

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

**THE EFFECTS OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION ON INSTITUTIONAL
SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF A SELECTED UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY**

LINAH TANYARADZWA MAHLAHLA

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**THE EFFECTS OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION ON INSTITUTIONAL
SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF A SELECTED UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences

Specialising in

Human Resources Management

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APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION

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DECLARATION

I Linah Tanyaradzwa Mahlahla hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences specialising in Human Resources Management in the Faculty of Management Sciences at Durban University of Technology is my own original work and has not previously been submitted at any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, all sources have been acknowledged, accurately cited, and referred to in the bibliography list.

Signed: _____

Date: 12/08/2024

Linah Tanyaradzwa Mahlahla

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my parents, Mr. Paul Mahlahla and Mrs. Evangeline Mahlahla as well as the entire Mahlahla and Kuwaza families.

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ABSTRACT

This study, is grounded in Quirke's internal communication framework and using Durban University of Technology (DUT) as a case study, investigates the role of effective internal communication in enhancing employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management to drive institutional success within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Employing a quantitative research design, the study utilised a pre-coded, structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions, organized into specific main themes aligned with the research objectives. The target population comprised DUT employees, and a simple random sampling method was used to select 310 participants, comprising both administrative and academic staff. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including factor analysis and structural equation modelling (SEM). Findings indicate that communication practices are generally perceived as positive, but highlight concerns regarding decision-making participation and feedback mechanisms. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) identified four key components: internal communication and engagement, continuous feedback and goal attainment, communication clarity and attainment, and work environment satisfaction and engagement. The SEM analysis provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between communication variables and their impact on employee engagement and goal attainment. These insights suggest that targeted communication strategies focusing on clarity, inclusivity, and support can significantly enhance workforce engagement and alignment in HEIs.

The study emphasises that improving clarity in communication channels and fostering a supportive communication environment can positively influence employee engagement and goal attainment in HEIs. Additionally, promoting inclusive communication practices can further amplify these effects by facilitating a more transparent and participative communication culture in institutions of higher learning. This research contributes to organisational communication theory advancement by empirically validating the relationships outlined in Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework in the context of HEIs. By elucidating the mechanisms through which communication channels, supportive communication environment, clarity in communication, and inclusive communication influence employee engagement, employee relations, diversity

management and ultimately goal attainment, the study provides fresh dimensions on internal communication dynamics, and their implications for higher institutions' success.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

DUT	DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
SPSS	STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES
HEIs	HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
PCA	PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS
EE	EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
ER	EMPLOYEE RELATIONS
DM	DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
KMO	KAISER-MEYER-OLKIN

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The importance of internal communication has grown significantly as organisations and institutions invest increasingly in addressing their employees' needs to achieve their objectives. It is critical for employees to perform their duties effectively so that an organisation can achieve its goals. This chapter introduces the research study, providing a detailed background, including the study's aim, objectives, and research questions. It outlines the problem statement and offers insights into key themes central to the research. These include a brief overview of the relevant literature, the methodology employed, and the analytical strategies adopted.

1.2 Background to the Study

In the past, internal communication has been predominantly associated with disciplines such as public relations, marketing, and journalism. However, as popular as it is in these fields of study, scholars such as Karange *et al.* (2015: 129) have observed that it is increasingly becoming a key function of Human Resources Management. Since this study observes success within the context of an academic institution, I will use the term 'institutional success' rather than 'organisational success'. Nevertheless, to remain consistent with existing literature that emphasises 'organisational success', these terms will be used interchangeably.

Welch (2011: 328) emphasises the critical importance of internal communication for management and leaders globally, since it is directly correlated with an organisation's effectiveness and success. Husain (2013: 44) further asserts that internal communication is a key factor in organisational success. Govender's (2015) research examines internal communication issues at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), particularly during a transition period. Her work identifies gaps that this research aims to address. These gaps are specifically regarding the role of communication in strengthening employee relations, fostering employee engagement,

and managing diversity—factors that can significantly contribute to institutional success. Despite its importance, there remains a lack of theoretical and empirical research on how internal communication in the higher education sector can enhance employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management to promote institutional success.

In their study on employee retention and performance at South African universities, Selesho and Naile (2014: 295) identify internal communication as a key factor influencing the performance and success of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This study builds on the understanding that employee relations, employee management, and diversity management are crucial in the workplace. As such, the role of internal communication in institutional success is investigated. Specifically, the study focused on how effective internal communication can enhance employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management, which are essential for achieving organisational success in higher education institutions.

Ezeldin and Nisar (2017: 2) highlight the importance of communication in HEI success but note that the conceptualisation of communication by practitioners, scholars, and researchers has received limited attention in the context of institutional success, globally. Delport, Hay-Swemmer, and Wilkinson (2014: 21) similarly observe that many South African HEIs still have significant progress to make in implementing effective internal communication systems. This aligns with Anyangwe's (2012) view that universities often fail to consistently monitor internal communications. Groenewald (2004: 6) identifies key challenges facing internal communication practitioners today, including employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management—themes that this study investigates.

According to Hume (2011), various scholars have proposed a range of frameworks, theories, and models addressing internal communication and its constituent elements. Notable among these are Quirke's progression of internal communication, Communication, Social Exchange Theory, Stakeholder Theories, and Social Network Analysis. Although multiple theoretical perspectives were reviewed, this study predominantly draws upon Quirke's (2002:169) progression of internal communication framework, owing to its explicit delineation of the different stages of advancement within internal communication. The objective of this study was to effectively integrate

Quirke's (2002) framework to enhance the understanding of how internal communication can be strategically employed to promote institutional success. Quirke (2002) identified premises that speak to employees' involvement and engagement, managing employee relations, and incorporating diverse views through internal communication.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This study investigated the role of internal communication in enhancing employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management to achieve organisational success, with a particular focus on HEIs. Delport, Hay-Swemmer, and Wilkinson (2014: 21) highlight that HEIs in South Africa, characterised by their academic nature, are often managed by academics who are often not familiar with communication dynamics at the managerial level. They argue that internal communication functions within these institutions are frequently underdeveloped. Institutional/organisational success is attributed to various factors, including effective workplace communication, given its influence on employee behaviour.

Strydom and Fourie (2018: 1) identify diversity management as a principal challenge for HEIs in South Africa. They argue that, for institutions to thrive and remain sustainable, it is imperative to eliminate communication-related obstacles. Moreover, Welch and Ruck (2012: 296) assert that poor communication is a significant barrier to employee engagement and a major cause of disengagement. In line with this, Husain (2013: 44) posits that well-defined internal communication is essential for enhancing employee engagement. By communicating clearly from management, employees are able to gain a better understanding of how their responsibilities align with the institution's vision, which facilitates effective performance. Therefore, this study aimed to examine how effective internal communication strategies can be implemented to achieve excellent employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management.

1.4 Aim of the Study

The study investigated how internal communication can be used to improve employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management to achieve institutional success in the context of HEIs, with the DUT in South Africa as a case study.

1.5 Research Objectives

- To determine the role played by internal communication in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management at a selected University of Technology.
- To explore the relationship between internal communication and institutional success at a University of Technology.
- To propose a Human Resources internal communication framework that can be used to achieve organisational success in a University of Technology

1.6 Research Questions

- What role does internal communication play in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises at a selected university of Technology?
- How can internal communication affect institutional success at a University of Technology?
- What Human Resources internal communication framework can be employed at a University of Technology for the purpose of institutional success?

1.7 Historical Overview

South African HEIs operate within a complex socio-political context characterised by historical inequalities, transformation imperatives, and resource constraints (Bhengu, 2019). Efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion necessitate effective communication strategies that foster dialogue, understanding, and collaboration

among stakeholders (Mestry and Singh, 2021). The adoption of inclusive communication practices can contribute to building a sense of belonging and advancing diversity within HEIs. However, challenges such as, language barriers, cultural differences, and technological limitations impact effective communication and employee engagement in South African higher education (Esterhuyzen and Fourie, 2019).

Since the dawn of civilisation, Nabi, Noysol, and Adnan (2017: 301) concede that the involvement in communication has always been a central driver toward building a courteous association across all individuals. This assertion has been supported by various scholars across different academic fields. Welch (2012: 246) for instance, emphasised that internal communication is crucial for organisational effectiveness and that well-established systems can enhance positive relationships between management and employees. Welch's contribution is particularly relevant to this research, as her argument that effective communication improves employee relations aligns with the study's focus.

Despite the existing studies on internal communication, there appears to be a paucity of empirical literature specifically addressing internal communication within HEIs. This gap is noteworthy given the dynamic nature of the academic environment, which involves constant changes to curricula, strategic planning, and study materials. It is essential for employees to stay informed about these changes to better understand institutional priorities. Consequently, institutions often have communication departments designed to ensure mechanisms for effective internal communication (Govender, 2015). In this context, this research aims to contribute not only to the existing body of knowledge but also to propose a framework for workplace communication in higher education institutions. The research will further contribute by proposing a framework to enhance the understanding and analysis of internal communication within a University of Technology.

1.8 Unpacking the Concept of Internal Communication

Balakrishnan and Masthan (2013: 2) observe that internal communication involves an exchange of information both formal and informal between employees and with management. Similarly, Van Staden, Marx and Erasmus-Kritzinger (2002: 15) concur that internal communication refers to a flow of information between management and employees at various organisational levels to achieve organisational objectives. Thus, the importance of effective internal communication in the workplace cannot be overstated. Internal communication not only facilitates the transfer of information but also fosters a sense of community within an organisation by nurturing positive relationships between management and employees (Karanges et al. 2015: 130). Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014: 183) also emphasised that internal communication is crucial for enhancing transparency between management and employees.

Historically, internal communication has been studied within disciplines such as public relations, marketing, and journalism. Grimsley (2021) defined internal communication from a Human Resources perspective as ‘the process of aligning employees with company strategy by systematically informing, influencing, motivating, and engaging individuals at all levels through relevant one-way and two-way channels—both digital and physical.’ Srivastava (2016) viewed internal communication as the cornerstone of an engaged workforce, which ultimately determines an organisation's success or failure. Verčič and Vokić (2017: 886) also noted that ensuring good employee relations has become a key human resources and management initiative, with effective daily communication serving as the most straightforward method. Additionally, Rana (2018) highlighted the importance of effective communication in the workplace, arguing that in today's diverse environment—comprising various cultures, age groups, genders, and religions—understanding these differences is crucial. This understanding can only be achieved through effective communication among all employees, from top to bottom. Therefore, for an organisation to succeed, an effective communication system is essential. Given that good employee relations, engagement, and diversity management are fundamental to organisational success, this study explored how communication can be leveraged to achieve these goals.

1.9 Overview of the Higher Education Landscape in South Africa

It has been more than two decades since South Africa transitioned into democracy. The initial elation was soon followed by the arduous task of restructuring and rebuilding the country's fundamental social institutions. This was to address the significant challenges of inequality, poverty, and the need for economic growth. Higher education, then as now, remains central to the nation's modernisation, transformation, and regeneration efforts. Delport (2020: 107) argues that HEIs are often perceived as lacking business focus due to their scholarly nature. Academic institutions are characterised by vertical hierarchies, requiring adherence to various policies and procedures to execute operations. The bureaucratic, academic, and complex nature of HEIs affects both internal and external practices.

Effective communication structures in HEIs encompass formal channels, such as institutional hierarchies, policies, and procedures, as well as informal networks and communication patterns among employees (Bambacas and Patrickson, 2019). These structures are crucial for facilitating information flow, collaboration, and decision-making processes within the organisation (Baldwin and Blyton, 2020). In South African HEIs, communication structures are shaped by historical legacies, transformation imperatives, and socio-political dynamics (Bhengu, 2019). The legacy of apartheid continues to influence organisational structures and power dynamics, highlighting the necessity for inclusive and equitable communication practices (Basson and Coetzer, 2020).

1.10 A Note on Methodology

Research design is an essential component of any study. According to Creswell (2014: 113), the research design encompasses the process of collecting, evaluating, and interpreting information for the purpose of answering research questions. This study employed a quantitative approach. The target population consisted of full-time academic and administrative staff at DUT. At the time of data collection, the institution's

internal database, accessed directly from the Human Resources department, listed 1,584 academic and administrative staff across its campuses.

Zikmund et al., (2013: 66) emphasise that research design involves identifying and selecting appropriate individuals from a sampling frame that represents the whole population. For this study, a sample population was selected from the total population with the expectation that this sample would be representative of the entire group. The research utilised a simple random sampling technique, a form of probability sampling. According to Denscombe (2012: 341), effective sampling requires that every individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample. The simple random sampling method ensures that every element in the target population, as well as any possible sample of a specified size, has an equal chance of being chosen (Denscombe, 2012). To address confidentiality concerns, personal identifiers were removed from the data collection instrument, as respondents were drawn from a list of full-time DUT staff members.

Based on Sekaran and Bougie's (2014: 270) assertion that "the sample size is determined by the level of precision and confidence desired in estimating the population parameters, as well as the variability in the population itself and the cost-benefit," a population of approximately $N=1584$ warranted a sample size of $n=310$. Consequently, a sample size of 310 was calculated for the DUT community. This sample size was determined according to the table provided by Sekaran and Bougie (2014) for sample selection. Since the DUT encompasses a broad range of population categories, the study specifically targeted full-time staff members, including both academic and non-academic personnel of all ages. Data for this study was collected using questionnaires. Louw (2014: 247) defines a questionnaire as a list of questions compiled by a researcher for the purpose of primary data collection for a particular study.

A closed-ended, structured questionnaire was administered online via email to DUT staff members. The online questionnaires were accompanied by an information letter and a consent form. Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 212) emphasises that the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents is ensured when using questionnaires. They further note that questionnaires allow respondents to take their time to provide thoughtful responses at their convenience. Additionally, questionnaires are ideal for reaching a

large target population. A five-point Likert scale was employed to gauge the degree of agreement or disagreement, with an option for neutrality, for each statement related to the main theme.

When conducting research with self-administered questionnaires, it is essential to perform a pilot study to ensure questionnaire comprehensibility. In this study, a pilot phase was conducted, involving consultations with 20 additional members beyond the primary respondents. The responses of these 20 respondents were collected to form a data set. This data was then analysed using Cronbach's coefficient alpha test to evaluate questionnaire reliability. The pilot respondents were randomly selected from DUT's full-time academic and non-academic staff and were not included in the main study.

To establish validity, the measuring instrument was carefully aligned with the research aims and objectives. Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the pilot data to further assess the validity of the measures. Cronbach's coefficient alpha test was used to determine the measuring instrument's internal consistency. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011: 53), Cronbach's coefficient alpha assesses the extent of correlations among items, thereby measuring the internal consistency of the instrument.

As a part of this study, permission was initially obtained to conduct research within the institution, and data collection began only after receiving ethics approval. Each distributed questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter that introduced the research to the respondents. The cover letter detailed several ethical considerations, including the research title, the study's objectives, confidentiality, anonymity, and other relevant ethical protocols. Respondents were assured that participation was voluntary and informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The research was conducted with strict adherence to the principles of confidentiality and anonymity. Respondents' names were not solicited, ensuring confidentiality.

Data analysis, as defined by Remenyi and Bannister (2012: 118), involves the processing, testing, and evaluation of data to derive meaning in relation to hypotheses, theories, or the development of new theories, leading to conclusions and recommendations. For this study, a professional statistician was engaged to perform

the requisite statistical analyses. The data were analysed using the latest version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 29 for Windows.

1.11 Organisation of the Chapters

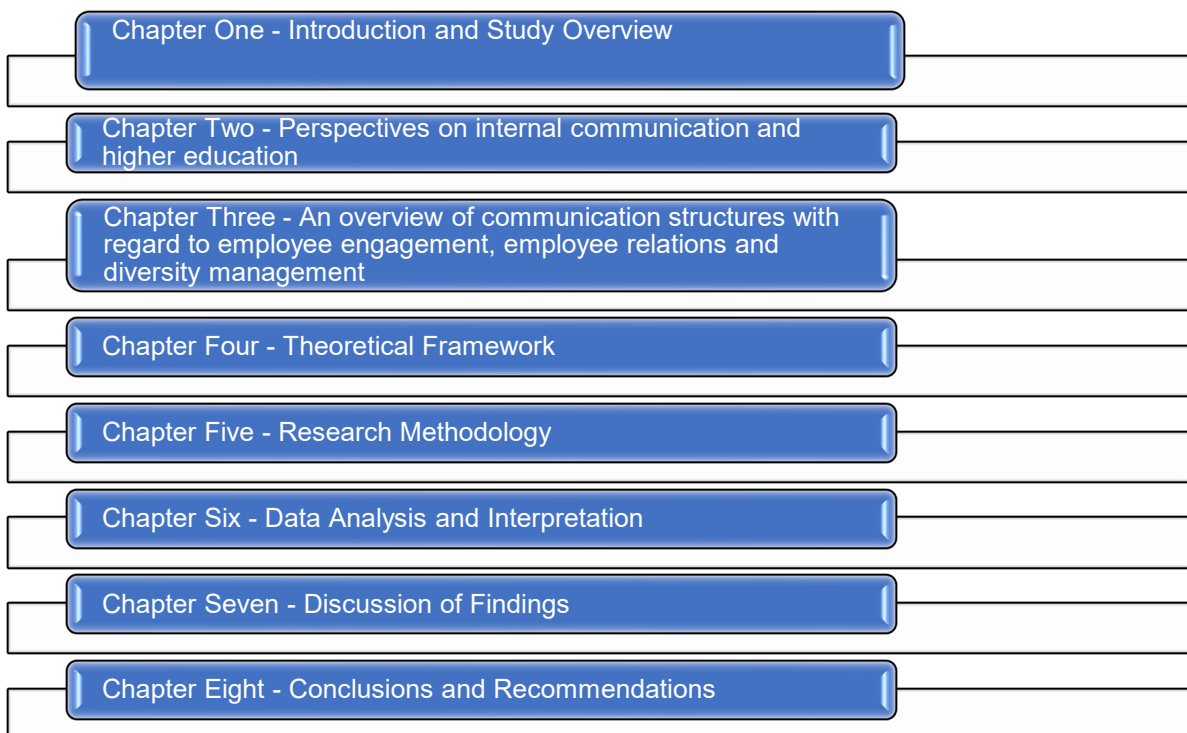


Figure 1.1: Research Overview

This chapter introduced and outlined an overview of the research, highlighting key aspects that would be elaborated upon in the subsequent chapters. Chapters two and three reviewed the pertinent academic literature on internal communication issues, focusing on employee engagement, employee relations, and workplace diversity management. Chapter four presented an overview of the theoretical frameworks considered for the study. It placed particular emphasis on Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework, which served as the central framework for the research.

Chapter five detailed the research methodologies employed, including a comprehensive description of the various approaches used for data collection and analysis. This chapter provided insight into the methodological framework guiding the research process. Chapter six presented the data analysis and findings. The analysis

utilised various statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, inferential statistics such as factor analysis and structural equation modelling. SPSS and AMOS version 29 were employed for these analysis. To enhance clarity and visualisation, the data was supplemented with graphs, charts, and tables.

Following the data analysis and interpretation, Chapter seven discussed the findings in detail. Chapter eight concluded the thesis, summarising the key findings from the preceding chapters and presenting the theoretical conclusions and arguments derived from these findings. Additionally, this final chapter provided recommendations based on insights gained throughout the study.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the anticipated outcomes of the thesis. It emphasises the aims, objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, and the statement of the problem. These elements set the stage for the subsequent chapter, which explored the literature review critically.

CHAPTER TWO

PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

Scholars have introduced a range of definitions for internal communication. Although the definitions differ, each has unique nuances and shares common themes. For example, Men and Bowen (2017) define internal communication as a collaborative process involving organisations and their internal stakeholders. The goal is to foster a shared understanding of organisational goals and objectives, cultivate a win-win situation that builds enduring relationships, and engender organisational success.

According to Kalla (2005), because internal communication encompasses all formal and informal communication, it should be viewed from an integrated and multidisciplinary perspective. Kalla opines that there are four distinct domains where internal communication can be categorised: business communication (focused on employee communication skills), management communication (concerned with managerial communication skills), organisational communication (centred on philosophical and theoretical issues), and corporate communication (emphasising the formal corporate communication function).

Whether verbal or non-verbal, communication is an integral part of human lives. It can be argued that human existence revolves around communication. This logic has also been transferred to the workplace in that effective communication strategies must be employed for an organisation to achieve significant success. Within this context, this study was designed to investigate the roles of effective internal communication in ensuring organisational success, with a specific focus on a University of Technology.

