail required for the study (Kelly, 1999a). Even though more employees were available for interviewing

in this study, the researcher made use of the concept of saturation where data collection ceases when no new information or ideas are added to the data collected up to that point (Kelly, 1999a).

For the present study, the researcher set out to interview the entire universe (of the organisation) of approximately 30 employees, although, mentioned above, the principle of saturation was applied once the data collected yielded no new information. However, since appointments with employees were made at their convenience, the researcher was left to ensure that at least all levels and departments were represented in the data. To this end, a combination of quota sampling and purposive sampling was employed. Neuman (1997) describes quota sampling as sampling according to specified categories, such as the departments in the current investigation. Purposive sampling uses the judgement of expertise in selecting cases. In summary, judgement was employed to ensure that the sample yielded was representative enough of the universe.

Further details of the sample, including demographics and the execution of the interviews, are included in Chapter 5.

Ethical considerations

Without restricting access to research, which is contrary to the very existence of research, studies and their results are open to dilution and individual interpretation by various users. Using a language to communicate the research that is suitable for various users is important for creating a sound research report (Dash, 2002; Willig, 2001).

Provided researchers are concerned with the impact of their research, there are certain ethical concerns that they ought to consider. Among these are (Neuman, 1997; Willig, 2001):

- Informed consent: The research participants are aware of the nature of the research and its procedures, and give consent to participation before the research takes place. In the present study consent was obtained when interviews were sought with respondents, and re-affirmed at the start of the interview.

- Confidentiality and anonymity: The researcher must keep all material and information obtained during the research process confidential. This implies that the data is such that no specific respondent can be linked to a specific response, and that all respondents remain nameless.

Confidentiality was assured at the start of each interview. All material was labelled and categorised so as not to identify any particular respondent.

- Protection against physical harm, psychological abuse and stress: Researchers must be aware of any potential harm, in any way, that the respondents may be exposed to, and minimise such harm at all times. The present study does not expose the respondents to any physical harm. During the introduction of each interview it was stated that there are no right or wrong answers, and that it was the respondent's opinion that was of concern.

- Debriefing and use of research results: Participants should have access to any publications or reports in a study they partook in. The report will be added to the existing library of resources. The aim is for the results to provide the organisation under study with suggestions for future action and to highlight areas of improvement in communication.

Analysis of results

Hanson (1995) encourages a focus of data collection and analysis on context, rather than on data reduction as a means to analysis.

Transcriptions: tools of analysis

De Vos et al. (2002) urge researchers to consider the facilitation of analysis when selecting a systematic method for data collection. This method of data collection should enable the researcher to organise data for ease of use during analysis.

Transcripts are often the qualitative researcher's equivalent of a data file. Since transcription is a crucial stage of analysis that prepares the data for further stages, transcribing should not be treated as a routine operation (Strati, 2000). Henning (2004) also emphasises the connection of data transcriptions to analysis by stating that transcripts should be done as soon as possible after the interview. She advises that as much of the data as possible should be transcribed by the interviewers themselves. In this way, later data analysis will be facilitated as interviewers will already be familiar with the content by the time they come to this stage.

A comment can usually be understood in the context of the interview as a whole, therefore the entire interview is transcribed. All interviews should be transcribed electronically, so as to assist in navigating around the data (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The transcription process should be consistent and must

reflect verbatim (word for word) the discussion during the interview (Henning, 2004). In order to check the reliability of the transcription, edit it and add any further notations, transcripts should be reviewed once completed by listening to the recording and reading through the transcript (Henning, 2004; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

Data analysis

Even though qualitative data consist of text, words, phrases and representations of experiences, it does not mean that the systems of analysis are vague, as opposed to the systematic and logical analysis methods used in quantitative research (Neuman, 1997). Strati (2000) sums it up by saying that researchers operating in organisational environments are more in search of meaning than of defining laws.

Strati (2000) also warns that data analysis and interpretation should be done with caution and with an awareness of the limits presented by the contextual nature of the setting. He highlights the following:

- The study is conducted at a certain point in the organisational context.

- The data collected (interviews as well as observations) are inherently focused on people (including the researcher) and experiences, not on objective accounts.

- The data (both those collected from participants as well as from observations), are in a manner already an interpretation.

- The research is conducted with the framework of theory and research strategies.

- Information is constructed in the form of written accounts (or transcripts).

- The analysis made from the constructed texts is done according to research ethics and the audience for which it is written.

Concept formation begins during data collection and forms an important part of qualitative data analysis (Babbie, 2004; De Vos et al., 2002; Hoyle et al., 2002; Neuman, 1997). In short, the researcher analyses data by arranging them into themes or categories based on similar concepts, thereby forming concepts. One technique to achieve this is network analysis (Neuman, 1997) or concept mapping (Babbie, 2004), where relationships are indicated in a mapped format. This graphical format may facilitate a conceptualisation of the relationships. It is this method that was employed in the current study, since relationships between constructs are the key focus. This method was systematically applied to the interview transcripts as well as to the participant observation notes.

