Changing employee behaviour through strategic communication

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Abstract

Businesses that actively engage in integrated internal communication practices should theoretically be more likely to foster employee engagement during change management interventions. Competitive forces and a dynamic business environment compel most organisations to continuously review the relevance of their current business operating model. As a result, organisations develop new strategies or revise existing ones. Part of the change management process of executing a strategy is the ability to communicate it to employees, in a manner that ensures alignment between strategy and employee. The communication process therefore must seek to effect behavioural changes among its recipients. This paper investigates the practices of a business unit of an organisation in the financial services sector which has recently undertaken an extensive strategic communication exercise. Through a series of survey questions and interviews, the research seeks an answer to the question of whether integrated internal communication initiatives are effective in changing employee behaviour. Furthermore, the report investigates the forces that either inhibit or promote internal communication; and engages communication practitioners to determine whether return on investment metrics are implemented that link internal communication initiatives to financial performance. Results from the research revealed that strategic communication does have the capacity to affect employee engagement, but if left unchecked, factors such as language, distance and education have the capacity to inhibit effective communication initiatives. Furthermore, the absence of financial metrics and indicators related to the strategic communication initiative render it improbable to determine a return on investment for the internal communication initiative.

Keywords: internal communication, employee engagement, return on investment, strategic communication
Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisations and consent to carry out this research.

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Thomas Govender

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For any errors or inadequacies that may remain in this work, of course, the responsibility is entirely my own.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the research problem

While there have been a number of excellent studies and the subsequent development of theoretical frameworks on corporate communication, there is still a significant lack of empirical studies investigating how organisations formulate and execute an effective internal communication initiative focusing on the organisations change in strategy, at a business unit level (Aggerholm, Andersen, Admub, & Thomsen, 2009).

1.1. Introduction

According to Gause’s principle, competitors that make their living in the same way as each other cannot continue to coexist, no more in business than in nature (Hardin, 1960). In order to survive, each competitor must possess a unique advantage that is able to distinguish them from their peers. With an increase in competition, this differentiator becomes a mutually exclusive benefit allowing the species / organisation to exercise a competitive edge. Ultimately in the race to survive it crowds out the competition (Henderson, 1989, p. 140).

In a theoretical world, if every business were allowed to grow indefinitely, the resultant effect would be a finite environment overcome by an infinite business size (Henderson, 1989, p. 140). However, the introduction of strategists in business has promulgated the use of imagination and logic. This allows businesses to “accelerate the effects of competition and the rate of change” (Henderson, 1989, p. 140) and thereby perpetuate the Darwinian principle of “survival of the fittest”.

The principle of survival of the fittest, when applied to the biological environment, refers to a “natural selection conceived of as a struggle for life in which only those organisms’ best adapted to existing conditions are able to survive and reproduce” (The Free Dictionary, 2012). Henderson (1989, p. 140) argues that in business, the use of imagination and logic, which make strategy possible, are the catalysts that create a behaviour.

Tactics are applied that allow the business to both adapt to their changing environment and to also start to shape that environment to suit its own purpose. However as competitive forces continually evolve, imagination and logic alone are insufficient alone as strategic tools (Henderson, 1989, p. 140). Business is required to deeply understand
the “complex web of natural competition” (Henderson, 1989, p. 140) and introduce new tools to its strategic arsenal to adapt to the changing environment.

Until the 1940’s, the use of strategy was considered as a tool mainly used for military purposes. Battle plans have been devised for offensive and counter-offensive moves with excerpts for battlefield strategy being traced all the way to Sun Tzu’s “The art of war”. Since then, there have been several contributors to the definition of strategy dating back to Von Neumann and Morgenstern in 1947 who defined strategy as “a series of actions by a firm that are decided on according to the particular situation” (Bracker, 1980, p. 220).

More interestingly, it was not until 1967 that the importance of operationalising strategy took on a more formal approach with the introduction of C D Mueller’s 2SLS regression model which looked at the “strategic resource allocation to investigate funds-allocation process in a number of firms” (Bracker, 1980, p. 222).

Over the years, business has come to recognise that despite its best intentions and the development of the most advanced strategic models, the inability to implement a strategic model is as good as having no strategy at all. Conversely, Martin (2010) argues that previous comments by Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan Chase, where he stated “I’d rather have a first-rate execution and second-rate strategy any time than a brilliant idea and mediocre management” are technically flawed and misleading.

According to Martin (2010) this advocates that the implementation of strategies often fail because of the effect of the “choice-less” doer (Martin, 2010). This phenomenon occurs where an organisation merely cascades a series of operational requirements and tasks from senior management to customer facing staff with the intent that the completion or following of a set of standard operating procedures will ensure that desired outcome for the desired strategy (Martin, 2010).

From this, it can be deduced that a set of standard operating procedures and the development of operating models and frameworks are insufficient to ensure that a strategy is executed, let alone executed successfully. This is where the role of strategic communication is most critical to an organisation. According to Hoover (2010), research suggests that strategic execution often fails due to a more acute focus on “structural reorganisation and neglects the most powerful drivers of effectiveness – decision rights and information flow” (Hoover, 2010, p. 16).
1.2. Research motivation

Irrespective of whether one considers communication as being an important function of the organisation or not (van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007), it has become increasingly evident that communication, both internal and external, is integrated into the core of organisational existence (van Vuuren et al., 2007). Against the backdrop of a continually changing business environment evolving from the effects of changes in external and internal forces such as competition, regulation, technology, changes in the socio-political landscape, the ripple effect of the financial crisis in North America and the Eurozone. Furthermore, the pressures on developing economies of unemployment, infrastructure and economic instability, it has become common practice for organisations to continually review their strategies and make changes that are able to both react to and overcome these challenges while returning value to stakeholders.

Large organisations have an overarching corporate strategy which is often the basis of the corporate brand, while business units within the organisation, who have defined measurable goals also, need to develop and execute strategic initiatives that both complement the corporate strategy and achieve business unit goals. Through brand promotion and product awareness, the corporate strategy is often subliminally or explicitly communicated across the organisation, but the challenge facing the business unit is in effectively integrating a communication programme that not only has to deliver on desired outcomes, but also ensure employee engagement at all levels of the business unit, while reaching employees across the geographic spread of the organisation.

1.3. Research focus

The purpose of this study is to initiate an exploratory study of the internal communication practices at an organisation within the financial services sector, more notably, the banking sector. This research seeks to explore the processes, media and method adopted by a business unit within the organisation in communicating its change in business strategy through integrated communications and the subsequent outcomes of its approach. Consideration is given to several variables which have a direct influence over the way in which communication is delivered and received.
Sub-objectives of the study are to determine:

- Effectiveness of strategic communication in changing behaviour
- Alignment of strategy and employee as envisaged by management
- The effects of forces that inhibit or promote effective communication
- The processes involved prior to implementing a communication strategy initiative
- Evidence of a return on investment framework to financial performance of effective communication strategies

The study seeks to determine, within the context of the organisation whether strategic communication is effective in changing employee behaviour, or whether in the battle between culture and strategy it is ingrained culture that is the victor over the desire to seek new horizons. On another level, through a series of employee surveys and management interviews, the study attempts to gauge whether the desired outcomes as envisioned by senior management and enacted through the internal communication initiative are aligned with the employee interpretation of the communication. Based on this, it also asks the question as to whether the custodians of the internal communication initiative are sensitive to the effects of cultural diversity, language, distance, communication preferences and other contributing factors to the reception and interpretation of the strategic communication initiative.

Management interviews will be undertaken to determine the extent of the planning process and to understand why a specific plan of action was undertaken and the choice of employing specific communication tools and practitioners. Additionally, questions will be raised around the cost estimates of funding a strategic communication initiative. Meng and Berger (2012) introduced a paper on measuring the return on investment (ROI) of organisations’ internal communication efforts which opens another avenue of investigation as to the effectiveness of strategic communication initiatives.

Questions are posed to the management of the organisation on whether metrics exist that are able to quantify a ROI on each internal communication initiative while measuring both financial and non-financial indicators. More importantly, it asks the management if they are able to ascertain whether financial performance can be directly correlated to the strategic communication initiatives or whether such performance can be attributed to normal business operations. This study is important to business leaders
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as it will enable them to quantify the investment in internal communication initiatives, and to further understand the role that effective communication plays in fostering employee engagement.

1.4. Research aims

The challenge for both corporates and employees is the overload of data and information, given that “in the last 30 years mankind has produced more information than in the previous 5000” (Wingington, 2008, p. 71). Additionally in the world we presently occupy, we are continuously bombarded by “urgent, instant, up to the minute news and messaging” (Wingington, 2008, p. 71). Welch (2011) suggests a conceptual model that illustrates “a communication orientated perspective of employee engagement” where such engagement is directly impacted by internal communication. While the model does not consider demographic and geographic constraints as variables that may impact on employee engagement, it does provide a visible perspective that incorporates various constructs and psychological conditions that infer integration between communication and employee engagement, and provides a platform for further research.

This conceptual model, as envisaged by Welch (2011) suggests that through communication, leadership has the ability to affect the engagement levels, behaviour and vigour or attitude of its employees. However, the mere facilitation of communication does not guarantee this. Instead, through meaningful communication experiences, management must seek to attain emotional and cognitive engagement which has the potential to align organisation and employee goals.
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Figure 1.1. The employee engagement concept and internal corporate communication: a conceptual model. Adapted from "The evolution of the employee engagement concept: communication implications" by Mary Welch, 2011, Corporate Communication: An International Journal, 16, p. 340. Copyright by Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
1.5. Conclusion

For various reasons, organisations have to engage in the implementation of new strategies or revise existing strategies. However, the development of a set of standard operating procedures, the development of operating models and the implementation of frameworks are insufficient to guarantee the successful execution of an organisation’s strategy (Martin, 2010), especially where the organisation institutes a new strategy. With any strategy, the goal of management is to ensure alignment between the organisation strategy and its employees. At this juncture, the role of strategic communication is highlighted as a critical success factor to the implementation of the new strategy.

Through careful analysis, consultation and the understanding of the factors that inhibit or promote effective communication, management should be able to develop an integrated internal communication initiative to articulate its new strategy and objectives. The successful implementation of this communication initiative should focus on initiating employee engagement that has the capacity to influence employee behaviour. The net effect of a positive engagement is a positive change in behaviour which is a step further in the quest to align the strategy and the employee.

However, the communication process alone is insufficient to ensure that alignment will occur or that the new strategy once implemented will be successful. It is therefore incumbent on leaders of the organisations, and communication practitioners, to develop a set of metrics and financial indicators that are able to measure the return on investment of a specific integrated internal communication initiative.
Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Communication as a social science is inundated with theoretical frameworks and models that attempt to provide a perspective of its purpose and effectiveness in society. Additionally, the extensive literature also identifies forces that act towards inhibiting or promoting effective communication. The literature review hereafter does not focus on communication purely as a social science. Rather it seeks to investigate the role communication plays and whether it is an agent of change in the context of business communication and strategy.

The literature review explores several areas including:

- Definitions of communication and strategy
- Strategy execution models
- Communication strategy
- The role of communication on fostering employee engagement, influencing culture and behaviour and enhancing productivity.
- The forces that can promote or inhibit effective communication
- The role of management in designing and implementing strategic communication
- Tools available to facilitate communication initiatives
- Measuring the return on investment of strategic communication initiatives.

2.1.1. Communication defined

The most common place human activities are often taken for granted, and it’s only when we stop to examine and understand them in a systematic way (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008), that we recognise how puzzling and pervasive they really are, and more importantly the real influence they exert over our daily interaction, behaviour and cultural dynamics.

When postulating the definition of communication in their book Communication Theory and Scholarship, Littlejohn and Foss (2008) suggest that communication should be
treated as “central to human life”. They further suggest that communication is not just the active transfer of messages or interaction among individuals, but that it extends to those “near and far, living and dead” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

Over the years, distinguished individuals such as Dr Theodore Clevenger Jr. (an authority on audience response and quantitative methods in speech research) (The Florida State University, 2012), Professor Frank Dance, who proposed the “Helical Model of Communication in 1967” (Management Study Guide, 2012) and many others have promulgated and theorised several definitions of communication either based on judgements or observations. The National Communication Association (2010) describes the field of communication as “a study of how people use messages to generate meaning within and across all kinds of contexts, cultures, channels and media” (National Communication Association, 2011).

The National Communication Association (2011) describes a “transactional model of communication” as a process involving the encoding of messages and its subsequent transmitting via a chosen channel which is then decoded by the other communicator and the effect of “noise” or “interference” may lead to a misinterpretation or incomplete understanding of the intended message (National Communication Association, 2011).

A relatively old interpretation, but still relevant in the modern era is the description provided by Bruno Bara (1949) where he states “that communication is essentially a cooperative activity between two or more people in which the meanings of each transaction are constructed by all those actors together engaged in the shared task of reciprocally attending to the other communicants words” (Bara, 2010).

The various definitions of communication suggest that the discipline of communication is not as simple as individuals or businesses may assume it to be. Communication is either enhanced or distorted by aspects of language, culture, mediums of transmission, age, gender, “physical, psychological, or physiological distraction” (National Communication Association, 2011), implying that the mere transmission of a message does not explicitly guarantee understanding or compliance.

Communication as a science is widespread, and the role it plays in organisations is often critical to success or failure, especially in the arenas of strategy and its subsequent implementation. Up until the 1970’s, corporate communication was referred to as “Public Relations” (Cornelissen, 2011) and the implications thereof was
that the function was externally focused. However, the demand for more information from other stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2011), both internal and external has since changed the practice of corporate communication which has since developed into a more specialised function embodying a whole range of specialised disciplines including corporate design, corporate advertising, internal communication to employees, issues and crisis management, media relations, investor relations, change communication and public affairs (Cornelissen, 2011). For purposes of this document, the focus remains on internal communication as opposed to an all-encompassing view of organisational communication, and the emphasis on communication when organisations change strategy.

2.1.2. What strategy is

While there may be many definitions of strategy, especially in relation to the various contexts in which it may be applied, the application of corporate strategy implies that an organisation’s “objectives, purposes or goals” (Andrews, 1997) are often determined by a pattern of decisions (Andrews, 1997). Subsequently, it’s these patterns that generate the “principal policies and plans” (Andrews, 1997) that allow the organisation to pursue these goals.

Henry Mintzberg further suggested that strategies follow three central themes (Mintzberg, 1978):

a) “strategy formation can fruitfully be viewed as the interplay between a dynamic environment and bureaucratic momentum, with leadership mediating between the two forces” (Mintzberg, 1978)

b) “strategy formation over time appears to follow some important patterns in organisations, notably life-cycles and distinct change-continuity cycles within these” (Mintzberg, 1978).

c) “the study of the interplay between intended and realised strategies may lead us to the heart of this complex organisational process” (Mintzberg, 1978).

The modern era has seen an increase in the number of multinationals, many of who are significantly diversified across a range of products, services and geographies. Although the corporate strategy may arguably encompass the overall vision of the
organisation, business units operating within the framework of large corporations also
distinguish themselves by determining how they will compete within the larger group, or
how they aim to position themselves among competitors (Andrews, 1997).

The above supports the view that strategy exists at different levels within an
organisation. These could range from across the overall business (Riley, 2012) to sub-
units operating at lower tiers of the organisation. In their book “Exploring Corporate
Strategy” Professor Gerry Johnson and Professor Kevan Scholes define strategy as:
“Strategy is the direction and scope of an organisation over the long-term: which
achieves advantage for the organisation through its configuration of resources within a
challenging environment, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder
expectations” (Johnson & Scholes, 1998).

Internally, an organisation has the capacity to develop its strategy at the corporate
level, the business unit level and the operational level (Riley, 2012) while recognising
sub-structures within each of these levels of the organisation may develop their own
unique strategy to supplement the overall strategy. The field of strategic management
suggests that at a theoretical level, “strategic management is about taking strategic
decisions” (Riley, 2012) but at a practical level it involves the virtuous circle of “strategic
analysis, strategic choice and strategic implementation” (Riley, 2012) as well as a post
implementation review.

2.1.3. Executing strategy

For many organisations, the most difficult aspect of strategic management is the
implementation phase (Riley, 2012). Organisations planning to implement change
stemming from strategy, whether it is a focus on core competencies, organisation
synergy or value creation, generally adopt one of several current change models, a
hybrid of several existing models or formulate a model that is best suited to the
organisation’s culture. Some of these models include John Kotter’s “The eight-step
process for leading change” (Kotter, 2011), Prosci’s “ADKAR model” (Prosci, 1994-
2012), the “Kurt Lewin change management model” (Burnes, 2004), and several
others. While each of these models depicts areas of strength and limitations, there is a
common theme that permeates through them, which is encapsulated in the need for
communication and reinforcement.
In Kotter’s “eight-step process for leading change” (Kotter, 2011) his fourth step emphasises the need to “communicate the vision” (Kotter, 2011) suggesting that the message of change is in direct and daily competition with other messages and information on a daily basis (Kotter, 2011) and that the typical practice among some organisations to call a meeting to communicate the vision or change as a once-off exercise does not constitute an effective change management process (Kotter, 2011) which is best facilitated through frequency and demonstration (Kotter, 2011). The desire to create organisational culture is underlined by the need to facilitate informal communication, one-on-one meetings and group interactions (Mansueto Ventures LLC, 2010).

Although the ADKAR model suggests that “awareness and desire” are critical components of the model (Prosci, 1994-2012) and are the starting blocks before the initiation of any change intervention, successful change management is maintained through “reinforcement” (Prosci, 1994-2012). The linkage between organisational “change management tools” and individual change management is demonstrated as:

The beginning and ending phase of the ADKAR model illustrates the need for communication whether used as a tool for diagnosis or integrating change into organisational culture requires sustainable channels of communication (Prosci, 1994-2012).

In Kurt Lewin’s model of “unfreeze, change, freeze (or refreeze)” (Burnes, 2004), the author, as far back as 1947 when first introducing the model suggested the need for communicating a clear picture of the desired change highlighted this by stating that “without reinforcement, change could be short-lived” (Burnes, 2004).

The Pennsylvania State University Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment released a paper in May 2009 as part of their “Innovation Insights” series dealing with the topic of “implementing a strategic plan” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2009). In this series they suggest that communication is a critical component not only in the implementation phase, but that communication should actually commenced as soon as the “planning process is determined” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2009). In his paper, “Six communication secrets of top-performing organizations”, Bill Trahant (2008) states that: “Through better communication, government executives and human capital professionals engage employees to improve organizational performance” (Trahant,
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2008, p. 68). He goes on to list these six secrets as (1) focus on the customer, (2) engage employees in running the business, (3) help managers communicate effectively, (4) manage change effectively, (5) measure the impact of employee communication, (6) brand the employee experience as a recruiting tool (Trahant, 2008, p. 69-73).

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the role played by communications in the dissemination and implementation of strategy, one must first understand the various dynamics involved in communication, encompassing the effect of stakeholders and identifying who they are within the organisation, the method of communication utilised, the barriers to effective communication, the role played by management in effective communication and the subsequent measurement of communication effectiveness.