Since the dawn of civilisation, the evolution of communication has always been a central driver in building a courteous association between all individuals (Nabi, Noysol and Adnan, 2017: 301). Several other scholars from different academic sojourns have validated their assertions. One such scholar is Welch (2012: 246), who states that internal communication is central to organisational effectiveness. If effective systems are in place, it results in positive internal relationships between management and

employees. Welch's contribution is important for this research; her notion that employees can relate better through effective communication is pertinent to the current course of study.

Balakrishnan and Masthan (2013: 2) observe that internal communication involves an exchange of information, both formal and informal, between employees and management. Similarly, Van Staden, Marx, and Erasmus-Kritzinger (2002: 15) agree that internal communication is a flow of information between management and employees at different levels to meet the organisation's objectives. Therefore, the issues related to effective internal communication cannot be overemphasised in the workplace. It is even more imperative given that not only does internal communication aid the inflow of information, but it also creates a sense of community within an organisation by establishing good relationships between management and employees (Karanges *et al.*, 2015: 130). This is also acknowledged by Mishra Boynton and Mishra (2014: 183), who state that internal communication is vital to increase transparency in the workplace between management and employees.

For Srivastava (2016), internal communication is the cornerstone of an engaged workforce, which subsequently determines the success or failure of such an organisation. Verčič and Vokić (2017: 886) also assert that ensuring good employee relations has become critical for human resources, and management initiatives such as effective day-to-day communication to be the easiest method. Put differently, if organisations ensure that messages are well communicated, they promote employee engagement. In another perspective, Rana (2018) explored the importance of effective communication in the workplace. She believes that in today's world, employees are diverse people with different cultures, age groups, gender groups, religions, and so on. As such, she argues that it is better to understand the cultures and differences of people, which can only happen through effective communication between all employees, from top to bottom. Thus, an effective communication system is essential for an organisation to be successful in its affairs. Since it has been established that good employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management are fundamentals of a successful organisation, this study aimed to investigate how communication can be used to achieve these premises and, in turn, lead to a successful organisation.

While there have been studies on internal communication, there seems to be a lack of literature, especially on internal communication in institutions of higher learning. This is even more surprising given that the academic environment is dynamic; constant changes are made to the curriculum, strategic plan, study materials, etc. As such, employees must be aware of the continuous changes to better understand the institution's priorities. Therefore, institutions often have a communication department that aims to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to ensure effective internal communication (Govender, 2015).

Within this context, this study aimed to contribute a new body of knowledge to the existing literature and to propose a framework for workplace communication in institutions of higher learning. In this research, therefore, a further contribution to knowledge is the proposal of a useful framework for understanding and analysing internal communication at the University of Technology.

Before delving into the review, it is essential to restate the objectives that predicate the study. The central aim was to investigate how internal communication can enhance employee relations, engagement, and diversity management for institutional success at the DUT.

The objectives of the study were to determine the role of internal communication in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management, to explore the relationship between internal communication and institutional success, and to propose a human resources internal communication framework that can be used to achieve organisational success at a University of Technology.

2.2 The Importance of Internal Communication to Organisations

The academic thesis on internal organisational communication originates from Dale Carnegie's class on how to treat communication in the workplace (Clemmons, 2022). Hay (1974) posits that by 1927, organisations had started paying attention to the critical role internal communication plays in organisational success. A Hawthorne

study conducted at Harvard University presented telling evidence that showed that employees performed significantly better and were more receptive and understanding of organisational goals and objectives when they received prompt, clear, concise, and engaging internal communication that not only informed, but involved them in the planning and execution of organisational strategies.

Perhaps the turning point in the study of internal communication came in the 1940s with the introduction of the feedback loop concept and two-way communication in academic discourses. Organisations and businesses could now decipher the pulse of their stakeholders, gauge their responses to their communication and communication channels, and use the data to inform new communication strategies for internal and external stakeholders (Bell and Roebuck, 2015).

There are two operationalised levels of internal communication within organisations. Karanges *et al.* (2014) list the levels as organisation-employee, supervisor-employee, or internal organisational and internal supervisor communication. Karanges *et al.* (2014) opine that internal communication occurs between an organisation's executive team and employees. For HEIs such as the DUT, the institutional executive team would include the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments, etc. Internal supervisor communication occurs between supervisors and their employees. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), both levels of communication are essential within organisations, as they provide avenues for sharing organisational goals and visions needed for improving employee performance and organisational success.

Organisations seek to maintain goodwill with their various publics and stakeholders to improve brand equity and attract patronage and support. One way an organisation can achieve these is through effective communication. This is very important because no matter how well intentioned an organisation is, it will not achieve its goals and objectives if the public is unaware of its intentions due to lack of or ineffective communication. Before the advent of 'brand ambassadors', employees of organisations served as ambassadors. Even today, employees are the organisation's most essential 'brand ambassadors'; often the first external stakeholder contacts (Bruning, Castle and Schrepfer, 2004; Yang and Grunig, 2005).

According to Ahmed and Rafiq (2003), the external publics of organisations are often better served when the internal publics of the organisations have all the necessary information through effective internal communication to answer questions, provide clarifications, and 'sell' the organisation's goals and objectives, as well as their vision and mission. When employees act uninformed about the strategies and goals of an organisation, it sends the wrong message to external stakeholders, some of whom have more than financial stakes. Many stakeholders want to protect their names and brands, so they often dissociate themselves from organisations without good internal communication. Researchers (Caillouet and Allen, 1996; Smidts, Pruyn and Van Riel, 2011) believe highly committed and engaged employees can publicly share information about the organisation that ultimately impacts external public relations efforts that contribute to the positive reputation and brand.

However, the first step in effective external communication is an excellent internal communication process. Regardless of the organisation, internal communication is essential for organisational growth and the achievement of set goals and objectives. Internal communication is a critical process in HEI settings because internal and external relationships in HEIs are determined by how communication occurs. Internal communication is between academic management, staff, and students, whereas external communication involves potential students and academic stakeholders. Consequently, this chapter presents internal and external communication in HEIs. The results show that both forms of communication are very important to ensure the visibility of an HEI on the market.

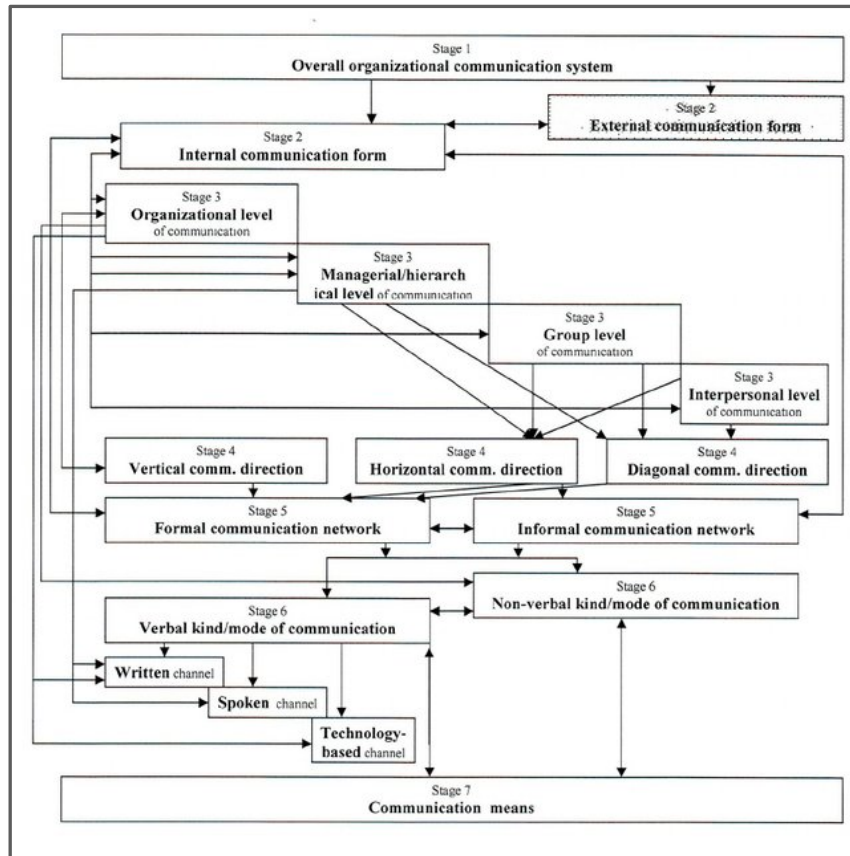


Figure 2.1: Stages of the Organisational communication system (internal communication sub-system specified)

Figure 2.1. shows the seven stages of the organisational communication system proposed by Greenbaum (1974). He states that each stage carries a distinct function within an organisation. However, they all play crucial roles in ensuring that communication is effective and reaches the desired goal of fostering employee productivity and loyalty and ensuring that all members of internal and external stakeholders of the organisation understand the goals and objectives set.

According to Greenbaum (1974), the structure shows information flow inside organisations, covering all segments and hierarchical levels. Greenbaum posits that when organisations communicate persuasively, the company relies on strategic messages sent through formal written or technology-based channels to produce a long-lasting impact. Managers are most appreciated when communicating (formally and informally) through the most accessible written and spoken channels. All the constituents of this matrix are so tightly interconnected that it does not allow saying that, e.g., the organisational level does not imply informal or non-verbal communication.

Second, since effectiveness is an indispensable feature of both communication and the organisational communication system, the suggested logic could facilitate the overcoming of the existing significant communication barriers. It is a potential framework for unbundling and understanding the structure of separate sub-systems of communication barriers and how they impact the other communication levels (Greenbaum, 1974).

Third, the presented matrix shows that the individual's potential as an essential communicator within organisations cannot be overemphasised. The matrix offers the hierarchical structure and characteristics of internal communication within organisations. Beyond message delivery, internal communication is a strategic organisational decision that requires intentional and deliberate planning, coordination, and alignment of internal communication initiatives with broader business strategies, including their interrelation with external communication networks (Greenbaum, 1974). Li, Tao, and Lee (2023) found that when organisations practised intentional and strategic internal communication at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees were more motivated to take vaccines and practice healthy steps to prevent the spread of the virus, at home and at work. It showed that the organisation cared for them beyond business growth to individual well-being.

Fourth, the intentional application of a strategic internal communication process provides communication managers with the requisite information on the impact of culture, organisational dynamics, management philosophy, etc., on the effectiveness of the chosen internal communication strategy. Greenbaum (1974) posits that the internal communication process also potentially provides organisations with the knowledge that could aid in deciding the proper timing and wording of effective internal communication and that elicits the needed feedback.

Greenbaum (1974) further states thus:

This structure should serve as a unifying matrix for viewing a two-way or multi-directional communication process. Notably, the above scheme of organisational communication stages could be transformed and modified according to the specific goals of organisational research. For instance, when coping with organisational uncertainty, communicating down the given stages, agents could procure specific ties and establish peculiar reciprocities.

Organisations seeking to build commitment within employees, develop and achieve superior business outcomes, influence brand and corporate reputation, share knowledge, build trust and create engaged and aware employees must value and implement effective internal communication strategies. Studies (Kalla, 2005; Yates, 2006; Dortok, 2000; Welch and Jackson, 2007; White, Vanc and Stafford, 2010) show that effective internal communication fosters an emotional feeling of connectedness in the organisation by employees, thereby leading to motivated staff that are loyal and willing to work harder and go the extra mile for the achievement of set goals and objectives.

A 2006 study involving 335 participants selected from 260 US and 75 Canadian companies presented intriguing evidence of the effectiveness of internal communication as a determinant and indicator of financial performance of an organisation. The study revealed that organisations with well-organised internal communication units showed a 19.4% increase in market premium and were 4.5 times more likely to have highly engaged employees (Yates, 2006). Conversely, Welch (2012) argues that organisations that do not pay attention to or set up effective internal communication processes often have poorly motivated employees and lack engaged relationships with their stakeholders.

According to Yates (2006), effective internal communication within organisations is expressed in educating employees about the organisational culture and values, helping connect employees with the business, aligning employee actions with customer needs, providing financial information and objectives, clarifying and promoting new programmes and policies, integrating new employees into the organisation, sharing information on the value of the total reward programme and demonstrating leadership during change.

Approaches such as sharing information and investing in communication can help gain value through higher shareholder returns, increased market premiums, enhanced employee engagement, and lower turnover. Effective internal communication is a secret weapon to strengthen financial and organisational progress. Companies that invest and are great with internal communication deliver better market share, more shareholder value, increased engagement, and lower employee turnover (Yates, 2006).

The role of internal communication in the promotion of employee job satisfaction cannot be overstated. The ripple effect of employee satisfaction on organisational success is unquantifiable. According to Ndlovu *et al.* (2021), stakeholders have a way of knowing if employees are not respected and if their opinions are not considered or regarded by the organisations they work for. In the case of HEIs, the student body, arguably the most critical stakeholders, often unwittingly bears the brunt of demotivated employees, as unsatisfied employees (lecturers and administrative staff) could potentially translate into broken relationships and poor service delivery. According to Pongton and Suntrayuth (2019), internal communication in HEIs fosters better collaboration between all academic and administrative staff of HEIs and between the staff and student community.

HEIs, such as the DUT research case study, face many problems that could become intractable conflicts without effective communication. Issues like service delivery challenges with funding for students and research staff, issues with host communities, internalisation, and so on, could be springboards for more significant conflicts that could run the institutions aground. According to Anyangwe (2012), when employees and stakeholders know that they can contact internal communications units directly to seek advice on anything they need to communicate, when people know that there are open channels to express their concerns or ideas, they are often more willing to express themselves, and thus contribute to organisational growth and development.

Anyangwe (2012) posits that beyond setting up communication channels, HEIs like the DUT should focus on people who will and can manage such channels. When people believe in and share an organisation's strategy, goals, and vision, they become the channels. It is always foolhardy for members of an organisation to hear about strategies or plans from third parties instead of directly from their organisations. If organisations such as universities do not have open and collaborative internal communication, all the shiny tools and surveys will not make a significant change.

The view is echoed by Ruck (2023), who opined that effective internal communication is essential because it fosters strategic alignment within and between the organisation and its external publics. Strategic alignment helps employees' harness and align resources, systems, and processes to achieve organisational strategy.

2.3 Internal Communication Functions

O'Neil *et al.* (2018) conducted a study that involved a Delphi panel of internal communication practitioners in North America. Based on the findings of the study, they developed a set of measurement definitions and standards for professionals in the field of public relations and communication in general. In a similar study conducted in Latin America by Yue and Thelen (2023) involving 20 internal communication professionals selected from nine Latin American countries, they found insights into the distinct and perceived functions of internal communication from a professional perspective.

The findings of O'Neil *et al.* (2018) and Yue and Thelen (2023) align with the position held by Lee *et al.* (2021) and Ni *et al.* (2018), who posit that while it is essential to recognise the critical role played by stakeholder approach in recognising distinctions among different levels of communication within organisations, it is crucial to segment employees according to their positions and responsibilities, and how it impacts on their experiences at the workplace. According to Yuea *et al.* (2024), it would help internal communication if employees were grouped as frontline workers (such as those in hospitality, retail, healthcare, and manufacturing) and office-based employees. These groupings are essential because they help communication practitioners select messages that suit diverse work environments, communication dynamics, and challenges.

Yuea *et al.* (2024) broadly categorising workers into single boxes unwittingly overlook the nuances of internal communication in distinct work settings. In HEIs, for example, it would be imprudent to classify all workers in the same category. Segmentation is not necessarily for class or power reasons. What distinct categorisation does is that it allows for tailor-made messages that address issues like work description, cultural dynamics, and generational and even gender differences.

Internal communication serves various purposes for organisations like HEIs. Their functions are determined by the organisation's vision and mission statements. The functions are also determined by the geographical and sociocultural milieus in which the organisations operate (Larsson, 1997). Erickson (1992) categorises these functions into five:

- **Work communication** – This type of communication is necessary for employees within the organisation to carry out their daily tasks. In the context of HEIs, it could mean the resumption date, curriculum expectations, examination dates, admission procedures, etc. According to Habaci *et al.* (2013), HEI employees must know precisely what their job functions are, their scope, and the required timelines. They maintain that an effective internal communication environment is essential for the success of HEIs in meeting their goals and vision and satisfying the needs and expectations of their various stakeholders, especially their internal public.
- **News communication** – Employees must be constantly updated on what is happening in the organisation and how developments impact their work and functions. Ljajić and Pirsl (2021) believe that every occurrence in HEIs, whether positive or negative, is always traceable to the intentionality of the institution in ensuring that internal communication, which encompasses the facilitation of dialogue, message production and delivery, announcement of updates and news, recasting of vision and mission statements, etc. is effective and tailored for specific conditions and situations.
- **Control communication** – This function aims to be a rudder for employees in ways that ensure that every action is tailored towards achieving organisational goals. . It is not uncommon for organisations to send the same messages consistently over a long period of time. The goal is not to be repetitive. The aim is to ensure that employees remain focused on the set organisational goals and objectives. Control communication is not ‘control’ in the sense of literal control. It is more of a guide.
- **Change communication** – This function encompasses unplanned events, such as changes in goals or strategies, that go beyond regular news communication. Perhaps one of the most widely used concepts to explain organisational change is the Kubler-Ross change curve (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

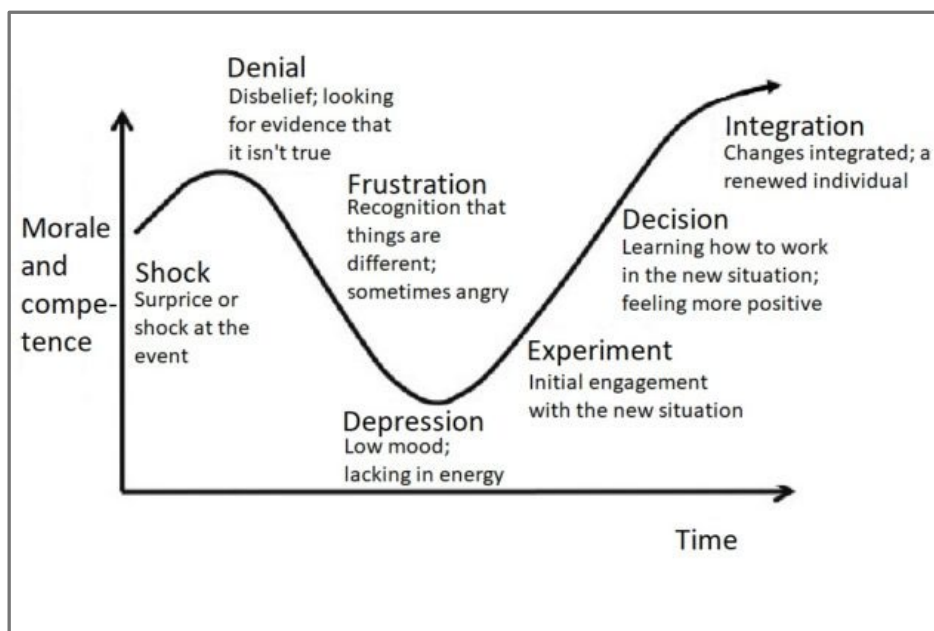


Figure 2.2: The Kubler-Ross Curve (1969)

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross initially developed the Kubler-Ross Curve in the 1960s to explain the grieving process. Over the years, the curve has been widely applied to multidisciplinary fields, including communication. The curve helps individuals understand the change process and how it impacts them. In the organisational setting, the curve helps managers understand how employees respond to change and how to communicate in ways that make change more acceptable and easier to adapt to.

In internal communication in HEIs, the curve helps the communication department understand how messages impact employees, especially emotionally, and how to plan for those emotional responses. Research shows that change is a constant in organisations. It is widely suggested that organisations make changes every three years, including restructuring or adopting new technologies and working processes. These changes can appear predictable, but they must be communicated to employees to ensure that they understand and accept them. Employees feel emotionally invested in the organisations they have worked in for years. Internal communication must be pragmatic and emotional (Fredberg and Pregmark, 2022).

Culture communication focuses on how the organisation manages leadership, equality, diversity, and similar issues. Lee and Yue (2020) argue that one of the most critical functions of internal communication is fostering respect for employees' different cultural norms, values, and communication styles within organisations. There are similarities between the five points listed and the four types of internal communication, as mentioned by Larsson (1997). Larsson listed work, news and situation, control and evaluation, and culture communications. In addition, Larsson listed three internal communication functions similar to those of Erikson (1992). According to Larsson, organisations communicate to inform and establish their goals, plans, policies, and ideas with employees so that they can fully participate in achieving these goals. The second function is coordination and direction within the organisation. It is always essential to ensure that employees are guided so that they do not unwittingly deviate. The third function is to provide management with information about the company and the reliability of the downward information flow from management.