Babbie (2004) provides some suggestions on ways to form these concepts: frequency, magnitude, structure, and process. Although many computer programmes exist that allow for a faster coding or content analysis process, Babbie (2004) and Hoyle et al. (2002) warn that discovering patterns within a context of a social nature may require a more refined and flexible system than a computer programme could provide. Henning (2004) also comments on this through mentioning that a single answer should be interpreted in the context of the rest of the data/interview and should not merely be assigned a label or code.

When forming concepts or identifying themes during analysis, Berg (1998) highlights the use of thematic analysis in terms of manifest content, or content that is physically evident, and latent content, or the interpretation of the underlying meaning. One such technique, as mentioned above is concept mapping. Besides the researcher's acknowledgement of his or her influence on the data collection and interpretation, the researcher should include examples or excerpts from the data in the interpretation, especially when making interpretations of underlying meanings.

Although various data analysis methods exist for interpretation, Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) suggest that broad guidelines. As a starting point they suggest the following:

1. *Familiarisation and immersion:* by the time analysis is nearing, the researcher should already have some understanding of the meaning of the data. When data collection is complete researchers should immerse themselves in the written accounts and texts, so that they are very familiar with the data.

2. *Inducing themes:* the important thing here is that concepts or themes are induced, as opposed to trying to fit the data into existing themes. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) suggest that simple language (used by respondents) be used to name categories. Importantly, they also encourage the researcher to not merely summarise content but to think of it in terms of processes and functions. In terms of the number of optimum themes, they suggest that two or three may not cover the complexities of the data, and that more than ten would probably yield fewer main themes with sub-themes. Importantly, the authors urge researchers to constantly keep the research objectives in mind during the analysis phase.

3. *Coding:* during the process of developing themes the data is categorised or broken into different sections or clusters. Producing themes or patterns are not finite steps, but rather related activities that produce a circular process of analysis.

4. *Elaboration:* this process explores the themes extracted more closely. The main objective here is to arrive at a deeper level of meaning of the data, and to stop when one reaches a point where no further items of significance are added.

5. *Interpretation:* as the written account of the subject under study, the interpretation could follow the themes produced. What should be remembered here is the influence of the writer's opinion, prejudices, subjective views and involvement throughout the research.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the appropriateness of using a qualitative research methodology for the present study. In-depth interviews and participant observation constitute the data collection methods, while data analysis is conducted through concept formation using content mapping. The following chapter considers the results of the study as they have emerged from the data presented.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the methodology applicable to the present study. A qualitative approach was identified as the appropriate methodology, with in-depth interviews being the means of data collection. In order to incorporate the principle of triangulation, participant observation and meeting notes were included in the data collected. The data were analysed by means of concept formation to arrive at concept or theme identification. In this chapter the sample composition and results will be discussed.

Details of the universe under investigation

As described in Chapter 1, the marketing research organisation that forms the universe and context of this investigation comprises various departments which manage the major steps of the research process for any particular project. These include a top management team (comprising the managing director and the individual department managers), client service executives (CSEs), research executives (REs) and a production department. There are other departments, for example fieldwork, that also contribute to the research process. Figure 5.1 shows further details on numbers of staff.

The organisational structure is designed according to the functions that each of these departments perform, as well as cross-functional project teams. For example, a typical project employs a CSE, an RE, and one or two individuals from the production department. The main tasks and responsibilities of the CSE are selling a research project, designing the related material, and presenting the findings. The main task of an RE is project management, in other words receiving the material from the CSE and ensuring that the project-specifics are carried out effectively by each of the other relevant departments. The production department is largely responsible for processing raw data into data that the RE and CSE can use for analysis of the results. Figure 5.1 provides a visual representation of the organisation's design along these functions.
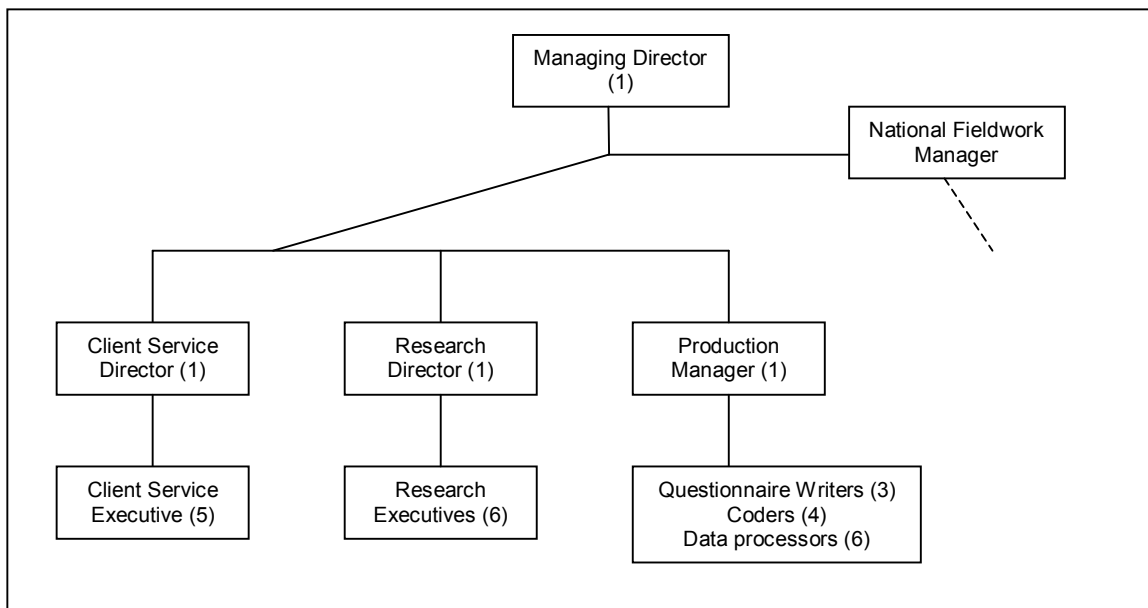
Figure 5.1. *Organisational design of the marketing research organisation used in the present study*. The figures in brackets indicate the number of employees within that job description at the time of this study. The dotted line from National Fieldwork Manager indicates a further structure.