2.2. Strategic communication

Many people confuse expressive communication and strategic communication inferring them to be the same, whereas they have distinctly separate paradigms (Neal, 2010, p. 40). Where expressive communication is regarded as egocentric by nature and is utilised more frequently in the expression of feelings (Neal, 2010, p. 40), the nature of strategic communication is “purposeful” and is based on the desire to influence (Neal, 2010). This implies that strategic communication is much more challenging for practitioners within the organisation, especially since many individuals within the organisation are not trained to communicate strategy.

They therefore become heavily dependent on expressive communication (Neal, 2010) seeing it as a form of expressing their desires to communicate an important message. Neal (2010) argues that many managers ignore some of the basic steps of communicating strategy and often ignore four fundamentals that support strategic communication (1) “what am I trying to achieve?” (2) “how will my audience react to what I am trying to achieve?” (3) “will my message be resisted?” (4) “what do I know about my audience that will help me tailor my message”? (Neal, 2010, p. 40).

Some of the tools that strategy communicators could employ are the use of “story telling” (Neal, 2010) which, by the use of metaphors and symbolism is designed to
create an experience and stimulate emotion and subsequently “overcome resistance to the underlying change” (Neal, 2010, p. 40).

Salem (2008) in proposing simple leaning as first order change and in contrast learning resulting from transformational change also known as second order change suggests that “seven communication behaviours” that could be listed as to why “management attempts to transform organisations seldom succeed” (Salem, 2008, p. 333). These seven communication reasons organisations do not change can be listed as: (1) Insufficient communication, (2) Local identification, (3) Global distrust, (4) lack of productive humour, (5) poor interpersonal communication skills, (6) conflict avoidance and (7) and inappropriate mix of loose and tight coupling (Salem, 2008, p. 338 – 343).

2.2.1. A stakeholder approach to internal communication

The field of corporate communication, as defined by Van Riel (1995) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 181) states: “… an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent.” According to Welch & Jackson (2007, p.181) along with “public relations, public affairs, environmental communication, investor relations, labour market communications, and corporate advertising,” internal communication is seen as one of the facets of organisational communication.

Adopting this perspective, that internal communication is a subset of organisational communication, several writers, including Van Riel (1995), Smidts et al, 2001 and Dolphin (2005) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p.178) often cite the definition of Frank and Brownell (1989) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p.179) of internal or employee communication as: “the communications transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialisation that are intended to design and redesign organisations, to implement designs, and to co-ordinate day-to-day activities”. The general consensus then regards internal communication as the “communication flow among people within the boundaries of the organisation” (Mazzezzi, 2010, p. 221).
2.2.2. Stakeholder involvement in integrated corporate communication

Closer examination of this definition suggests that the focus is rather on “organisational communication” (Welch & Jackson, 2007) instead of internal communication being a component of an “integrated corporate communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The stakeholder perspective adopted by Scholes (1997) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p.181) sees internal communication as: “the professional management of interactions between all those with an interest or ‘a stake’ in a particular organisation.” However, the stakeholder perspective does not identify a distinction of what the “interests or stakes” are in an organisation and subsequently does not distinguish whether these interactions refer to internal or external stakeholders. Kalla (2005) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 182) defines integrated internal communications as: “all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation.”

A review of the above definitions, Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 183) suggest that internal communication can be interpreted as “the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organisations.” Argenti and Forman (2002) (as cited in Mazzezi, 2010, p. 224) describe the aims of internal communication in the system model as “including targeting messages, disseminating information, delivering communication outputs, educating people to share the company’s objectives and standards and creating the willingness to be a member of the company.”

While stakeholders, in this context could be interpreted as the employees or management of the organisation, it also proposes another area of discussion regarding the definition of internal communication, in that all employees are treated as a single entity suggesting that interactions and internal communication itself can be disseminated as generic, which poses a challenge for multinational corporations operating within the context of a global environment. In organisations, there are different groups with different interests and stakeholder theory (Welch & Jackson, 2007) encourages managers to consider these groups. There are several participants to the various stakeholder groups and Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 184) list several, including: “all employees, strategic management, day-to-day management, work teams and project teams.” While there is a definitive need to consider the needs of
stakeholders, empirical evidence is required to contradict the bias that internal communication towards identified stakeholders adopts the view of one size fits all.

This would further suggest that the management of internal communication requires a focus on the participation of stakeholders in internal communication, the direction which the internal communication takes and the content of the communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 184). The direction that the internal communication follows, and the media subsequently employed, suggests a dominance of one-way or asymmetrical (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 184), vertical or downward, lateral or horizontal (Clampitt, 2000, as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 184), or upward communication (Tourish & Hargie, 2004) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 184). When considering these factors, a distinction in internal communication is identified: “who communicates, to whom, in what way, with what content, and for what purpose” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185).

2.2.3. Employee engagement

A lack of employee engagement has the potential to derail even the most comprehensive of strategic initiatives. The literature focus herein looks at the role played by internal communication in fostering employee engagement through emotional and cognitive engagement. Internal corporate communication has a distinctive role to play in building employee engagement through clear, consistent and continuous communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185). The goal of internal corporate communication, especially where strategic management is concerned is to “promote commitment to the organisation,” to further develop “a sense of belonging”, provide an “awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims” (Welch and Jackson, 2007, p. 186). Additional drivers of employee engagement include, but are not limited to, the ability to provide upward feedback without the fear of prejudice, continual updates on events affecting organisation and the commitment from management, especially at senior levels (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p. 5).

Practitioners of internal corporate communication suggest that two-way symmetrical communication is the ideal, especially for enhancing employee engagement, and is regarded as one of seventeen characteristics of excellent organisations (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 187). Reality dictates that with the exception of small organisations,
face-to-face discussions among managers and all employees to discuss strategy is practically impossible (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 187). As a result, one-way communication, especially where strategy is the subject of discussion is “both unavoidable and necessary” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 187). This is especially practical where message consistency is important (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 187). In contrast to this view, Ruck and Trainor (2012) contend that organisations run the risk of “information overload” when predominantly adopting a “one-way approach to internal communication” (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p. 3).

In addition to this, Chen, Silverthorne and Hung (2006) raise a concern that current research “has tended to ignore member satisfaction with organisational communication practices” (Chen, Silverthorne, Hung, 2006, p. 243). One of the mechanisms suggested to address this is for organisations to facilitate the “identification of criteria for successful communication” (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p. 3). One of the drawbacks of internal communication is the aspect of an “over-emphasis on leadership communication” (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p. 19) rather than the focus on genuine feedback or engagement with employees (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p.19). A side-effect of this practice is that employees may express resentment for being “communicated at” (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p19) instead of operating in an environment where they are “communicated with, leading to disengagement” (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p.19).

2.2.4. The goals of internal communication in employee engagement

Reverting to the goals of internal corporate communication, as suggested by Welch & Jackson (2007), De Ridder (2004) (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 190) proposes that “good quality, effective task communication is crucial to creating commitment, while good quality non-task communication is vital to creating trust.” Communication creates a climate within organisations, and poor communication can be seen as a contributor to low levels of trust (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Poor communication can further contribute to creating a lack of understanding of an organisations strategic direction (Welch & Jackson, 2007), and if internal stakeholders express this, they may be reluctant to trust in their senior managers or the organisations strategic direction (Welch & Jackson, 2007) further contributing to a lack
of engagement from employees which undermines the objective of internal corporate communication.

The study, “Secrets of top performers: how companies with highly effective communication differentiate themselves” (Luss & Nyce, 2008) states that “six years of Watson Wyatt research confirm that effective employee communication is a leading indicator of financial performance” (Luss & Nyce, 2008, p. 2). The study, which analysed data collected from 264 companies representing 6,2 million employees worldwide, highlights some key findings including: (a) “that the positive correlation between effective communication and financial performance extends worldwide”, (b) “a significant improvement in communication effectiveness is associated with nearly a 16 percent increase in market share”, (c) “employee communication programs that drive behavioural change have the strongest correlation to financial performance” (Luss & Nyce, 2008, p. 2).

2.2.5. Internal communication impact on employee behaviour

Employees are representatives of the organisations, whether explicitly or tacitly, and as such as responsible for the behaviour of the organisation and the belief and adopting of the organisations corporate identity as part of their culture. This process lends itself to developing an association both with the organisation and business units’ identity with the potential of motivating employees to become self-appointed ambassadors of the company (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008). Barney’s (2001) position on the “resource based theory of a firm” suggests there is evidence supporting the view that high performance in organisations is explained by the strength of an organisation’s resources and not by the strength displayed in its relative market position (Barney, 2001). The role played by internal communication is encompassed in the processes supporting organisational learning and knowledge generation (Mazzei, 2010, p. 222) which are subsequently built on the basis of developing trust in an organisation which ultimately foster the sharing and exchanges of organisational resources resulting in the development of the social capital of the firm (Mazzei, 2010, p. 222).

Referring back to the resource based view, a more maturely developed knowledge and trust relationship within the organisation, embedded in internal communication practices, are seen as elements of an organisation’s competitive edge (Mazzei, 2010,
In proposing the constructivist approach to internal communication, Mazzei (2010) states that “communication and relationship processes allow a company, its members and its stakeholders to become mutually meaningful and influential.” Internal communication, when incorporating the social processes involved in interactions, that give meaning and sense to organisational events and processes, support the resource-based theory of the company especially where the internal communication processes adopt a constructivist approach (Mazzei, 2010, p. 223).

2.2.6. Changing behaviour through internal communication

For many organisations, effective communication is easily to articulate as a core skill required by the organisation, but altogether more difficult to achieve (Bacon, 2007, p. 354). In today’s increasingly competitive market, it is an organisational imperative for communication to be mastered (Lillis & Tian, 2009, p. 429). Ferraro (2002) (as cited in Lillis & Tian, 2009, p. 429) suggests that it is inevitable for a “degree of miscommunication” to occur where “language, values, customers and ways of thinking” influence the culture of people either in a country or organisation.

Although organisations operate in a post-apartheid South Africa, race, culture, language and several other associated factors still impact on society and corporations (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008). Organisations face further challenges with a workforce marked by educational differences and literacy challenges, and a further segmentation within the organisation of management and employee levels (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008). This poses the challenge to communication practitioners in determining whether the all-encompassing medium of communication is impacted or influenced by “language proficiency, race and education levels” (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008, p. 80).

2.2.7. Changing culture and behaviour

At a national level, culture is regarded as a deeply embedded system of beliefs that is reflected in the behaviour of society (Chen, Sun and McQueen, 2010, p. 228). These deeply embedded systems “learned similarities in speech, behaviour, ideology, livelihood, technology and value systems” (Schuster & Copeland, 2008, p. 261).
According to Park, Ribiere and Schulte Jr. (2004), organisational culture can be defined as “the shared, basic assumptions that an organisation learnt while coping with the environment and solving problems of external adaptation and internal integration that are taught to new members as the correct way to solve those problems” (Park, Ribiere & Schulte Jr, 2004, p. 107).

Culture is unique across various organisations, and this developed over time and creates a visible and invisible identity by which the organisation can be recognised (Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi & Mohammed, 2007, p. 38). Organisations pursuing a change in strategy often find themselves competing against organisational culture, and success is only obtained when culture and strategy are aligned requiring intense “change management and support” and comprehensive communication, not just a bulletin or intranet posting (Asser & Hodges, 2009, p. 13).

Kogut & Zander (1992) (as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 324) propose that an essential challenge facing organisations in today's business environment is “knowledge creation, knowledge sharing,” and behavioural change. Argotte (1999) and Cabrera & Cabrera (2005) (as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 324)) further support this statement by reasoning that the cognitive resources that are available within a group or organisation remain underutilised if knowledge isn’t shared.

The transfer of knowledge which is critical in developing an organisation’s culture can either be explicit or tacit; where explicit knowledge transfer relates to “knowledge that can be articulated into words and numbers and can be shared in the form of data” (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2010, p. 229). In contrast tacit knowledge relates to an individual’s “practical skills or experiences” that is accumulated over time (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2010, p. 229) and allows the individual to operate at a certain degree of proficiency or efficiency. Tacit knowledge is more difficult to measure and formalise thereby making the transfer of knowledge and evolution of culture more onerous (Chen, Sun, McQueen, 2010, p. 229).

In addition, when the marketplace in which an organisation competes becomes highly commoditised, employee behaviour can play a significant role in formulating a “differentiation strategy” (Bacon, 2007, p. 351). Bacon’s (2007) research suggests a strong correlation between employees “behavioural differentiation” and the organisations “concomitant drive to improve quality of execution” subsequently
suggesting that “quality of execution” and “behavioural differentiation” require a common culture in order to achieve customer centrism (Bacon, 2007, p. 352). Bacon (2007, p. 352) goes on to suggest that behavioural change “would reflect general culture change” and this can be dissected down from the holistic organisation to a business unit level. Further challenges facing organisations seeking “common cultural context” is the effect of geographic distances from a central office that have a direct impact on such cultural contexts and behaviours through knowledge sharing (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2010, p. 229).

2.2.8. Internal communication and knowledge sharing

According to Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi and Mohammed (2007, p. 25), of the seven critical success factors that are required to ensure successful knowledge sharing and the development of organisational culture, communication is the second most important factor, subsequently implying that a crucial step in the ability to transfer knowledge and develop organisational culture is communication (Jones & Mahon, 2012, p. 780). The ability and impact on business is the ability of its people to communicate (Schuster & Copeland, 2008, p. 266). Cultural bias suggests that the use of some words which are common in language may have explicit or implicit meanings among certain cultures and when used in the organisation with a diversity of cultures, it may have an impact on the application of logic used to process information and whether such information processing impacts on the development of organisational culture (Schuster & Copeland, 2008, p. 266).

The bias of Western cultures perpetuates the concept of “good or bad, right or wrong or true or false” as “ideas, activities and constructs that are deemed as universal truths in philosophies propagated by individuals such as Plato and Aristotle” (Schuster & Copeland, 2008, p. 270). Eastern cultures on the other hand perceive “several variations of the truth and view nothing as absolute” (Schuster & Copeland, 2008, p. 270). The implications for business are to find the intersection among culture, language and business practice on order to foster growth for the organisation. Organisational growth also increases diversity which subsequently contains cultures that prefer different channels of communication (Jones & Mahon, 2007, p. 780).
2.3. Harnessing productivity through communication and culture

Organisations that have the ability to harness the productive capacity of a highly diverse workforce are more equipped to deal with challenges due to the variety of available mind-sets (Marques, 2008, p. 6). Core features of culture include “preferences for individualism or collectivism, religious beliefs, political environment, social hierarchy, attitudes towards work” (Rentz, 2009, p. 512), which ultimately impact on an individual’s view of how to process communication within the organisation’s internal environment.

This is further compounded by the interaction between male and female, age, level of education, language and generational gaps (Rentz, 2009, p. 512). Salem (2008) precedes his identification of seven communication behaviours that managers ignore in facilitating change by imploring that without a change in culture, the search for enduring improvement within the organisation is unlikely to be attained (Salem, 2008, p. 334).

“Embedded communication practices that distinguish one group from the other” is how Salem (2008, p. 334) goes on to describe what culture means to an organisation. In 1959, Edward T Hall commented that “culture is communication and communication is culture” (Lauring, 2011, p. 233). The relevance or importance of underlying cultures within an organisation cannot be ignored or assumed to be easily remedied. Organisations with established cultures are generally more robust and subsequently “more resistant to strategic change initiatives” (Salem, 2008, p. 334).

Arguments in favour of the benefits of intercultural business communication suggest that culture is an important factor influencing how individuals encode messages and subsequently impacts on the medium chosen for transmitting and interpreting messages (Lauring, 2011, p. 234). However, the implication of this argument suggests that in effect, culture may be construed as a disturbance or hindrance to communicating shared meaning in messages (Lauring, 2011, p. 234). This disturbance or hindrance is evident when individuals utilise inherent norms and values within one culture to attempt to interpret or explain the behaviour individuals from another culture (Lauring, 2011, p. 234). This practice of ethnocentrism has the capacity to mislead individuals or groups into making false assumptions concerning cultural differences, which may have the unintended consequence of distorting intercultural communication (Lauring, 2011, p. 249).
However, it is important to note that the impact of communication on culture is also impacted by the business context and one must be circumspect not to intermediate national culture and organisational culture as being one in the same. Although technology is considered highly beneficial, it can also become an impediment where cultural diversity, “relationships and trust are still crucial to effective communication” (Jones & Mahon, 2012, p. 780). Further compounding this is level of explicit and tacit knowledge that resides among the employees of the organisation and the crucial role that communication plays in transferring or leveraging this knowledge while being impeded by culture, relationship and trust (Jones & Mahon, 2012, p. 776).

2.3.1. Language as a barrier

According to Louhiala-Salminen and Rogerson-Revell (2010, p. 92) “Language matters for business communication in any environment”. Chen, Sun and McQueen (2010, p. 231) emphasise this by arguing that despite the presence of a common dialect, “shared language is essential to productive knowledge transfer.” The evolution and progress of communication technology and the continuous change in the business structures operating in an increasingly global environment require that communicators be more effective in their strategic communication initiatives “irrespective of the various mother tongues involved” (Louhiala-Salminen & Rogerson-Revell, 2010, p. 92). With a lapse of more than a decade into the 21st century, the most “dominant language in international business” is undoubtedly English (Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 408).

2.3.2. The use of English as a business language

Although English is primarily the preferred language of business communication, multicultural organisations are still faced with challenges where linguistic differences and cultural diversification could create additional barriers to “communication and understanding” (Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 324). A concern raised by Ehrenreich (2010) is whether the dominance of English as a preferred language in business is at the expense of other languages, and furthermore, in what context is English in business language relative to “using English as a communicative tool”? (Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 409). Additionally, according to Ehrenreich (2010), research suggests that
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English that is used for communication purposes within an organisation is not the same as when it is used by native speakers within their business or local communities (Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 410).

2.3.3. Language and culture

Makela et al (2007) (as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 327) state that dissimilarities in language, especially in multicultural organisations can be drivers of “uneven patterns of knowledge sharing and interaction” and has the potential to negatively impact on interaction and performance (Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 327). It is argued by Feely & Harzing (2003) (as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 327) that speaking in a second language is a less rich means of communication than doing so in one’s native tongue and has implications for developing a common frame of reference for sharing knowledge (Zenger & Lawrence, 1989, as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 327).

Language barriers also have the propensity to impact on group formation (Lauring & Selmer, 2011) and while some authors argue that diversity is good for an organisation (Lauring & Selmer, 2011), this sentiment is often reminiscent of monolith organisations and does not factor in the effect of organisations that have a wide geographic spread where language and culture, and subsequently knowledge sharing are interconnected.

Directly related to knowledge sharing is communication frequency where Rogers and Kincaid (1981) (as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 329) propose that with every cycle of knowledge exchange, there is a discovery of underlying differences or confirmation of agreements which allow for minor or major adjustments to perceptions and understanding.

2.4. The responsibility for internal communication

The lack of a formal communication and language policy has significant practical implications and ramifications for organisations. Without a formalised policy and operational processes Rumelt (1984) and Barney (1991) (as cited in Mazzezi, 2010, p. 222) define the resource-based theory of the company as the “competitive edge stems
from firm-specific resources that a company owns and that assure its uniqueness in its sector”. Teece and Pisano (1994) (as cited in Mazzezi, 2010, p. 222) expand this by stating that “a sustainable competitive advantage requires the ownership of resources and the ability of a company to access, use, exchange and combine them.”