2.4 Channels of Internal Communication

Internal communication is so crucial that organisations have begun to pay more attention to its pivotal role in organisational success. According to Mazzei (2010), internal communication is concerned with communication taking place within the boundaries of an organisation, where individuals use strategies to communicate with each other.

As important as internal communication, when it is undertaken without paying due attention to the communication channel, it might end up being a futile attempt. Communication channels available to HEIs may be mediated or non-mediated. Channels are mediated by allowing individuals to communicate through mediating elements or machines such as computers and other electronic media (Thompson, 2020; van Deventer and Snyman, 2004; Yao and Ling, 2020). Articles published on AGRA, AGROVOC and AIMS are forms of data exchange through mediated communication channels (Delserrone and Dinkelman, 2016; Dodgson *et al.*, 2021).

Conversely, non-mediated communication channels are direct and interpersonal communication that are not mediated by humans or machines. The sender and receiver are close to each other. Non-mediated communication includes face-to-face communication, dialogues in meetings or conferences, etc. (Zhao and Wang, 2015). The use of appropriate communication channels guarantees that the data reach the receiving audience (Mwinami, Dulle and Mtega, 2023).

According to Welch (2012), employees have consistently demonstrated their preferences for internal communication channels, signifying a need for organisations to focus on these channels while leveraging the ever-changing digital media landscape. This review discusses the common and effective internal communication channels available to the management team of HEIs. The review aligns with those of Holmin and Safarova (2015), who listed the common internal communication channels adopted by HEIs as face-to-face, video calls, telephone, text, email, and data output.

Face-to-face communication provides opportunities for instant feedback and deciphering of body language. Daft and Lengel (1983) believe that more complex issues requiring prompt feedback and action should typically be undertaken through

face-to-face communication. Researchers (Argenti and Forman, 2002; Daft and Lengel, 1986; Kaur and Sharma, 2015) posit that face-to-face communication has the significant advantage of presenting the message sender with an opportunity to read and react to cues from the receiver. This is significant because sometimes people may feel that asking for extra clarity on certain messages might be a burden on the sender. However, with face-to-face communication, the sender can read whether or not the receiver is on the same page with them regarding the sent message. The challenge of face-to-face communication is that participants must be in the exact geographical location. It can only be limited to a certain number of participants (though this is changing with technology), and blended messages are not as precise due to the lack of editing ability (Broom and Sha, 2013; Munter, 2009).

Another crucial channel of internal communication is written communication. The critical advantage of written communication is its permanence. Although written communication can be deleted, its two-way nature (from sender to receiver) means that even if one party deletes the message, there is a strong possibility that the other party would still have a copy of the message. Examples of written communication include letters, memos, websites, blogs, and even social media posts.

Munter (2009) posits that an added advantage of written communication is that it is editable. Face-to-face oral communication is often difficult to correct. Granted, people can seek and get clarity, but in a public relations context, much damage could potentially have been done to the organisation's brand image before clarity is sought and received. However, Berger (2014) and Munter (2009) posit that the challenge with written communication is that it is often difficult or impossible to decipher the emotional state of the sender and/or receiver of communication. In addition, the sender only has control over the message sent. There are no guarantees that they will be read or understood as intended.

Researchers advocate blended channels as the most appropriate for internal communication (Daft and Lengel, 1987). A blended approach combines different communication channels to achieve effective communication. It helps to contextualise messages to specific issues using a mix of channels. These channels bridge the gap between geography, technological expertise level, and, in some cases, even language.

However, several factors should be considered before deciding on the suitability of a channel for internal communication. The most important consideration is whether the channel achieved its set goals of conveying a message that is received in a timely, well-understood manner and generates feedback that shows an understanding of the message sent.

The importance of feedback in internal communication cannot be overemphasised. When internal communication is well-crafted and disseminated through a well-thought-out channel, it enhances the quality and intentionality of the message and provides insights into the intended recipient's mind through the feedback received. When feedback is received, it fosters dialogue that elicits a feeling of belonging in employees. In addition, feedback improves organisational performance and productivity by facilitating the alignment of communication objectives with organisational goals, monitoring progress, adjusting strategies, and recognising employee accomplishments.

According to Blidaru (2019), internal communication feedback is critical for organisational success. It benefits both managers and subordinates. Feedback is even more vital in HEIs, as lecturers and students require adequate feedback for various reasons. While the student requires feedback on academic performance or other related issues, employees often need feedback to appraise their jobs or to ascertain their understanding of organisational vision and mission. Blidaru (2019) further posits that feedback has different roles depending on the employee level. For those beginning their career, feedback is a guide to understanding their role and mission. For middle-level employees, it is a way to improve performance and identify development opportunities; for senior employees, it is a means to maintain productivity. Hillman, Schwandt, and Bartz (1990) posit that feedback is often utilised to encourage the right behaviour that would aid organisational growth. Therefore, the selection of an internal communication channel is critical on the basis of the ability to receive actionable feedback in time.

Terzić and Aščić (2017) list other factors to consider before selecting an appropriate channel for effective internal communication. Ultimately, an effective communication channel should be fast, maintain the integrity of the message without distortion, and

be easy to use, accessible, and reachable to both the sender and the receiver (Kok *et al.*, 2016; Zizka, 2014).

The first point raised by Terzić and Aščić (2017) is cost. One of the significant challenges with communication, whether internal or external, is that sometimes the most appropriate channel could be less cost-effective. One way to determine the cost of communication channels is to perform a comparative cost analysis to establish clear communication objectives and criteria. How far will the message go? What is the level of engagement? What expenses are associated with each channel's message creation, distribution, and maintenance? Answering these questions helps determine whether the cost is worth the channel.

Another factor to consider when selecting a channel is confidentiality. According to Terzić and Aščić (2017), employees will not feel confident in the communication channel and their organisation if they believe that their communication will be public knowledge. For example, when employees face relationship- or mental health issues, they expect to be able to communicate with the relevant support departments of the organisation without the details of their communication becoming public knowledge. HEIs must prioritise confidentiality in internal communication to build a healthy work environment. The onus is on the communications team to decide on the issue to be communicated, determine its sensitivity, and select an appropriate, safe, secure, and confidential channel.

Urgency is another key factor to consider when choosing an internal communication channel. According to Terzić and Aščić (2017), it is recommended that internal communication channels be selected based on the urgency of the message to be transmitted. Choosing a method that will produce the desired result timeously is essential. No matter how efficient or cost-effective a channel is, if the message sent is received late or if the feedback arrives later than needed or expected, the channel choice would be regarded as inappropriate.

The distance between individuals and/or groups involved in internal communication is also essential before creating a communication channel. If the message to be communicated is urgent and if the individual(s) involved are within proximity, face-to-face communication may be more appropriate than other forms of internal

communication. However, if the communication involves a large number of people spread over a large geographical area, for example, in institutions with multiple campuses, it would be better to select other channels like digital media, emails, or conference telephone calls, depending on the importance of the message.

Other factors to consider are resources (Consider the equipment and staff available, sender and recipient) and the Recipient (Consider who is sending/receiving the message). It is important to consider power parity and how it impacts internal communication. When sending messages to superiors or line managers, specific communication channels would be more appropriate than others. Although HEI line managers should maintain open-door policies and accessibility, the reality is that some managers on the corporate ladder are busier than others. The Vice-Chancellor, for example, is not as accessible as the Dean, and the Dean is not as accessible as the Head of Department (HoD). These subtle power issues should be considered when choosing appropriate internal communication channels.

2.5 Internal Communication in Higher Education Institutions

Most seminal studies on internal communication focus on private sector organisations and are often domiciled within the field of public relations. Although the principles of public relations, vis-à-vis internal communication, are the same, the organisational dynamics between private organisations and HEIs are different, thus requiring different approaches (Mbhele and de Beer, 2021). The main difference between private organisations and HEIs is that while private organisations are very mechanistic, with communication flowing from top to bottom, HEIs operate with duality in the decision and communication pipeline. Mbhele and de Beer (2021) advocate that the collegial structure of faculties in HEIs often leads to a professional bottom-up bureaucracy that uses the faculty senate as its main arena for making decisions and disseminating internal communication. According to Mintzberg (1979), the staff are more mechanical in their approach, resembling private organisations' operations. Like private organisations, decisions flow from upper-level administrators to front-line staff. Brown (2000) believes that this duality can alienate some organisational staff if leaders do not prioritise balance between both structures.

Clark (1983) argues that although HEIs are regarded as drivers of change and innovation in society, they have often been considered the slowest to enact change. The workplace of the 21st century is significantly different from the workplace of the 19th and 20th centuries. Advancements in technology and the ever-changing student demography and dynamics have meant that HEIs must be steps ahead of enacting social change, particularly in communication. Scholars argue that one of the reasons change initiatives and innovations in HEIs fail to materialise is the failure of effective internal communication (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Probst and Raisch, 2005; Styhre, 2002).

HEIs such as the DUT play an essential societal role. Their roles are even more critical in emerging economies such as South Africa, where the necessary skills are needed to accelerate development. HEIs provide a platform for the development of vital and reflective individuals in various spheres of expertise. With the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the role of technology-driven HEIs such as DUT cannot be overemphasised. Daily technological advancements and new ways of thinking and living have meant that HEIs must be ahead of changing trends by inculcating new modules and designing new curriculums. Machine learning, artificial intelligence, big data, etc., are courses that were non-existent only a decade ago, but have significantly transformed society.

Given the enormous responsibilities and expectations of HEI involvement in society, researchers (Greer, 2013; Immerwahr, Johnson, Ott and Rochkind, 2012) posit that the public has shone its light on HEIs in an unprecedented way, thus increasing public scrutiny. According to Campbell (2018), in recent years, particularly with the advent of social media and online education, there has been an escalated distrust of higher education by the various stakeholders of HEIs. A 2017 Pew Research poll corroborates this position. The poll shows that of the sampled participants, only 55% believed that HEIs still play a significant role in society. On the contrary, according to the study, a majority of Republicans and independents leaning Republican (58%) felt that HEIs have adverse effects on American society. It suffices to state that the Pew Research study was conducted in an American context. However, the sentiments are probably the same in many milieus like South Africa, where youth unemployment is

increasing and the number of unemployable South Africans has increased significantly, bringing to scrutiny the quality of tertiary education provided.

It is worth adding that most HEIs globally recognise the critical role that effective communication plays in organisational success. A cursory look at the internal communication statement of selected universities reveals an appreciation for the need for an internal communication system. For example, the University of Nottingham's internal communication statement reads as follows:

The Internal Communications team are responsible for leading communications and engagement with the university's 50,000 staff and students. The team is the first point of contact for advice on strategy, planning, and delivery of internal messaging and campaigns. We manage content for several digital and social channels, including central events listings. (University of Nottingham, n.d.)

As mentioned earlier, the internal communications team is the first point of contact for the university's internal and external publics. They must show competence and a deep understanding of the intricate dynamics at work in the institution.

Similarly to Nottingham University's statement, the University of Sussex's internal communications team states thus:

In the Internal Communications team, we help teams and departments to communicate issues and change; we manage several channels of communication; and we support staff and students to publicise their events and work (e.g. research findings, achievements, awards, etc.) (University of Sussex, n.d.).

The internal communication statement of the DUT is more elaborate and detailed. It reads:

A DUT employee or student informed about their institution is automatically an ambassador and marketer for DUT. This can only be achieved by facilitating two-way communication between management, students and all employees to ensure that everyone feels part of the university and its decision-making, is well informed, understands the direction the university is going and is informed about their future and the university's future. This will ensure that the messages conveyed will be consistent and in accordance with the goals and mission of DUT' (Durban University of Technology, n.d.).

Therefore, from the preceding, Dos Santos and Ventura (2021) posit that internal communication is essential for HEIs because employees must be constantly updated and involved in implementing strategies to align with real-world complexities.

According to Minia *et al.* (2015), the Duke University study on international communication with HEIs is the most comprehensive. The Duke study sought to understand the university's internal communication prospects and challenges. The first important finding in the study was that among those whose main role is some form of communication, only 17% list that internal communication is greater than or equal to more than 75% of their job responsibility; 57% of communicators responded that internal communication was less than 25% of their job responsibilities (Minia *et al.*, 2015).

According to Minia *et al.* (2015), sampled communicators felt ill-equipped to provide effective internal communication to all relevant stakeholders in the institution. The study found that 27% of the participants believed that they would perform better in disseminating effective internal communication if they had all the necessary policies and equipment. However, the study found that 72% of the participants sampled felt 'somewhat equipped' to carry out their communication duties effectively. Minia *et al.* (2015) concluded thus:

The combination of these two findings is extremely important as they could potentially show that within higher education, the strategy and messaging for internal communication is decentralised and being carried out by individuals who also focus on marketing and human resources and lack the resources necessary to feel they are effective internal communicators.

Zhou *et al.* (2023) believe that internal communication has experienced significant growth in multiple fields of human endeavour and has been entrenched as a vibrant sub-discipline within public relations. Although this study focuses on the impact of internal communication on organisational success, from the perspective of HEIs, the literature review shows growing intersections between internal communication as a public relations subfield and broader management and even political concepts. Zhou *et al.* (2023) advocate an application and intersection between internal communication and other critical areas within public relations, such as Corporate Social Responsibility

(CSR), Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA), and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG).

2.6 Conclusion

The chapter delved into internal communication, its origin, and its importance within organisations, specifically focusing on Higher Institutions of Education (HEIs). The chapter explored scholarly perspectives that emphasise the centrality of internal communication in fostering positive relationships between management and employees. It also explored the importance of internal communication in facilitating the employee employer relationship, which significantly impacts institutional success.

The literature review provided a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of internal communication, which includes formal and informal channels, and elucidates the significance of effective internal communication in aligning organisational goals and enhancing external perceptions. Ultimately, this contributes to the cultivation of positive stakeholder relationships.

The chapter also introduced Greenbaum's model of organisational communication stages. This model exemplifies the intricate interplay between formal and informal channels at various hierarchical levels. It underscores the strategic importance of internal communication, particularly in navigating uncertainties within an organisation and in nurturing employee dedication and productivity.

The next chapter provides a further elaborative discussion of internal communication in HEIs, unpacking the human resources premises, that is, employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management.

CHAPTER THREE
AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION
STRUCTURES WITH REGARD TO EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT, EMPLOYEE RELATIONS AND
DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

3.1 Introduction

This literature review chapter examines the function of internal communication in HEIs, with a specific emphasis on its influence on three key Human Resources principles: employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management. One key objective of this study is to thoroughly analyse the current body of research on internal communication practices and their effectiveness in promoting institutional achievement. By conducting an in-depth investigation of numerous scholarly sources, the review will emphasise how these practices contribute to institutional successes. The study aims to comprehend the relationship between internal communication and human resource practices in HEIs, acknowledging the distinct obstacles they encounter. It highlights the interdependence of these factors in attaining the strategic objectives of educational institutions. An extensive examination is crucial for detecting deficiencies in existing research and suggesting topics for further inquiry, thereby enhancing the comprehension of internal communication's function in the intricate context of higher education.

3.2 Employee Engagement: An Overview

Employee engagement is a complex term that is generally acknowledged as essential for the success of organisations in several sectors, including higher education. According to Budriene and Diskiene (2020: 43), employee engagement refers to the emotional and psychological dedication that employees have towards their organisation and its objectives. This dedication greatly impacts their desire to contribute to the success of the organisation (Kahn, 1990). Engaged employees are often characterised by their enthusiasm, motivation, and commitment to their work. They consistently demonstrate high levels of performance and a readiness to exceed their fundamental job duties (Saks 2006). Vazirani (2007) has considered employee

engagement as 'a tool to measure an employee's association with the organisation, and that strategy helps to attract, develop, and retain a skilful workforce.' Employee engagement enhances employee morale by fostering a dedicated workforce committed to their employment, leading to increased productivity and eventually enhancing organisational performance.

Tripathy (2019: 118) highlights that the importance of employee engagement goes beyond simple job satisfaction or commitment to the organisation. It includes a wider variety of elements that influence an employee's choice to spend significant effort in their job. Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) define engagement as the state of being characterised by high levels of vigour, devotion, and absorption. Vigour encompasses a state of having abundant energy and strong mental fortitude throughout work, together with a strong inclination to exert effort and a steadfastness to persevere despite challenges. Dedication encompasses a deep engagement in one's job, accompanied with feelings of importance, passion, motivation, satisfaction, and difficulty. Meanwhile, absorption is defined as a state of complete focus and deep involvement in one's job, when time seems to fly by, and it becomes difficult to separate oneself from work.

Liyani and Maryati (2024: 78) argue that the factors that influence employee engagement are complex and may fluctuate greatly depending on the specific circumstances and cultural backgrounds. Leadership style, communication, job design, organisational fairness, and work environment are important factors that significantly impact employee engagement levels (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Effective leadership is characterised by clear vision communication, showing respect for people, and cultivating a supportive and trusting atmosphere, which ultimately leads to increased engagement. Efficient communication, particularly about expectations and feedback, is crucial to making employees feel appreciated and understood, thus enhancing their level of engagement (Welch, 2011).

Furthermore, employment attributes such as autonomy, task diversity, and relevance significantly influence the level of engagement of an employee. When employees see their job as significant and worthwhile, their levels of engagement are likely to be elevated (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Organisational support, perceived organisational support, and development opportunities have a substantial impact on

employee engagement by fostering a sense of worth and support in their personal and professional progress (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Dickson and Isaiah (2024:3) report that obstacles to promoting employee engagement persist, particularly in settings characterised by excessive bureaucracy or strictly defined job responsibilities. In such environments, employees may experience limitations and less opportunities to fully use their abilities, which might result in decreased levels of engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Thus, organisations, especially HEIs, must strive to establish circumstances that promote independence, innovation, and knowledge acquisition, which are favourable for achieving a high level of involvement.

Ultimately, understanding and improving employee engagement is crucial for the prosperity of any organisation, including higher education institutions. Organisations can improve their operational performance and contribute to their strategic goals by prioritising factors that create engagement, such as supportive leadership, effective communication, meaningful job design, and a good work environment. Employees who are engaged not only demonstrate higher performance but also have a greater likelihood of contributing to innovation and organisational growth. Therefore, fostering employee engagement is crucial to ensuring long-term institutional success.

3.2.1 Employee Engagement in the Context of HEIs

The employee engagement dynamics within HEIs has distinct traits and dynamics that differentiate it from other sectors. Within HEIs, involvement includes not just the administrative personnel, but also encompasses academics and researchers, who all fall within the employment relationship. The complex structure of these roles necessitates an engagement strategy that can effectively cater to a wide range of professional identities and activities, hence exerting a substantial impact on the overall levels of involvement within the institution (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and van de Vijver, 2014).

A crucial aspect of employee engagement in HEIs is its significant connection to intrinsic motivation and personal satisfaction. Academics sometimes choose to pursue jobs in higher education because of their strong enthusiasm for their field of study and their profound belief in the need to disseminate information. These individuals are

internally motivated, which compels them to fully immerse themselves in their profession, going above the typical expectations outlined in their job descriptions (Shuck and Wollard, 2010). Academics who are engaged are more inclined to contribute to their academic communities. This reflects a greater level of devotion and immersion in their profession, which is a key characteristic of engagement, as defined by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004).

Moreover, the ever-changing atmosphere of HEIs cultivates an inherently captivating ambiance. The bureaucratic and governance systems at several HEIs may sometimes impede involvement, particularly when they restrict academic autonomy or inadequately acknowledge the accomplishments and contributions of faculty members (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Leadership at HEIs is crucial for fostering involvement by promoting openness, providing assistance, and cultivating a culture of recognition and empowerment.

Lohana *et al.* (2024: 72) report that the level of employee engagement at HEIs is greatly influenced by the collegiality and the quality of interpersonal connections among the personnel. Collaboration and peer support are crucial elements of the academic environment, exerting a significant impact on engagement levels across various departments and disciplines. According to Halbesleben (2010), when employees feel like they are part of a supportive academic community, they are more likely to become more engaged in their work. This increased engagement leads to a stronger commitment to the aims of the institution and an overall improvement in job satisfaction.

Cassim *et al.* (2024: 3) postulate that ultimately the level of employee engagement is influenced by a multifaceted interaction of several elements, such as internal drive, organisational backing, competent management, job stability, and the quality of interpersonal connections. In order to successfully address these variables, HEIs must create customised engagement strategies that acknowledge the distinct problems and requirements of their academic and administrative personnel. HEIs can promote engagement and achieve greater academic achievements and institutional success by creating an environment that celebrates and supports the different roles and contributions of their employees.