The fieldwork department is almost an entity on its own with its own team structures. The scope of this investigation falls within the research services departments (i.e. CSE, RE and Production), and the fieldwork department is thus not included in the data collection. The fact that they form part of the organisation means that they do exert an influence on various aspects and dynamics occurring within the research service departments, and this will be taken into account during the analysis of the results, where applicable.

In terms of communication processes, the REs form the central point or hub of a specific project due to their project management functions. In short, once a project is approved the CSE who sold the project is allocated a RE to deal with for the duration of that project. The RE then liaises with and instructs the various other departments involved, namely, questionnaire writing, fieldwork, coding and data processing, in order to manage the project from the proposal to the presentation stage. Once results for the project are produced they are handed to the CSE, who in turn, presents the results to the client. Upon completion of the project the project-specific team is dissolved and allocated to other projects.

Another channel of communication in the organisation included in this study, is meetings and the specific dynamics within them that relate to the topic of the present study. At the time of this study, top management meets three times a week, and each department meets once a week. Individual managers are tasked with

providing top management with progress reports and feedback on projects, and information and feedback on specific issues at hand. They also participate in discussions on strategic issues. The individual managers also provide their employees with relevant information and feedback from the top management meetings. As such, the departmental meetings provide a forum for such feedback, and also provide a channel for the managers to get feedback on progress on projects and to deal with any other issues that may arise. Notes from meetings span approximately three months up to and including the period in which the in-depth interviews for this study were conducted. In addition to these meetings, a weekly production meeting that includes representatives from each department (including the fieldwork department) is held to discuss progress on work.

In addition, two workshops or conferences occurred (one for the REs and one for the CSEs) approximately six to eight months prior to the in-depth interviews. Minutes, reports, and discussion plans which could contribute to the present study were noted.

Details of the sample

In total 14 in-depth interviews were conducted. Five of the interviews were conducted within the top management level with the Managing Director, Research Director and Manager, Senior Research Executive, Client Services Director and Production Manager. Three interviews were conducted with CSEs and four with REs. Within the production department two interviews were conducted with data processing managers. A total of four men and ten women were interviewed. Although the average number of years of work experience is seven years, half of the respondents had less than five years' experience, and the other half from ten years upwards. Respondents ranged from 20 years old to approximately 40. All respondents, except one RE, have a tertiary qualification in the arts or marketing areas, including research psychology.

The average interview length was 28 minutes. The shorter interviews took approximately 20 minutes and the longest 50 minutes to complete. Interviews were kept to a reasonable length since they were mostly conducted during office hours.

Although the universe could be deemed small enough to conduct interviews with each individual, the researcher made use of the principle of saturation (Kelly, 1999a). The data collection spanned

approximately three weeks. Towards the end of this period the researcher had conducted interviews representing all relevant role players, and the information received was becoming more and more similar.

Process of data analysis

Once transcriptions of the in-depth interviews were complete, the formal process of data analysis commenced. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the broader analysis of the transcripts began during the actual transcription phase. Through a circular process of concept formation using a concept mapping technique, certain concepts or themes and related dynamics were identified regarding the organisation's communication and feedback processes, and will now be discussed in more detail.

Themes identified

From a systemic viewpoint, the themes that emerge through the process of analysis are interrelated. Many of the dynamics occurring under the heading of one theme appear or are related to the dynamics occurring elsewhere. Additionally, the principles of systems theory mean that each theme and the concepts discussed around it are often found to be a part of or very closely linked to another theme, since the whole system is greater than the sum of its parts.