The development of the knowledge worker within an organisation and the knowledge and trust relationship between an employee and an organisation are “fundamental elements of a company’s competitive edge” (Mazzezi, 2010, p. 222). Adopting the constructivist approach which identifies communication as a social process of interaction (Mazzezi, 2010), that gives sense and meaning to action, events, roles and processes within an organisation.

This further incorporates the theory of enactment, which states that “each member of an organisation can enact processes to negotiate meanings and make the organisation operate” Mazzezi (2010, p. 223) and one further concludes that “the responsibility of effective communication does not lie only in the hands of managers” (Mazzezi, 2010, p. 223).

2.4.1. Employee attitudes towards internal communication

Different people have different attitudes towards communication. While some can passively process information passed onto them, others actively seek and interpret information, and then engage in action (Mazzezi, 2010). The level of awareness people have about a situation largely influences their active or passive communication behaviours (Mazzezi, 2010). The perceptions of the existence of obstacles in redressing a situation or the level of involvement in a situation is determined by these behaviours and gives rise to the premise that more aware people tend to be more active, whereas those having the perception that they are powerless display a passive communication behaviour (Mazzezi, 2010). Snell et al. (as cited in Mazzezi, 2010, p. 224) suggested that through several contributing factors, employees have a psychological contract with their organisation, and those exhibiting an intense psychological contract contribute most to company success and are most active with regards to communication behaviours.
2.4.2. Designing internal communication programmes

The traits of individuals can be regarded to some extent as fixed, or a steady-state predisposed aspect of one’s personality (Welch, 2011), subsequently, these traits may often be less receptive of communication interventions and may not be influenced by such interventions (Welch, 2011). Psychological states and attitudes conversely are regarded as more learned dispositions (Welch, 2011), “which can be influenced by communication” (Welch, 2011, p. 335). Employee engagement is influenced by internal communication and must be regarded as a competence of organisational practice which has the potential to demonstrate the values of the organisation to all of its employees (Welch, 2011), and subsequently involve them in achieving organisational goals. Therefore well-designed internal communication programmes are critical to employee engagement, and must not be confused with organisational commitment (Welch, 2011).

Welch (2011) distinguishes between organisational engagement and organisational commitment which, although related, still remain unique constructs. The development of internal communication plans must distinguish between communicating to influence engagement or communicating to propagate commitment which in turn is impacted by an employee’s “affective (attachment to the organisation), continuance (perceived cost of leaving), and normative (obligation to remain)” (Welch, 2011, p. 337) relationship with the organisation.

2.4.3. The impact of communication on the corporate identity

A positive corporate image has many advantages, including the attraction of shareholders, employees and other stakeholders (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008). Given these advantages associated with a positive corporate image, it is understandable that organisations spend considerable resources on the “management and communication of its corporate identity” (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008, p.81). However, organisations often do not contribute sufficient energy and resources in conveying its corporate identity to its internal public, especially its employees (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008). The communication of the organisations corporate identity is important to organisations, especially in the modern climate of multinational companies and
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diversified companies across various levels who have to manage the expectations of different identities within the same organisation (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008).

2.4.4. The role of management in strategic communication

Van Vuuren, de Jong and Seydel (2007, p. 118) propose that one of the “central roles of management is to motivate people towards reaching targets, goals and the organization’s mission”. Murray (2012) (as cited in Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p.4) makes the observation that although “communication is one of the top three crucial skills of leadership” it is often tragically neglected. This poses additional challenges to organisations who adopt a two-way communication protocol (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p. 4).

While managers are aware that the attitudes of employees is an important contributor to performance and well-being (van Vuuren et al., 2007), developing these perceptions around attitudes is not as easily achieved. It is with this notion in mind that the subject of organisational fit is becoming increasingly relevant in determining workplace commitment. Employees who are in the organisation because they want to be there are described as “affectively committed” (Meyer & Allen, 1997, as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 188). Van Vuuren, et al. (2007) suggest that employee satisfaction with the way in which managers communicate, directly contributes towards enhancing “affective organisational commitment” and continued progress around manager (supervisor) communication provides a foundation for both employee attitudes and organisational fit (van Vuuren, et al, 2007).

2.4.5. Communication practices and tools adopted by management

One of the major challenges to management is making the assumption that employees throughout the organisation have the same understanding of business and communication (Rentz, 2009, p. 512). Through a series of studies, both quantitative and qualitative, Huseman et al. (1980) (as cited in Abu Bakar, Su Mustaffa & Mohamad, 2009, p. 15) developed a framework that identifies “seven types of communication that occurs in superior-subordinate relationships”, namely: “(1)
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direction, (2) information, (3) rationale, (4) feedback, (5) positive expression, (6) negative expression and (7) participation”. In a later test of these communication types, Hatfield and Huseman (1982) (as cited in Aba Bakar et al. 2009, p. 15) found that they have a significant impact on the job satisfaction of subordinates. Larkin and Larkin (1994) (as cited in Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p.4) further suggest three ways to communicate with employees: (1) “communicate directly to supervisors, (2) use face-to-face communication, and (3) communicate relative performance of the local work area”.

Communication from management, in modern organisations, is important not only in conveying messages of authority, processes and information, but are also necessary in achieving “cooperation and alignment with corporate strategy and values” (Aggerholm, Andersen, Asmub & Thomsen, 2009). Although organisations may be proficient in formulating values and subsequently communicating these values to employees of the organisation, such activities “do not always lead to the enactment of corporate strategies” (Larkin & Larkin, 1994 as cited in Aggerholm et al., 2009, p. 266). To avoid corporate strategies, mission statements and values becoming just a mere play on words, the values envisaged by management should be integrated in the daily organisational procedures (Aggerholm et al., 2009) and strategic management practices.

2.4.6. The importance of management communication tools

A major managerial implication of internal communication in modern organisations is that internal communication cannot be construed to merely be a “message-targeting function” (Mazzezi, 2010, p. 231). Internal communication has a much bigger role to play in identifying which communication behaviours (active or passive) should be activated within an organisation, and determining which groups of employees can be deemed to be passive or active and what managerial actions are required or most likely to promote and incorporate active communication behaviours (Mazzezi, 2010). The constraint of a lack of employee awareness, sensitivity and ability contribute to creating inactive communication behaviours. To overcome this, it is incumbent upon managers to develop activation strategies that transform inactive employees into active ones (Hallahan, 2001 as cited in Mazzezi, 2010).
Additional tools available to management are the creation and promotion of a team listening environment as suggested by Johnson, Reed & Lawrence (2011). They contend that the environment supporting a positive team listening environment has the potential to develop into a “high performance environment” (Johnson, Reed & Lawrence, 2011, p. 16) subsequently resulting in increased organisational commitment (Johnson, Reed & Lawrence, 2011, p. 16). However, the dependency on technology often results in management assuming that the mechanisms utilised in distributing information are effective. This often results in management not realising that the migration to more knowledge-based economies requires that more effective communication mechanisms be facilitated in the working environment (Johnson, Reed & Lawrence, 2011, p. 21).

2.4.7. Communication capital

An organisation’s communications practices, processes and procedures that are not totally dependent on individuals is referred to as organisational capital (Malmelin, 2007, p. 303). The process of motivating staff or implementing business strategies or the achieving of organisational goals could not be made possible in an organisation “without a strong culture of confidential communications” (Malmelin, 2007, p. 303).

While communication may be regarded as an organisational asset, its core success factor for the organisation depends both on the way that the role of communications is understood (Malmelin, 2007) and implemented. Internal communication has been previously regarded as a supportive or auxiliary function in the same categories as human resources or financial administration (Malmelin, 2007), the treatment of internal communication as organisational capital has strategic functions associated with it.

Malmelin (2007) suggests that a model of communication capital could be used in “charting, analysing and developing the organisation’s communications resources” (Malmelin, 2007, p. 308), with the goal of determining the competence that communication provides within the organisation and further utilising it as a management tool (Malmelin, 2007). Apart from being an instrument of merely conveying a message to stakeholders, it could be used as a reporting tool, or a system of data collection thereby providing the organisation with an opportunity to coherently
and strategically analyse its available resources related to knowledge and know-how (Malmelin, 2007).

2.5. Communication media

The use of the term communication media is often lost in translation and more often refers to the technical infrastructure and systems required to convey a message, instead of also including a communicative and discursive content it intends to disseminate (Hearn, Foth & Gray, 2009). Hearn, et al. (2009) suggests that “when implementing any new media, three classic questions” are raised: “who is communicating, what is the content, and what media are being used?” (Hearn et al. 2009, p. 50).

While the concept of a “monolith corporate centre is still common” (Hearn et al. 2009, p. 50) among many organisations, it has become increasingly common for employees and entire workgroups to be fully mobile and to be “distributed in an anytime-anywhere work style” (Hearn et al. 2009, p. 50). Therefore, the onset of a more agile and distributed workforce requires that evolution of internal communication become more agile and distributed (Hearn et al. 2009). This prerequisite also presents several challenges to most organisation including: the acquisition of skills sets required to develop the appropriate media, the frequency and changes resulting from new and innovative technology (Hearn et al. 2009) and more importantly, who is responsible for the internal communication role and what is its mandate?

2.5.1. The use of plain language

An enhancement to using the correct communication media is the propagation for the use of plain language. Although the use of plain language, also known as plain English, has been extensively covered as discussion topics, research and enacted in various forms as legislation as far back as 1960 in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada (Petelin, 2010), the promotion of plain language has been taken up several countries including both developed and emerging economies with South Africa also being a subscriber (Petelin, 2010).
Some of the key principles of plain language is that the document can be used for its intended purpose by the intended reader with the aim of plain language being that a document is both “understandable and usable” (Petelin, 2010, p. 206). Eagleson (1990) (as cited in Petelin, 2010, p. 206) argues that “it is the writer’s responsibility to be clear. It is not the reader’s responsibility to understand.”

While many authors focus on the words and sentences in documents to establish a precursor for plain language, Balmford (1998, 1999) as cited in Petelin, 2010, p. 207 contends that plain language goes beyond mere words and sentences but is extended to the entire document considering “content, language, structure and design” (Petelin, 2010, p. 207).

Message content (Wigington, 2008, p. 71) which addresses aspects of the number of messages in material, or the use of “unnecessary words, jargon and technical language” (Wigington, 2008, p. 71); the relevance and importance of the message to the reader and message formatting to improve the readability of material (Wigington, 2008, p. 71) are additional considerations to ensure progress in effective communication through plain language.

2.5.2. Readability of documents

In formulating internal communication documents, an organisation intends for various stakeholders to read, but more importantly understand the message the organisation intends conveying (Sattari, Pitt & Caruana, 2011). Blouin (2010) and Li (2008) (as cited in Sattari et al., 2011, p. 283) suggest that one of the cornerstones of the communication process is the readability of documents which is often emphasised in other disciplines as well, such as financial reporting and accounting statements. The desirable outcomes for an organisation cannot be achieved if readability and the comprehension thereof are not successfully attained among organisations targeted stakeholders (Sattari et al., 2011).

Easily readable text has the potential to improve comprehension, retention and reading speed (Sattari et al., 2011) which in turn is impacted by reader competence and reader motivation (Sattari et al., 2011). Gunning (1952) (as cited in Sattari et al., 2011, p. 286) proposed the use of the “Fog index” to assess report writing. Expanding on the Fog
index, which is one of the more widely used indices, Ehrenberg (1982) (as cited in Sattari et al., 2011, p. 286), notes that long words strain one’s short-term memory and generally make it difficult to remember how sentences started by the time one arrives at the end. He further notes that text with low fog-factors (2 to 3) remains relatively easy to read, but an increasing count in fog-factor relegates the reading to difficult reading.

2.5.3. Online and face-to-face communication

The rapid technology evolution has also had a profound effect on the use of technology to facilitate communication within organisations. Subsequently, such technologies and channels of organisational communication have inadvertently redefined organisational design and workplace structures (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 55). The size of an organisation and the implementation of communication technologies are interrelated with varying degrees of importance ascribed to factors such as innovation, financial mass, management requirements, employee proficiency, commonality in culture and language and the use of information (Cudanov, Jasko & Savoiu, 2010, p. 30).

Other organisation features including “decentralisation and departmentalisation” also play a role in either the introduction or management of information and communication technologies (Cudanov, Jasko & Savoiu, 2010, p. 30). The advent and evolution of technology has delivered such innovations as e-mail, video-conferencing, instant messaging, mobile phones (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 55) with this expanding even further with the advent of smart-phones and the various forms of social media. According to Katz and Rice (2002) (as cited in Kupritz and Cowell, 2011, p. 55), e-mail has been the “most widely used communication technology over the past decade.”

Although the evolution of technology provides organisations with the convenience and comfort of being able to transmit data over geographically dispersed areas and time zones (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 56), there are also inherent dangers when assumptions are made around the interpretation and dissemination.

Language and culture serve as significant distortions of messages (Lauring, 2011) and serve as warnings to organisations not to become entrapped in the misconception that communication is successful once the message has been delivered. Compounding this
is the increased flow of information experienced by today’s employees. “Profound information overload, multitasking and interruptions” according to Kirsh (2000) (as cited in Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 57) requires more attention from staff especially where conveying messages through such communication channels is normally accompanied by a request or task.

According to Argenti (2003) (as cited in Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 57), although the modern employee desires “sophisticated and high-tech communications”, there is an even greater desire for personal contact with their managers. An organisational understanding of this desire and leveraging it often becomes the cornerstone of effective internal communication systems (Argenti, 2003, as cited in Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 57) for organisations and could lead to the development of additional organisational competencies.

Studies undertaken by Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) (as cited in Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 74) support this view with the following statement: “face-to-face communication is the most productive way to build strong relationships based on mutual respect and on-going symmetrical dialogue.” However, the challenge faced by organisations, despite the obvious and widely appreciated benefits associated with face-to-face communication, is that the cost of initiating such modes of communication, especially where organisations have to maximise their scare resources, and serves to inhibit such activities (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 55) forcing organisations to seek substitutes therefore making the use of on-line communication technology more appetising and affordable.

2.5.4. The use of e-mail

E-mail can be considered as an agent of interaction (Vigden, Sims, & Powell, 2011, p. 85) between the various units that constitute an organisation. The use of e-mail as an embedded technology has become so ingrained in organisational processes, that its use is seemingly unquestioned despite its consequences being relatively un-researched (Vigden, Sims, & Powell, 2011, p. 84). Ingham (2003) (as cited in Vigden, Sims & Powell 2003, p. 84) emphasises that for organisations, e-mail is no longer just of form of communication or storage of organisational information, but can also be considered as a task manager.
In Vigden, Sims and Powell’s (2011) article: “Understanding e-mail overload” they propose the use of hermeneutics when attempting to fully understand the use of e-mail from an organisational perspective. Hermeneutics is the “study of the interpretation of texts and their influence on the people who write them, read them, and are affected by their existence” (Vigden, Sims & Powell, 2011, p. 85).

Although organisations and managers consider e-mail as part of the routine of operations, Vigden, Sims and Powell’s (2011) work reveals four major concerns that organisations must be cognisant of: (1) “individual e-mail efficiency, (2) individual e-mail pressure, (3) organisational e-mail effectiveness and (4) organisational risk. The article “Changing the way we work” (Library Technology Reports, 2008, p. 6) suggests that e-mail has been both a boon and a curse to organisations. It suggests further that if not managed properly, e-mail has the capacity to “encourage miscommunication, team dysfunction and information overload” (Library Technology Reports, 2008, p. 6). When organisations place too much emphasis on e-mail as the main tool to achieve organisational effectiveness, and thereby utilise e-mail as the only communication tool that becomes central to the way the organisation functions must be wary that e-mail overload does not diffuse the effectiveness of the intended communication (Vigden, Sims & Powell, 2011, p. 94).

Due to the process of “distanciation”, the author of an e-mail has no control once it has left their outbox (Vigden, Sims & Powell, 2011, p. 94). The process of “autonomization” implies that the e-mail thereafter takes on a life of its own and its meaning is influenced by the culture and society of the recipient who also has the capacity to appropriate additional meanings to a message before passing it on (Vigden, Sims & Powell, 2011, p. 94). As such, the onus is on the sender to follow on the effectiveness of e-mail as a communications tool to ensure both understanding and consistency of the conveyed message.

2.6. Integrated communications

Christensen et al. (2008) (as cited in Christensen, Firat & Cornelissen, 2009, p. 207) describe integrated communications as: “the notion and practice of aligning symbols, messages, procedures and behaviours in order for an organisation to communicate
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with clarity, consistency and continuity within and across formal organisational boundaries.” Faced with the complexities of a new generation of sophisticated and informed stakeholders and the increasing relationship between the organisation and its surrounding environment (Christensen et al., 2009), the implementation of integrated communication practices have recently become increasingly intensified (Christensen et al., 2009).

Kalla (2005, p.302) makes an interesting point when highlighting the distinction between communication theory and organisational application or practice “…a paradox exists because although increasing awareness concerning the importance of communication to organisations exists, that knowledge appears to have rarely translated to practice”.

2.6.1. Implementing integrated communication

There are several ideals surrounding the implementation of integrated communication. An overview of these as suggested by several writers include the “managing of many sources of information about a product or service to which a customer is exposed” (Schultz et al. 1994, as cited in Christensen et al., 2009, p. 208). Additionally, the “strategic coordination of all corporate messages relevant for the maintenance of the brand” (Keegan et al, 1992, as cited in Christensen et al. 2009, p. 208), and the “control of all messages imperative in establishing long-term and profitable relationships with all stakeholders” (Duncan & Moriarty, as cited in Christensen et al., 2009, p. 208).

It can be said that integrated communications is derived from the following statement: “Know thy organisation and produce a general overview of all its communications” (Christensen et al., 2009, p. 208). The advantages of integrated communication include bolstering the organisational brand, the building of a reputation based on being distinct and trustworthy, as well as providing guidelines on resource allocation in effectively delivering a consistent message in a cost efficient manner using the correct mediums (Christensen et al., 2009). Conversely, an absence of integrated communication not only delivers disjointed and fragmented messages, but also weakens and irritates the organisations stakeholders (Smith, 1996, Balmer, 1995, Ind, 1997, Knox & Bickerton,

Knowing and understanding the advantages and disadvantages of integrated communication would seem relatively conspicuous; however, one of the most complex issues facing managers of communication is the practical implementation of integrated communication (Christensen et al., 2009). This shortcoming is further propagated by the absence of formal models and procedures to implement the ideals of integrated communication (Schultz & Schultz, 2003, Wightman, 1999, as cited in Christensen et al., 2009, p. 208), overshadowed by contribution of “turf battles”, egoism, “managerial parochialism, functional silos and lack of horizontal communication between departments” (Christensen et al., 2009, p. 209) preventing the necessary integration of corporate messages (Christensen et al., 2009).

2.6.2. Integrated communication as a strategy

The current business climate subliminally suggests that corporate communication is not only focused on products and services, but increasingly includes the interaction among organisations and their stakeholders, the use and disposal of natural resources, their relationship to social interest groups and political affiliations, the investment choices, their treatment off and behaviour of staff, their contribution to society (Christensen et al., 2009). It has become increasingly apparent that “communications is no longer a bounded set of tactical activities” (Christensen et al., 2009, p. 210) but must be regarded as an on-going strategic process that is subsequently treated as a “general managerial competence” (Cornelissen, 2008 as cited in Christensen et al., 2009, p. 210).