3.2.2 The Role of Internal Communication in Engaging Employees

Letlatsa (2023: 26) states that internal communication is crucial to improving employee engagement. An efficient internal communication system is essential for fostering a feeling of community and togetherness among employees, particularly in large and geographically spread academic settings. Clear, consistent and transparent communication within an organisation promotes trust and openness, which are crucial for engaging personnel. The correlation between communication and engagement is supported by research, suggesting that when employees are well informed and see that their opinions are valued, their levels of dedication and contentment increase (Men, 2014; Mishra *et al.*, 2012).

Internal communication facilitates participation by ensuring that the objectives of employees are in harmony with those of the institution. When employees have a clear understanding of how their individual contributions align with the larger objectives of the organisation, they are more inclined to see their work as significant and are driven to achieve better levels of performance. The aim is further strengthened by strategic communication initiatives that not only provide information, but also motivate and engage people in decision-making processes (Welch and Jackson, 2007). Consistent and efficient communication has the ability to connect these differences, promoting a culture that values inclusivity and active involvement (Quirke, 2008).

DiFonzo and Bordia (1998) discussed that information communication plays a crucial role in effectively handling and implementing changes inside HEIs, which often experience several reforms and transformations. In such instances, the purpose of internal communication is to elucidate the rationale behind changes, the anticipated results, and the advantages they provide to both the organisation and its staff. Effective communication strategies during change projects can greatly facilitate transitions, minimise resistance, and strengthen employee commitment, all of which are essential to maintain high levels of engagement during potentially disruptive times (Kotter, 2012)

Letlatsa (2023: 25) highlights that the influence of internal communication on engagement is also apparent in the domain of employee appreciation. Employees at HEIs, just like those in any other industry, want a sense of being valued and recognised for their achievements. Implementing effective internal communication techniques that

emphasise accomplishments, communicate success stories, and publicly recognise efforts may raise employees' sense of value, hence increasing their level of engagement and motivation. This acknowledgement not only commemorates previous achievements but also inspires other individuals within the organisation to pursue greatness (Brunetto *et al.*, 2012; Welch, 2011).

HEIs can cultivate a productive work environment by implementing strategic, inclusive, and responsive communication practices that meet the needs of employees, leading to increased commitment, satisfaction, and productivity. This setting facilitates not only the personal development of people but also the scholarly and managerial achievements of the institution as a whole.

3.2.3 Internal Communication Strategies for Enhancing Employee Engagement in HEIs

Internal communication strategies play a crucial role in any organisational setup by creating a favourable atmosphere that promotes employee engagement. Various strategies have been established that can greatly influence the levels of engagement by fostering openness, inclusion, and cooperation across all levels of the organisation.

According to Shirina *et al.* (2022: 1781) an essential approach is to establish open communication channels that foster feedback and conversation. Regular meetings, online forums, and suggestion boxes can help this process by empowering employees to express their ideas, concerns, and recommendations. These platforms not only enhance employees' sense of worth and recognition, but also provide management vital insights into their employees' wants and concerns. Studies suggest that employee participation in organisational communications is positively correlated with increased feelings of ownership and commitment to the institution (Men, 2014; Mishra *et al.*, 2012).

Another effective method is the use of digital communication technologies to improve connectedness and facilitate access to information. These technologies facilitate the dissemination of institutional news, policies, and changes to employees, resulting in decreased uncertainty and increased involvement in the institution's objectives and actions (Welch and Jackson, 2007). In addition, digital platforms have the capability to provide more customised communication, enabling messages to be specifically

adapted to certain groups or people. This boosts the relevance and level of engagement (Smidts, Pruyn and van Riel, 2001).

Another successful approach is to use visual communication tools, such as infographics and video messaging, to effectively deliver intricate information in an appealing and easily understandable way. Visual communications have the potential to enhance comprehension and memory of information, leading to improved involvement, especially in environments where there is a high volume of information, such as in HEIs (Quirke, 2008). These technologies also help to dismantle boundaries across hierarchical levels, making leadership more accessible and relevant to the broader university community.

Effective communication by leaders is a crucial method for improving engagement. Leaders of HEIs should embrace a communication style that is transparent, welcoming, and promotes trust and mutual respect. Frequent communication from top management on the organisation's trajectory, obstacles, and accomplishments helps foster a stronger sense of connection and involvement among employees toward their leaders. The communication in question should be genuine and compassionate, demonstrating leaders' sincere concern for their employees' welfare and growth (DiFonzo and Bordia, 1998; Kotter, 2012).

Finally, HEIs should prioritise the implementation of communication training programmes for all employees, particularly those in positions of management or supervision. These programmes may provide employees with the essential abilities to successfully communicate, deal with problems, and cultivate a supportive work environment. Training sessions may specifically focus on the development of skills in interpersonal communication, cross-cultural communication, and digital communication competency. Institutions can improve their internal communication by developing these skills, which will result in effective and inclusive communication. This, in turn, will increase employee engagement in general (Brunetto *et al.*, 2012; Welch, 2011).

3.3 Employee Relations: An Overview

Employee relations at HEIs include the complex and diverse interactions between the institution and its employees, including numerous elements of the work environment, such as interpersonal connections and organisational rules. Conceptualising employee interactions entails comprehending the importance of these connections and their influence on the institution's overall well-being and efficiency. Implementing effective employee relations methods is essential to create a supportive environment that can greatly improve work satisfaction, minimise conflicts, and cultivate a healthy organisational culture (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001; Kahn, 1990).

The importance of strong employee relations in HEIs cannot be stressed enough. When employees perceive that their organisation appreciates their efforts and prioritises their well-being, they are more inclined to demonstrate elevated levels of job satisfaction and dedication to the organisation. These criteria are essential for sustaining elevated levels of academic excellence and operational effectiveness in HEIs. Furthermore, establishing robust employee relations is crucial to fostering trust and loyalty among employees, which is important to effectively manage the difficulties and transformations inherent in the educational sector (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Saks, 2006).

Effective communication, mutual respect, and equal treatment are essential components of maintaining positive employee relations and preventing problems from escalating by resolving concerns promptly. Furthermore, organisations that give importance to fostering strong relationships with their employees are more likely to recruit and retain highly skilled individuals, which is essential for maintaining a competitive edge and attaining sustained success (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Shuck and Wollard, 2010).

Employee interactions within HEIs have a significant influence on both innovation and organisational transformation. Employees who perceive a sense of support and appreciation are more inclined to engage in institutional governance and decision-making procedures, therefore offering their thoughts and perspectives, which may stimulate innovation. Participation in this process is crucial in the rapidly changing realm of higher education, where institutions must constantly adapt to emerging

teaching methods, technological progress, and regulatory demands. Therefore, cultivating productive employee relationships not only boosts the level of individual employee involvement, but also drives the joint endeavour towards organisational development and adjustment (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Macey and Schneider, 2008).

Ultimately, it is crucial to conceptualise and prioritise employee relations within HEIs in order to guarantee a productive, engaged, and harmonious workforce. Employee relations play a crucial role in not only managing human resources, but also in shaping the overall performance and reputation of an organisation. HEIs can cultivate a favourable academic environment that promotes contentment, commitment, creativity, and, ultimately, institutional achievement by prioritising strong employment relationships.

3.3.1 Employee Relations in the Context of HEIs

Employee relations at HEIs are now intricate and impacted by several elements that affect how institutions handle their interactions with academic, administrative personnel, and other stakeholders. Employee relations at HEIs include interactions involving employers, employees, employees between themselves, and employees with students. HEIs are under growing scrutiny about their connections due to economic constraints, shifting demographics, and developing educational expectations (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and van de Vijver, 2014; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Executives, who play an important role in the academic mission of HEIs, are one of the main players in determining the atmosphere around employee relations within these institutions. Faculty members serve as both employees and vital contributors to the institution's research output. Faculty administration has a substantial influence on an institution's capacity to recruit and maintain top-notch academics, thereby impacting its reputation and standing. Factors such as the stability of employment, the flexibility to pursue academic interests, the amount of people required, and the level of remuneration are often disputed matters that may create tension in relationships if not handled with openness and impartiality (Hagedorn, 2000; Johnsrud and Rosser, 2002).

Administrative personnel are an important group of individuals who have a vested interest in employee relations within HEIs. The synergy between administrative staff and institutional leadership is crucial for the seamless functioning of the university. The administrative staff plays a crucial role in managing the operational aspects and providing assistance needed to carry out the institution's strategic goals. Therefore, their involvement and contentment are vital for the overall performance of the institution. The challenges in this field usually centre on issues such as employment stability, advancement opportunities, and acknowledging the contributions of non-academic personnel (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

The present condition of employee relations at HEIs is influenced by wider socio-economic patterns, including the need to enhance efficiency and accountability. These factors often result in budget reductions and organisational changes. These alterations might put pressure on employee relationships by fostering an atmosphere of ambiguity and rivalry among staff. In addition, the increasing focus on internationalisation and online education has brought about significant developments in employee relations. Staff members are now required to adjust to various student populations and technology advancements (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and van de Vijver, 2014; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Ultimately, employee interactions at HEIs are influenced by a diverse range of internal and external elements. To effectively manage these relationships, a balanced strategy is necessary. This approach should consider the requirements and expectations of different stakeholders while also being in line with the institution's strategic objectives. Implementing equitable and clear procedures, promoting honest and open dialogue, and acknowledging the valuable input of every staff member are crucial tactics for preserving a favourable and efficient work atmosphere in HEIs (Mishra *et al.*, 2012; Shuck and Wollard, 2010).

3.3.2 Building Employee Relations through Effective Internal Communication in HEIs

Internal communication is essential to establish and maintain effective employee relations within HEIs. Implementing effective internal communication techniques promotes an environment of transparency and mutual respect, which are essential for

productive cooperation and positive workplace connections (Men, 2014; Welch, 2011). HEIs can create a more unified atmosphere that promotes both individual and collective achievement by effectively communicating with and involving all employees.

Facilitating transparency is one of the main ways in which internal communication enhances interactions and cooperation in HEIs. Openness in communication fosters trust among employees, which is crucial to cultivating strong interpersonal connections and to efficient collaboration. Frequent communication from management about institutional changes, choices, and the rationale behind these decisions helps clarify the institution's operations. This transparency fosters a sense of security and confidence among employees, since it eliminates the need for them to conjecture about the intentions or future plans of the organisation (Mishra *et al.*, 2012; Smidts, Pruyn and van Riel, 2001).

In addition, internal communication may improve employee relations by promoting inclusion. Using inclusive communication channels that effectively reach every member of the institution and actively seeking feedback from a wide range of diverse groups, internal communication procedures ensure that all perspectives are acknowledged and taken into account. The presence of inclusion not only improves the quality of decision-making processes but also reinforces the connections between employees by promoting a feeling of belonging and recognition. When employees perceive that their viewpoints and efforts are valued, their dedication to the organisation and propensity to cooperate with others are enhanced (Quirke, 2008; Welch, 2011).

In the context of institutional conflict, internal communication plays a crucial role in effectively resolving disputes within HEIs. Efficient communication facilitates the expression of complaints and the resolution of conflicts in a courteous and productive manner. Implementing comprehensive training programmes focused on communication skills, conducting mediation sessions, and organising open forums can form an effective overall approach to proactively address and resolve employee concerns before they develop. Additionally, implementing frequent feedback channels, such as surveys and focus groups, enables management to collect valuable information on possible areas of conflict and take proactive measures to resolve them. Adopting this proactive strategy not only enhances relationships but also contributes

to the maintenance of a harmonious and collaborative working environment (Men, 2014; Mishra *et al.*, 2012).

Internal communication fosters cooperation by bringing people together to work toward shared objectives and principles. By consistently communicating messages that support the purpose and strategic objectives of the institution, employees can develop a better understanding of how their work contributes to the overall aims of the organisation. This alignment facilitates the cultivation of collaboration and cooperation, since employees are more inclined to collaborate efficiently when they have a shared goal and direction (Quirke, 2008; Welch and Jackson, 2007).

3.3.3 The Place of Effective Employee Relations in Institutional Success

Strong employee relations are crucial for the overall performance of HEIs. Robust connections within an institution not only promote a nurturing work environment, but also bolster productivity, institutional standing, and student achievements. Research has shown that when employees have favourable connections with their colleagues and superiors, they are more inclined to be dedicated to the organisation's objectives, display elevated levels of job contentment, and achieve superior performance in their positions (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

The correlation between robust employee relations and organisational effectiveness may be shown by the direct influence on employee retention rates. Organisations that foster a healthy work culture by promoting courteous and constructive communication, implementing effective dispute resolution processes, and acknowledging employee accomplishments often see reduced employee turnover rates. The stability of the workforce enables institutions to maintain knowledge and decreases the challenges linked to the loss of talent and ultimately the recruitment and training of new personnel. Having a steady workforce is important for preserving the quality of individual performance due to the interrelatedness of functions, which in turn affect the overall performance of the institution. (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2008; Shaw, 2005).

The establishment of productive employee interactions fosters a culture of cooperation and ingenuity within the academic setting. When employees experience a sense of respect and appreciation, they are more inclined to participate in cooperative research and instructional endeavours. Collaboration of this kind has the potential to foster

advances in both pedagogy and exploration of new research domains. Research has shown that healthy workplace connections at HEIs are associated with higher research output and enhanced multidisciplinary collaboration. These factors are important markers of institutional performance (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and van de Vijver, 2014; Johnsrud and Rosser, 2002).

Moreover, favourable employee relations have a significant influence on the calibre of service given to students, which is crucial to achieving of institutional success. Employees who are content and involved are more inclined to provide students with superior education, assistance, and guidance. The increased level of engagement greatly enhances student happiness, retention, and success, which are crucial indicators for measuring institutional effectiveness. Increased levels of student satisfaction can enhance institutional reputation and appeal to potential students and staff, hence fostering more achievements (Kuh *et al.*, 2006; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

Establishing and maintaining productive relationships with employees is essential to successfully manage and adapt to changes inside HEIs. Organisations that have strong skills in handling employee relations may more efficiently implement strategic changes, such as updating curricula, implementing technological advances, or restructuring the organisation. An engaged workforce that has confidence in its leadership and actively participates in change processes is more inclined to endorse and embrace these changes in a good way. HEIs must possess flexibility to maintain competitiveness in a continually changing higher education environment (Armenakis and Harris, 2009; Kotter, 1996).

3.4 Diversity Management: An Overview

According to Thomas and Ely (1996: 124). 'Diversity should be understood as the varied perspectives and approaches to work which members of different identity groups bring to the workplace.'

'The goal of any diversity strategy is the creation of an equitable or fair employment system in order to improve the bottom line/business.' (Wilson, 1997: 19). 'Diversity management (DM) is the process or strategy of promoting practices that nurture a

culture and environment in which all parties in the employment relationship are enabled to perform and achieve personal as well as institutional objectives (Deshwal and Choudhary, 2012). According to Bernadi and De Toni (2009), diversity management is a strategic management approach to human resources management that is supported by some programmes, activities, and tools directed towards the integration and development of inclusivity in organisations. Roosevelt (1991) also defined diversity management as an organisational commitment aimed at recruiting, retaining, rewarding, and promoting a heterogeneous mix of employees in an organisation. Barabino *et al.* (2001) posits that DM is a mechanism for promoting full participation of everyone in organisational activities by supporting the individual characteristics of each member and utilising their unique characteristics as a strategic lever.'

Diversity management in higher education refers to strategies and practices used to promote and support diversity within academic institutions. This includes creating an inclusive environment that values and respects individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Various approaches can be taken to achieve diversity management, such as implementing policies and programmes that address equity, inclusion, and representation.

Diversity management in HEIs refers to the deliberate processes and procedures used to establish an inclusive atmosphere that recognises and leverages the varied backgrounds of parties in the employment relationship. This encompasses the comprehension, acknowledgement, and appreciation of variations among individuals in terms of age, social position, cultural background, gender, physical and mental capabilities, racial identity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and reliance on public assistance. Effective diversity management involves more than just adhering to anti-discrimination laws and rules. It also entails incorporating diversity into the fundamental operations and educational processes of an organisation (Bensimon, 2005; Cox, 1993).

The objective of diversity management is to actively encourage inclusion and harness the advantages of diversity to cultivate a competitive academic atmosphere (Gurin *et al.*, 2002; Milem *et al.*, 2005). Institutions that effectively handle diversity may bolster

their image, attract a wider array of students and staff, and increase the calibre of their educational offerings.

Leaders should not only support and promote diversity but also show their dedication through tangible actions and decision-making. This leadership strategy prioritises diversity and

3.4.1 Internal Communication Diversity and Inclusion

Internal communication plays a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives in HEIs. Implementing effective communication techniques can greatly improve the visibility of diversity efforts, promote an inclusive culture, and guarantee that all stakeholders in the institution feel valued and included (Men, 2014; Welch, 2011).

The strategic implementation of internal communication can facilitate the integration of diversity and inclusion in the regular functioning of an organisation. Institutions may emphasise the significance of diversity and inclusion by consistently showcasing narratives that honour a wide range of origins, experiences, and accomplishments in their institutional communications, such as newsletters, emails, and social media posts. This serves to both educate the community about the importance of diversity and strengthen the institution's dedication to these ideals (Roberson, 2006; Wrench, 2013).

Furthermore, internal communication plays a crucial role in educating the university community about diversity and inclusion policies, procedures, and processes. Effective communication campaigns may educate employees on their rights and obligations concerning diversity and inclusion, therefore mitigating prejudice and promoting a harmonious atmosphere. In addition, internal channels can be used to disseminate training and development programmes that provide the community with the essential skills to interact effectively with diversity. These programmes can include cultural competence training and seminars on unconscious prejudice (Gurin *et al.*, 2002; Hurtado, 2007).

Internal communication promotes diversity and inclusion by enabling open communication and seeking input. Establishing transparent channels of

communication that actively seek the input of the community may provide useful insights into the efficacy of diversity programmes and shed light on areas that need improvement (Kezar and Eckel, 2008; Men and Stacks, 2013).

In addition, internal communication can promote a stronger feeling of belonging among under-represented groups by ensuring that all communications are inclusive and accurately portray the diversity of the community. This entails employing language that is both unbiased and actively inclusive, showcasing a variety of individuals in institutional visuals, and guaranteeing that communication materials are accessible to individuals with disabilities, such as by providing video captions and utilising web designs that are compatible with screen readers. Institutions can cultivate an inclusive climate by meticulously considering the construction and delivery of messages, ensuring that all individuals feel acknowledged, listened to, and valued (Morrison, 2010; Stanley, 2006).

3.4.2 The State of Diversity and Inclusion in HEIs

The current state of diversity and inclusion in HEIs demonstrates both advancements and persistent obstacles. Although progress has been made in diversifying the demographic composition of these institutions, such as improving gender balance and providing support to individuals of different religious and linguistic backgrounds, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done to achieve complete inclusivity and fairness. (Milem *et al.*, 2005; Smith and Turner, 2005).

HEIs have been more responsive to concerns about diversity, driven by external social influences and their own acknowledgement of the educational advantages that a diverse pool of employees may provide to the academic setting. Their sensitivity is often evident in their internal communications, which have a vital impact on moulding the school atmosphere. Efficient communication that demonstrates respect and recognition of diversity has the potential to cultivate a feeling of inclusion and approval among all individuals within a community. For example, when institutions use inclusive language that avoids stereotypes, they show a dedication to diversity that can help reduce feelings of marginalisation among minority groups (Gurin *et al.*, 2002; Wrench, 2013).

Furthermore, the level of diversity and inclusion in HEIs is significantly impacted by the prevailing legal and political environment. For example, affirmative action rules and diversity quotas have been highly controversial subjects that influence employment procedures. Institutions often use internal communications to negotiate intricate matters, guaranteeing that all parties involved are well-informed and that the institution's rules are clear and open. Transparency is crucial not only to comply with legal requirements, but also to foster trust among members of the community (Hurtado, 2007; Tienda, 2013).

Furthermore, the expanding interpretations of diversity, which now include not only colour and gender, but also age, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic position, provide new challenges to higher education institutions. Every group may have unique requirements and encounters that require diverse methodologies and assets. The ability of internal communications to directly address the complex nature of diversity has a significant influence on the inclusiveness of the organisation. For example, by guaranteeing that communication channels are accessible to handicapped persons or by offering support services to non-native speakers at the institution, a sincere dedication to inclusion may be shown (Kezar and Eckel, 2008; Williams and Wade-Golden, 2007).