Four broad themes were identified from the data collected, which relate very closely to the communication and feedback process within the organisation under study. They are mentioned in no specific order, although a thread of logic leads one into the other. The themes identified were:

(1) Lack of vision

(2) Ineffective or non-existent communication channels

(3) Lack of team cohesion

(4) Limitations in terms of skills and resources

It is worthy to note that the names given to these themes are not finite, nor all encompassing. The names are given merely to serve as tools in the process of categorisation and theme identification.

Lack of vision

One of the themes emerging from the data is a general as well as a specific lack of goal orientation. In the broader sense, respondents indicated that many employees do not feel either part of a team or part of a process. One respondent mentioned that there is no sense of belonging.

In the broader sense, respondents indicated a general lack of vision, where each department, and the employees within it, seem to function in isolation and do not see their role in the strategy of the organisation as a whole. This sentiment was mentioned on all levels of the organisation. Communication was indicated as a catalyst here, where the lack of or inefficiency in communicating the organisation's strategy and vision results in an absence of a general sense of belonging and purpose. There was a strong sense of not feeling part of a team, in which all members are in it together. This feeling was also echoed on all levels.

More specifically, within each department, as well as within a specific project, all of the CSEs interviewed suggested that the other research service departments are not completely in touch with the client and their objectives, and thus do not see themselves as part of a team, all working towards a common goal. On the other hand, three out of the four REs interviewed pointed out that the CSEs do not always share the information related to the project's objectives.

Another dynamic that occurred within this theme is taking ownership. Managers and CSEs felt that there is a general lack of ownership of a project from some of the REs as well as from the production department. This in turn was said to lead to a lack of responsibility, and in some cases, a lack of accountability for their work. This was also observed at various internal meetings where attendees would refer to a task as being someone else's responsibility.

All levels commented on a general lack of effective planning in terms of work-related tasks, especially in the sense that all agreed that up-front planning is integral to the success of any project. A lack of sufficient time and inexperience were cited as reasons for this. During internal meetings where there were discussions of problems and difficulties, managers would remark that the issue could have been avoided if sufficient planning had been done initially.

Team cohesion and a team atmosphere were reported to be lacking. One respondent, a RE, mentioned that "if everyone just did their part it would be so much easier." This was also indicated by a member of the production department who felt that what was missing was teamwork, and that "everyone must do their share." This once again highlights the idea that there is no sense of belonging in the organisation.

Inefficient communication channels

Another theme underlying much of the data is the lack of communication in some areas, and the inefficiency of communication in other areas. The REs, CSEs, and managers noted that the feedback and communication between departmental managers within the top management team exists, and is relatively open and consistent. However, the REs, CSEs and the production department respondents all felt that this is where the communication stops. It is evident that information perceived as critical to the smooth running of a project is not being disseminated to the REs and CSEs once top management has made a decision. One CSE mentioned that one of their projects was postponed in order to prioritise another project, and that they were only told upon enquiry, or discovered in the course of casual conversation, to why there was little or no progress on the project. In the same light, CSEs and REs alike mentioned that these decisions are often made without consulting them, although they feel that they are in a position to supply knowledge on the background of the project and the specific needs of the client.

Relating to the first theme, all levels felt that team cohesion would improve if top management communicates to the rest of the organisation as a whole on a regular basis. There was mention of a monthly "communication meeting" that was started but seemed to have faded away. Respondents indicated that if communication from top management was formalised in such a meeting, it would improve the sense of cohesion. Some items that respondents have appreciated hearing about and would like to hear more about in the forum of these meetings, is progress on revenue targets, new appointments, new initiatives, human resource issues and problems being experienced in other departments. Respondents felt that they would also feel better equipped in terms of managing their work if these meeting occurred regularly.

The REs indicated that they do receive such regular feedback from their managers on a regular basis, but that even this information would be filtered specifically for them. In other words, they do not get to hear the full message straight from top management, but rather snippets of information in isolation, rather than within

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the context of the organisation as a whole. One RE mentioned that "the irony is that we have so many meetings but we're still in the dark."

Regarding other departmental meetings, the CSEs all stated that there are no meetings where they can get together to receive feedback from management, raise their concerns, and hear about the rest of the company. As a result, they feel separated from the other departments which are doing the actual work on their projects. Recently, a new manager who was appointed to head the production department has made it one of her priorities to have weekly meetings, not only to cover work-related progress but also to have a forum to discuss problems.

Regarding the structure of the organization, a CSE and a top manager both remark that the organization's design does not often allow for efficient and open communication. For example, the CSE is not allowed to speak to the fieldwork department. The perception is that perhaps top management felt that since it is the function of the RE to manage the project, the CSE should obtain his or her information from them. However, one CSE said that if a problem occurs and the RE cannot be found, it is counterproductive to wait for the appropriate person to attend to the problem at a later stage, rather than to try to address it immediately oneself. One of the top managers commented that the marketing research industry must rely on systems and procedures to operate effectively, although these procedures should also be flexible.