Eco (1979) and Iser (1974) (as cited in Christensen et al., 2009, p. 213) suggest that “reception is a self-referential process of integration” in the sense that receivers read meaning into the message by importing relevant information from their own world. Based on this Christensen et al. (2009, p. 213), suggest that “reception is always a creative process that cannot be planned and managed by the sender.” While organisations have to deal with the knowledge that not all messages are received or interpreted in the manner intended, it is increasingly complex for organisations attempting to adopt a practice of integrated communication in a climate where the
strategy of integration still assumes all messages sent are therefore all messages received (Christensen et al., 2009). It therefore becomes a prerogative for organisations to promote a consistent understanding among employees and management of corporate values, and the manifestation of these values through organisational practices, including communication (Christensen et al., 2009).

2.7. Return on investment

Return on investment, which is originally an accounting term, can be described as the financial returns realised when measured against the financial investment made to generate those returns (Entrepreneur Media Inc, 2012). Although this methodology is commonly used in financial models to ascertain the financial viability or efficiency of investments, its use in the field of effective communication is uncommon thereby implying that the inability to derive a “set of effective metrics” that can easily and robustly demonstrate to senior management the return on investment from “internal communication initiatives” may result in unpredictable responses where “appreciation, support and participation” are required (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 1).

The practice of using return on investment (ROI) metrics in marketing communications is common for many organisations especially where a common set of communication objectives are available (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 3). Morris (2010) suggests that the resultant effect of improved internal communication is “a higher level of employee engagement” subsequently leading to an increase in market value for the organisation in question. While it can be argued that there are definitive returns from investing in internal communications, there are a lack of clearly defined and appropriate techniques that are readily available to organisation to determine “communication ROI” (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 4).

However, one must not be misled into believing that academic research linking financial performance to internal communication is completely absent. Research in this field can be traced back to the early 1980’s, and while early pioneers such as David Dozier, James Grunig and Glen Broom have advocated the use of a mixture quantitative and qualitative measures, there is little or no consensus “as to the best metrics to measure return on communication initiatives” (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 4).
2.7.1. Financial versus non-financial indicators

Although it is easier to quantify, financial indicators are not the only indicator that an organisation should employ to determine the ROI on each investment in internal communication. Stacks and Michaelson (2010) (as cited in Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 5) suggest five major non-financial indicators that impact on both the financial performance and social construct of the organisation: (1) “credibility, (2) trust, (3) reputation, (4) relationships and (5) confidence.”

Stakeholder expectations can be enhanced when these non-financial indicators are combined with the quantitative indicators derived from various financial indicators, thereby supporting the view that stakeholder engagement is more than just a financial measure but is also a focus on the triple bottom line. However, the ability to allocate scarce resources within an organisation leads senior management to demand more quantifiable evidence of the effectiveness of internal communication prior to allocating financial resources to support the various internal communication initiatives. This leads back to the question of the most appropriate metrics that must be identified by an organisation to measure its internal communication ROI.

2.7.2. The need for ROI metrics

Research carried out by Meng and Berger (2012) revealed that of a sample size of 123 respondents, 46% indicated that within the confines of their organisation, a “formal measurement or assessment” tool utilised to “measure the effectiveness of internal communication” was non-existent. Further to this, the research identified that the size of an organisation also played a significant role in determining whether there was a need or the relevant feasibility was necessary to develop a metric for measuring an internal communication ROI (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 11). It is more likely that the financial resources of larger organisations, “with more than 25,000 employees” will allow them to develop a set of indicators that will be able to track the investment in internal communication and its return on investment, whether in the form of financial or non-financial indicators.

Conversely, smaller organisations are either constrained either by the inability to see the value in determining an ROI on internal communication or by insufficient financial
resources or technical capability. Research by Meng & Berger (2012) suggests three potential reasons why measurement of internal communication effectiveness is not facilitated: (1) the lack of resources, (2) difficulty in determining a specific cause-and-effect relationship between communication and business results, and (3) time constraints.

Having a defined set of measurement standards and metrics should essentially form part of an organisation’s standard operating procedure. It should also theoretically be incorporated into the overall strategic planning process so that the value to be derived from a given set of actions based on a specific strategy can be measured with regards to internal communication processes (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 12).

In organisations aspiring to achieve high levels of effectiveness through internal communications, performance and effectiveness indicators should also be incorporated into the employee scorecard so that the personal interest of individuals can be aligned to organisational interest. More importantly that there is alignment between the organisation strategy and employee behaviour with the internal communication process be the facilitator between them (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 13).

In advocating the use of the balanced scorecard as a tool to measure performance, Kaplan and Norton (1992) argue that traditional performance indicators were predominantly focused on financial measures, while a more recent focus has been on operational measures. However, leadership and management should not have to choose between financial and operational measures (Kaplan & Norton, 1992, 71). The reality is that “no single measure can provide a clear performance target or focus attention on the critical areas of a business” (Kaplan & Norton, 1992, p. 71). Their argument substantiates the view that although no single measure can be adequate, it is the need for the existence of such measures that drives the desire to determine a ROI for internal communication effectiveness.

2.7.3. ROI metrics

Meng and Berger (2012) suggest “five aspects of internal communication initiatives” that should be measured on a regular basis, over and above other metrics that an organisation might deem necessary to measure organisational performance. These
include: (1) “increased awareness of understanding, (2) concentrated engagement
among employees, (3) improved job performance, (4) changed employee behaviours,
and (5) improved business performance at the organisational level” (Meng & Berger,
2012, p. 13).

These measures include both financial and non-financial indicators and include
measures such as employee attitudes, improved efficiency, revenue growth, customer
satisfaction, etc. Sanchez (2007) corroborates this by asserting that the inclusion of a
good communication ethos coupled with good leadership and appropriate rewards and
recognition leads to and engaged workforce.

Subsequently, the behaviour an engaged workforce is demonstrated through: (1) a
willingness to go the extra mile in executing even routine projects, (2) being motivated
to perform to the highest standards, (3) applying creativity to all work, and (4) having a
vested interest in the organisation’s success.

While employee surveys would seem the most obvious choice to measure internal
communication effectiveness, the risk is that poorly designed, irrelevant, ill-timed, or
inconsistent employee surveys without any follow-up action could have the opposite
effect on the intended outcomes (Sanchez, 2007, p. 51). Meng & Berger’s (2012)
research further suggests that the results of ROI measures of internal communication
initiatives at regular intervals across various geographic areas did not vary much from
the results at the centralised head office, with feedback from respondents suggesting
that communication initiatives must be preceded by an understanding of employee
performance goals and measures before “developing any communication measures”

Subsequently, such measures should incorporate a measure of employee
engagement, which can be linked to the organisation’s profitability, performance, and
customer satisfaction among other measures (Sanchez, 2007, p. 49). Given the
complexity of organisational structures and the dynamics of operational practices, there
isn’t a one-size-fits-all metric that can be utilised to measure effective internal
communication initiatives.

Rather, ROI calculations should be designed around each communication initiative on
the premise that each initiative is somewhat different or has different objectives (Meng
& Berger, 2012, p. 22). In addition, ROI calculations centred on internal communication
effectiveness must be carefully constructed to provide a “meaningful rate of return” (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 23) as the introduction of ROI in this arena includes both financial and non-financial indicators and does not follow the traditional accounting models of calculating ROI.

2.8. Summary

Communication as a science is widespread, and the role it plays in organisations is often critical to success or failure, especially in the arenas of strategy and its subsequent implementation. Strategy exists at different levels within an organisation. These could range from across the overall business (Riley, 2012) to sub-units operating at lower tiers of the organisation. For many organisations, the most difficult aspect of strategic management is in the implementation phase (Riley, 2012). Van Vuuren, de Jong and Seydel (2007, p. 118) propose that one of the “central roles of management is to motivate people towards reaching targets, goals and the organization’s mission”. Organisations planning to implement change stemming from strategy generally adopt one of several current change models, including John Kotter’s “The eight-step process for leading change” (Kotter, 2011), Prosci’s “ADKAR model” (Prosci, 1994-2012), and the “Kurt Lewin change management model” (Burnes, 2004).

Each of these models depicts areas of strength and limitations; yet there is a common theme that permeates through them, which is encapsulated in the need for communication and reinforcement. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the role played by communications in the dissemination and implementation of strategy, one must first understand the theory behind the various dynamics involved in communication. These encompass the effect of communication on stakeholders, while identifying who they are within the organisation. It also includes mediums of communication utilised, the barriers to effective communication, the role played by management in effective communication and the subsequent measurement of communication effectiveness.

There are several participants to the various stakeholder groups, including: “all employees, strategic management, day-to-day management, work teams and project teams” (Welch and Jackson, 2007, p. 184). The management of internal communication requires a focus on the participation of stakeholders in internal
communication, the direction which the internal communication takes and the content of the communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 184).

According to communication theory, internal communication has the capacity to build employee engagement (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185), influence employee behaviour (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008), develop or enhance organisational culture (Asser & Hodges, 2009), be used as an instrument for knowledge sharing (Jones & Mahon, 2012) and (Salem, 2008).

However, several barriers exist that have the ability to nullify the effects of internal communication objectives, including language (Chen, Sun and McQueen, 2010), employee attitude (Mazzezi, 2010), distance, the choice of communication media (Hearn, Foth & Gray, 2009) which includes on-line communication, face-to-face engagements, e-mail correspondence, etc. However, despite all of the knowledge of internal communication in the possession of practitioners is irrelevant if the management of the organisation are unable to integrate the communication process (Christensen et al., 2009).

Finally, the adoption of an integrated internal communication process cannot be deemed to be fully effective unless its return on investment is adequately measured (Meng & Berger, 2012). While it can be argued that there are definitive returns from investing in internal communications, there are a lack of clearly defined and appropriate techniques that are readily available to organisation to determine “communication ROI” (Meng & Berger, 2012). While several models exist that advocate a mixture of quantitative and qualitative measures to determine the return on investment of communication initiatives, there is a definitive absence of consensual metrics (Meng & Berger, 2012).

While the depth of communication theory is extensive, its usefulness is only appreciated when measured against the practical application of its components. The theory herein identifies a combination of attributes, benefits, barriers to be addresses and processes to be implemented for the successful implementation of an integrated internal communications process. The analysis of the literature supporting the various theoretical frameworks in operation forms one of several objectives that this research paper seeks to pursue.
Chapter 3: Research Propositions

Neal (2010) suggests that the nature of strategic communication must be “purposeful”, and is technically based on the desire to influence. Luss and Nyce (2008) corroborate this argument by referring to the Wyatt Watson research on the “Secrets of Top Performers: how companies with highly effective communication differentiate themselves” where they state that: (a) the positive correlation between effective communication and financial performance extends worldwide, and (b) employee communication programs that drive behavioural change have the strongest correlation to financial performance (Luss & Nyce, 2008, p.2).

At the core, effective strategic communication initiatives are designed to build employee engagement (Welsh & Jackson, 2007, p. 185) and modify or enhance behaviour and are crucial in creating trust and commitment (De Ridder, 2004, as cited in Welsh & Jackson, 2007, p. 190). However, Bacon (2007, p. 354) highlights the reality that although effective communication is easy to articulate, it is altogether more difficult to achieve.

In large and diverse organisations that are geographically widespread, the challenge for communication practitioners is designing an effective strategic communication initiative that is generic enough to perpetuate employee engagement but pedantic enough that it takes cognisance of employee constraints, organisational culture and operational effectiveness. For example, the preferred use of English as a business language, although widely used, does not guarantee that all parties will interpret the message in the same way as argued by Ehrenreich (2010).

In addition, the influence of Eastern and Western cultures on the workforce as argued by Schuster and Copeland (2008) suggest that the application of such cultural bias may lead to a fundamentally different interpretation of the same message which has a direct impact on the choice of one’s actions. Aspects of education, distance, gender, use of plain language, as well as the role of management and the choice of media in which to deliver the message be it through story-telling, e-mail, face-to-face interactions, intranet or bulletin boards, all have a direct impact on the effectiveness the execution of the strategic communication initiative.

Meng and Berger’s (2012) work on investigating the return on investment of internal communication initiatives also poses another challenge for strategic communication
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practitioners to consider. Ultimately it asks whether such initiatives, despite the best allocation of financial and non-financial resources, generate sufficient return on investment for it to be continued. More importantly, it asks whether the right metrics, if any, are being utilised by practitioners to distinguish between performance as a result of strategic communication initiatives or business as usual operations. Meng and Berger (2012) go on to suggest that in pursuing the objectives of measuring return on investment for strategic communication initiatives, the use of non-financial indicators are as important as financial indicators concluding that although there may be no single template for an organisation, the need for the development of such metrics is crucial to the sustainability of the internal communication practitioner and process.

3.1. Research questions

To assist in understanding the effect of strategic communication on the organisation as well as measuring the effectiveness of strategic communication initiatives, the following research questions have been proposed to guide data analyses (Meng & Berger, 2012):

1. Does senior management achieve its goal of changing employee behaviour through its strategic communication initiative?
2. Are the barriers to effective internal communication, as proposed by several authors, evident in the communication strategy process?
3. Does senior management engage in the practice of measuring the return on investment of strategic communication initiatives?
Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1. Overview

While significant theory covers the nature and processes involved in internal communication, this theory generally treats communication as part of the overall daily operations of the business. Insufficient theory that provides a framework when specifically dealing with the aspect of communicating changes in organisational strategy through integrated communication processes, especially in the dynamic business environment organisations presently operate in.

“Scientific research is systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of natural phenomena guided by theory and hypotheses about the presumed relations among such phenomena” (Kerlinger, 1986, as cited in (Chaturvedi, 2012, p. 3). Therefore this exploratory study adopts a pragmatic philosophy (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 107) approach and has incorporated several different techniques aimed at formulating a response to the research questions posed above.

4.2. Organisational Choice

Research was limited to a business unit of an organisation in the financial services sector specialising in offering banking products to the general public and small businesses. The benefit of focusing the research on a single business unit was the opportunity to focus on internal communication at concentrated level instead of the holistic organisation which is highly diversified.

The Nedbank Group, a member of the Old Mutual Group, is the fourth largest banking group – measured by assets in South Africa (Banks in South Africa, 2011-2012). “Nedbank embarked on a strategic journey in 2010 to sustainably turnaround the Retail business” (Nedbank Group, 2012) and to date a population size in excess of 10,000 Nedbank Retail staff have been through a change management and strategic communication process “to achieve alignment to the Retail strategy” (Nedbank Group, 2012).

To apply a degree of reasonability and practicality, the research was focused on permanent employees in Nedbank Integrated Channels which is a division of the
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Nedbank Retail and incorporates its Branch Network division which is its customer facing division and subsequently employs the largest contingent of staff across the group (Nedbank Group, 2012). Prior to proceeding with any form of data gathering, approval was sought and received from various stakeholders within Nedbank Group and Nedbank Retail. The choice of organisation was influenced by several factors which included access to respondents, the fact that the organisation had recently undertaken the strategic communication exercise and corporation from the organisation.

4.3. Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted in two stages. Stage one was a pre-investigation stage to help collect preliminary data for the main stage of data collection (Yeo & Youssef, 2010). This included obtaining ethical sign-off and permission from the organisation in question and thereafter included obtaining the approval of the various departmental heads in order to canvas their staff. Prior to this, the design questionnaire was vetted by the appropriate organisation representatives with the assurances that information gathered was to be held in the strictest confidence and not be used outside the scope of the research proposal.

Stage two included the following:

a) The aim to create “understanding from data as the analysis proceeds” is often a common feature of qualitative research projects (Sage Publications, 2006). The qualitative research technique of doing in-depth interviews “involves conducting individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspective on a particular idea, program or situation” (Boyce & Neale, 2006). A semi-structured interview (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 158) was carried out with Mr Ashley Sutton-Pryce, the executive head responsible for human resources and communication for the Retail and Business Banking division to ascertain what the core objectives and aims where when deciding to communicate the strategy to stakeholders. The interview was guided by a set of pre-defined questions aimed at addressing the core research questions (Appendix 1).
b) The advantage of using a survey method in comparison to other methods such as direct observation or experimentation is because it yields a broader range of information (Statistics Canada, 2003). To this extent, surveys are effective producing information across a multiplicity of ranges including socio economic characteristics, opinions and motives of respondents, etc. (Statistics Canada, 2003). Information gathered could be used for multiple purposes including the planning of product features, advertising media, market variables, etc. Quantitative research offers the advantage of allowing for generalisation through statistical analysis (Statistics Canada, 2003). A quantitative survey was conducted using the stratified probability sampling technique (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 136; Wesfall, 2008; Robin et al. 2000; Babbie, 2004 as cited in Holtzhause & Fourie, 2008, p. 82) resulting in a sample size of 873 potential respondents from within Nedbank Integrated Channels.

The nature of the organisation structure allows for an hierarchical approach to the reporting structure with direct reports being identified up and down the organisational structure. To ensure an adequate representation of minority groups (Chaturvedi, 2012), the sample size was stratified according to several variables including job level and business unit.

Elements of systematic sampling (Chaturvedi, 2012) were also utilised in selecting the sample list. To ensure validity of the data sample (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 127) and to eliminate factors of potential derailment such as “testing, ambiguity about causal direction and history” (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 127) a comprehensive action plan was developed with key milestones and deliverables designed not to coincide with other organisational activities or surveys and more importantly the written guarantee to participants that respondents would remain anonymous at all times. The action plan contained the following:

4.4. Questionnaire design

The design of the questionnaire consisted of two components: the first was designed around a semi-structured interview process to gauge the responses of management to several key questions around the integrated communication process. The second part
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consisted of designing a survey questionnaire which would elicit the unbiased responses from a sample of employee’s across multiple levels of the organisation.

4.4.1. Designing the management questionnaire
The objective of a semi-structured interview allows for the elimination of completely closed-end questions while also allowing the interviewer the opportunity to guide the interviewee in so much that the interviewee is not allowed uninterrupted discourse on a particular subject matter. Ideally, one is able to elicit the ideas and opinions of the interviewee without having to resort to manipulating the interviewee towards preconceived choices and meanings.

The objective of the qualitative questionnaire was aimed at gathering insights into management objectives, practices and processes that would either serve to support or contradict the theory surrounding internal integrated communication practices. To this extent, the questionnaire was structured in a way that would inevitably address the three research questions, and also follow a pattern similar in construct to the literature review.

After several iterations, and independent reviews, the final output was a questionnaire that consisted of eighteen questions subliminally grouped into: (a) identifying management objectives, (b) what was the decision making process in initiating the internal communication process, and (c) is there a mechanism to determine the return on investment of the strategic communication process? Prior to administration, the semi-structured interview questionnaire was submitted to the head of risk for a business unit to ensure that there was no conflict of interest and the confidential and sensitive information pertaining to the organisation would not been divulged. In addition, it was then subject to scrutiny according to academic requirements.

4.4.2. Designing the survey questionnaire
Consideration was first given to “content validity” (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 142) to ensure that questions posed to respondents would ensure that enough data could be collected so that the research questions could be answered and that the objectives of the study could be accomplished (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 142). The questionnaire used the business norm of English as the language of choice. Question types
incorporated the use of lists, categories, rating, using a Likert scale (Institute for Social Research, 2012; Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 143). The collection of primary data (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 78) focused on closed ended questions based on the objectives of answering the research question as directly as possible without too many inferences from respondent’s opinions preventing the researcher from becoming subjective in the data analysis process.