3.5 Creating a Nexus: Internal Communication, Employee Engagement, Employee Relations, and Diversity Management

The connection between internal communication, diversity management, and employee relations is closely intertwined, creating a fundamental triangle that promotes institutional success and fosters a harmonious workplace. Efficient internal communication is the foundation on which diversity programmes and strong employee relations can be established and maintained. Internal communication plays a crucial role in promoting understanding and acceptance of diversity policies within an organisation. By fostering open and inclusive discussion, it facilitates the efficient integration of these policies into daily activities.

Internal communication improves the effectiveness of diversity management by promoting awareness and education about diversity efforts. It has a crucial function in

raising awareness among the institution's members about the different requirements and experiences of a diverse workforce. Internal communication can cultivate a culture of inclusion by providing frequent updates, feature articles, and targeted communications that showcase diversity success stories and problems. The emphasis on transparency and ongoing commitment to diversity serve to strengthen the significance of diversity management as a central institutional objective, directly impacting the atmosphere of employee relations by fostering a sense of inclusivity and regard among all members of the staff and student body (Roberson, 2006; Wrench, 2013).

Furthermore, internal communication plays a crucial role in resolving possible problems that may arise due to diversity in the workplace. HEIs can effectively address and resolve misconceptions and issues arising from cultural, ethnic, or other differences by facilitating open discourse through forums and channels. The implementation of this dispute resolution procedure is crucial for fostering harmonious employee relations and harnessing the enriching potential of diversity inside the organisation, therefore preventing any divisive outcomes. Effective communication, when properly handled, guarantees that all parties feel acknowledged and that solutions are achieved in an equitable and open manner. These factors are essential for fostering trust and collaboration in a varied academic setting (Gurin *et al.*, 2002; Hurtado, 2007).

The influence of internal communication also encompasses the attraction and retention of a diverse and inclusive workforce. An institution may enhance its talent pool by successfully conveying its commitment to diversity and inclusion, which will attract a wider spectrum of job applications. This not only enhances the institution's image, but also strategically contributes to employee relations by cultivating employees that are sensitive and receptive to differences. Employees in such settings tend to be more engaged and dedicated to the institution's goal, which in turn strengthens their connections with colleagues and management (Milem *et al.*, 2005; Smith and Turner, 2005).

The interplay of internal communication, diversity management, and employee relations significantly influences the overall academic and operational success of HEIs. When these factors are properly aligned and mutually supportive, they provide

a conducive atmosphere for innovation to thrive and enable the institution to adapt and respond effectively to social changes. Integrating many views promotes innovative problem-solving and may result in significant advancements in research and teaching approaches, hence boosting the academic reputation and appeal of the institution (Stanley, 2006; Williams and Wade-Golden, 2007).

Ultimately, the connection between internal communication, diversity management, and employee relations is fluid and intricately linked. The interplay of each aspect synergistically enhances the others, creating a resilient structure that effectively sustains the operational and strategic objectives of HEIs. Efficient management of this combination of three elements not only enhances the dynamics of the workplace, but also greatly contributes to the overall educational goals of the institution. This emphasises the crucial importance of well-planned and inclusive communication strategies in fostering a prosperous and harmonious academic community.

The correlation between internal communication, diversity management, and employee engagement is crucial in establishing the culture and efficacy of HEIs. Efficient internal communication functions as a channel for both distributing information and cultivating an inclusive culture that appreciates diversity and improves employee engagement. By implementing strategic communication efforts, HEIs can ensure that diversity initiatives go beyond just policies. Instead, they become integral to the institution's identity and operational procedures (Men, 2014; Welch, 2011).

Internal communication promotes the execution of diversity management by ensuring that all individuals within the organisation are informed about and understand the importance of diversity efforts. When employees believe that their distinct origins are acknowledged and appreciated, their levels of commitment and involvement are likely to rise, as they regard their work environment as being helpful and validating (Roberson, 2006; Shore *et al.*, 2011).

Furthermore, efficient internal communication improves employee engagement by ensuring that all employees, regardless of their position or experience, feel included in the institutional conversation. Consistent and comprehensive communication helps alleviate sentiments of isolation and under-representation among minority groups, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion within the organisation. Engagement

flourishes in an atmosphere characterised by discussion rather than a one-sided conversation, and where employees see that their voice is acknowledged by the management. Promotion of inclusion improves employee morale and encourages them to actively engage in their responsibilities, creating a positive cycle of feedback that benefits both parties and the organisation as a whole (Mishra *et al.*, 2012; Welch, 2011).

In addition, the combination of diversity management and internal communication contributes to increased employee engagement by promoting fairness and equality in the workplace. Transparent communication on diversity objectives and the measures used to achieve them is essential to foster trust. Trust is an essential element of employee engagement. When employees have confidence in their institution's genuine commitment to fostering diversity and ensuring equitable treatment for everyone, they are more inclined to develop a deep connection with the institution's purpose and values. This alignment not only strengthens their involvement but also improves their readiness to engage in and endorse diversity programmes (Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Nishii, 2013).

Incorporating diversity management into the institution's fundamental strategic goals and successfully communicating it via internal channels helps foster new ideas and practices that improve institutional performance. Research has shown that teams composed of individuals with varying backgrounds and perspectives exhibit higher levels of creativity and are more adept at resolving complex challenges. Effective management and communication of diversity result in engaged employees that can propel the institution forward. This involvement not only enhances individual pleasure and productivity, but also supports the overarching objectives of educational quality and innovation that characterise top higher education institutions (Cox, 1993; Richard, 2000).

The interplay of internal communication, employee engagement, and employee relations is crucial in determining the organisational culture and success of HEIs. Efficient internal communication serves as a catalyst that improves employee engagement and relations by developing a foundation of trust and openness. This is essential to create a cooperative and lively working environment (Men, 2014; Welch, 2011).

Internal communication has a direct impact on employee engagement by ensuring that all employees are well informed, connected, and aware of their duties and the aims of the organisation. Consistent and transparent communication from leadership on the organisation's trajectory, modifications, and the rationale behind choices fosters a sense of appreciation and belonging among employees. This inclusion improves employee morale and stimulates their proactive participation in their respective positions, which is a crucial component of employee engagement. In addition, engaged employees are more inclined to contribute positively to employee relations through effective collaboration with their colleagues and active participation in institutional efforts (Mishra *et al.*, 2012; Saks, 2006).

Internal communication improves employee relations by offering channels for conversation and input, which are crucial to resolve complaints and cultivating a feeling of oneness. Establishing mechanisms that promote staff expression of concerns and recommendations fosters a transparent organisational atmosphere, facilitating rapid and efficient resolution of problems. This transparency not only enhances interpersonal dynamics among employees by minimising disagreements but also corresponds to increased levels of commitment and involvement as employees see their contributions to be respected and considered in the decision-making procedures (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Roberson, 2006).

The interplay of internal communication, employee engagement, and employee relations is also evident in the handling of change within HEIs. Efficient internal communication on institutional changes aids in expectation management and minimises uncertainty, which can have a negative impact on employee relations and engagement. Engaging and informing employees about the change process fosters acceptance and adaptation, which are essential for maintaining high levels of employee engagement throughout transitions. Furthermore, well-handled communication in these situations improves confidence in the organisation, which is a crucial factor in maintaining favourable employee relationships (Armenakis and Harris, 2009; Kotter, 1996).

Ultimately, the dynamic interaction of internal communication, employee engagement, and employee relations is vital to the well-being and achievement of HEIs. Effective internal communication cultivates a favourable work atmosphere that boosts

employee engagement by ensuring that they are well-informed and actively participating. At the same time, it improves employee relations by guaranteeing a collaborative and responsive work environment that meets employees' requirements. These characteristics play a crucial role in enhancing the overall energy and efficiency of educational institutions, allowing employees to reach their maximum potential in a supportive and dynamic environment.

The effectiveness of leadership has a profound impact on the overall performance of the institution. It influences several aspects, such as organisational culture, staff morale, stakeholder relationships, and policy execution. Leaders' communication style has the power to establish the overall atmosphere of an organisation, influencing how it is seen and how it functions both internally and externally. Effective leadership encompasses the essential aspects of clarity, openness, consistency, and inclusivity. These elements are vital for building trust and promoting alignment across the organisation (Men, 2014; Mishra *et al.*, 2012).

Leaders that effectively convey their ideas and aims with precision and a clear understanding create trust and encourage people to work towards the organisation's objectives. This style of communication serves not only to provide information, but also to motivate and involve the community. Leaders who effectively communicate a distinct and persuasive vision contribute to the development of a strong sense of purpose that may motivate staff and ultimately strengthen their dedication to the success of the institution (Kotter, 1996; Northouse, 2018).

In addition, openness in leadership fosters trust, a crucial component of efficient governance in higher education institutions. Leaders who transparently communicate the institution's issues, achievements, and decision-making processes foster an atmosphere of trust that promotes openness and communication among all stakeholders. Transparency plays a crucial role in change management, as stakeholders who are well informed and actively engaged are more inclined to endorse and embrace new ideas and adjustments. Leadership's effective communication during times of transition reduces resistance and promotes a culture of flexibility and resilience (Armenakis and Harris, 2009; Gilley *et al.*, 2009).

Effective communication by leaders is essential for resolving conflicts. Leaders who have strong communication skills have the ability to handle disagreements in a manner that acknowledges and values the viewpoints of all involved parties. This fosters an environment of harmony and collaboration across the organisation. This involves not only face-to-face contact with leaders, but also the deliberate use of mediated communication through policies and public declarations that create a culture of respect and fairness. Implementing such practices is crucial for maintaining an inclusive atmosphere that allows the co-existence and enhancement of varied ideas and viewpoints in the learning and working environment (Mor Barak, 2014; Wrench, 2013).

Moreover, leadership communication has a direct influence on employee engagement and satisfaction. Leaders who consistently interact with their employees and actively solicit comments on different matters exhibit their appreciation for their employees' contribution, hence increasing levels of engagement. Employees who are actively involved and committed to their work are more inclined to make meaningful contributions to their positions, resulting in increased productivity and improved overall results for the organisation.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature analysis highlights the crucial importance of internal communication in improving the overall performance of HEIs. Efficient internal communication enhances transparency and trust within the organisation, leading to increased employee engagement and strong employee relations. HEIs can foster a supportive and inclusive environment for academic and administrative success by ensuring that all members of the institution are well informed and have their perspectives heard. Integrating internal communication with diversity management efforts has been shown to improve the environmental climate by fostering inclusion and using varied views. This, in turn, increases creativity and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, effective leadership communication significantly influences the formation of organisational culture and facilitates the process of implementing change, underscoring the need for leaders to communicate with precision, honesty, and foresight. In essence, the research indicates that robust internal communication frameworks are essential for HEIs, not only to effectively traverse the intricacies of the current educational

environment but also to prosper within it. Therefore, it is crucial for HEIs to use effective communication methods.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter of this study, the significance of effective communication, particularly internal communication within HEIs, cannot be overstated. HEIs are vital partners in the intricate and delicate relationship between 'town and gown'. Internal communication is critical to promote unity, cooperation, and advancement within HEIs and between HEIs and their various and diverse stakeholders.

This chapter reviews relevant theories that underpin and underlie the critical role of internal communication in higher education contexts. Various theoretical perspectives, models, and concepts are examined and reviewed. Their links to the central aim of the study are presented to show how effective internal communication fosters organisational resilience, stakeholder involvement, student engagement, and institutional excellence. This section discusses five essential theories that show the connection between internal communication, employee engagement, and institutional success. The theories to be examined are Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Systems, Social Exchange, Stakeholder Theories, and the Social Network Analysis.

Theoretical frameworks serve as the backbone for scholarly research, offering a structured lens through which phenomena can be examined and understood. In the context of exploring the role internal communication plays in institutional success, theoretical frameworks illuminate the intricate dynamics that underpin communication processes, employee engagement, employee relations, diversity management, and the resultant institutional performance. These frameworks not only provide a conceptual foundation for the study, but also guide the research methodology, data collection, and analysis. Through a careful synthesis of theory, this chapter aims to set a solid foundation for examining internal communication's pivotal role in shaping organisational landscapes, especially in the context of HEIs like the DUT.

4.2 Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework

Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework as depicted in Figure 4.1 below represents a seminal approach to understanding and enhancing communication. Developed by Bill Quirke, a leading figure in the field of internal communication, this framework articulates a strategic and structured process to improve communication. Its development was rooted in the recognition of the central role that effective internal communication plays in achieving organisational objectives, fostering employee engagement, and driving change (Quirke, 2008). The framework outlines a series of progressive stages: awareness, understanding, involvement, commitment, and advocacy, each building on the previous to create a comprehensive communication strategy that not only disseminates information but also cultivates a participatory and committed organisational culture.

Historically, the framework emerged from the need to address common communication pitfalls within organisations, such as information overload, lack of clarity in messages, and the absence of mechanisms for feedback and dialogue (Quirke, 2008). Quirke identified these stages as critical steps in moving employees from mere receivers of information to active participants and advocates for the organisation's goals and values. This progression is not just about the flow of information; it is about building a shared understanding and aligning the workforce towards common objectives, thereby enhancing organisational effectiveness.

The relevance of Quirke's framework to the study of internal communication within a university setting, such as the DUT, cannot be overstated. Universities are complex organisations with diverse stakeholders, including staff, students, and the wider community. Effective internal communication within these institutions is crucial to align efforts, facilitate change, and ensure successful implementation of strategic initiatives (Macnamara, 2016). The application of Quirke's framework provides a structured approach to diagnose, design, and implement effective communication strategies tailored to the unique context of higher education. It offers a lens through which internal institutional communication practices can be critically examined and enhanced to

support institutional goals, foster a positive organisational culture, and improve overall institutional success.

Moreover, in the context of higher education, the framework's emphasis on involvement and commitment is particularly pertinent. These stages highlight the importance of engaging academic and administrative staff in dialogues around institutional objectives, thus fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to these goals (Welch, 2012). This engagement is critical in a sector where the success of initiatives often hinges on the buy-in and active participation of a highly knowledgeable and autonomous workforce. By mapping communication practices with Quirke's stages, the study can identify gaps and opportunities for enhancing the effectiveness of internal communication within the university.

Additionally, the final stage of the framework, advocacy, underscores the ultimate goal of internal communication: cultivating ambassadors for the organisation who actively support and promote its objectives both internally and externally. This aspect is particularly relevant for universities that seek to bolster their reputation and attract talent, funding, and partnerships. Through effective internal communication, universities can empower their staff and students to become advocates, thereby extending their reach and impact beyond the campus (Mazzei, 2014).

By applying Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework to the DUT, the study aimed to unravel the complexities of internal communication in an HEI context. By systematically examining each stage of the framework, from awareness to advocacy, the study provides insights into how internal communication processes can be optimised to support the university's strategic objectives. This involved not just the dissemination of information, but fostering a two-way communication flow that encourages feedback, dialogue, and participation across all levels of the institution (Johansson and Heide, 2008). Through this lens, the study seeks to contribute to the wider discourse on internal communication within the HEI sector, offering evidence-based strategies to improve organisational effectiveness and success.

In summary, Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework offers a valuable theoretical foundation for examining and enhancing internal communication within complex organisations like universities. Its focus on moving employees through

stages of awareness, understanding, involvement, commitment, and advocacy provides a comprehensive approach to developing communication strategies that support organisational objectives. By applying this framework to the DUT, the study not only aimed to identify the current state of internal communication, but also to propose actionable strategies for its improvement, thus contributing to the achievement of institutional success and the cultivation of a vibrant and engaged university community.

Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework is a detailed methodology that delineates the evolutionary path of internal communication within an organisation, from the initial stage of awareness to the ultimate goal of commitment. Each stage is essential for fostering a comprehensive understanding and engagement among employees, thus aligning the organisational objectives with individual actions and beliefs.

In summary, Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework outlines a strategic approach to evolving the communication landscape within organisations from simple awareness to deep-seated commitment. Each stage builds on the last, requiring tailored communication strategies that address the unique needs and dynamics of the workforce at each point. By meticulously guiding employees through these stages, organisations can foster a culture of open communication, engagement, and alignment with organisational objectives, thus improving overall performance and success. This framework serves as a valuable tool for organisations, including educational institutions such as the DUT, aiming to optimise their internal communication processes to achieve strategic goals.

4.2.1 Locating Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework in Higher Education Institutions

Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework, with its structured approach to enhancing organisational communication, finds a particularly pertinent application within the context of HEIs such as the DUT. Higher education environments are characterised by their complex organisational structures, diverse stakeholder groups, and the critical role of communication in the achievement of educational and institutional objectives. Implementing this framework in such settings can significantly

contribute to the development of a cohesive institutional culture, the enhancement of employee engagement and relations, and ultimately the support of the institution's strategic goals.

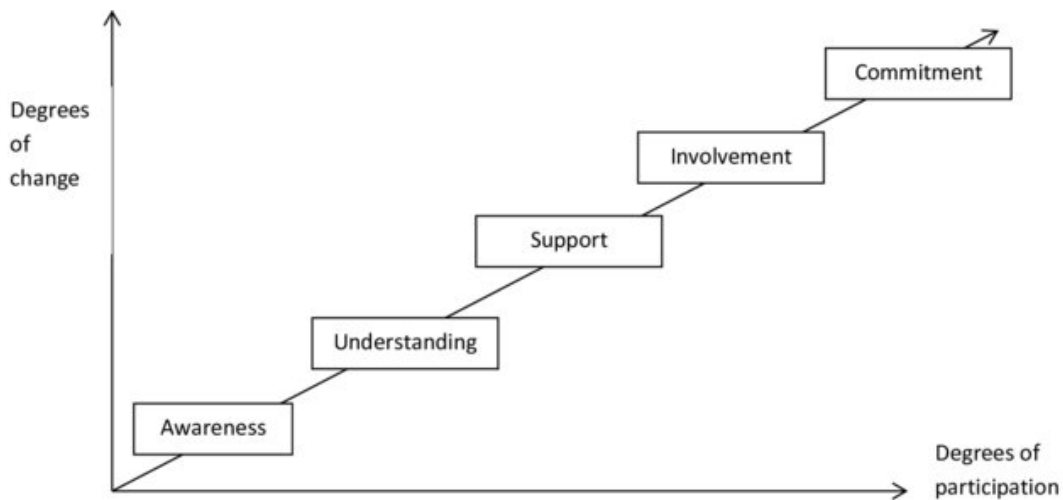


Figure 4.1: Quirke’s Progression of Internal Communication Framework

Awareness in the higher education context involves ensuring that all members of the institution, including staff and students, are informed about the university's mission, values, strategic goals, and key initiatives. Given the diversity of academic disciplines and the breadth of administrative functions within a university, achieving widespread awareness requires tailored communication strategies that address the specific informational needs of different segments of the university community (Doorley and Garcia, 2007).

Understanding deepens this initial awareness, moving beyond mere knowledge of institutional objectives to a comprehensive grasp of their importance and the role individuals play in achieving them. In a higher education setting, this might involve detailed discussions, workshops, and seminars that delve into the implications of the strategic plan for different faculties, centres, and departments. Such activities encourage active dialogue and questions, facilitating a clearer understanding among faculty and staff of how their work contributes to broader institutional goals (Men, 2014).

Involvement is particularly crucial in higher education, where the success of academic and administrative initiatives often hinges on the active participation of a wide range of stakeholders. Encouraging involvement in decision-making processes, formulation

of strategies, and the implementation of key initiatives can significantly enhance commitment and buy-in across the institution. Participatory approaches, such as the formation of cross-functional teams for project implementation and the use of feedback mechanisms to shape institutional policies, can cultivate a sense of ownership and collective responsibility among staff (Tkalac Verčič and Pološki Vokić, 2017).

Support, in the academic context, translates to active endorsement and contribution towards the university's objectives and initiatives. This can be achieved by recognising and rewarding contributions that align with strategic goals, facilitating avenues for staff and faculty to contribute ideas and innovations, and creating a supportive environment that values and acts on input from across the institution. Demonstrating how individual and collective efforts contribute to success can motivate further support and engagement within the community (Johansson, Heide and Simonsson, 2014).

Commitment, the pinnacle of Quirke's framework, embodies a deep-seated allegiance to the institution's vision and goals, driving individuals to go above and beyond in their roles. In higher education, achieving this level of commitment requires fostering a culture that aligns institutional goals with personal values, emphasises the importance of education and research in society, and provides opportunities for professional growth and recognition. Cultivating such a culture ensures that faculty, staff and even students become ambassadors for the university, actively contributing to its reputation and success both internally and in the wider community (Mazzei, 2014).