All respondents stated their belief that the responsibility for initialising and maintaining communication channels lies with top management. From there, each departmental manager should take responsibility for communicating information. All levels agreed that it is also an individual responsibility in that each employee should personally make the effort to ensure that there is communication between departments. Despite their belief that communication was a joint responsibility, all levels observed that it is often only the REs who communicate with everyone, and noted that although the REs are not always effective, at least they communicate.

Falling within the realm of this theme is the concept of lack of follow-through or feedback. One example of this was highlighted by all levels, namely, the workshops or conferences that were held. Although all levels were convinced of the importance of the workshops, indicating that they are useful in evaluating people's positions and developing new initiatives, they nevertheless felt that all the effort is meaningless if there is no follow-up session to see if any of the points discussed have been put into place, and whether they are

working or not. The respondents reported that an expectation of action is created at these workshops or conferences, but when there is no resulting action afterwards, they are left feeling let down.

Lack of team cohesion

Very closely related to the first theme discussed is team cohesion. At all levels the idea of a blaming culture was described to represent the atmosphere in the organisation, where individuals focus only on their own work so that when things go wrong they cannot be blamed. This atmosphere is also evident during the internal meetings, where attendees often passed blame onto another department if problems were experienced.

Lack of team cohesion was particularly mentioned with regards to the production department. Managers explained that previously the production department felt that they did not belong within the team and should merely carry out their functions without creative input or initiative. The production managers described this perception as one of their current priorities in that they are focusing on changing a stance of 'it not being part of the job' to that of 'knowing your contribution to the organisation as a whole.'

As part of this concept of cohesion, a top manager reported a belief that many people, at all levels, are unsure of what is expected of them. This was mentioned in the context of roles and responsibilities, and suggests that these are vague in terms of how each employee relates to the organisation as a whole. Top managers stated that employees then make the assumption that many others think about and conduct their work with the same understanding as they do. This was mentioned particularly in the light of there being a large proportion of inexperienced REs and production staff.

Adding to the sense of a lack of cohesion is the perception among some of the top managers that that some of the more long-standing employees are resistant to change, whereas those who are termed "inexperienced" are thought of as innovative and more dynamic. In this regard, both CSEs and REs mentioned a perception that top management favours those who are younger in experience, but who do not necessarily have the skill and knowledge that the industry often demands.

Skill and resource limitations

This brings us to the final theme, namely, limitations in skills and resources. In this context, skills refers to knowledge and experience, while resources refers more to support and staff complement than tangible resources like computers or paper.

The nature of the industry, which means that there is a continuously large workload, is mentioned at all levels as being a challenge, although top managers view it more as an obstacle to overcome and to learn from, as opposed to the problem other employees say it is. The non-managerial respondents recognise this as something they cannot change, although it should be taken into consideration when problems arise.

As mentioned previously, all levels indicated that the REs and some of the production staff have little experience of the functions they fulfil. Time limitations and large workloads were cited as being the difficulty in providing sufficient training and development. Over and above this, some of the CSEs said that a lack of skills is also due to a lack of supervision from individual managers. One of the top managers did not, however, see operational issues within their department as their primary function, but indicated that their main role was to provide the managing director with information, progress and feedback, only getting involved in actual work when a problem arose.

Although systems and procedures for daily work tasks exist, more than half of the CSEs and REs felt that these were not being adhered to, mostly due to a lack of responsibility, but also due to inexperience, a lack of initial training of new appointments, and a lack of supervision of newer employees.

Resources in terms of the number of staff members were not mentioned specifically by any respondents. Rather, the lack of resources was cited in terms of an absence of sufficient support, supervision, and passing on of knowledge and skill to (particularly) the REs, especially since they are viewed as the centre of the work process in their project management roles. One respondent, an RE, did remark that in their view "resources may not necessarily help, we need to work smarter."

Conclusion

This chapter examined the context of the universe from which the sample was taken. Through a process of data analysis certain themes were identified as relating to the communication and feedback processes

within the organisation under investigation. During a discussion of the themes it is evident that they do not appear in isolation, but rather are interrelated with one another, and should be viewed as equally relevant to the topic in the context within which they occur. Internal consistency appears to be enhanced in that similar results were obtained in various settings, namely, from in-depth interviews as well as meetings and conferences. In the following chapter these themes are extrapolated further so as to come to a point of providing conclusions and recommendations for improving communication in the organisation.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 5 presented the results of the investigation. These results will now be examined in the light of the literature review and the theoretical background. In order to facilitate a logical flow in the discussion of the results, each theme identified in the results chapter (Chapter 5) will be considered individually. Then the interrelation between the themes will be discussed. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations stemming from the results will be presented.

Lack of vision in the organisation

The first theme is a general and specific lack of goal orientation in the target organisation. This is closely linked to the theme of a lack of team cohesion, which will be discussed further on.