The development of the actual questionnaire went through several iterations with objective guidance to ensure that ambiguity in questions was avoided, ethical standards were complied with, and that there was a logical flow to the questions being asked. A total of 20 questions were finally successfully submitted (Appendix 2) for ethical clearance both to the management of the bank’s Retail division and the academic institute’s ethical clearance committee. In conjunction, the semi-structured interview questions were submitted simultaneously following the same processes listed above, but allowing for some degree of ambiguity so that more data could be gathered to pursue further analysis and learning.

4.5. Distribution of the survey questionnaire

A survey website named SoGo Survey was used to create a template for the survey questionnaire. This allowed for the consideration of both aesthetic and practical qualities in designing the questionnaire and to ensure ease of use. Prior to distribution, a pilot testing program (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 148) was facilitated involving several colleagues within the organisation, who were subsequently excluded from the final sample to ensure validity and avoid subject error impacting on the reliability of the data collection process (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 128).

The SoGo survey tool allowed for survey questionnaires to be emailed to participants with the choice of either accessing the survey via a link or copying and pasting the link into a toolbar for ease of access. The web-based e-mail also included reasons for the survey, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, approval from management and the contact details of the researcher and research supervisor.
The survey tool provided facilities for tracking the number of complete and incomplete responses on a timeous basis, without revealing the results of individual participants. There was no limitation to the time-frame within the day in which the survey questionnaire could be accessed, but responses were limited to one per participant. To protect against subject error and subject bias, the survey questionnaire was electronically distributed to respondents during a 21 day window period and timed in such a way that it did not coincide with other organisational surveys either similar or dissimilar in nature.

4.6. Choosing the sample list

In order to engage a fairly comprehensive list of participants, a stratified random sampling technique (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 136) was utilised to ensure reliability of the probability sampling. Access was granted by the divisional heads of the employee list of the two largest client facing divisions namely the Branch Networks division and the Strategic Sales and Alliances division. The structure of the employee list was based on a hierarchical list with division executives at the top, regional managers below them, thereafter area managers, then branch managers, team leaders and finally the various subordinate levels.

This follows the guidelines as envisaged in the systematic sampling technique, where the sampling process involves a random start with the selection of every specific element from then onwards (Chaturvedi, 2012). To ensure the validity of the probability sampling from this stratified sampling, the following process, for participant selection was adopted:

Step 1: A regional manager was first selected
Step 2: beneath the regional manager would sit a series of direct reports, including both client facing and back-office support staff. Every third direct report was selected from the regional managers list of direct reports.
Step 3: From the list of every third regional manager’s direct report, a list of direct reports under that sub-ordinate was identified, which also included both client facing
and back-office support staff. From this list of subordinates, every third participant was selected.
Step 4: If these participants also had direct reports, subsequently, every third staff member was selected as a possible participant.

The end result of the abovementioned process together with the use of predominantly close-ended survey questions, created the probability of a stratified sample size of participants across various genders, race groups, years of service, hierarchical level, educational qualifications, and language preference to ensure that subject error, subject bias, observer error and observers bias to ensure both validity and reliability of the data (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 128).

4.7. Facilitating the semi-structured interview

Upon his request, the interview questionnaire was submitted to the interviewee a day prior to the actual interview. To this extent, the interviewee suggested that reviewing the questionnaire would allow him the opportunity to solicit information not readily available but needed to support the objectives of the questionnaire and to also allow for responses to not be ambiguous in nature. The interview was conducted at the national head office of the organisation. Prior to the commencement of the interview, permission was sought from the interviewee for the interview to be recorded; and post the interview, permission was sought to utilise the interviewees name and designation in the research report.

4.8. Limitations of the research

Due to time constraints, the research survey questions were not circulated to other divisional heads within Retail in order to expand the available list for the stratified sampling technique. It is uncertain as to whether the inclusion of these participants would have significantly impacted on the outcome of the findings or created a level of ambiguity. In addition, due to the technical constrains imposed by the organisation on internet access rights and the nature of the participants job function, some of the
participants selected could not access the survey questionnaire link and as such could not participate in the survey.

However, the volume involved were immaterial to the overall sample size. In addition, a technical error on the survey questionnaire allowed respondents to submit responses without having to fully complete the survey questionnaire. However, the number of respondents that submitted incomplete responses was marginal and did not compromise the outcome the research investigation.

4.9. Process of data analysis

The quantitative data was analysed by means of frequency and contingency tables using statistical software packages currently available from the SoGo Survey application suite and Microsoft Excel 2010. Prior to undertaking the analysis, which was most likely to support this form of exploratory study, the data gathered was reduced and aggregated via an explorative factor analysis with the objective of identifying any interrelations among the single variables (Beurer-Zullig, Fieseler & Meckel, 2009).

The overarching method of analysis is to interpret the expectations of the senior management team as recorded from the semi-structured interview with the managing executive for communications and match these to the responses from the survey questionnaire in order to gauge the level of alignment or dissonance between expectation and reality. This was also used to identify potential lessons or gaps in the communication practices of the organisation in strategic communication. Of the 873 requests sent out, there were 185 responses suggesting a 22.0% response rate with approximately 70% of responses being received within the first seven days of distribution to the sample group.
Chapter 5: Results

5.1. Analysis of the semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview was conducted with the managing executive responsible for human resources and communication, at the bank’s Retail and Business Banking division, Mr Ashley Sutton-Pryce. The objective of the interview was to understand the processes involved in the strategic communication process. Furthermore, it was designed to determine management objectives in facilitating their specific communication process of the new strategy; and subsequently get an understanding of their measurement of results and future plans.

At the core of the new strategy was a strategic intent that incorporated two themes:

a) “Delivering a choice of distinctive client-centred banking experiences that build many deep, enduring relationships with Nedbank” (Nedbank Group, 2012, p. 28).

b) “ Delivering growth and sustainable shareholder returns through effective allocation of scarce resources” (Nedbank Group, 2012, p. 28).

Subsequently, this intent could be translated into twelve step change strategic initiatives incorporating three fundamental imperatives: (a) “effective risk management”, (b) consistent investment in clients” and (c) “strong alignment of product, channel and consumer insights” (Nedbank Group, 2012, p. 28). This would require that in excess of “10,000 Nedbank Retail staff” (Nedbank Group, 2012, p. 51) undergo a change management and communication process “to achieve strategic alignment to the Retail strategy” (Nedbank Group, 2012, p. 51).

5.1.1. Objectives, processes, tools and execution

At the outset, through their specific communication process, the management team intended to ensure alignment between the business strategy and its employees. The implications of this meant that through the integrated communication process, management’s objective was to change employee behaviour and subsequently instil a new culture among the workforce that would ensure the alignment needed to steer the organisation onto its envisaged path.
Changing employee behaviour through strategic communication

To do this, the belief was that there had to be buy-in from employees into the strategy and in order to achieve this, an appropriate format and medium of communication had to be facilitated as part of a change management initiative. Aspects of wording, graphics, branding visibility and a myriad of other considerations had to be factored in prior to commencing with the strategy with the focus “planning light and execute heavy” (Sutton-Pryce, 2012).

To ensure consistency, all information and production of material required, which included hand-outs, booklets, DVDs, and survey questions, was done through a central office. To maintain consistency, consultation was undertaken and advice sought from several internal stakeholders and external contributors to ensure that the most appropriate change management model of communication was chosen as well as the method of delivering the message. In this instance, the management agreed upon a face-to-face approach which included involving the organisation’s line management in the process.

However, prior to communicating the new strategy to the employees, a plan of action was put into place to ensure that executive and senior management were also aligned to the new strategy and that there was no dissonance between the message of the communication process and the message from line management to staff. The process to immerse management in the new strategy was to initially engage in an executive forum which included the all divisional managers and upwards, across the Retail spectrum, to participate. The objectives of this engagement was to ensure that best practices could be shared, that global trends were understood, business clusters could be aligned and that questions, concerns and suggestions around the strategy could be dealt with prior to rolling out the communication campaign to the rest of the staff contingent. At an operational level, this required that a hardcopy communication pack be given to every attendee for pre-reading and engaged discussion thereafter at an offsite location facilitated by communication and change management professionals as well as the group executive members.

Upon the successful completion of this exercise, a decision was undertaken to facilitate a national road-show throughout all the provinces to engage with the staff and deliver the message of the new strategy. Several key challenges were identified, namely
Changing employee behaviour through strategic communication

around the operational capacity to accommodate staff from a multiplicity of locations into central venues and to ensure that the consistency of the message permeated through all staff despite language and cultural diversity. In order to achieve this, the managing executive of the business unit was tasked with taking a different approach to the traditional management presentation formats which involved removing the previous practise of telling and introduced a new concept of strategy conversations.

The communication plan incorporated an engaged conversation strategy which included aspects of story-telling, audio-visual displays, feedback detailing historical events, current trends and future aspirations, culminating in a sharing of the new strategy and objectives. However, in order to ensure that the delivery of the strategic communication was effective, it was decided that instead of utilising the traditional approach of large auditorium presentations with mass gatherings, management would engage “smaller and more concentrated groups” (Sutton-Pryce, 2012) of between eight to ten employees to engage them in the strategy conversation.

However, in order to achieve, there had to be collaboration, adherence to process protocols and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the management teams were well versed in the process and content to be able to cascade the strategy down to the lowest level of staff. More importantly, to ensure consistency of the message, the entire process throughout the sample structure had to be completed within a specific time frame. Through careful monitoring, the communication’s team discovered some line managers were still undertaking mass gatherings with large teams, and as soon as detractors were identified, their activities were halted and reported to the executive.

5.1.2. Decision making process, alternatives and sustainability

When deciding on a communication plan and which communications tools to adopt, it was decided that a structured plan approach would be utilised, which included several steps:

a) Concentrated group sessions consisting of natural teams. This meant that management could only engage employees within their clusters, teams and direct reports, thereby ensuring that the wholesale concept of communication was avoided.
b) Team briefings were facilitated, which was a concept that the communication’s team adopted from United Kingdom change management practices. More importantly, these briefings had to be facilitated by relevant line managers and had to encourage employee involvement.

c) To ensure that the communications process was effective, every staff member had to log onto the bank’s intranet and confirm the time and date that the strategy conversation had taken place, which also allowed the employees to provide feedback, which was continuously monitored by the communication’s team to identify trends and make adjustments to the process accordingly. To enhance the strategy conversations, operational changes were also introduced, which involved technology enhancements.

d) Acknowledging that many employees were also engaged in other organisational and training initiatives, the communication’s team decided upon a specific time frame for completion and no matter the nature of the interruption, they would stick to their plan.

In deciding which communication methods to adopt, the use of social media was not considered to be a part of the strategic communication process. There were several challenges facing the communications team when considering the use of social media as a platform for communication, including the embryonic effects of using social media for organisational communication which still lacks empirical data to support its effectiveness for strategic communication, the effects of technology where all staff were not in the same position to access the technology behind social media and also the trend of generational diversity and the impact that this would have on employee utilisation and interpretation of the message.

The objectives behind the strategy were to ensure behavioural change to facilitate alignment and develop an organisation culture, and the risk of using social media was that the message would become more a topic of social discussion in an open forum than a tool to ensure functional effectiveness. Although the effects of generational theory were considered, the communications team asserted that the most effective form of communication would be firstly through face-to-face strategy conversations, subsequently followed up by an email message and other communication platforms including the intranet.
Frequency of communication was also another consideration. The communication’s team realised that in order to be effective, the strategy conversations could not be executed as a once-off plan. To deal with this, a strategy was devised which would ensure that through various media, employees would constantly reminded of the strategy objectives and constantly informed on the effectiveness and results of the strategy. In addition to this, employees were issued with commitment cards that were intended to re-position the communication.

It was also constituted as mandatory for all new recruits to participate in a strategy conversation and on-boarding process within a specified period of the joining the organisation. This process was tracked and based on the feedback from the tracking tool; detractors were communicated to and escalated to the relevant management to ensure completion of the process. An independent audit, using external providers, was also commissioned to determine the effectiveness of the strategy conversations communication strategy which involved obtaining feedback from all levels of employees and seeking alternative and innovative media of communication to sustain the communication process.

To ensure operational effectiveness and synergy, the strategy conversations included both permanent and contracted employees. To ensure momentum in the process could be sustained, it was decided that the functioning of the communications team be a centralised role which would ensure that research findings could be interpreted and shared from a central portal to avoid distortion and the effects of a dilution in the message.

To ensure consistency, cross-cluster collaboration was also encouraged to ensure that the sub-cultures that exist in various divisions did not incorrectly interpret the strategy conversations thereby creating conflict among the various divisions when pursuing execution. Feedback was also encouraged and promoted via the use of a learning wall where staff could post messages or suggestions regarding the communications process. Questionnaires and surveys were also utilised as an option to gather employee feedback.
Unfortunately, above the line expenditure associated with the entire strategy conversation process could not be readily accessed. Although the central communication team could account for the cost of printing and other consumables, management were more focused on the opportunity cost of not undertaking this exercise.

5.1.3. Return on investment
The strategy conversations initiative was not considered to be the silver bullet that would ensure that the new strategy was successful. Rather, the executive considered it as an integral tool in creating a culture shift in the organisation and a tool to initiate a change in behaviour. It was believed that by utilising this approach, it would create a culture of engagement within the organisation and these behavioural changes would subsequently generate positivism, which impacts on staff morale which should ultimately translate into improved organisational performance. The executive believed it to be an additional spoke in the wheel and not the hub itself, interpreting that the execution of key strategic deliverables ultimately lay within the leadership levels of the organisation.

As such, the strategy conversation was not considered to provide the organisation with a competitive advantage, but rather focus on developing organisational culture, which could then be translated into a competitive advantage and improved performance. The strategy conversations were designed to create momentum, which, when started could not be stopped. As such, in the absence feedback forms, staff surveys and suggestion from employees, the management did not institute any mechanism to track the return on investment of the strategy conversation initiative.

The resultant effect saw the staff feedback becoming the ultimate form of measurement; but the executive and communications team did not consider, nor were they in a position to accurately quantify a financial metric or performance indicator that could be correlated back to the initiation of the communication process.

However, to suggest that the organisation did not seek to understand the impact of its internal communication initiative for its new strategy is incorrect. The management
team engaged the services of an external organisation to gather independent feedback from employees. Some findings, which were shared by the interviewee, indicate that distance from the head-office and the diversity of native languages has had little or impact on the interpretation of the strategic communication. This feedback, which remains largely confidential at this stage, has been collated into a management document which will be studied by the management team prior to embarking on the step of its integrated communication strategy.

5.2. Survey questionnaire analysis

5.2.1. Demographics

To establish an initial platform for the sample group, several questions focused on gathering demographic information and included obtaining information on domicile province, geographic spread of office locations, gender, race, language preference and educational qualifications.

Of the nine South African provinces, 66.5% of respondents reside in Gauteng, followed by the Western Cape (13.5%) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (11.1%) with the remaining six provinces consolidated at 8.9%. Of the 66.5% of respondents that reside in Gauteng only 25% operate out of the national head office in Sandton, Johannesburg.

Figure 5.1. indicates that at a national level, 31.4% of respondents work out of regional head offices and 28.6% of respondents work outside of a domicile branch either in an urban or rural area or a shopping centre. The diversity of responses in the free-text field indicate that some employees did not work in offices but operate out of mobile units implying that they did not operate out of a fixed location, while others work in rented office spaces, or in the premises of strategic partners.

However, detailed responses to the free text field of “other” suggest that several respondents did not correctly interpret the question as they identified their business unit instead of the domicile location of their branch.
Gender plays a role in the various cultural norms. Of the total number of respondents, 56.8% were female with 66.7% of all female respondents residing in Gauteng. A causal effect between the gender types and the responses to changes in behaviour and performance forms the basis for an alternative exploratory study on the effects of communication on gender types, especially in large corporations. Communication theory suggests a definitive link among race, language and culture, and subsequently the impact this has on the receiving and sending of messages in the communication process.

Of the 185 respondents, there were two respondents who opted not to respond to identifying their race group, while 32.4% of respondents identified themselves as black and 31.4% as white with white females (19.7%) forming the largest segment of respondents. The national head office comprises 20% black and 36% white respondents.

Of the total number of respondents, 40% of black respondents work outside the infrastructure of a domicile branch or office while 26% of white respondents fall into a similar category. Figure 5.2. highlights the gender split of respondents across the various race groups indicating the most represented group as black male and least represented as Indian female.
Language has the capacity to serve as either a barrier or enhancer to effective communication whether this is at an organisational or national level. As illustrated in Figure 5.3. English as a first language was the predominant choice from 52% of total respondents followed by Afrikaans (18%), isiZulu (8%) and Setswana (6%). Of the 97 respondents who selected English as their first language, only eight percent were Black.

Among the other ethnic languages that were spoken as first languages in South Africa, isiZulu (22%) is the most commonly spoken followed by Setswana (18%) and isiXhosa (15%). Among White respondents, 48% selected Afrikaans, with 16% of Coloureds selecting Afrikaans as their first language. All Asian and Indian respondents selected English as their first language.

Further analysis suggests that 78% of respondents prefer English as their choice of corporate communication, while 14% prefer their first language as the preferred choice for corporate communication. However, upon closer examination of the detailed responses, twenty of the 25 respondents who selected this option had selected English as their first language.
If the data is therefore adjusted to compensate for this “error” in choice, it suggest that 89% of all respondents prefer English to be their corporate communication, while eight percent of all respondents have selected their choice of preferred language as “Irrelevant.” Figure 5.4. depicts the percentage of respondents who prefer English as their choice of corporate communication instead of their first language.

Figure 5.4. Respondents who prefer English corporate communication
Of the 56.8% of female respondents, 25 (13.5% of female respondents) were in possession of either an undergraduate or post graduate degree, while 26 (14.1% of male respondents) were in a similar position. Respondents in possession of either a diploma or certificate attribute 33.0%, while employees only in the possession of a matric exemption were 31.9% of respondents as depicted in Figure 5.5.

Detailed analysis of the data revealed an anomaly where seven respondents listed their actual degree, certificate, diploma or internal development course instead of selecting a suitable option from the pre-defined list. In addition, seven respondents opted not to respond to this question.

At a provincial domicile level, 40% of all respondents residing in Gauteng were in possession of a post matric qualification followed by the Western Cape (8.6%) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (8.1%). In relation to choice of first language, 34.1% of contributors who speak English as first language were in possession of a undergraduate or postgraduate degree, followed by Afrikaans (9.2%), isiZulu (4.9%), isiXhosa (3.8%) and Setswana (3.2%).

Figure 5.5. Gender split across education levels
5.2.2. Functional role and communication preference

Respondents were asked to indicate their years of service to the organisation, as well as their function role within the organisation and their choice of communication preference. Table 5.1 highlights that the majority of responses were from employees working greater than 10 years at 44.3%, followed by employees who have been in employ between five and ten years attributing 29.7% of respondents, followed by those in employment for less than five years came in at 21.6%. Those respondents that were employed for less than one year come in at 2.7% with three respondents opting not to answer the question.