Applying Quirke's framework within the context of DUT or any other higher education institution offers a systematic approach to strengthening internal communication, which is fundamental to navigating the complexities of academic environments. Effective internal communication not only enhances operational efficiency and academic excellence, but also contributes to a more engaged, motivated, and cohesive university community. By moving through the stages of awareness, understanding, involvement, support, and commitment, HEIs can foster a culture of open communication, shared goals, and collective achievement, positioning themselves to successfully meet the challenges of the modern educational landscape.

Figure 4.1 presents a visual representation of Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework, showcasing a stepwise approach to enhancing engagement within an organisation. It begins with 'Awareness,' where the fundamental step is to inform the workforce about the institutional goals and initiatives. As the diagram ascends, it moves to 'Understanding,' indicating that employees must not only be aware of the information, but also fully understand its relevance to their roles and the broader objectives of the institution. This progression continues to 'Involvement', where employees actively participate and contribute to the initiatives, signifying a higher degree of change and participation. The subsequent stage, 'Support', reflects a deeper level of employee buy-in, where individuals not only participate in, but also support and advocate for the organisation's goals. The culmination point, 'Commitment,' represents the peak of employee engagement, where there is a complete alignment of individual and organisational goals, leading to the highest degrees of change and participation. In applying this framework to the study at the DUT, the aim was to explore how this hierarchical model of communication could facilitate transitions from mere knowledge of institutional goals to a deep-seated commitment, thus fostering a more robust and cohesive educational environment. This progression model serves as an invaluable tool for systematically evaluating and enhancing internal communication strategies to support the strategic aims of the DUT, ultimately leading to institutional success and a thriving academic community.

Previous studies that have used or supported Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework underscore its utility in enhancing organisational communication and, subsequently, organisational success. The practical applicability of this framework in a variety of organisational settings highlights its robustness and adaptability. The research by Welch and Jackson (2007) validates Quirke's framework, identifying the connection between levels of internal communication effectiveness and employee engagement. Their findings reveal that organisations employing a structured approach to communication similar to Quirke's stages are more likely to report higher levels of employee understanding, involvement and commitment.

Further empirical support comes from a study by Ruck and Welch (2012), which examines internal communication and its impact on employee engagement across different sectors. Their research confirms that when organisations invest in

communicating clearly about their strategies and engaging employees in the communication process, as advocated by Quirke's framework, they experience improved employee engagement and organisational performance. The role of middle managers in facilitating the progression from awareness to commitment has also been empirically investigated (Men, 2014), providing evidence that managers who effectively communicate, foster understanding and involve employees in decision-making processes contribute significantly to achieving organisational goals.

In the higher education sector, a study by Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2012) explores how internal communication practices align with Quirke's framework to influence institutional effectiveness. The study demonstrates that universities with well-structured internal communication strategies that promote understanding and involvement among academic staff and administrators see a positive impact on organisational outcomes. Moreover, an investigation into the link between internal communication and job satisfaction by Karanges *et al.* (2015) resonates with the framework's emphasis on the progressive nature of communication. Their findings suggest that as employees move through the stages of awareness to commitment, there is a corresponding increase in job satisfaction and organisational identification, lending empirical support to the importance of advancing through Quirke's stages.

In the healthcare sector, where effective internal communication is vital, researchers have applied Quirke's framework to understand communication in hospital settings (Johansson, Miller and Hamrin, 2014). The results indicate that a progression-focused approach to communication, where employees are guided from basic awareness of hospital policies to a deeper commitment to patient care, correlates with better patient outcomes and employee job satisfaction. Additionally, research within public sector organisations has shown that internal communication processes that closely adhere to Quirke's model led to more effective change management and policy implementation (Mazzei, 2014). Specifically, when employees are aware of the reasons for change, understand the implications, are involved in the change process, support the initiatives, and are committed to ensuring their success, public organisations report higher efficiency and public service delivery outcomes.

Overall, these studies validate the efficacy of Quirke's framework and highlight its importance across different organisational contexts, including higher education. By

employing this structured approach to internal communication, organisations can foster a workforce that is not only well informed, but also deeply engaged and committed to the organisation's mission and goals, which is essential for achieving sustained success. Despite its widespread use and the empirical support it enjoys, Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework is not without its critiques and limitations. One common critique is that the framework assumes a linear progression from awareness to commitment, which may not accurately capture the complexity and cyclical nature of communication processes within organisations (Men, 2014). Communication is often more iterative and dynamic, with feedback and adjustments occurring at every stage, rather than following a strictly sequential pattern.

Another point of criticism is the framework's perceived focus on top-down communication. While Quirke emphasises the importance of dialogue and involvement, the framework stages suggest a process initiated and guided by management, potentially overlooking the value of bottom-up communication and the insights that can be gleaned from it (Johansson, Heide and Simonsson, 2014). In complex organisations, especially those with strong cultures of autonomy such as universities, top-down communication can sometimes be met with resistance or disengagement, calling for a more participatory approach (Mazzei, 2014).

Additionally, the effectiveness of the framework can be limited by the organisational culture and the existing communication climate. If an organisation has a history of poor communication practices or a culture of distrust, simply implementing a structured communication strategy may not be enough to achieve the desired outcomes of engagement and commitment (Welch, 2011). Organisational change often requires deeper cultural interventions, and communication strategies must be tailored to fit the unique context and challenges of each organisation.

Moreover, Quirke's framework does not explicitly address the role of technology in communication. In the digital age, where new technologies constantly emerge and influence communication practices, the framework can appear outdated if it does not consider how digital tools and platforms can facilitate or hinder the progression from awareness to commitment (Karanges *et al.*, 2015). For example, the indiscriminate use of technology for internal communication can lead to information overload, which can hinder rather than improve understanding and involvement. The application of the

framework to different national cultures also presents challenges. What works well in one cultural context may not translate effectively in another due to differing expectations and norms regarding communication within organisations (Tkalac Verčič, Verčič, and Sriramesh, 2012). For instance, high-power distance cultures might not respond well to the involvement stage, as it assumes a level of egalitarianism in decision-making that may not exist in more hierarchical societies.

In the context of higher education, where academic freedom and independence are highly valued, the framework may need to be adapted to ensure that it aligns with the values and norms of academic staff. This might involve emphasising the role of faculty and staff as co-creators of communication strategies rather than merely recipients (Doorley and Garcia, 2007). Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the framework may oversimplify the complex relationship between communication and organisational outcomes. Effective communication is undoubtedly a crucial component of organisational success, but it is not the only factor. Other variables such as leadership styles, external environmental forces, and individual employee attributes also play a significant role (Men, 2014). Thus, while Quirke's framework is a valuable tool for conceptualising internal communication processes, it should be used in conjunction with other theories and models to fully understand and influence organisational dynamics.

In summary, while Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework offers a comprehensive strategy for enhancing internal communication, it must be considered within the broader context of organisational culture, communication technologies, and the specificities of different organisational and national cultures. Adapting the framework to meet the contemporary challenges of the digital age and the unique characteristic of each organisation is essential for its successful implementation and the realisation of its full potential. The adaptation of Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework to the current study involving the DUT requires careful consideration of the institution's unique cultural and operational context. Given the criticisms and limitations previously discussed, the framework was extended and modified to ensure its relevance and efficacy in a contemporary higher education setting.

First, acknowledging the non-linear nature of communication as critiqued by Men (2014), the framework was adapted to allow for feedback loops at each stage, creating a more dynamic model that reflects the iterative process of communication. This adaptation acknowledges that understanding and involvement may occur simultaneously or may need revisiting even after commitment has been achieved. By incorporating these feedback mechanisms, the adapted framework would more accurately depict the complexities of internal communication within the DUT, where the flow of information is not just top-down but multidirectional. To address the perceived focus of the framework on top-down communication, the study incorporated strategies that encourage bottom-up communication. This included the use of surveys, open forums, and digital platforms that facilitate dialogue and input from all levels of the university community. In doing so, the study accounted for the valuable insights that could be gained from grassroots communication and ensured that all voices within the DUT were heard and considered (Johansson, Heide and Simonsson, 2014).

The cultural nuances of the university were also taken into account. DUT, like many modern HEIs, is a microcosm of a broader society, with diverse cultural backgrounds represented among its staff members. The framework was adapted to be culturally sensitive and inclusive, ensuring that communication strategies are respectful and mindful of the varied cultural norms within the institution (Tkalac Verčič, Verčič and Sriramesh, 2012).

Given the centrality of technology in today's communication landscape, the framework was updated to include strategies that leverage digital tools effectively. This adaptation addressed the potential for information overload and sought to use technology in a way that enhances, rather than impedes, the progression of communication from awareness to commitment. The study explored which digital platforms and communication methods are most effective at each stage within the university setting, recognising the need for a digital communication strategy that is aligned with the institution's objectives and the preferences of its members (Karanges *et al.*, 2015).

Furthermore, to ensure that the framework was not applied in isolation, the study integrated it with other theoretical models that consider the impact of leadership, external forces, and the attributes of individual employees on organisational dynamics. This comprehensive approach provided a more nuanced understanding of internal

communication in the DUT and the various factors that influence its success (Men, 2014).

Finally, the adaptation of the framework involved an emphasis on co-creation, particularly in the involvement and support stages. Recognising the importance of academic freedom and the autonomy of university staff, the study engaged faculty and staff as active participants in the development and implementation of internal communication strategies. This approach aligns with the collegiate ethos of higher education and ensures that communication strategies resonate with and are supported by the academic community (Doorley and Garcia, 2007). In adapting Quirke's framework, a holistic and flexible approach was employed that allowed for adjustments and refinements as the research progressed and as insights were gained from the DUT community. This ensured that the framework was not only theoretically sound but also practically relevant and capable of effecting meaningful improvements in internal communication within the university.

4.3 Other Theoretical Inclinations

Having already identified Quirke's progression of internal communication framework as the central theory guiding the study, it is worth noting that there are also other theories that share affinity with the current field of study. Among such other theories are the system theory, social exchange theory, stakeholder theory and social network analysis. Although much reference will not be made to these theories in this study, they are theories that have been applied to organisational settings and further research can incorporate these theories.

Systems theory has its foundation in biology and engineering, it has evolved over the years to become one of the most influential theories that explain the relationship between different units working independently and collectively to make the whole (in this case, the organisation) function effectively (Katz and Kahn, 1966).

Barker and Angelopoulos (2006: 118) define a system as a collection of interconnected elements that form a unified or complex entity. The systems theory focuses on fostering efficient functioning between the various components of the organisation

(Booth, 1986). According to Waweru (2002), in the context of HEIs, the systems theory, the institutional vision, and mission (which is the whole) determine the character and functions of the parts (faculties, departments, and units). The core of systems theory is its principles of interrelatedness and interdependence, which are crucial for effective internal communication. Thus, systems theory is relevant to this study because it explains how institutions like the DUT, with a defined hierarchical structure with various sections, function as a cohesive entity, and all staff work towards a common goal.

Luhmann (1970) avers that because society constitutes social systems through communication, they (social systems) emerge from individual interactions. Thus, it can be assumed that society is a system that encompasses all the experiences and activities inherent in communication. According to De Beer and Rensburg (2011), systems theory has endured over time because it exists within a defined boundary and responds and adapts to environmental changes to achieve and maintain desired states. According to Neher (1997), the overall patterns of interrelationships and interconnectedness among all units and departments is a crucial consideration for HEIs when adopting a systems view.

According to Scot (1974), systems theory, when applied to communication within HEIs, helps explain human communication's interconnectedness. It helps HEIs such as the DUT recognise that any communication emanating from any unit has the potential to impact the entire institution. An organisation's communication affects its functioning, ultimately affecting its overall performance. Thus, although the component departments of the DUT are hierarchically structured, they are nonetheless interdependent, meaning that one component or department cannot function without the support of other elements. Byers (1997) avers that HEIs like the DUT must tailor their communication system to their specific environment and technology. According to Byers, organisations differ by the uniqueness of their independent systems, just as humans differ from one another due to the uniqueness of their DNA and individual cells.

For example, in stable environments, some organisations may choose to have a centralised structure and a communication system that combines instructions and expressive communication. This top-down communication approach could be straightforward for less educated staff to understand and accept, but more

cumbersome for professional employees who derive more satisfaction in organisations operating in dynamic environments with open and complex communication flows. Therefore, different organisations will select various models of employee communication based on their unique environments and organisational goals (Byers, 1997).

As for the social exchange theory, Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) posit that social exchange theory views organisations as transactional spaces. From the keyword 'exchange', the theory avers that the organisation, like humans, is transactional in its relationships. The central question is always: What's in it for me? It is arguably one of the most influential conceptual frameworks for unbundling workplace behaviour, specifically from a communication perspective. Theorists in Social Exchange Theory (SET) agree that it involves a series of interdependent interactions that generate reciprocal obligations for the parties involved (Cropanzano, Prehar and Chen, 2002).

The process of social exchange is often wittingly or unwittingly facilitated by organisations and supervisors who engage in regular communication with their employees. Scholars (Blau 1964; Emerson 1976; Ruck and Welch 2012) believe that social exchange fosters interactions that elicit obligations, appreciation, and trust. The process of social exchange is often not demanded. Saks (2006) believes that employees are trusted, supported and fully integrated in internal communication. They feel obligated to reciprocate the respect and favour they receive. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) describe this interchange as a fundamental characteristic of positive exchanges based on a sense or feeling of obligation. Rich, Lepine, and Crawford (2010) posit that beyond obligatory loyalty, effective internal communication fosters a deep understanding of belonging in employees, which makes them lifelong brand ambassadors for the organisation they work for. This means that there are no off days, as employees represent the organisation at every opportunity, providing information, clarifying issues, and promoting visions without ambiguity because they are well informed.

One critical tenet of SET is that human and organisational relationships gradually evolve from trustworthy, loyal, and mutually advantageous commitments attained through adherence to specific exchange rules by all parties involved (Emerson, 1976: 351). SET helps explain employee engagement through internal communication. The

theory explains how employees can improve performance and productivity, which ultimately enhances organisational performance if truly engaged through effective internal communication that shows respect and reciprocal connections between employees and organisations. When HEIs like the DUT apply feedback from internal communication with employees to institutional strategy, employees feel supported, trusted, and valued. This can potentially translate into enhanced performance and productivity for both the employee and the institution (Karanges *et al.*, 2014).

Eisenberger *et al.* (1997) and Robbins and Judge (2017) define perceived organisational support as the employee's views of how much the employer values their contributions. When feedback is provided, employees want to see that their input is considered and implemented, no matter how little. It also reflects the perceptions of employees about the reward system inherent in their organisations. Employees want assurances, through communication and action, that they will be rewarded for improved performance and exactly what the reward entails (Eisenberger, Huntington *et al.*, 1986).

According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), when HEIs such as the DUT establish effective internal communication channels, they help employees develop a sense of connection and better understand their roles within the institution, consequently fostering increased engagement. The importance of engagement cannot be overstated. Organisations are made up of people. No matter how laudable and lofty the goals of an organisation are, if the employees, the organisation's most important stakeholders, do not feel included, the chances of success would be very slim. In summary, SET offers valuable insight into the factors that contribute to employee engagement and underscores the significance of mutual relationships between employees and organisations.

Einwiller *et al.* (2021) posit that SET explains how, when organisations like the DUT utilise resources, it fosters prosocial attitudes and behaviours and promotes the establishment of stable and positive relationships. From an internal communication perspective, Einwiller *et al.* (2021) argue that SET can foster social exchange between employees and organisations through appropriate, informative and timely communication. Higher levels of employee satisfaction with the quality of internal

communication enhance their perceptions of the organisation and their roles and obligations.

The stakeholder theory, for its part, emphasises the importance of all stakeholders in the employment relationship. One of the significant challenges with the communications department of organisations is the treatment of employees as a single entity. According to Welch and Jackson (2007), if internal communication strategically manages interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels, then identifying them rather than lumping them together is expedient. Although most public relations practitioners initially struggled to accept the term 'internal stakeholders', Freeman (1984) cautiously accepted the term. Still, he noted the need for organisations to maintain an external focus, stating that internal stakeholders must be seen as the conduit through which managers reach other external stakeholders. Freeman also identified a range of internal stakeholders, such as line management, team members, and other internal groups (related departments and subsidiary managers). In the context of HEIs, the internal stakeholders would be Faculty Deans, Unit Heads, Heads of Departments, Administrative Heads, and so on.

The researchers trace the origin of the term 'stakeholder' to the Stanford Research Institute in 1963. However, over the years, the term has been used several times by researchers examining the various internal and external individuals and groups whose actions or inactions can potentially impact organisations. In 1984, renowned public relations and management scholar Freeman published a book titled *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* which would continue to serve, and still serve, as foundational work that has brought the concept of the stakeholder and their impact on the organisation.

Freeman (1984) defines the stakeholder as any entity whose actions can influence or are influenced by mission-driven organisations. Building on Freeman's seminal work, Donaldson and Preston (1995) argue that it is morally obligatory for companies to consider and mainstream all stakeholders' interests to achieve long-term competitiveness and profitability. Donaldson and Preston further identify three theoretical approaches to addressing stakeholders.

- (i) The descriptive approach represents organisations as entities comprising different stakeholder groups with their interests. This perspective is considered the least comprehensive, as its primary goal is to acknowledge and consider stakeholder claims or concerns.
- (ii) The instrumental approach emphasises the importance of stakeholder management in contributing to financial outcomes. This perspective is considered progressive as it aims to strike a balance between financial interests and stakeholder interests.
- (iii) The normative approach prioritises stakeholders as the 'ends' rather than the 'means' to achieve financial outcomes. This comprehensive view focuses solely on stakeholders, considering them as the primary focus and objective.

At the core of the premise of the stakeholder theory is the realisation that different stakeholders have different needs and expectations and that aligning business strategies and internal communication to address these needs is central to organisational growth and development.

According to Fassin (2009), organisations use stakeholder theory for in-depth analysis of their various stakeholders. In the context of the DUT, this analysis would require the institution to consider the needs and wants of its employees when designing and implementing effective internal communication strategies. It is often expected to overlook or disregard internal stakeholders and pay more attention to external ones. However, disgruntled employees often result in poor institutional performance. For example, if lecturers are unhappy, it would inevitably translate into unhappy teaching or relational methods with students, which would translate into poor academic performance and, in turn, poor institutional performance. The cycle continues until the issue of disgruntled stakeholders is addressed.

Welch and Jackson (2007) recommend differentiating stakeholder groups into segments, demographics, or occupational classification. In the context of HEIs such as the DUT, staff can be grouped in ways that would aid in easy identification and classification with respect to suitable internal communication and reliable channels. For example, staff can commonly be identified as manual and ancillary, academic

support, administrative, academic, and research. Alternatively, Cheney and Christensen (2001) recommend using structural levels to identify broad organisational stakeholder groups. The groups are strategic management, day-to-day management, and team and project management.

Understanding stakeholder theory helps managers consider various groups with different stakes, contributions, and expectations in the organisation. When applied to internal communication, this understanding fosters a deeper understanding of and identification of participants representing different stakeholder groups at various organisational levels. From a theoretical perspective, internal communication in HEIs helps institutions maintain a line of communication with employees that ensures the identification and achievement of strategic goals. According to Orsini (2000), when HEIs pay attention to their internal stakeholders, they are better equipped to find and develop strategies that best meet needs and communicate goals and objectives.

Hopkins (2015) cautions that if organisations primarily seek to shape public opinion through external communication, it presupposes that internal communication aims to reinforce the operational image to ensure that employees understand the need to deliver clients' products and services punctually and within the allocated resources. In the context of HEIs, the institution transmits internal communication to cultivate a more egalitarian work environment where employees shape the company's operational strategies. This helps to optimise efficiency, minimise expenses, and streamline staff allocation. An understanding of stakeholder theory, for example, places the organisation in an advantageous position to know the unique roles of employees and how they integrate into the organisational vision and goals. Argenti (1998) believes that this knowledge helps to build effective internal communication strategies that eventually inspire more strategic external communication.

As for Social Network Analysis (SNA), this focuses on the connections and relationships between people or groups within social networks, such as HEIs. According to Gupta, Trivedi, and Singh (2024), understanding the nature and characteristics of such networks helps organisations gather information on the connections between various stakeholders. The information collected can help guide organisational decisions, which can be applied to gleaned behavioural traits and relational capabilities. Bernard (2020) avers that assuming that groups are social

building blocks is imprudent. Individuals can belong to the same group but not to the same social network. According to Bernard, networks offer platforms for individuals to negotiate hierarchies. Through networks, individuals learn to conform to deviate from social norms, develop group boundaries, etc. This is particularly important to HEIs in designing and implementing effective internal communication. Understanding networks over groups helps to spread internal communication that achieves desired goals and objectives.