The principle of feedback, explored at length above, appears not to have been utilised by management in conveying the organisation's vision and goals effectively. Respondents directly indicated that management have not communicated the organisation's broad (and specific) strategies to the employees, which leaves the employees with no general sense of direction. Each department appears to understand their functions and tasks. However, an understanding of the way in which their roles fit into the greater organisational strategies seems to be vague. If the principle of feedback was employed, the senders of the message (i.e. management communicating the organisation's vision and goals) would have seen that the message was either not received or that it was not understood.

To avoid conflict within an organisation, Hartley and Bruckmann (2002) cite communication as key. The respondents felt that departments work in isolation, and not towards a common goal, causing frustration to those who are tasked with the ultimate success of a project. All levels within the organisation under study commented on a lack of efficient planning and a general lack of planning at the beginning of a project. Increased sharing of information, or communication regarding roles prior to a project starting, would assist in having each project team member knowing and understanding (through feedback) their role in a common goal.

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Theunissen (1998) explains further that the sharing of information has a certain binding quality in that it improves a feeling of belonging. If the environment is such that communication is not open, employees may not see their part in working towards a common goal. Leading from this, they would also not be taking ownership of their part in the process, since they do not see its value. If goals are shared there will be a sense of ownership (Drafke & Kossen, 2002). It is understandably difficult for employees to feel part of a team if they have not taken ownership of their tasks because they do not understand how they slot in with the common goal.

From this discussion it is evident that there are many dynamics around communication in the target organisation that all relate to and influence each other. To facilitate sustainability, the organisation should be seen as a living system. The dynamics discussed here operate within the context of this living organisation. The employees in the investigation have expressed a sense of functioning in isolation, not working towards a common goal and a general lack of taking ownership. This in turn is likely to influence how they take responsibility and are accountable for their work, which further adds to the sense of isolation. Sales (2002) suggests that isolation and a lack of working towards a common goal can be overcome by including all employees in the strategic visioning, or at the very least communicating this vision to all employees.

Respondents reported that project teams were not involved in the planning at the start of a project. Wageman (1997) emphasises that an effective team needs a clear, simple and specific sense of direction. Top management's apparent failure to communicate a clear vision and goals adds to this directional confusion. In both instances inefficiency and lack of communication with regard to goals and objectives contribute to the breakdown of the team as a whole.

Matrix organisational designs like those of project teams require everyone to accept the design and decide to work together in order to avoid conflict. Such conflict is evident between the departments in the organisation under study, where much blaming of others is found.

From here it is appropriate to examine the theme of inefficient communication channels, since it is apparent that inefficient or deficient communication has contributed to lack of vision, common goals and teamwork.

Inefficient communication channels

The results of this study indicate that the upward communication, namely, communication between managers and the top management team, is open, consistent and effective. However, the downward communication is in some cases nonexistent and in other cases inefficient or ineffective. The CSEs do not seem to receive any communication or feedback from management whatsoever, whereas the REs and the production department receive regular communication and feedback from their managers regarding discussions and decisions from top management. Yet, the REs still feel that this feedback is insufficient for facilitating team cohesion, since it entails only information pertaining to their work and not to other departments.

An open atmosphere for communication seems to be lacking between employees and management, and the absence of downward communication or feedback fuels this barrier in the communication process. Oshry (in Sales, 2002) explains the importance of managers providing feedback to top management and communicating with one another. As mentioned earlier, this appears to be happening in the organisation, but only from a management level upwards. Communication processes seem to be working well at this level, but have influenced the sense of team cohesion within the organisation as a whole.

The literature shows that downward communication should not be vague, hurried or distorted in any way. In this study this communication seems to be profoundly lacking since managers do not pass on information effectively, if at all. An example of this would be how critical decisions regarding a project made at management level are received by the CSE (and RE) through the grapevine or through casual conversation. Although O'Hair et al. (2001) do not discourage the use of the grapevine as a means of conveying information, in this instance such critical information should follow formal (and immediate) communication processes.

Although the literature has not specifically covered the aspect of where the responsibility for maintaining effective communication processes lies, an answer is suggested in the results. Respondents believe that top management is responsible for maintaining effective communication channels. The literature does suggest that it is important for managers to constantly reinforce the value of communication in an effort to integrate all departments into the communication infrastructures. The results also show that it appears to be the

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absence and inefficiency of communication from top management to the rest of the employees that presents a barrier in the communication processes and contributes to a lack of a sense of cohesion.

The workshops or conferences held are held as another example of this poor downward communication. Expectations were created at the workshops when problems were identified and discussed in terms of possible solutions and future actions, but it seems as though changes were either not implemented or were not followed through. Issues appear to be revisited again and again, but nothing seems to materialise from the discussion. This indicates a general lack of follow-through or feedback on the part of management. The discussion on organisations as living systems highlighted the importance of closing the loop to obtain feedback on problems so that the organisation can grow from implementing changes. The organisation under study does not seem to manage this process effectively due to poor or nonexistent follow-up and feedback obtained from workshops. As a result, there is no sustainable change.