Of the respondents employed for ten years or more, 59.8% reside in Gauteng, while 34.1% of respondents with more than ten years employ were operating out of regional head offices in comparison to only 23.2% operating out of the national head office. Similarly, 34.5% of respondents with between five and ten years of service operate out of the regional head offices.

Conversely, the largest proportion of respondents with less than five, but greater than one year of service was based at the national head office (35.0%). When analysing the gender groups for period of employment, similar results were observed for female (44.8%) and male (44.3%) for employees working greater than ten years. The percentage split of female to male employees was fairly similar across the range of choices, potentially implying that in this organisation, tenure of service was not dependent on the gender of the employee.

Table 5.1. Years of service in relation to gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Less than 1</th>
<th>Less than 5</th>
<th>Greater than 5, but less than 10</th>
<th>Greater than 10</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
<th>Percentage Split</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Split</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the respondents employed for greater than ten years, 45.1% were white followed by coloured at 20.7%. However, for the tenure of service for the periods five to ten years and less than five years, black respondents hold the dominant proportion at 41.8% and 50.0% respectively. Of the total number of white respondents, 63.8% have been employed for a period of ten years or more, in comparison to black respondents where 71.7% have been employed for a period of greater than one, but less than ten years of service, contrast to white respondents who were observed at 34.5% over the same period. Across all employment periods, English was the dominant first and language and preferred language of internal communication.

The highest proportion of respondents in possession of a postgraduate degree were those that have been employed for less than five years (41.4%), while in contrast, 50.0% of all respondents of an undergraduate degree were employed for more than ten years. Of respondents in position of either a matric or certificate, 46.5% were employed for more than ten years.

Figure 5.6. highlights the relationship between employees job function and indicates that those respondents occupying a management function are represented by more individuals that have been in employment for ten years or more (60.3%), while the majority of staff in client facing roles have been employed for a period between five and ten years.

**Figure 5.6. Years of service in relation to job function**
The job function category did not seek to identify the job title of respondents, but rather the overarching functional role that the respondent was responsible for within the organisation. The categories include client facing, support, back office, management and other, which was a free text field which catered for respondents who did not fall into this category. Of the 185 respondents, 24 respondents chose to complete the free text field to identify their job function. Further analysis revealed that 62.5% of those respondents who opted to utilise the free text field identified their role as being in a sales environment, implying that they were in effect client facing respondents.

Several team leaders, who should have selected management as the option, had chosen to rather use the free text field to identify their job title instead of functional role. In analysis the data, the free text fields related to sales and relationship management were converted into client facing roles, with team leader roles being converted into management. There were three respondents who chose not to answer this question. Management roles were in the majority at 34.1%, followed by client facing (33.0%) and support (24.9%) with the support function being the least represented.

Of the respondents residing in Gauteng, 34.5% function at a management level, whereas in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the apportionment was higher with 43.5% of respondents domiciled there occupying management functional roles. The management functional role was mainly fulfilled out of regional head offices with 44.4% of respondents identifying this, in contrast to only 23.8% of management respondents being based at the national head office. In stark contrast, 47.5% of all client facing respondents did not occupy one of the organisations main office sites; while 52.2% of respondents who operate in the support functional role were based at the national head office.

The proportion of male to female management was 50.8% and 49.2% respectively, in contrast to the proportion of client facing respondents where 57.4% were female and 42.6% were male, with similar results also holding true for support based roles. Table 5.2. demonstrates a cross-split of information by identifying the percentage of respondents that live within the various provinces in relation to the job function these individuals perform. The table reveals that while 64.3% of all respondents reside in Gauteng, 41 (65.1%) of all management functions are accomplished by respondents living in Gauteng.
Table 5.2. Job function in relation to province of employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Back office</th>
<th>Client Facing</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
<th>Percentage Split</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>119</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwa-Zulu Natal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Split</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion black and white managers were 31.7% and 34.9% respectively. Of the total number of black respondents, 38.3% were client facing (20.7% for white), 33.3% were management (37.9% for white) and 25.0% were in support (34.5% for white). At a volume level, more coloured respondents were client facing than in management and support with similar results holding true for Indian respondents while the majority of Asian respondents occupy management functional role. Of the respondents who have selected management as a functional role, 36.5% were in possession of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, in contrast to client facing staff where only 9.8% were in possession of a degree.

Of the respondents who have selected support as functional role, 33% have a diploma while 37% were in possession of either an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. Of the respondents in the management functional role, 60.3% have been employed for more than ten years, whereas only 29.5% of client facing respondents fall into the same category. The majority of client facing respondents (41.0%) have been employed for between five and ten years.

Figure 5.7. indicates that of the total number of respondents, 65.9% prefer e-mail as their first choice of communication, followed by 23.8% who prefer a face-to-face conversation with their line manager. Surprisingly, only 4.9% of respondents prefer road-shows with executives as a preferred form of communication, while four respondents suggested via free text that they prefer multiple forms of communication to ensure variety, while another was not partial but found electronic as more convenient,
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with two suggesting that while face-to-face discussion with their line manager was their first option, it had to be followed-up by email.

At a gender level, 69.5% of female respondents and 62.0% of male respondents prefer e-mail. Contrastingly, of the number of respondents who selected road-shows with executives, and face-to-face conversations with line managers, the proportion of male to female was higher in each instance at 66.7% 52.3% respectively. Across, race, gender, preferential language, years of service and job function, the choice of email as the preferred form of communication was a dominant factor. Interestingly, none of the respondents selected hand-outs as a preferred method of communication. This presents an opportunity to undertake an exploratory study into the effectiveness or popularity of hand-outs in the internal communication process.

**Figure 5.7. Preferred choice of communication**

![Preferred choice of communication](chart)

5.2.3. Strategy communication impact on culture and values

When asked about their familiarity with the strategy, 37.8% stated that they “strongly agreed” and 53.0% stated that they “agreed”, with 3.8% of respondents being undecided, with only 1.1% “strongly disagreeing” as depicted in Figure 5.8. Interestingly, of the respondents who operate out of the national head office, 39.6% “strongly agreed” with the statement that they were knowledgeable of the strategy,
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whilst 44.8% of respondents who were based in regional head offices made the same claim. Of the number of female respondents, 32.4% “strongly agreed” while 57.1% “agreed” in comparison to male respondents where 45.6% were in strong agreement and 48.1% were in agreement. Of the respondents that disagreed 83.3% were female, similarly to the uncertain respondents where 85.7% were female.

**Figure 5.8. Knowing what the new business strategy is**

The proportion across race groups for the choice of “strongly agrees” and “agrees” were fairly similar, except for Indian where 73.3% of Indian respondents only agreed with the statement. For respondents with English as a first language, 33.0% were in “strong agreement” while 59.8% were only in “agreement”, in contrast to Afrikaans where the split among respondents was almost equal. With regards to educational qualifications, respondents with a matric, certificate or diploma were in the majority when only agreeing with the statement, in contrast to those with postgraduate and undergraduate degrees, where 56.9% strongly agreed with the statement.

Irrespective of respondent’s years of service, across all choices the proportion of “agree” to “strongly agree” was higher. For those in management functions, an equal split of 49.2% of “strongly agree” and “agree” was observed, whereas in client facing respondents the split was 24.6% and 60.7% respectively. Interestingly, of respondents who prefer email as a form of internal communication, only 31.1% strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 47.7% of those who preferred face-to-face communication
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strongly agreed. Where respondents preferred executive road-shows as a form of communication, 88.9% responded as “strongly agree”.

When asked if there was a significant difference between the retail strategy and the group strategy, 10.8% of respondents selected “not at all”, while 48.6% chose “not really”, 21.6% chose “somewhat”, 11.9% were undecided and 4.9% selected that the two strategies were very much different. Of the respondents based at the national head office, only 14.6% intoned that the group strategy was different from the business unit strategy, in contrast to the regional head office where the same view was held by 24.1% of respondents.

Of the total number of female respondents 41.0% stated that there was somewhat of a difference or were undecided if there was a difference between the two strategies, whereas male respondents in response to the same options only came in at 24.1%. Interestingly, of the respondents who stated that there was a significant difference between the two strategies, 66.7% were male.

No significant variance was noted among the various race groups with regards to this question, while 39.2% of English speaking respondents noted some variance or were undecided if there was a difference between the two strategies. Interestingly, of the respondents who believed that there was a significant variance between the two strategies, 55.6% have worked for between five and ten years and 33.3% have worked for less than five years.

Of the respondents who preferred email communication and face-to-face engagements, 38.5% and 40.9% respectively were of the opinion that they were either undecided, somewhat agreed or agreed very much that there was a difference between the group and retail strategy. Interestingly, 45.9% of respondents who agreed that they knew the strategy were uncertain, agreed or agreed very much that there was a difference to the group strategy.

When asked whether there was alignment between the new strategy and the organisational culture, 84.3% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed. Interestingly, 4.3% of respondents chose not to respond to this question, while 2.2% disagreed that there was alignment and 9.2% were uncertain. Interestingly, of those respondents who strongly agreed that they knew the strategy 57.1% strongly agreed that there was alignment between culture and strategy, while only 4.1% of those who
agreed that they knew the strategy strongly agreed that there was alignment. Subsequently, when asked whether the new strategy incorporated the organisations published values, 59.5% chose “very much” and 27.0% chose somewhat while 5.9% were undecided on whether the values were incorporated into the strategy, and 4.4% of respondents stated that the values were not incorporated in the strategy and 1.1% strongly stating there was dissonance between the two.

Table 5.3. analyses the cross-reference between respondents views on the alignment of the strategy to the organisational culture and the years of service completed by these respondents. Table 5.3. highlights that 60.0% of all respondents agree that alignment is visible, and interestingly of the 44.3% of respondents who have been employed for ten years or more, 68.3% support this view. In addition, 75.0% of all respondents that have been employed for less than five years have either strongly agreed or agreed that the culture and the strategy are aligned.

Table 5.3. Alignment between strategy and organisational culture in relation to years of service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of service</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
<th>Percentage Split</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 5, but less than 10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Split</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.4. Communicating the strategy

Figure 5.9. illustrates that of the total number of respondents, 34.6% asserted that the strategy was communicated to them at least every month, while 28.6% suggested it was quarterly. In addition, 14.6% selected bi-annually while 11.9% suggested annually. Of the respondents that were in disagreement, 7.0% suggested that the strategy was
never communicated, while 3.2% of respondents refused to respond to this question. Interestingly, of the respondents who suggested that the strategy was never communicated, 38.5% were based in regional offices, while 46.2% were based in offices not owned by the bank.

Of the respondents who declared that the strategy was never communicated, 23.1% have been employed for greater than ten years, 30.8% between five and ten years and 46.2% less than five years. More respondents at the national head office believed that the strategy was communicated annually (22.9%) than monthly (20.8%), in contrast to those operating outside of the national head office who state that they receive communication on the strategy monthly (39.4%) rather than annually (8.0%).

**Figure 5.9. Frequency of communication**

![Frequency of communication chart](image)

Only 15.4% of these respondents were in possession of a degree and 7.7% of them operate in a management role, while 53.8% were client facing and 30.8% were support staff. Interestingly, when these candidates were asked whether the strategy aligned to the organisation culture, 30.8% agreed, while 7.7% disagreed and 46.2% were also undecided, and 30.8% were of the opinion that there was no alignment between the retail strategy and the group strategy. More interestingly, of these respondents who
stated that the strategy was never communicated, 38.5% state that the strategy was aligned with the values; while another 38.5% state that they were undecided. At a gender level, 53.8% of respondents state that the strategy was never communicated were female and 46.2% male, with 30.8% of respondents having English and another 30.8% having isiZulu as their first language as their first language.

When asked how often line managers had a conversation with them regarding the strategy, 35.1% selected monthly, 23.2% selected quarterly, 10.8% selected bi-annually, 12.4% selected annually, 16.2% selected never and 2.2% did not respond as depicted in Figure 5.10. At a provincial level, more respondents in Gauteng suggested that they had quarterly conversations with their line manager (27.7%) in comparison to the Western Cape (11.1%) and Kwa-Zulu Natal (17.4%). Of the 34.6% of respondents who suggested that the strategy was communicated to them monthly 67.2% also suggested that they had monthly conversations with their line manager around the strategy.

Interestingly one respondent who selected that communication was never received, contrastingly selected that they had a monthly conversation with their line manager around the strategy, while 84.6% who selected that they never received communication also stated that they never had a conversation with their line manager. Of the respondents who suggest that communication around the strategy was only received annually, 50.0% also claim to only have conversations with their manager around this strategy annually.

**Figure 5.10. Frequency of line manager communication**
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Of the respondents who stated that the strategy and the values were very much aligned, 41.8% had conversations monthly and 27.3% had conversations with line managers quarterly. Of the combined 84.3% of respondents who agreed and strongly agreed that the strategy and the culture were aligned, 38.5% have conversations monthly and 25.0% have conversations quarterly.

Of the 59.5% of respondents who say there was no dissonance between the retail strategy and the group strategy, 41.8% have monthly line manager conversations and 21.8% have these conversations every quarter. Of the 90.8% who state that they knew what the strategy was, 38.1% have monthly management conversations while 23.8% have quarterly conversations while only 11.3% claim never to have these conversations with line managers; supporting the notion that the frequency of management communications plays a significant role in employees knowing the strategy.

Interestingly, of the 65.9% who prefer email as a form of communication, 33.6% also have monthly conversations with their line manager, whereas 40.9% of respondents who prefer face-to-face communication also prefer monthly management conversations. Interestingly, although it would seem normal for respondents in management positions to prefer longer lags in their line managers communicating the strategy to them, 34.9% of respondents in management positions prefer monthly conversations and 28.6% prefer quarterly which was surprisingly high, possibly suggesting an increased level of engagement. A contrast occurred in years of employment where 14.6% of respondents who have been employed for more than ten years, 14.5% employed between five and ten years and 20.0% employed less than five years have never had strategy conversations with their line managers. On a positive note, the higher proportion of respondents (58.4%) across all employment groups has regular conversations with their line managers.

With regards to executing the strategy and measuring outputs via a balanced scorecard, 38.9% stated that the execution of the strategy was very much a part of their scorecard, while 28.1% stated that it was somewhat a part of their scorecard, 10.8% were undecided, and 14.1% believe that the execution was not really part of their scorecard, while 6.5% say that the execution was not part of their scorecard at all. The proportion of respondents who state that the execution was very much part of their
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scorecard instead of being somewhat a part of their scorecard was higher at the national head office than at the regional head offices.

This could possibly be due to the fact that more of the centralised and management roles being based at the national head office with operational requirements filtering to the regional offices and branches thereby making the execution more relevant to the scorecard. Conversely, for respondents who did not work out of company owned offices, 45.3% say that the strategy was very much a part of their scorecard rather than the 22.6% who say it was somewhat a part of the scorecard.

5.3. Changing behaviour through strategic communication

When strategies change too frequently, they tend to create uncertainty in the organisation. When faced with the question of frequently changing strategies in, 33% of respondents could neither agree nor disagree that the strategy changed too often, while 22.7% agreed that it did change too often and 36.2% disagreed that it changed too often. At the extreme end, 2.2% strongly agreed that it changed too frequently, while 4.3% strongly disagreed with this statement.

Interestingly, while 45.8% of respondents at the national head office disagreed that changes occurred too frequently, at the regional offices there was little variance between those that disagreed (39.7%) and those that neither agreed or disagreed (37.9%) suggesting that the perception of respondents at the head office varies from those in outlying offices.

Another measure which compares the frequency of line management communication and frequency of strategic management change indicates that of respondents whose line managers communicate the strategy to them monthly, 30.8% agreed, 29.2% were unsure and 32.3% disagreed with the statement that the strategy changed too often.

These similarities could suggest that although the frequency of communication is preferred, it could also lead to incorrect perceptions regarding the change in strategy suggesting that the consistency of the message may be an area of concern. Contrastingly, of respondents whose managers communicate quarterly, 23.3% agreed, 30.2% were uncertain and 41.9% disagreed with the statement the strategy changed too often, which once again possibly suggests a link to consistency and frequency of communication.
Respondents with the most number of years of service should be more able to determine whether the strategy changed too often. However, the analysis of the data suggests that of the respondents who were working at the organisation for ten or more years, 14.6% agreed, 39.0% were unsure and 41.5% disagreed with the statement.

This thereby creates the paradox of whether the process of communicating the strategy in previous periods was significantly different to the current process in so much that respondents with long service cannot significantly determine whether there have been too many strategy changes or not. Interestingly, for respondents who were working for a period of between five and ten years, more respondents agreed (36.4%) that strategy changes occurred too frequently in contrast 32.7% who disagreed.

Of this subset, respondents who receive monthly line management communication and agreed (45.8%) that the strategy changed too often exceed those that disagreed (33.3%), in contrast to quarterly management strategy communications where the proportions of “agree” and “disagree” were equal at 27.3%. The dissonance between client facing and management respondents also presents another avenue for further exploration as more client facing staff agreed (32.8%) that strategy changes occurred too often in comparison to management (20.6%).

Interestingly, the majority of client facing respondents that were employed for between five and ten years agreed (44.0%) that the strategy changed too often, whereas, the majority of client facing respondents in employ for ten years disagreed (44.4%) with the statement. Respondents in a management function, whether in employment for between five and ten years or more than ten years were in the majority when disagreeing with the statement that strategy changes occurred too often. Interestingly, the difference in the number of respondents who were employed for less than five years and were either unsure (32.5%) or disagreed (35.0%) with the statement was marginal.

Figure 5.11. demonstrates that when asked whether the new strategy required one to change the way in which they did their job, the responses were varied with 11.4% of respondents stating change was almost always required, 20.5% stating that change was regularly required, 30.3% stating that change was regularly required, 24.9% stating that change was rarely required and 10.8% stating that change was never required, while 2.2% did not respond. If the data were summarised into change
required, which would include the almost always, regularly and occasional categories, and no change required, which would include rarely and never, 62.2% of respondents agreed that the new strategy did require one to change the way they did their job, and 35.7% disagreed that change was required to do their job.

**Figure 5.11. Change in behaviour as a result of the new strategy**

In relation to job function, 11.5% of client facing staff and 12.7% of staff in management functions selected that they “almost always” had to change the way in which they approached their jobs as a result of the new strategy. In addition, 26.2% (client-facing) and 27.0% (management) responded that they had regularly changed the way in which they did their job as a result of the new strategy. The analysis of data for respondents in client facing, management and support functions indicate that the majority initiate some form of change intervention in their job function as a result of the new strategy. Interestingly though, 60% of respondents in a back-office function role indicate that they rarely or never had to change the way in which they had approached their jobs as a result of the new strategy.

When these respondents were asked whether the new strategy would impact the performance of the business, 46.5% stated “very much”, 28.1% selected “somewhat”, 12.4% were “undecided”, 8.1% stated “not really” and 4.3% said “not at all”, while 0.5% did not respond to the question. When these results were matched against the question of whether one needs to change their job with regards to the new strategy; and the data is consolidated into “agree” or “disagree”; the results indicate that 54.8% of respondents who agreed that they had to change the way they did their jobs also
believed that the new strategy would impact of the performance of the organisation “very much”, whereas of those that disagreed with changing the way they did their jobs, the majority at 33.3% agreed that the new strategy would “very much” impact on performance.