According to Sias and Cahill (1998), Social Network Analysis is crucial for communication practitioners because it leverages the knowledge of employees' penchant to function within the broader organisational network. Employees exchange information, resources, and emotional support within this network with their peers, managers, or leaders. The goal of internal communication within organisations such as the DUT should be to expand employee networks and use these networks as sources of information for management on the pulse of employees. It should also be used to transmit messages from the management to employees through networks. When people feel like they belong to networks, it fosters cooperation and shared understanding.

Porter and Rigby (2021) state that social network analysis allows organisations to decipher organisational norms and social cues through direct employee interactions. They stress that friendship networks formed within the workplace can significantly influence employees' perceptions and attitudes toward their organisation. This, in turn, affects internal communication outcomes, such as the quality of the employee-organisation relationship and the communication behaviours of employees.

Social Network Analysis offers an essential theoretical framework for understanding, applying, and advancing internal communication within organisations like HEIs. Yuea *et al.* (2014) believe that Social Network Analysis helps organisations view their employees within the context of workplace networks. Although employees have their unique characteristics and traits, this uniqueness finds expression within networks of shared interests. According to Yuea *et al.*, networks help organisations identify vital communicators, understand how information flows and the sources, and decipher where communication breakdown potential starts. Having this critical information can

potentially lead to deeper insights into the dynamics of internal communication and how it impacts organisational success.

4.4 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The research led to the proposal of an extensive conceptual framework intended to deepen our understanding of the current impact of internal communication on institutional success (Figure 4.2). The examined literature and study objectives served as the foundation for this framework. It also takes into account the theories that guide this research. Six hypotheses were formulated in line with the objectives.

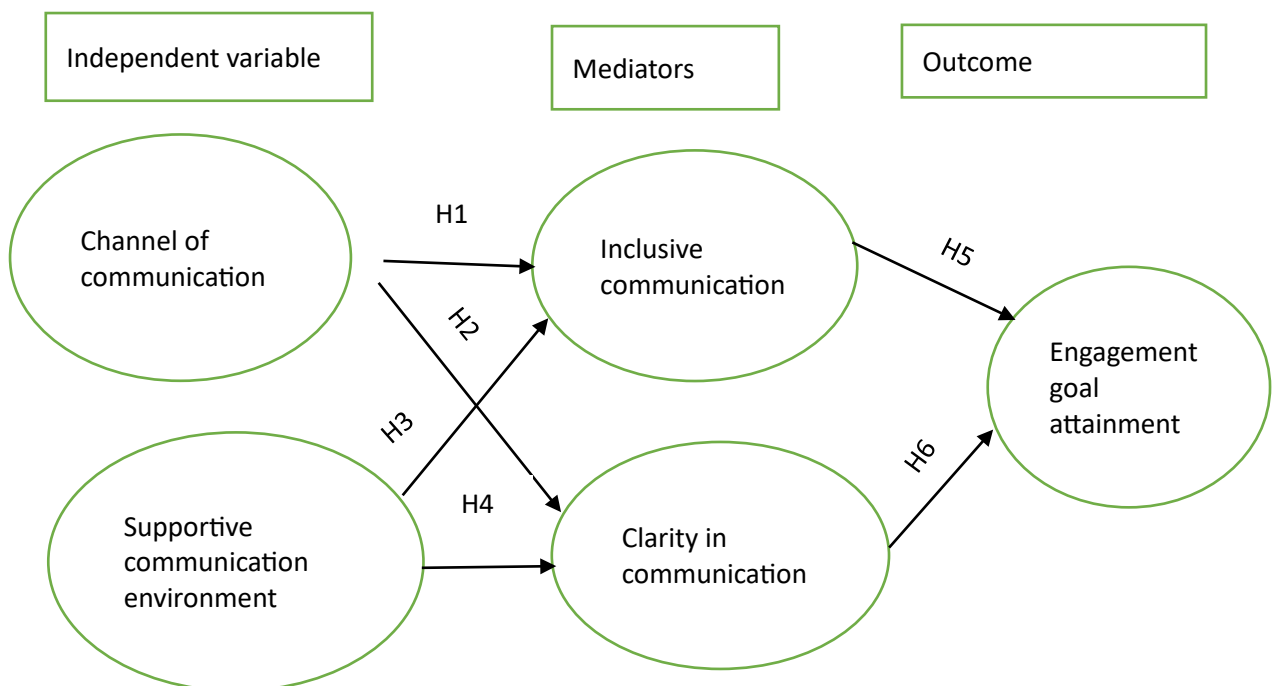


Figure 4.2: Proposed Conceptual Framework

4.4.1 Effective communication systems influence inclusive communication practices

According to Wolfgruber, Sturmer and Einwiller (2021: 1844) organisational inclusion is defined as creating an environment where a person’s feeling of distinctiveness and belonging is nurtured through formal or unofficial participation in employee employer relations and where employees feel respected and empowered to contribute meaningfully. Caidor and Cooren (2018: 22) argue that research has proposed numerous guidelines for implementing diversity management practices to foster an

inclusive organisational environment. They further argue that the role played by organisational communication systems and practices is often minimised. Their research report that the achievement or failure of equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives is influenced by engagement between employees and employers, and thus communication plays a significant role. Sen (2023) states that in recent times, organisations are seeing more diversity, which makes inclusive communication practices of importance. To address this change, communication systems are essential. When communication systems are implemented in a way that promotes inclusivity, it fosters engagement, collaboration, a feeling of community, and in turn leads to a more progressive organisation thus in turn organisational success. The diversity of audiences represented in employer-employee relations presents a challenge for HEIs and a need for inclusive communication. The absence of communication systems and approaches may reduce the success of communication initiatives (Noro, Cruz and Kleber 2024: 5). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Effective communication systems influence inclusive communication practices.

This hypothesis explores the connection between effective communication systems and the promotion of inclusive communication practices. Inclusive communication ensures that all employees, regardless of their background, role, or perspective, are involved in and informed about institutional matters. This inclusivity is crucial for diversity management as it ensures that diverse voices are heard and valued. It also strengthens employee relations by fostering a culture of respect and equality, which in turn enhances employee engagement as employees feel more connected and committed to the organisation.

4.4.2 Effective communication systems enhance clarity in communication

One of the most common challenges faced by organisation when it comes to communication is not achieving clarity around important and key messages Craemer (2021: 1) according to Suthers (2017: 15) scholars and practitioners agree that for communication systems to be utilised effectively, effective communication practices are vital. A communication system consists of individuals, the messages they want to

share, the technology that facilitates communication, and the institutional frameworks that restrict and regulate the types of discussion that are permitted.

Craemer (2021: 1) indicates that in the communication process, a message's effectiveness can be compromised by the sender due to factors such as use of an inappropriate communication channel, not acknowledging the significance of non-verbal cues, failing to provide context, inappropriate choice of words. On the other hand, the recipient may not interpret the message the way it was intended. According to Bucata and Marius (2017: 50), effective leadership entails developing communication systems that ensure that when communicating messages are understood by the employees. This serves as the foundation for communication processes that enable employees to build interpersonal relationships and maintain open lines of communication between the employer and employees. Communication systems must be designed in a way that promotes information flow and accurate information sharing, which in turn creates an environment that allows employers and employees to freely express themselves and seek clarity where needed.

Talmage (2024) states that understanding, teamwork, and productivity all increase when people can express their views, ideas, and objectives succinctly and precisely.

Employees who have successful interactions at work are more likely to stay engaged with the organisation, understand its goals and strategies, connect with its values, and have a sense of belonging as they learn how they fit into the larger picture. Furthermore, engagement and performance in employment are just a few of the outcomes that good internal communication can affect (Peters 2024). Given the foregoing discussion of the importance of effective communication systems in relation to clarity in communication, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Effective communication systems enhance clarity in communication.

This hypothesis examines whether effective communication systems lead to clearer communication within the institution. Clarity in communication is vital for reducing misunderstandings, ensuring that employees are aware of their roles, responsibilities, and the organisation's objectives. When communication is clear, it directly influences employee engagement, as employees who understand what is expected of them are more likely to be motivated and productive. Additionally, clear communication

strengthens employee relations by minimising conflicts and fostering a more collaborative working environment.

4.4.3 Supportive communication environment enhances clarity in communication

Given that people from different backgrounds come together in organisations, it is of paramount importance to create an environment which advances clarity in communication in the employment relationship. The communication infrastructure in an organisation plays a pivotal role in shaping employee-employer relations and fostering employee engagement. By creating a communication environment characterised by clarity, transparency, and accessibility, HEIs can strengthen mutual understanding, trust, and collaboration between employees and employers. Research suggests that clear communication is essential for building strong relationships, resolving conflicts, and aligning individual and organisational goals (Shockley-Zalabak, 2014).

Noro *et al.* (2024) state that it is important for institutions to establish clear channels and protocols for disseminating information and soliciting feedback. By providing employees with timely and relevant information through multiple communication channels, such as email, intranet portals, and staff meetings, HEIs can ensure that employees are well informed about institutional policies, initiatives, and expectations (Shockley-Zalabak, 2014). Moreover, by soliciting feedback from employees and actively addressing their concerns and questions, HEIs can demonstrate a commitment to transparency and openness, fostering a culture of trust and accountability. To this end, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Supportive communication environment enhances clarity in communication.

This hypothesis explores how a supportive communication environment impacts clarity. A supportive communication environment encourages open, honest, and respectful interactions which enhances the overall clarity of messages. Such an environment is particularly important for diversity management, as it ensures that all employees feel comfortable asking questions and providing feedback, leading to a

better understanding of diverse perspectives. This also boosts employee engagement and thereby creating a work culture where everyone feels valued and understood.

4.4.4 A supportive communication environment enhances inclusive communication

The challenge of establishing strategic communication processes and systems in organisations is the first step towards building an environment. According to Bucata and Rizescu (2017), the internal communication environment should be established in a way that values individual differences taking into consideration the factors below:

- Respect and sensitivity towards every party in the employee employer relationship
- Acknowledging cultural differences
- Communicating and engaging in ways that foster and uphold confidence and trust

When employee contributions are not acknowledged, it results in an unfavourable communication environment and climate. An unfavourable internal communication climate makes it challenging for employees to engage with each other or the employer and ultimately affect organisational performance (Razak *et al.*, 2019: 3). Inclusive internal communication practices, such as regular feedback mechanisms and open-door policies, can further reinforce positive employee-employer relations by ensuring that employees' voices are heard, concerns are addressed, and contributions are acknowledged.

By aligning diversity management and inclusive communication initiatives with organisational goals and values, organisations can create a shared sense of purpose and direction among employees and employers (Jackson *et al.*, 2003). When employees understand how their individual roles and contributions contribute to broader organisational objectives, they are more likely to feel motivated, committed, and invested in the success of the organisation. Through strategic alignment of diversity initiatives with employment relations goals, thus fostering a culture of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect, leading to improved employee satisfaction and performance. In line with the discussion on favourable communication environment, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: A supportive communication environment enhances inclusive communication.

This hypothesis tests whether a supportive communication environment fosters inclusive communication practices. In a supportive environment, all employees are encouraged to participate in discussions and decision-making processes, which promotes inclusive communication. This is essential for diversity management, as it ensures that communication is not dominated by any single group or perspective. It also enhances employee relations by building a more collaborative workplace, where diverse teams can thrive. Consequently, employee engagement increases as employees feel their contributions are meaningful and valued.

4.4.5 Inclusive communication enhances goal attainment

Higher education institutions face considerable obstacles in the successful implementation and maintenance of diversity management and inclusive internal communication strategies, despite the potential benefits they offer. A notable impediment is the resistance to change that arises when new diversity strategies are implemented. To address effective internal communication barriers in HEIs, leadership must recognise that communication is an intrinsically complicated process. Employees view and interpret messages in accordance with their backgrounds, values, emotions, and experiences, which make communication fundamentally challenging (Reidhead 2021: 268). Quirke (2002) highlights that involvement signifies a two-way communication stream, where employees' voices are heard, and their inputs are valued. When employees feel valued, respected, and included, they are more likely to align their personal goals and behaviours with organisational objectives, leading to increased motivation, engagement, and productivity. Through the strategic alignment of diversity management and inclusive communication initiatives with institutional goals, HEIs can cultivate a culture of excellence, collaboration and continuous improvement, driving sustainable growth, competitiveness, and societal impact. Hence the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 5: Inclusive communication enhances goal attainment.

This hypothesis examines the impact of inclusive communication on the achievement of institutional goals and in turn institutional success. Inclusive communication ensures

that all employees are aligned with the institution's mission and goals, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment. This alignment is crucial for employee engagement, as employees who feel included are more motivated to contribute to the institution's success. Additionally, diversity management benefits from inclusive communication by leveraging diverse perspectives to achieve innovative solutions and better decision-making, ultimately leading to improved goal attainment.

4.4.6 Clarity in communication enhances goal attainment

The goals of an organisation, no matter how well defined, will almost certainly not be achieved if they are not well communicated. One of the most crucial aspects for achieving institutional goals and objectives towards organisational success is communication. These goals are achieved by employing internal communication to ensure that employees are aware and aligned with the goals (Razak and Johar 2019: 3) Quirke's progression of internal communication framework postulates that it is vital to ensure clarity and comprehension, ensuring that employees not only know about organisational initiatives, but also understand their significance and how they contribute to the bigger picture (Welch and Jackson 2007). An organisation can function more effectively when goals are clearly communicated between employees and the employer. According to Holliday (2023), when communication is carried out effectively, it ensures that employers and employees are in alignment with each other's expectations, goals, objectives, and strategies. It reduces confusion, minimises mistake, while concentrating all efforts towards achieving the same goals. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 6: Clarity in communication enhances goal attainment.

This hypothesis tests the relationship between clear communication and the successful attainment of institutional goals. Clarity in communication ensures that employees understand their roles and the organisation's expectations, reducing errors and improving efficiency. This clarity is vital for both employee engagement and employee relations, as it minimises confusion and fosters a productive work environment. Clear communication also supports diversity management by ensuring that all employees, regardless of background, have the same understanding of

organizational goals, leading to more coordinated and effective efforts toward achieving those goals.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored a spectrum of theoretical frameworks that offer varied lenses through which to view organisational communication and effectiveness. From Quirke's progression of internal communication, emphasising the evolutionary stages of organisational dialogue, to the Systems Theory that focuses on fostering efficient functioning between the various components of the organisation that outline a strategic approach to communication, each framework contributes unique insights into the dynamics of organisational interaction. Social Exchange Theory, with its focus on viewing organisations as transactional spaces, contrasts with Stakeholder Theory, which maintains that if internal communication strategically manages interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels, then identifying them rather than lumping them together is expedient. drawing a connection between the theories, internal communication, employee engagement, employee relations, diversity management, and institutional success.

The chapter unbundled systems theory, which perceives organisations as interconnected entities with various components collaborating to achieve common goals and objectives. The chapter discussed the importance of such systems relationships with HEIs such as the DUT, emphasising the necessity of cohesive communication channels that facilitate effective operation across all departments and units.

The chapter also examined social exchange theory and stakeholder theory. The chapter examines Social Exchange Theory, which considers organisations as transactional spaces where interactions generate reciprocal obligations. Stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of considering the diverse interests and expectations of internal stakeholders in HEIs. It advocates for a comprehensive approach that addresses the needs of various stakeholder groups, including faculty, administrative staff, and management.

The chapter concluded by situating the theories within the context of internal communication in HEIs. The goal of the theoretical framework section was not just to discuss theories. The goal was to show how a nuanced understanding of theoretical underpinnings can help HEIs initiate, plan, and develop effective internal communication processes tailored to the unique needs and dynamics of specific HEIs. When aligned with internal communication efforts, theories can help HEIs cultivate engaged, collaborative employees, which, in turn, will drive institutional growth and development.

These frameworks collectively underscore the complexity of organisational operations, highlighting the critical role of effective communication in achieving strategic objectives, enhancing internal processes, and fostering employee relations and engagement when dealing with a diverse workforce. By integrating these theories, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview that not only enriches the understanding of internal communication and effectiveness, but also offers practical guidance for enhancing the operational and strategic dimensions of institutions, particularly within educational settings like the DUT. This multifaceted theoretical exploration lays the foundation for assessing and improving institutional practices, driving home the importance of a nuanced approach to communication and effectiveness in achieving organisational success.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

5.1 Introduction

Effective internal communication is crucial to the success of an organisation. It promotes collaboration, cohesion, and alignment toward common goals (Welch, 2011; Husain, 2013). In the ever-changing landscape of HEIs, where diverse stakeholders come together to achieve multiple goals, internal communication plays an even more significant role. This research aimed to examine the complex relationship between internal communication and institutional success at the DUT. By focusing on employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management, this study wanted to uncover how effective internal communication contributes to the achievement of organisational goals.

The need for this research arises from understanding that HEIs, such as the DUT, function in complex environments marked by constant change, diverse stakeholder interests, and evolving educational paradigms. In this context, effective internal communication becomes crucial to creating a positive work environment, boosting employee morale and commitment, and encouraging inclusive practices that value diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Although the importance of internal communication in organisational settings is recognised, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that specifically examine its impact in HEIs, particularly in the South African context. Given the limited empirical studies on this subject, this doctoral research was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To elucidate the role of internal communication in achieving institutional success at DUT, with a particular focus on employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management.
- ii. To explore the intricate relationship between internal communication practices and institutional success metrics.
- iii. To propose a comprehensive Human Resources internal communication framework tailored to the unique context of DUT, integrating best practices from academia and industry to optimise organisational outcomes.

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methodology used to achieve the research objectives. It covers various aspects such as research design, population and sampling procedures, data collection instruments and processes, data analysis techniques, pilot study methodology, limitations, validity and reliability considerations, and ethical considerations. By thoroughly documenting and justifying the methodological choices, this chapter shows the rigour and credibility of the research, laying the foundation for reliable data collection and analysis. It also enables other researchers to replicate the study, contributing to knowledge in the field of organisational communication and management, specifically in the higher education sector.

5.2 Research Philosophy and Approaches

Research philosophy refers to the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide the research process. It influences the choice of research methods, data collection techniques, and data analysis procedures (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). According to Žukauskas *et al.* (2018: 121), research philosophy refers to a researcher's way of thinking, which guides them in obtaining reliable and fresh knowledge about their study subject. In simpler terms, it serves as the basis for the research process, including problem formulation, selection of research approaches, data collection, processing, and analysis. Wilson (2014) emphasises the importance of a strong understanding of research philosophy, as it is essential to clarify the chosen design and the gathering and interpretation of evidence. In this study, the research philosophy serves as a foundation to understand the nature of reality, knowledge acquisition, and the role of the researcher in knowledge generation. Three primary areas of research philosophy include epistemology, ontology, and axiology.

5.2.1 Epistemological Considerations

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. Different epistemological perspectives offer varying views on the nature of reality and the ways in which knowledge can be attained (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). To summarise this explanation, Wilson (2014) simplifies that epistemology investigates the essence of knowledge and our understanding of the environment. The philosophical assumptions underlying the epistemology are perceived as follows.

Positivism

Positivism, as an epistemological perspective, underscores the primacy of empirical evidence and scientific methodologies in the pursuit of knowledge (Zammito, 1830). It accentuates the necessity for objective observation and measurement of phenomena to discern universal laws or regularities governing both the natural and social realms. Positivists posit that reality exists independently of human perception and can be understood through systematic observation and experimentation (Bryman, 2016). Auguste Comte, the progenitor of positivism, introduced this concept in his seminal work 'Course in Positive Philosophy', advocating for the application of scientific principles to the study of society (Jonmarie, 2015). He stressed the significance of empirical evidence and systematic observation in understanding social phenomena. Positivism remains a pivotal epistemological perspective in the social sciences, guiding research methodologies that prioritise empirical observation, measurement, and the application of scientific methods.

Under the umbrella of epistemological philosophy, positivism adopts an objective and dispassionate stance in examining phenomena, regardless of the individuals involved in a research study (Wilson, 2014). Saunders *et al.* (2016) concur, noting that positivism employs a naturalist approach to generalise observed social occurrences, establishing statements that assume the status of laws. Neuman (2014) supports this perspective, highlighting positivism's reliance on empirical evidence, hypothesis testing, and statistical analysis to establish causal relationships and generalise findings.