A pattern of behaviour seems to emerge in that this lack of follow-through or incorporation of feedback appears elsewhere, for example, in neglecting to disseminate information on decisions to employees. The regular "communication meetings" held with all employees also seem to have faded.

The results show that some CSEs and top managers felt that the current organisational design does not allow for efficient and open communication. In chapter 3 organisational design was discussed and it appears as though the organisation under investigation follows a matrix design, making use of functional groups and project teams. The literature shows that the matrix structure is well suited to an environment that is process driven (functional work groups or project teams refer). One wonders whether the inefficient communication processes are not due to the lack of formal communication processes rather than a perceived inappropriate organisational design. As such the organisational design appears appropriate to the work environment.

A last point worth mentioning is that, from management's perspective, there have been many recent changes (retrenchments, the appointment of new managers) which have improved work processes. Many of the respondents, representing both managerial and non-managerial levels, agree that there have been improvements in some areas, but that there is still no sense of team cohesion. The inefficient communication processes have not created an open atmosphere in which communication can facilitate building positive relationships, a sense of belonging, and a sense of sharing common goals.

Lack of team cohesion

The theme of team cohesion has been alluded to in previous themes. In this section this theme will be discussed in more detail.

A blaming culture seems to have added to the sense of isolation some individuals feel. What seems to make this concept of a lack of team cohesion more complex is that, in addition, respondents reported that they are unsure of their roles in the organisation as a whole. In a working relationship there is the perception that others are also unsure of or unaware of their responsibilities. Although work-specific tasks are understood, the respondents refer to the sense of knowing the value of their contribution, and understanding their role in working towards a common goal, be it project specific or part of the organisation's strategic vision. As mentioned earlier, this may impact negatively on accepting ownership and building team cohesion.

Another aspect relating to a lack of team cohesion is the perception that the long-standing, experienced employees are less willing to change. Top management is then perceived to favour those who are younger and display initiative, even though they lack experience. This perception appears to have contributed to a lack of trust in management, which, coupled with their inefficient communication and lack of follow-through and feedback, fosters the belief that not everyone is equally important, which in turn negatively influences the sense of team cohesion.

Skill and resource limitations

The final theme incorporates elements that have not yet been discussed. Some of these elements relate to the previous discussions and it is important to remember that from a systemic point of view, all these dynamics are to be included when trying to understand the organisation as a whole.

Work experience, training and supervision are elements within this theme that relate to the topic. In terms of work experience, some of the respondents cited a lack of supervision for less experienced employees as a reason for their failure to gain necessary skills. This appears to be a stumbling block in effective evaluation and feedback, where problems are not always identified, and if they are, they are not always solved and fed back into the system so that it may grow through learning.

The literature has demonstrated how organisations operate in increasingly complex and competitive markets, and how they must draw on internal knowledge to strengthen themselves. This ability appears to be lacking in the organisation under study, and it seems likely that knowledge, skills and experiences are not being passed on to less experienced staff.

The literature also indicates the importance of investing in training to ensure that the future needs of the organisation are met. There appears to be insufficient training in this organisation, which coincides with the lack of knowledge transfer within it.

Both these concepts (lack of knowledge transfer and lack of training) seem to contribute negatively to the already nonexistent or inefficient feedback and evaluation processes. Wageman (1997) mentions feedback on completed tasks as an attribute of effective work teams that is absent in ineffective teams.

Summary of themes

From the analysis above the dynamics affecting communication process are as numerous as they are varied. The dynamics involved in terms of a general and specific lack of vision were examined first and it was found that downward communication and feedback appear to be deficient. The absence of a sense of working as a team towards a common goal seems to contribute to a feeling of not belonging and affects employees' sense of ownership. Organisational design was also mentioned in terms of how it encourages or dampens communication processes.

This led to a further exploration of inefficient communication processes as they may have been a catalyst to these dynamics. It is evident from the discussion that upward communication (between departmental managers and top management alone) is open and well established. Downward communication is seen to be insufficient or completely absent. The concept of a lack of feedback is once again raised in that follow-through on decisions is either nonexistent or is attempted half-heartedly. These deficiencies are again related to not working together as a team and not sharing a common goal. This in turn influences the understanding of individual roles and responsibilities as they pertain to the organisation as a whole, which seem to be unclear or misunderstood. Again, this contributes to a lack of team cohesion.

Lastly, knowledge transfer and training were examined and found to be lacking. The important concept of feedback does not seem to be incorporated, since no learning takes place in order to reduce things such as wasted physical resources and time and to strengthen the organisation's ability to invest in its future needs.

Before making recommendations for future action, the limitations within the boundaries and context of this investigation will be considered.