5.4. Conclusion to the results

In designing the communication strategy, management set out with several objectives, mainly focused on creating a culture shift within the organisation culminating in behavioural changes that could ultimately be translated into improved performance. In planning the communication process, it was decided that rather than merely providing information, an effective means of communicating the strategy would be to engage in strategy conversation where large wholesale communication was avoided in favour of smaller concentrated groups were engagement and not telling was the key method of delivery.

In large organisations, especially those that are very diverse across race, gender, language, culture and geography, the communication process if fairly complex. The difficulty for communication practitioners was ensuring both a consistency of message delivery and more importantly that the recipients of the message interpret it in the same way, irrespective of the level of diversity.

Against this background, the view of both the executive management, who are the custodians of internal communication, and the employees, who are its recipients, was sought to determine if communication objectives were met and results were visible. This involved facilitating semi-structured interviews with executive management and gathering information from employees via staff surveys. The information gathering process, across both spectrums, was also designed to gather information that either supports or was converse to communication theory.

It also provided a platform to identify potential gaps in the communication process and pursue alternative options and tools to ensure effective communication practices across organisations. It also allowed for the exploration of new areas of communication theory not just as a social science, but for being utilised as an effective organisation tool with the potential of creating a competitive advantage for the organisation.
Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

6.1. Research question one:

Does senior management achieve its goal of changing employee behaviour through its strategic communication initiative?

6.1.1. Management considerations for internal communication

At the outset, the management objective was to change the behaviour of employees at an individual level so that there could be alignment between the new business unit strategy and the employees that worked in it. The fourth step in John Kotter’s eight step process emphasises the need to communicate the vision (Kotter, 2011) which in this case was centred on “delivering distinctive client-centred banking experiences” (Nedbank Group, 2012, p. 28) and “building enduring relationships” (Nedbank Group, 2012, p. 28). After careful consideration, the executive management team of the organisation decided to incorporate the lessons from several change management practitioners instead of using a single model. At the heart of the change management process was the integrated communication strategy which was intended to be instrumental in aligning the new business unit strategy and its employees.

6.1.2. Employee engagement

Internal communication on its own may be viewed as just another tool utilised by organisations to transmit data. However, in building employee engagement, it has a distinctive role to play by adopting a clear, consistent and continuous communication process (Welch & Jackson, 2007). However, one of the drawbacks of internal communication is the “over-emphasis on leadership communication” (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p. 19) instead of focusing on genuine feedback or employee engagement (Ruck & Trainor, 2012).

Employee resentment is heightened when there is the perception that employees are being communicated at (Ruck & Trainor, 2012). Where this environment persists and the growing perception of not being “communicated with” (Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p. 19) increases, it exacerbates the process of employee disengagement (Ruck & Trainor, 2012). In an organisation that utilises communication more than an instrument to
disseminate data, “good quality, effective task communication is crucial to creating commitment, while good quality non-task communication is vital to creating trust” (De Ridder, 2004, as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 190).

Some theorists promote the opinion that the high performance in an organisation is the result of its relative market position. Others, who refer to the “resource based theory of a firm” holds the view that the strength of an organisation’s resources is more likely to explain its high performance (Barney, 2001). Subsequently, the knowledge that effective communication must be a core skill of the communicator is easier to articulate that altogether achieve (Bacon, 2007). Miscommunication, to some degree, is inevitable (Ferraro, 2002, as cited in Lillis & Tian, 2009), especially in an environment embodying a diversity of language, race, cultures, generations, levels of education, proficiency, literacy, and values (Ferraro, 2002, as cited in Lillis & Tian, 2009, and Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008).

### 6.1.3. Organisational culture

Culture is unique to organisations and given its ability to permeate the organisation over time, it has the capacity to create both a visible and invisible identify that allows it to be identified by internal and external stakeholders (Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi & Mohammed, 2007). The challenge for many organisations seeking to pursue a change in strategy has more to do with the organisation competing against its organisational culture, instead of its external competitive forces, or the implementation of new operational procedures. Inevitably, culture and behaviour are linked to the extent that employee behaviour has the propensity to play a significant role in an organisation’s “differentiation strategy” (Bacon, 2007, p. 351).

For some organisations, their “quality of execution and behavioural differentiation” require a common culture (Bacon, 2007, p. 351). In addition, Bacon (2007) makes the suggestion that the facilitation of behavioural changes in an organisation is ultimately reflective of the general culture change of that organisation and permeates all the way from the holistic organisation down to the various business unit levels.
6.1.4. Processes and mediums for internal communication

Feedback, from the semi-structured interview with the bank’s managing executive for human resources and communication, revealed that before embarking on an internal communication drive, considerable thought was given to the most appropriate medium and/or media to be used in the communication process. Through the process of consultation and considering the inputs of internal stakeholders, a decision was taken that a process of “strategy conversation workshops” (Sutton-Pryce, 2012) would be facilitated instead of the traditional form of wholesale leadership communication programmes.

The first-step in this two-step process included the cascading of the new strategy all the way from senior management down to the lowest levels of staff in concentrated groups. Instead of focusing on disseminating the outline of the strategy and providing instruction on the operational processes, divisional and business unit heads engaged staff in conversation style workshops focused on recapping historical events and repositioning the future through story-telling and engagement. This process was generally facilitated through smaller concentrated workshops initiated by line management and included only direct subordinates. A key factor of the internal communication strategy was to ensure that the process was to be completed over a specified time frame to ensure effectiveness and consistency.

The second step in the integrated communication process was to ensure that reading material was not just in the form of hand-outs, but also included DVDs which included audio-visual presentations. These were distributed to all employees, and post the employee engagement conversation and receipt of the relevant reading material, every staff member had to update their attendee status on the organisations internal systems. This not only ensured that every employee in the cluster had undergone a strategy conversation, but also allowed senior management to address line managers who were not ensuring completion on the internal communication strategy.

6.1.5. Distinguishing between group and business unit strategy

The research survey questionnaire incorporated several questions targeted at determining whether the integrated strategic communication was successful in
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achieving the objectives as envisaged by the senior management. Question 11 of the survey questionnaire specifically asked: “Do you know what the Retail strategy is?” The response was an overwhelming yes with 37.8% of respondents “strongly agreeing” with the statement and 53.0% “agreeing”. To ensure that the results did not only reflect the views of management only, the data was tested against the respondent job functions, which revealed that 34.1% of the total number of respondents was involved in a management function.

In finalising the probability sampling process, the selection criteria would have resulted in the ratio of divisional managers and business unit heads to “general” employees not being large enough to distort the responses of the final outcome. Further analysis of the 34.1% managers revealed that of the 90.8% respondents who “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement, only 36.9% operated in a management functional role; subsequently implying that 63.1% of staff from all other functional roles also “strongly agreed” or “agreed” knew what the new strategy was.

6.1.6. The impact of language on integrated internal communication

With regards to the aspect of language, only 52.4% of respondents have English as their first language. Of the total number of respondents who either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they knew the strategy, 46.4% had chosen another indigenous language instead of English. This addresses the issue of language as either a barrier or enhancer to effective integrated communication.

Although English is widely considered as the most “dominant language in international business” (Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 408), its use in common everyday communication and its use in organisational communication is not the same (Ehrenreich, 2010). However, in this instance, the data suggests that despite the high propensity of respondents that do not speak English as their “mother tongue”, the organisations use of English as a tool to disseminate their strategic communication has had little or no impact on the knowledge sharing process involved.

In addition, to determine the effectiveness of the integrated communication process, respondents were asked if they felt that there was a significant difference between the group strategy and retail strategy, to which 48.6% of respondents stated “not really”
and a further 10.8% responded as “not at all”. Of those respondents that selected “strongly agree” or “agree” to the previous question, 61.3% stated that there was no significant difference between the group strategy and the retail strategy. A portion (38.4%) of respondents however stated that there was “somewhat” of a difference between the two strategies, while 11.9% of respondents were “uncertain” if a difference existed, while 4.9% categorically stated that there was “very much” a difference between the strategies. Interestingly, 55.6% of respondents who identified that there was a significant difference between the two strategies has also declared English as their first language. Of the various indigenous languages to South Africa, and excluding Afrikaans, only 22.2% declared that the strategies were “very much” different.

6.1.7. Changing behaviour through integrated internal communication

There is still a significant lack of empirical studies investigating how organisations formulate and execute an effective internal communication initiative focusing on the organisations change in strategy, at a business unit level. (Aggerholm, Andersen, Admub, & Thomsen, 2009). When reviewing the management practices of integrated internal communication executed by the communications team, management identified their objectives to aligning strategy and employees, subsequently changing employee behaviour to change organisational culture to be in line with strategic goals.

By using a survey questionnaire, employees were asked if the new strategy would require them to change the way in which they did their jobs, implying more a behavioural approach than an operational change. Responses to this were varied with 11.4% of respondents indicating that the strategy “almost always” required them to change the way they went about doing their jobs, 20.5% indicating that this approach was undertaken “regularly”, while 30.3% indicated that they “occasionally” changed the way in which they did their jobs as required by the new strategy. Responses of rarely, never and no response totalled 37.8% of respondents. After excluding a 2.2% no response rate, the analysis indicates 62.2% of respondents believe that the new strategy required them to change the way in which they approach their jobs in some way or the other.

Further analysis of this reviews these results against two other key measures: years of service and job function. The new strategy commenced in 2010 (Nedbank Group,
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2012). The assumption is that employees for a period of five years or less should be new enough in the organisation for the new strategy to initiate a change in behavioural protocols and subsequently creating an environment of external adaptation and internal integration and hence a new organisational culture (Park, Ribiere & Schulte Jr, 2004).

However, this process should be somewhat more difficult to accomplish with employees who have been employed for more than five years and especially those in employ for more than ten years consecutively by the organisation. Asser and Hodges (2009) propose that organisations pursuing a change in strategy often find themselves competing against established organisational culture. Respondents working for less than five years constitute 24.3% of the volume and of these 46.7% indicate that they “rarely or never” have to change the way in which they do their jobs. Respondents employed for more than five and ten years constitute 74.1% of the total volume who responded. Of these respondents, 32.1% indicated that they “rarely or never” have to change the way in which they do their jobs, while 67.2% believed that “occasional”, “regular” or that they “almost always” had to change the way in which they did their jobs as a result of the new strategy.

At a different dimension, almost a third (30.6%) of respondents who are in client facing and management roles indicate that they “rarely or never” have to change the way in which they do their jobs. Client facing staff incorporates sales staff and customer relationship employees, while respondents in management functions indicate those that exercise a degree of operational control and have the propensity to impact behavioural outcomes. Of these, 68.5% have indicated that as a result of the new strategy, they “occasionally”, “regularly” or “almost always” change the way in which they do their jobs.

While the opportunity exists to investigate several other combinations, it is unlikely that the final outcome will significantly differ from the sets of results listed above. There is a lack of empirical evidence indicating at what level an internal communications initiative centred on communicating a change in organisational strategy is successful. This research supports the view that if more than 50% of respondents in the sample size have admitted to both knowing what the new strategy is and changing the way in which they work as a result after having received communication around the strategy, then the executive management would have achieved their strategic communication goal.
This then supports the view that well defined and executed strategic and integrated internal communication plan has the capacity to change employee behaviour and subsequently impact on organisational culture. It can be further inferred that management would have been successful in ensuring that strategy and employees were aligned.

6.2. Research question two

Are the barriers to effective internal communication, as proposed by several authors, evident in the communication strategy process?

The practice of internal communication is a common factor among many organisations today. Many practitioners theorise that there are several contributing factors that have the propensity to either enhance or distort the intended message of the internal communication process. In an attempt to answer the above research question, several key contributing factors were addressed and benchmarked against the results of some questions in the survey questionnaire as well as the feedback from the semi-structured interview with senior management.

6.2.1. Language as an inhibitor to internal communication

Theory suggests that the effect of dissonance between first language and spoken language often impedes the transfer of knowledge and idea sharing and also has direct implications on cultural norms or the development of organisational culture (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2010). English as a language is preferred choice of business communication (Lauring & Selmer, 2011), however, despite its presence as a common dialect, there use of a “shared language is essential to productive knowledge transfer” (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2010. p. 231). The use of English for organisational communication purposes is not the same as when it is used by native speakers within their business or local communities (Ehrenreich, 2010).

From the responses received to the survey questionnaire, it was determined that 52% spoke English language, while the remaining 48% spoke at least one of the official languages of South Africa, with the most common being Afrikaans (18%), isiZulu (8%)
and Setswana (6%). In order to initiate a comparative understanding of this data, it was matched against the 62% of respondents who stated that they change the way in which they work as a result of the new strategy.

When Afrikaans is eliminated and the focus is placed on indigenous the remaining African languages, it was noted that 61% were in the affirmative. In addition, 52% of all respondents speaking an indigenous African language indicated that they either “almost always” or “always” change the way in which they work as a result of the change in strategy.

Of the respondents who spoke Afrikaans as a first language, the results are significantly different with 3% of Afrikaans speakers “almost always” changing the way in which they do their jobs as a result of the change in strategy. The results for “regularly” changing were 9% and 42% for occasionally. The combined total of 45% reflected the view that they “rarely” or “never” changed the way they did their jobs as a result of the change in strategy.

The contrast in results suggests that language should still be considered as a barrier to effective internal communication when you consider that according to the 2001 National Census, the three most spoken first languages are isiZulu (23.8%), Xhosa (17.6%) and Afrikaans (13.3%). Despite the use of English as the most recognised language of commerce and science, it was spoken only by 8.2% of South Africans as a first language (StatsOnline, 2004).

### 6.2.2. Distance as an inhibitor

Chen, Sun and McQueen (2011, p. 229) suggest that organisations seeking to initiate a “common cultural context” find themselves challenged by the effects of geographic distances from the head office. It is further suggested that these geographical distances also have an impact on behaviour and knowledge sharing within the organisation (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2011, p. 229).

To measure this, a benchmark of 62% was used indicating respondents who changed the way in which they did their jobs in some way or another as a result of the new strategy. Only 26% of respondents are based at the national head office. The
remaining 745 are spread across regional offices, branches and offices leased by bank accommodating smaller staff contingents in outlying areas.

In evaluating these results, the data from the national head office and regional head offices were ignored with the focus being on outlying areas and branches either in urban areas, shopping malls or rural areas. The number of respondents was 41% of the sample size with 51% of these indicating that despite the communication of the new strategy, they “rarely” or “never” changed the way in which they did their jobs.

It would seem obvious that respondents working in the national and regional offices would be more likely to initiate a change in behaviour. The results above also indicate that the organisation does face a challenge where respondents who do not operate out of these environments do not feel the need to change the way they do their jobs to be in line with the new strategy.

6.2.3. The lack of education as an inhibitor

Holtzhausen and Fourie (2008) discuss the effects of education and literacy on organisations attempting to change behaviour through internal communication. They assert that communication practitioners are challenged by “language, proficiency, race and education levels” (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008, p. 80). Rentz (2009) also contributes to this by stating that education plays an integral role in an individual’s ability to process communication within the organisations internal environment.

Of the respondents in possession of a post graduate or undergraduate degree, 67% indicated that they were involved in some form of behavioural change regarding their receipt of the new strategy. However, 49% of respondents in possession of only a matric, a certificate or diploma indicated that they rarely or never participated in any form of behavioural change. This result aligns itself to the view that education does have an impact on the ability of internal communication practitioners and process to change behaviour.

6.2.4. Communication preference as an inhibitor

Reality dictates that with the exception of small organisations, face-to-face discussions among managers and all employees to discuss strategy is practically impossible
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(Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 187). As a result, one-way communication, especially where strategy is the subject of discussion is “both unavoidable and necessary” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 187).

However, Larkin and Larkin (1994) (as cited in Ruck & Trainor, 2012, p.4) suggest that one of the three most effective ways to facilitate employee communication is through face-to-face communication. Studies undertaken by Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) (as cited in Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 74) support this view with the following statement: “face-to-face communication is the most productive way to build strong relationships based on mutual respect and on-going symmetrical dialogue.”

By contrast, the use of e-mail as an embedded technology has become so ingrained in organisational processes, that its use is seemingly unquestioned despite its consequences being relatively un-researched (Vigden, Sims, & Powell, 2011, p. 84). Due to the process of “distanciation”, the author of an e-mail has no control once it has left their outbox (Vigden, Sims & Powell, 2011, p. 94).

The process of “autonomization” implies that the e-mail thereafter takes on a life of its own and its meaning is influenced by the culture and society of the recipient who also has the capacity to appropriate additional meanings to a message before passing it on (Vigden, Sims & Powell, 2011, p. 94). As such, the onus is on the sender to follow on the effectiveness of e-mail as a communications tool to ensure both understanding and consistency of the conveyed message.

When comparing the preference of respondents in relation to changes in behaviour, 66% of respondents preferred e-mail correspondence while 24% preferred face-to-face communication interactions. However, in contrast, 40% of respondents who preferred e-mail and 20% of respondents who preferred face-to-face indicated that they rarely or never initiated some form of behaviour change upon receiving communication of the new strategy. It can therefore be inferred that although the majority of respondents prefer e-mail correspondence as a form of communication, it is more likely that face-to-face communication interactions will initiate any form of behavioural change.

However, the challenge faced by organisations, despite the obvious and widely appreciated benefits associated with face-to-face communication, is that the cost of initiating such modes of communication, especially where organisations have to
maximise their scare resources, and serves to inhibit such activities (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011, p. 55) forcing organisations to seek substitutes therefore making the use of online communication technology more appetising and affordable.

6.2.5. Factors impacting on communication

An enhancement to using the correct communication media is the propagation for the use of plain language. Some of the key principles of plain language is that the document can be used for its intended purpose by the intended reader with the aim of plain language being that a document is both “understandable and usable” (Petelin, 2010, p. 206). Eagleson (1990) (as cited in Petelin, 2010, p. 206) argues that “it is the writer’s responsibility to be clear. It is not the reader’s responsibility to understand.”

In formulating internal communication documents, an organisation intends for various stakeholders to read, but more importantly understand the message the organisation intends conveying (Sattari, Pitt & Caruana, 2011). Easily readable text has the potential to improve comprehension, retention and reading speed (Sattari et al., 2011) which in turn is impacted by reader competence and reader motivation (Sattari et al., 2011).

In addition, directly related to knowledge sharing is communication frequency where Rogers & Kincaid (1981) (as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2011, p. 329) propose that with every cycle of knowledge exchange, there is a discovery of underlying differences or confirmation of agreements which allow for minor or major adjustments to perceptions and understanding. The results of the semi-structured interview revealed that considerable time was spent on determining the most appropriate form of communication, the right choice of marketing material, the distinct choice of language and grammar and the frequency of communication. Although 78% of all respondents indicated that they preferred English as the language of preference for corporate communication and only 14% preferred it in their own language, the theory suggests that there is a distinction between corporate and everyday use of a common language (Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 410).

With this in mind the communications team initiated a series of strategy conversations. This process involved the use of concentrated groups of staff entering into a dialogue with management. The process involved story-telling which captured the impact of
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historical events on the organisation, as well as strategy discussion outlying plans for the future. Management was adamant that dialogue alone would be insufficient and therefore engaged in a change in operational procedures and technology to ensure that employees who were now engaged in the new strategy conversations would also be equipped to execute it.

Communication material took the form of easy-to-read hand-outs, accompanied by DVDs which incorporated audio-visual clips of supporting the strategy conversation. Subsequent to the completion of the strategy conversation initiative, there have been several follow up exercises where additional information was distributed to reinforce the new strategy. To ensure consistency, it has become compulsory for all new entrants to be engaged in strategy conversations within the first couple of months of their recruitment. The adoption of these practices has allowed management to mitigate against those forces, that if left unchecked, could impede the effectiveness of the communication strategy.

6.3. Research question three

Does senior management engage in the practice of measuring the return on investment of strategic communication initiatives?

“Effective employee communication is a leading indicator of financial performance” (Luss & Nyce, 2008, p. 2). Morris (2010) suggests that the resultant effect of improved internal communication is “a higher level of employee engagement” subsequently leading to an increase in market value for the organisation in question. While it can be argued that there are definitive returns from investing in internal communications, there are a lack of clearly defined and appropriate techniques that are readily available for an organisation to determine “communication ROI” (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 4).

Having a defined set of measurement standards and metrics should essentially form part of an organisation’s standard operating procedure. It should also theoretically be incorporated into the overall strategic planning process so that the value to be derived from a given set of actions based on a specific strategy can be measured with regards to internal communication processes (Meng & Berger, 2012, p. 12). The semi-structured interview indicated that the management team had focused on gathering as
much information as possible on the effectiveness of the communication process. To this extent, an independent third party was sourced to gather data by conducting interviews with employees as well as engaging in staff surveys.

However, this exercise was targeted at identifying gaps in the integrated strategy communication process and the taking of corrective action or the adoption of new processes to ensure the effectiveness of the communication processes. At no point was there any consideration given to measuring the financial outputs of having effectively communicated the strategy across the business unit. To this extent, financial metrics and indicators linked to the integrated communication process was non-existent.

6.4. Summary

The discussion with the senior management of the organisation revealed that one of the key objectives on facilitating an integrated internal communications initiative was to align the new strategy to employees. To that effect, the research question was posed as to whether strategic communication initiatives have the capacity to influence employee engagement and subsequently employee behaviour as a result of the strategy. The results from the survey questionnaire indicate that it is indeed possible to influence employee behaviour through well planned and executed strategic communication initiatives.

As many theoretical frameworks suggest, transmission and receipt of a message do not guarantee alignment between the two. To this extent, the research examined the factors that could either inhibit or promote effective communication and subsequently affect employee engagement. The analysis of respondent feedback indicated that language, distance, education and communication preference can definitely be inhibitors to effective communication.

Lastly, the theoretical premise that effective communication should be reflected in the financial performance of an organisation was investigated. Feedback from the management team of the organisation revealed that neither financial metrics nor indicators were in place to measures the link between the communication strategy and the organisations financial performance.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

Although there are several studies and theoretical frameworks that address corporate communication, the effectiveness of specially designed, integrated internal communications initiatives that influence employee behaviour in relation to new organisation strategies has not been widely studied. At the outset, the objective of this research was not to investigate the effectiveness of the organisation’s new strategy. Neither was it aimed at determining whether the organisation had selected the appropriate form of intervention to communicate its new strategy.

Instead, it was aimed at determining whether an integrated approach to an organisation’s internal communication process was effective in aligning employee behaviour to the organisation’s new strategy. This was aimed at effectively asking whether the integrated communication process would result in a change in employee behaviour in relation to an employee’s functional role. In addition, it sought to understand the nature of the management practices and processes adopted in initiating this strategic communication initiative. This report does not in any way reveal the organisations internal research framework but takes an objective view of its communication practices as facilitated by its senior management and compares it to the responses of its employees to determine levels of alignment or dissonance.

The research report was restricted to a business unit of a single organisation in the financial services sector. The choice of selection was influenced by the ability to contrast the effectiveness of business unit communication in comparison to corporate or group communication concerning a change in strategy.

In addition, although the organisations business strategy is in the public domain, and has been communicated to both internal and external stakeholders, the uniqueness of its strategic communication initiative makes one curious as to whether such practices are considered as just routine communication protocols or do they create alignment between the strategy and its employees. One could argue that the use of a single organisation does not allow for enough data to answer the research question. However, such a view could imply that internal communication initiatives are therefore
comparable and as such recommend which of these are the most appropriate. This, however, was not the intended objective of the research report.

7.2. Summary of findings

The format of an internal communication initiative is often critical to its success. The typical practice of wholesale leadership communication involving informing or telling employees about the strategy is fast becoming obsolete in world where employees demand as much focus on communication as do shareholders. When designing its change management strategy, this organisation went through a rigorous process of consultation and collaboration among its internal stakeholders. The outcome was the implementation of an integrated internal communication initiative, aimed at communicating the business unit’s new strategy, through a series of “strategy conversations” instead of the traditional wholesale presentation approach.

To determine the level of alignment or dissonance between management objectives and employee actions, several research questions were posed to employees who had participated in the organisation’s strategy conversation sessions. The core of the survey was to determine whether this particular integrated internal communication initiative had the potential to influence employee behaviour to ensure alignment between the strategy and the employee. The results of the survey questionnaire with a relevant sample size of respondents indicated that integrated internal communication practices of this organisation indeed had the capacity to influence a change in employee behaviour. It can then be argued that the management objectives of aligning its strategy and employees could be achieved through its integrated internal communication initiative.

In addition, an assessment of the available literature suggests that the processes and practical applications of initiating a successful integrated internal communications strategy are fairly complex and extensive. Communication literature suggests that external and internal forces have the capacity to either inhibit or promote the effectiveness of the communication strategy (National Communication Association, 2011).
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Language, culture, level of education, communication preference, an employee’s functional role, frequency of communication and medium of communication are some of the constructs that have the potential to impact both employee engagement and influence behaviour (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2008). The analysis of the survey questionnaire revealed that although the integrated internal communication process certainly has the capacity to influence employee behaviour, it also presents the organisation with several challenges that must be considered in the planning of future internal communication initiatives.

In a highly diversified environment, the use of English as a business language does not guarantee that the message transmitted and the message received are completely aligned. Language is a key contributor to the transfer of knowledge and the development of both social and organisational culture (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2010). In a South African context, where there are eleven official languages, English isn’t often the first language of many employees.

The 2001 South African national census revealed that despite its common acceptance in science and commerce, English as a first language was only spoken by 8.2% of South Africans (StatsOnline, 2004). Analysis of respondent selections when matching changing employee behaviour to first language revealed that there is definitively a level of dissonance between employees who speak English as a first language and those that do not. The onset of globalisation has implications for the use of a common language to serve as the foundation for communication.

Geographic distances also have the capacity to inhibit internal communication initiatives (Chen, Sun & McQueen, 2011) especially in an environment where an organisation is attempting to forge a new organisational culture. In most cases, internal communication initiatives are designed and implemented at the monolithic head office. Although organisations have unique cultures, business-units and branches within the organisation also have sub-cultures unique to their environment.

Education has a direct impact on literacy and the ability of an individual to process communication (Holtshausen & Fourie, 2008). It may be practically impossible to consider the education levels of every member in the organisation before embarking on a communication initiative. This often results in the development of generic forms of
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communication which attempt to navigate a neutral zone in the execution of the communication initiative.

this process has provides both benefits and constraints to practitioners. benefits can be realised in the form of generic communication initiatives. constraints come in the form of interpretation by some employees, that the tone and nature of the initiative are either condescending or too complicated. this is further exacerbated by the diversity of first languages.

communication preferences also have the potential to serve as an inhibitor or promoter of internal communication initiatives. in the modern world, email has increasingly become the most common form of internal communication for organisations. although 66% of respondents preferred e-mail as their first choice of internal communication, the lack of research into the consequences of the increased volume in email correspondence make it difficult to determine whether the internal communication initiative is task driver or an effective communication tool. the interview with the organisations managing executive for communication revealed that while social media served its place in the organisational context, there was insufficient evidence to suggest its use as an internal communication tool.

the format of integrated internal communication initiatives, the appropriate use of communication material, utilising a plain language framework and consistently reinforced communication are the hallmarks of a good approach to integrated internal communication initiatives. in addition, the tracking of progress and gathering of feedback from employees serve as important tools to review the effectiveness of the communication strategy. feedback from the semi-structured interview with the managing executive revealed that management decisions to facilitate a concentrated approach to strategy conversations would be more effective than wholesale presentation and communications. in addition, the communication practitioners within the organisation utilised a variation of hand-outs, movie-clips, and line manager and employee engagement to deliver its integrated internal communication initiative.

since then, several reinforcement initiatives were facilitated using desk-drops, additional hand-outs and an internal research survey utilising the services of an independent service provider. in addition, to ensure the consistency of the strategic communication process, management implemented an internal protocol obligating all
new incumbents to participate in a strategy conversation workshop within several weeks of permanent employment.

Luss and Nyce (2008) suggest that one of the leading indicators of an organisation’s financial performance is an effective employee communication programme. While the concept of return on investment (ROI) is largely viewed as an accounting concept, its relevance to internal communication initiatives is becoming increasingly apparent. While the use of ROI metrics and indicators has been in existence for several years, its direct use to measure strategic communication effectiveness has not been sufficiently documented.

Meng and Berger (2012) argue that there is a lack of clearly defined and appropriate techniques that are readily available for an organisation to determine “communication ROI”. During the interview proceedings, the managing executive indicated that while the process of gathering feedback and revising the integrated internal communication initiative was fairly efficient, there wasn’t a protocol or framework in place that could correlate to effectiveness of the communication strategy to the business unit’s financial performance.

7.3. Recommendation to stakeholders

The frequency and consistency of the integrated internal communication initiative are critical to its sustainability. Analysis from the survey questionnaire revealed that employees who engaged in monthly strategy conversations with their line managers were more likely to initiate some of behavioural change in line with the new strategy than those that were engaged less frequently.

However, the continued use of face-to-face engagements is costly and time-consuming for any organisation and therefore not sustainable. The suggestion is for communication practitioners to vary the choice of media and technology utilised in internal communication initiatives. The ever increasing popularity of social media platforms and the impact of smartphones on daily activities indicate that communication practitioners have no alternative but to configure these options to meet their internal communication requirements.
Where the assumption persists that communication initiatives designed for head office is also relevant to outlying regions; it is then incumbent on the management of the organisation to measure the consistency of communication interpretation and make the required changes to communication initiatives before initiating additional communication initiatives. Further investigation is required by management to understand that a one-size-fits-all approach isn’t an effective strategy.

Aspects of generational theory, culture, language and education all conspire to inhibit the effectiveness of communication practices. For internal communication initiatives to be effective, practitioners must ensure that alternative forms of communication are investigated. These could include the use story-boards or cartoon-strips to support internal communication initiatives. Alternatively, audio-visual presentations involving role playing, with recognisable personalities, could be utilised.

Lastly, it is imperative for management to identify an appropriate set of metrics against which to determine the effectiveness of its communication strategy by linking it to financial performance. The absence of a return on investment indicator creates the risk where employees may continuously affirm that they appreciate the strategy conversations and acknowledge that they are fully versed in its operational protocols and merits.

However, if this cannot be translated into financial performance, how then does the management of the organisation determine if the new strategy, or the associated integrated communication initiative, has been successful? One way of addressing this is by incorporating the new strategy into the scorecard of employees across the strata of the organisation. The analysis of the survey questionnaire indicated that 38.9% of respondent fully incorporated the new strategy into their scorecard. These respondents formed 71.4% of those that indicated that they “almost always” changed the way they approached their job as a result of the new strategy, thereby giving merit to the use of scorecards.

7.4. Recommendations for future research

The study of generational theory suggests that the psychological and emotional constructs of individuals falling under the banner of “baby boomers”, “generation X” and
“generation Y” are different. This subsequently impacts on the communication capacity of individuals across these generations. Many organisations employ individuals across all these generational classes. An opportunity exists to study the effect of integrated communication initiatives and its causal effect on generational theory.

In addition to this, what role could social media, which seems to cut across generational divides, play in the internal communication practices of an organisation. Another avenue for additional research involves analysing organisations that have made several changes to their strategy over a five to seven year period and determine the role that the internal communication initiatives played in effectively communicating the strategy.

The effects of globalisation and the spread of multinationals, results in communication initiatives having to be generic enough to reach across distances, and yet facilitate the development of a common culture across the organisation. As emerging markets on the African continent continue to spread, established organisations will seek to enter these new markets to leverage the opportunities available. Cross-cultural communication at this juncture is critical to the success of any venture. Research opportunities exist that can investigate the effects of generic versus tailored internal communication processes in the context of developing organisational culture.

Diversified organisations that consist of several subsidiaries, or divisions that operate as stand-alone companies, are often challenged by the ability to share knowledge and ideas across a common platform. This is especially true where management in these organisations attempt to develop an organisational culture that permeates across the perceived boundaries that exist across business units within the diversified organisation.

A research opportunity exists that can look at the role of internal communication in establishing common culture in highly diversified organisations. At this level, an additional question raised is whether centralised internal communication has a role to play in the fostering of common culture, or is a decentralised model more effective.

Lastly, there isn’t enough research supporting the identification of a series of indicators or metrics that highlight a direct correlation or causal impact between internal communication practices of an organisation and its financial performance. A wide range of research opportunities exist in this subject across industries, organisations
and especially in highly diversified organisations where the operational strategy may differ between subsidiaries and divisions. As the role of internal communication continues to expand, more insight is needed on its impact on organisational and financial performance. This is especially true for multinationals where internal communication is the domain of a centralised function.

7.5. Concluding remarks

Over a period of time, one learns that communication is not just about the coding and decoding of messages. Neither is communication merely the domain of the spoken or written word. Society and business has become increasingly aware that our ability to effectively communicate is not just the result of our ability to speak or write. To a large extent, our ability to communicate is impacted by our cultural diversity, the effect of our first language in comparison to business language. Education, race, gender, age, distance, literacy levels, and myriad of other factors have the ability to either inhibit or promote our ability to effectively communicate.

Businesses are regarded as legal entities, and as such have no physical form. However, businesses also communicate both to its external and internal stakeholders. While human beings have the ability to identify behavioural and emotional traits, and verbal and non-verbal attributes, as additional contributors to communication, this doesn't hold true for organisations. In a human context it is evident that communication among individuals has the ability to engage one in a set of activities or behaviour. Whether this communication is forceful or subliminal is irrelevant, it is still able to impact on behavioural outputs.

The challenge for many organisations, as they seek to pursue new avenues of growth or consolidation, is to be ability to facilitate behavioural changes through internal communication practices. This is especially difficult given the complexity of human relations that exist within the organisation. Further challenges present themselves in the form of the overload of information available to employees who find it difficult to separate between communications purely for consumption or communications that require a change in behavioural output. However, if carefully constructed and executed, integrated internal communication initiatives do have the ability to influence employee behaviour so as to align employees to the organisation’s strategy.
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services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/august-2010/the-strategic-communication-plan


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### Appendix 1

**Semi-structured interview questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What are your objectives in communicating the business strategy?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>How do you emphasise the business unit strategy to staff without losing the emphasis or confusing it with the group strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>In a diverse organisation, how do you ensure that the communication of the strategy reaches all staff members, even those at grassroots level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Is there a difference in the manner in which you communicate the business strategy to your direct reports and to staff? If so, how do you ensure / measure the understanding of the business unit strategy that is communicated to staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>How do you ensure consistency in the message that is communicated in satellite offices or remote areas versus regional and head offices? Do you believe that the impact of the message is lost in any when communicating in satellite offices or remote areas? If yes/no, please elaborate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Do you believe that social media has a role to play in communicating the business unit strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>When deciding on the mechanism of communication, either via electronic media, face-to-face engagement, group sessions, etc, how do you decide what is the best option?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>How often do you communicate the strategy? Why did you choose this frequency?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>How do you measure whether the communication strategy has been effective?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10.</strong></td>
<td>What process is followed and resources used when designing the communication strategy?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11.</strong></td>
<td>What role do your direct reports play in either communicating strategy or providing feedback?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.</strong></td>
<td>In the event that you have to make changes to the strategy or discover that your objectives are not being achieved, what mechanisms do you have in place to address this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13.</strong></td>
<td>Assuming that the communication of the strategy is done through scheduled events, is there a mechanism in place to communicate the strategy to newcomers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.</strong></td>
<td>Is more emphasis placed on permanent or fixed term contractors? Please elaborate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15.</strong></td>
<td>How do you ensure that the message remains relevant to stakeholders given the high volume of messages that has to be digested on a daily basis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16.</strong></td>
<td>What mechanisms are in place for staff to provide feedback regarding the business unit strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>17.</strong></td>
<td>On average, what is the approximate cost of facilitating a communication strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18.</strong></td>
<td>Do you believe that you would still be able to achieve your business objectives if you did not embark on an initiative to communicate the business unit strategy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2

**Survey questionnaire to sample group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.  | Which province are you based in?  
    | a) Mpumalanga  
    | b) Limpopo  
    | c) North West  
    | d) Gauteng  
    | e) Free State  
    | f) Kwa-Zulu Natal  
    | g) Eastern Cape  
    | h) Western Cape  
    | i) Northern Cape |
| 2.  | Which of the following office buildings do you work in?  
    | a) National head office  
    | b) Regional office  
    | c) Branch in a major shopping centre  
    | d) Branch in an urban area  
    | e) Branch in a rural area  
    | f) Other – please specify |
| 3.  | What is your gender (for statistical purposes)  
    | a) Male  
    | b) Female |
| 4.  | What is your race group (for statistical purposes)  
    | Black  
    | Coloured  
    | Indian  
    | White  
    | Asian  
    | Foreign National |
| 5.  | What is your first language?  
    | a) Afrikaans  
    | b) English  
    | c) IsiNdebele  
    | d) IsiXhosa  
    | e) IsiZulu |
6. Do you prefer Nedbank corporate communication in your 1st language or in English only?
   a) First language
   b) English
   c) Irrelevant

7. What is your highest level of qualification?
   a) Matric
   b) Undergraduate Degree
   c) Postgraduate Degree
   d) Diploma
   e) Certificate
   f) Other – please specify

8. For how many years have you worked at Nedbank?
   a) Less than 1
   b) Less than 5
   c) Less than 10
   d) Greater than 10

9. What is your job function?
   a) Client Facing
   b) Support
   c) Back office
   d) Management
   e) Other – please specify

10. Which method of communication do you prefer most?
    a) Email
    b) Intranet
    c) Face-to-face with your line manager
    d) Handouts
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<tr>
<td>e) Roadshows with executives</td>
<td>f) Other – please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Do you know what your business unit strategy is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Strongly Agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Neither</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Is there a significant difference between the business unit strategy and the Group strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Very Much</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Somewhat</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Undecided</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Not Really</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) Not at All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>In your opinion, does the business unit strategy align to the Nedbank culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Strongly Agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Neither</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>In your opinion, does the business unit strategy incorporate the Nedbank values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Very Much</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Somewhat</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Undecided</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Not Really</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Not at all</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>How often is the business strategy communicated to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Monthly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Bi-annually</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Annually</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) Never</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>How often does your line manager have a discussion regarding the business strategy:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Monthly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Bi-annually</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Is the execution of the business strategy part of your scorecard?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Very Much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>In your opinion, does your business unit strategy change too often?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>In your opinion, does the current business strategy require you to change the way you do your job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Almost Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>In your opinion, will the current business strategy impact the performance of the business?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Very Much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>