Boundaries and context

In order to understand the results of the investigation within the context in which it occurs, it is necessary to review the limitations and boundaries within which this investigation falls. Such limitations would be the application of results to other contexts of other organisations, and the relative influence the researcher herself has on the data presented. Firstly, this research serves to qualitatively examine factors (relating to communication and feedback processes) within a specific context (a marketing research organisation). From a general systems theory perspective (as this is the framework applied in this investigation), this research could be reviewed by other marketing research organisations (since they share a similar context), which could benefit from the knowledge gained from this research.

Secondly, as discussed in the research methodology chapter (Chapter 4) the researcher acknowledges her influence on the research due to incorporating participant observation methods. Although this influence may have produced some limitations, it was felt that the researcher's presence in the organisation was beneficial rather than a hindrance, and resulted in her increased knowledge of research as a process, and knowledge and experience of the organisation as a system. In addition, the researcher feels that information elicited from respondents was more valuable and insightful partly because of the respondents accepting the researcher as part of the system.

The following section contains recommendations for the communication processes in this marketing research organisation.

Recommendations and future opportunities

Any research conducted carries the responsibility of contributing towards a phenomenon, that it, to have a purpose, regardless of what it is (Denscombe, 2002). Thus the results and conclusions, including any

recommendations, must relate to the aim of the investigation. This said, the current research aimed to examine communication and feedback processes in a marketing research organisation, and how these processes can be improved upon.

Some of the following recommendations were in fact identified at the CSE conference, which was facilitated by an independent consultant. That these recommendations are still valid (i.e. they have not been implemented) is perhaps a comment on the lack of communication, feedback and follow-through evident in the preceding discussions.

From the process driven investigation of communication in the marketing organisation under study, the following recommendations are made. It must be reaffirmed that these recommendations are interdependent and should not be viewed in isolation. From the previous discussions it is clear that these dynamics are interrelated. Recommendations are thus not listed in any particular order:

- *Communication of organisational vision and strategic objectives:* It is recommended that these goals be communicated by top management to all employees in a group setting, in a clear, simple manner. Roles and responsibilities as they apply to the goals should be defined. Importantly, top management should allow input, evaluation and feedback from employees as to their understanding and acceptance of these goals. These communications should take place on a regular basis (for example, once a month) to instil the value of communication.

- *Planning and project specific objectives:* A formalised process of incorporating all project members in the initial planning phase is recommended. Here too, clear communication of what is expected from the project, and clarification of each person's role and contribution towards the project objectives, are important. This should also be an open forum for communication for all project members to give input towards ensuring the smooth running of the project.

- *Encouragement of team cohesion:* One of the most significant obstacles to team cohesion is a failure to follow through on agreed actions, and feed back information to employees. Two recommendations are made for this: Firstly, as mentioned above, regular communication meetings should take place. If such meetings are held regularly and if the information received is utilised and followed through by management, this would encourage a sense of working towards a common goal and a sense of being on the same team. Secondly, individual and team successes should be consistently celebrated, while failures should be discussed openly to learn from mistakes.

- *Supervision and training:* In order to ensure knowledge transfer for sustaining the system, training and supervision of less experienced employees is important. In an industry where quality and accuracy are paramount, it is critical that all employees are sufficiently skilled at their tasks. Part of the training and supervision should include ensuring that all project team members are clear on what their task-related responsibilities are.

- *Evaluation:* Since feedback and evaluation have been identified as critical to the effective functioning of communication processes, it is recommended that a 360 degree or multirater evaluation programme be implemented. Chapter 2 contains more detail on such a programme. As discussed, an appraisal system that only includes the evaluation of employees by their manager is not sufficient. A multirater system would assist in formalising feedback and the follow-through and incorporation of change. Such a programme would work in combination with individual performance appraisals where performance goals match the organisation's objectives.

In addition to the above recommendations, it is suggested that such research be conducted again on a regular basis to continually assess whether the system under investigation is making effective use of the principles of communication and feedback. As mentioned above, similar results were found in previous investigations, and it is important to identify such a trend so that appropriate actions can be taken to overcome perpetuating difficulties.

In terms of future research opportunities, future investigations on the current organisation could assist the organisation in evaluating its progress. In terms of opportunities not specific to this organisation, other marketing research organisations may find the some of the results relevant to their context, since their process and work related tasks may be similar. Furthermore, the research contributes to psychology as a discipline in that it provides areas where the use of psychological principles could assist in the implementation of improvement strategies.

Conclusion

The research culminated in a discussion of the results and possible recommendations for interventions and future research. It is fitting at this stage to reflect on whether the research indeed addressed the objective it set out to achieve. The aim of this investigation was to describe how existing communication processes within a marketing research organisation can be improved upon to enhance individual and group

performance, as well as the success of the organisation as a whole. The conclusions and recommendations indicate that the research has highlighted areas of communication which the organisation as a system could improve upon to enhance its overall efficiency and success.

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