Bryman (2016) provides an overview of positivism as an epistemological stance, emphasising its focus on empirical observation, measurement, and generalisability in the pursuit of knowledge in the social sciences. Creswell and Creswell (2017) underscore the application of positivist principles in research design, emphasising objectivity, replicability, and the use of quantitative methods to uncover causal relationships in social phenomena. According to the positivist point of view, scientists act as impartial observers who, grounded in this philosophy, detach themselves from personal values and conduct independent research (Žukauskas *et al.*, 2018). By adhering to positivist principles, researchers aim to unearth objective truths about the

natural and social world, thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism represents an epistemological perspective that emphasises the subjective interpretation of social phenomena, focusing on understanding the meanings and interpretations individuals attach to their experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Unlike positivism, which seeks to uncover objective truths through empirical observation, interpretivism acknowledges the role of human subjectivity and context in shaping reality (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivists argue that social reality is constructed through the interactions and interpretations of individuals, and therefore researchers must strive to understand the subjective meanings and perspectives of participants (Crotty, 1998). This perspective aligns with the hermeneutic tradition, which emphasises the importance of interpretation and understanding in social inquiry (Gadamer, 2004).

According to interpretivism, social phenomena are complex and context dependent, which requires researchers to engage with participants in their natural settings and explore their lived experiences through qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). By focusing on the subjective meanings attributed to phenomena, interpretivists aim to generate rich and nuanced understandings of social reality (Silverman, 2016). Interpretivism has been widely used in fields such as sociology, anthropology, and qualitative research in psychology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It offers researchers the flexibility to explore diverse perspectives and uncover the underlying meanings and interpretations that shape human behaviour and interactions (Bryman, 2016).

Pragmatism

Pragmatism is an epistemological perspective that emphasises practical consequences and the utility of knowledge in guiding action (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). Rooted in the works of philosophers such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, pragmatism asserts that the meaning and truth of ideas are determined by their practical effects and outcomes (James, 2020a). William James, one of the key proponents of pragmatism, argued that the truth of an idea lies in its

ability to solve problems and facilitate effective action (James, 2020b). According to James, the value of knowledge lies not in its correspondence to an external reality, but in its usefulness in guiding human behaviour and decision making. Similarly, John Dewey emphasised the practical consequences of knowledge, asserting that ideas should be evaluated based on their consequences for human experience and social progress (Dewey, 1907).

Pragmatism offers a flexible and adaptive approach to knowledge, emphasising the importance of experimentation, problem-solving, and adaptation in the pursuit of truth (Wills and Lake, 2020). Unlike positivism, which prioritises empirical evidence and scientific methods, pragmatism embraces a more holistic view of inquiry, incorporating diverse methods and perspectives to address complex problems (Shaw *et al.*, 2010). In the field of social science research, pragmatism encourages researchers to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on insights from multiple disciplines to address real-world problems (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019; Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). Pragmatists argue that knowledge is contingent upon context and experience and, therefore, research should be guided by the needs and interests of the community being studied (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Pragmatism has been influential in shaping qualitative research methodologies, such as grounded theory and action research, which emphasise the practical application of knowledge in addressing social issues and promoting social change (Charmaz, 2014; Reason and Bradbury, 2008). By prioritising practical consequences and the utility of knowledge, pragmatism offers a valuable perspective for researchers seeking to address real-world problems and promote positive social outcomes.

Realism

Realism, as an epistemological perspective, posits that there is an objective reality that exists independently of human perception, but acknowledges that our understanding of this reality is mediated by our perceptions and interpretations (Dehalwar and Sharma, 2023; Khalili, 2022). Rooted in the work of philosophers such as Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer, realism seeks to uncover the underlying structures and mechanisms that govern the natural and social world.

At its core, realism asserts that the world operates according to certain causal mechanisms and regularities that can be discovered through empirical investigation (Bhaskar, 2014). Unlike positivism, which emphasises empirical observation and measurement, realism goes beyond surface-level phenomena to explore the underlying causal processes that shape social phenomena (Archer, 1995). Roy Bhaskar, one of the key proponents of critical realism, argues that social reality consists of both empirical phenomena and the underlying structures or mechanisms that generate these phenomena (Bhaskar, 2014). Critical realists seek to uncover these underlying structures through a process of scientific inquiry that combines empirical observation with theoretical analysis (Archer, 1995).

Realism acknowledges the limitations of human perception and interpretation but maintains that there is an objective reality that exists independently of our subjective experiences (Dehalwar and Sharma, 2023). Realists argue that while our knowledge of reality may be imperfect and fallible, it is possible to develop theories and explanations that approximate the underlying reality (Bhaskar, 2014). In the field of social science research, realism has influenced methodologies such as critical realism and ethnography, which seek to uncover the underlying structures and mechanisms that shape social phenomena (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 2014). Realism encourages researchers to go beyond surface-level descriptions and explanations to explore the deeper causal mechanisms that drive social phenomena (Noor and Darmaningrat, 2023).

By embracing a realist perspective, researchers aim to develop theories and explanations that accurately capture the underlying reality of social phenomena, enabling a deeper understanding of the complex social world (Archer, 1995). Realism offers a valuable framework for social science research, providing a nuanced understanding of the relationship between social structures, human agency, and social change.

5.2.2 Ontological Considerations

Ontology, a fundamental concept in philosophy and research methodology, pertains to the nature of reality and the existence of entities within it. It addresses questions about what exists, how entities are structured, and how they interact with each other

(Bryman, 2016). In research, ontology forms the basis for understanding the nature of the phenomena being studied and influences the researcher's perspective on the world. There are various ontological perspectives that researchers may adopt, each offering distinct views on the nature of reality. These perspectives include realism, positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and social constructionism, among others. Each perspective provides a different lens through which researchers can understand and interpret social phenomena (Bryman, 2016).

Realism, for example, asserts that there is an objective reality that exists independently of human perception, while positivism emphasises the empirical observation and measurement of phenomena. Interpretivism, on the other hand, suggests that reality is socially constructed and subjective, shaped by individuals' interpretations and experiences (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Pragmatism, another ontological perspective, emphasises the practical consequences of beliefs and actions, focusing on the usefulness and effectiveness of knowledge in addressing real-world problems. Social constructionism, meanwhile, argues that reality is constructed through social interactions and discourse, with meanings and interpretations shaped by social and cultural contexts (Bryman, 2016).

Each ontological perspective has implications for the research methodology and the way researchers approach the study of social phenomena. For example, a positivist ontology can lead to the use of quantitative methods and an emphasis on empirical evidence, while an interpretivist ontology can favour qualitative methods and a focus on understanding subjective experiences and meanings (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

In general, ontology plays a crucial role in shaping researchers' understanding of the world and guiding their choice of research methods and approaches. By critically examining ontological assumptions and considering the nature of reality, researchers can develop a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena they study and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

5.2.3 Axiological Considerations

Axiology, within the context of research methodology, pertains to the study of values and their role in guiding research endeavours. It encompasses the examination of

ethical considerations, moral principles, and personal or societal values that may influence the research process and outcomes (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Axiological considerations are crucial in research, as they shape the researcher's approach to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. Researchers must navigate ethical dilemmas, ensure integrity and transparency in their work, and consider the potential impact of their research on individuals and society as a whole (Bryman, 2016).

Several key aspects fall under the axiology of research methodology:

- (a) Ethical Considerations: Researchers must adhere to ethical principles and guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and confidentiality. Ethical considerations also involve obtaining informed consent from participants, minimising harm, and maintaining integrity throughout the research process (Bryman, 2016).
- (b) Objectivity and Bias: Axiology addresses the researcher's commitment to objectivity and the mitigation of bias in research. Researchers must strive to maintain impartiality and avoid personal biases that can influence data collection, analysis, or interpretation (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).
- (c) Value Neutrality: Axiology considers the extent to which researchers can remain neutral and objective in their research endeavours. Although complete value neutrality may not be achievable, researchers must acknowledge their own values, beliefs, and biases and strive to minimise their influence on the research process (Bryman, 2016).
- (d) Social Responsibility: Researchers have the responsibility to conduct research that contributes positively to society and addresses pressing social issues. Axiological considerations include the ethical implications of research findings and the possible consequences for individuals, communities, and society as a whole (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

Scholars such as Bryman (2016) and Creswell and Creswell (2017) emphasise the importance of axiology in research methodology, highlighting its role in ensuring ethical integrity, promoting objectivity, and addressing societal concerns. In essence, it focuses on the researcher's personal perspectives and beliefs, which remain separate from the research subject or phenomenon. Consequently, the researcher adopts an

external viewpoint when conducting research (Wilson, 2014). By integrating axiological considerations into their research practice, researchers can uphold ethical standards, maintain rigour and credibility, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

5.2.4 Methodological Considerations

Methodology refers to the systematic framework and set of principles employed by researchers to conduct their studies and generate new knowledge. It encompasses the overall approach, strategies, techniques, and procedures utilised to address research questions or objectives and achieve research goals (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The choice of methodology depends on various factors, including the nature of the research questions, the theoretical framework, the epistemological and ontological perspectives that guide the study, and practical considerations such as resources and time constraints (Bryman, 2016).

Common methodologies employed in research include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.

- (a) **Qualitative Methodology:** Qualitative research focuses on understanding complex social phenomena by exploring individual perspectives, experiences, and behaviours in-depth. It involves the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis, to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).
- (b) **Quantitative Methodology:** Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses, identify patterns, and establish relationships between variables. It employs structured data collection instruments, such as surveys, questionnaires and experiments, and statistical analysis techniques to derive empirical findings (Bryman, 2016).
- (c) **Mixed Methods Methodology:** Mixed-methods research combines qualitative and quantitative approaches within a single study to provide a comprehensive understanding of a research problem. It involves collecting both numerical and non-numerical data and integrating qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques to triangulate findings and enhance the validity of research outcomes (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

In addition to these broad methodologies, researchers can also employ specific research designs and techniques tailored to their research objectives, such as case studies, experiments, surveys, content analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology, among others (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Bryman, 2016). Methodological decisions are guided by the overarching research philosophy, which encompasses epistemological and ontological considerations and reflects the researcher's assumptions about the nature of reality, knowledge, and the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). By selecting an appropriate methodology and employing rigorous research techniques, researchers can effectively address research questions, generate reliable and valid findings, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

Table 5.1 provides a concise overview of the key differences between Positivism, Realism, Interpretivism, and Pragmatism in Epistemology, Ontology, Axiology, and Methodology.

Table 5.1: Comparative table highlighting key points based on Epistemology, Ontology, Axiology, and Methodology for Positivism, Realism, Interpretivism, and Pragmatism

Aspect	Positivism	Realism	Interpretivism	Pragmatism
Epistemology	Emphasises empirical evidence and scientific methods for acquiring knowledge.	Views knowledge as objective and independent of human perception.	Focuses on understanding subjective meanings and interpretations.	Emphasises practical consequences and usefulness of knowledge.
Ontology	Believes in an objective reality that exists independently of human observation.	Acknowledges the existence of an external reality that can be known through observation.	Recognises multiple social realities constructed by individuals and groups.	Views reality as dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by human actions and experiences.
Axiology	Value objectivity and neutrality in research to minimise bias and subjectivity.	Acknowledges the influence of values and perspectives in shaping research outcomes.	Recognises the role of values and perspectives in interpreting social phenomena.	Emphasise the importance of practical outcomes and the researcher's values in guiding research.
Methodology	Utilises quantitative methods and emphasises measurement and statistical analysis.	Utilises a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, depending on the research objectives.	Using qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, to explore subjective experiences.	Using a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to address research questions.

(Source: Researcher's own creation)

5.2.5 Research Philosophy adopted for the study

The choice of research philosophy is crucial, as it shapes the entire research process from conceptualisation to the interpretation of findings. This research is underpinned by a positivist philosophical stance, which asserts that there is an objective reality that exists independently of human perception and can be studied through empirical observation and measurement (Bryman, 2016). Positivism emphasises the use of systematic methods to uncover causal relationships and generalisable patterns in social phenomena (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

Positivism assumes that knowledge can be acquired through empirical inquiry, in which researchers collect and analyse observable data to test hypotheses and formulate general laws or theories (Bryman, 2016). This approach prioritises objectivity and replicability in research findings, with the aim of uncovering universal truths about the social world (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Given the positivist orientation, I relied on quantitative methods to collect and analyse numerical data. Quantitative research emphasises the measurement of variables and the use of statistical techniques to analyse the relationships between them (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). This approach facilitates the identification of patterns, trends, and associations within large data sets.

Positivism tends to adopt a reductionist perspective, breaking down complex social phenomena into simpler, quantifiable elements that can be systematically studied (Bryman, 2016). This reductionist approach enables researchers to isolate variables and control extraneous factors, enhancing the internal validity of research findings. The adoption of a positivist philosophical stance aligns with the objectives of this research, which aim to uncover objective truths about the impact of internal communication on organisational success.

Similarly, embracing realism ontologically acknowledges the existence of social structures and phenomena, providing a framework for understanding organisational dynamics within the DUT. By emphasising empirical observation and quantitative analysis, the research sought to identify measurable relationships between variables and generate findings that can be generalised beyond the specific context of the study. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of positivism, such as its

potential to overlook subjective experiences and the complexity of social phenomena. In general, the philosophical assumptions that guide the research provide a robust framework for systematic inquiry and knowledge generation in the field of organisational communication and management.

5.3 Research Approaches

The research approach guides the overall methodological framework within which a study is conducted. It encompasses the overarching strategy used to address research questions or objectives and dictates the methods used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. There are various research approaches, each with its own set of principles and methodologies, tailored to suit different research goals and contexts.

A widely recognised research approach is the deductive approach, which involves starting with a theory or hypothesis and seeking to test its validity through empirical observation and data analysis (Bryman, 2016). This approach is rooted in the positivist tradition, emphasising logical reasoning and systematic investigation to confirm or refute existing theories. Researchers using the deductive approach develop a hypothesis based on existing theory or literature and then collect data to empirically test this hypothesis (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Data collection in deductive research typically involves quantitative methods, such as surveys or experiments, and analysis is often conducted using statistical techniques to assess the relationship between variables (Bryman, 2016).

In contrast, the inductive approach involves collecting and analysing data to develop theories or hypotheses based on observed patterns or themes (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Unlike the deductive approach, which starts with a theory and seeks to confirm it, the inductive approach begins with data collection and analysis, leading to the formulation of new theories (Charmaz, 2014). Researchers using the inductive approach engage in qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, or document analysis, to gather rich contextual data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Analysis in inductive research focuses on identifying patterns, themes, or relationships in the data that are used to develop new theories or hypotheses (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The choice between deductive and inductive approaches depends on various factors, such as the nature of the research questions, the available data, and the researcher's epistemological orientation. Deductive approaches are suitable for hypothesis testing and theory confirmation, whereas inductive approaches are preferred for theory generation and exploration of complex phenomena. Table 5.2 summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the deductive and inductive approaches in research. It is important to note that the strengths and weaknesses listed in Table 5.2 are generalisations, and the suitability of each approach depends on the specific research context, objectives, and methodology. Researchers often consider a combination of deductive and inductive reasoning to address the limitations of each approach and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Table 5.2: Summarising the strengths and weakness inherent in deductive and inductive approaches

Aspect	Deductive Approach	Inductive Approach
Strengths	- Allows for the testing of existing theories or hypotheses	- Facilitates exploration and discovery
	- Provides clear direction and structure for research	- Generates new theories or explanations based on data
	- Results can be generalisable	- Flexible and adaptable to emerging patterns in the data
	- Can be more efficient in confirming or refuting theories	- Suitable for exploring complex and multifaceted issues
Weaknesses	- Limited by the validity of the initial theory or hypothesis	- Results may lack generalisability due to sample size
	- May overlook unexpected findings or phenomena	- Subject to researcher bias or interpretation
	- Relies heavily on predetermined constructs and variables	- Time-consuming process of data analysis and interpretation

(Source: Researcher's own creation)

Furthermore, the appropriateness of the selected approach depends on various factors, including the nature of the research questions, the epistemological stance of the researcher, the available resources, and the desired outcomes of the study. In this study, the deductive approach was selected as the most appropriate research approach. The motivation for the choice of the deductive approach is premised on the nature of the study objectives. The primary objective of the study is to confirm or refute existing theories on the relationship between variables (internal communication to achieve institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management). The deductive

approach facilitates hypothesis testing and theory confirmation, making it suitable for achieving research objectives (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, the study adopted a positivist epistemological stance, which emphasises the importance of empirical evidence and systematic observation in the pursuit of knowledge. The deductive approach is rooted in positivism, emphasising logical reasoning and hypothesis testing (Bryman, 2016). In addition, the study had access to quantitative data that could be analysed using statistical methods. The deductive approach is well suited for quantitative data analysis, allowing the testing of hypotheses using statistical techniques (Bryman, 2016). Overall, the deductive approach offers a structured and systematic framework for conducting research, which is valuable given the time and resource constraints of the study.

5.4 Research Design

Research design is a crucial component of any research endeavour, providing a blueprint for how data will be collected, analysed, and interpreted to address research questions or objectives (Creswell, 2014). It serves as a roadmap that guides the researcher throughout the research process, ensuring methodological rigour and coherence. It outlines the framework within which the data collection and analysis processes are carried out (Kalpokas and Radivojevic, 2021). The research design establishes a structured and cohesive plan that outlines the steps to be taken to conduct the investigation, ultimately with the aim of producing the desired results of the study (Gray, 2020). The choice of research design is significantly influenced by the research problem at hand (Bryman, 2008). The selection of an appropriate research design is contingent on various factors, including the nature of the research questions, the epistemological stance of the researcher, the availability of resources, and the desired results of the study. Different research designs offer distinct advantages and are suited to different research contexts (Table 5.3).

5.4.1 Types of Research Design

One common research design is the quantitative approach, which involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to test hypotheses and establish patterns or relationships among variables (Yilmaz, 2013). Quantitative research designs are

characterised by their emphasis on objectivity, replicability, and the use of statistical methods to derive conclusions from data (Denscombe, 2017). Another prevalent research design is the qualitative approach, which focuses on understanding phenomena from the perspectives of the participants, often through the collection and analysis of textual or non-numerical data (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research designs prioritise depth over breadth, with the aim of uncovering rich, contextual insights into the research topic. Mixed-method research designs, which combine elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, have also gained prominence in recent years (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017). These designs offer researchers the flexibility to triangulate findings from multiple sources of data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the choice of research design should align with the research questions, objectives, and epistemological stance of the researcher. This is vital because by selecting an appropriate research design, researchers can ensure the methodological integrity and validity of their study, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

Table 5.3: Concise overview of the main characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of each type of research design

Characteristic	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research	Mixed-Methods Research
Approach	Deductive, seeks to quantify data	Inductive, seeks to explore and understand phenomena	Combines deductive and inductive approaches
Data Collection Methods	Surveys, experiments, structured interviews	Interviews, focus groups, observations, document analysis	Combination of quantitative and qualitative methods
Sample Size	Typically large sample sizes	Smaller, purposive sampling often used	Varies depending on research focus and design
Data Analysis	Statistical analysis, numerical data	Thematic analysis, coding, narrative interpretation	Both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques
Strengths	Objectivity, generalisability, replicability	Rich, in-depth insights, holistic understanding	Comprehensive understanding, triangulation of data
Weaknesses	May lack depth, may oversimplify complex phenomena	Subjectivity, potential for researcher bias	Time-consuming, resource-intensive

(Source: Researcher's own creation)

5.4.2 Quantitative Research Design

Research design plays a pivotal role in shaping the methodology and outcomes of a study. Quantitative research encompasses various designs that serve different purposes and address different types of research questions. Four main types of quantitative research designs include descriptive, correlational, causal comparative/quasi-experimental, and experimental research (Ghanad, 2023).

Descriptive Research: Descriptive research aims to describe characteristics, behaviours, or phenomena within a population without influencing them. It involves collecting data to provide a comprehensive overview or snapshot of a particular topic of interest (Neuman, 2014). Descriptive research is often used to answer questions about the prevalence, distribution, and frequency of variables in a population. This design is useful for generating hypotheses and identifying patterns that may warrant further investigation.

Correlational Research: Correlational research examines the relationship between two or more variables without implying causality. It involves measuring the degree of association or correlation between variables to determine whether changes in one variable are accompanied by changes in another (Trochim, 2006). Correlational studies use statistical techniques, such as the Pearson correlation coefficient, to quantify the strength and direction of relationships between variables. This design is valuable for exploring connections between variables and making predictions based on observed patterns.

Causal-Comparative/Quasi-Experimental Research: Causal-comparative or quasi-experimental research investigates cause-and-effect relationships between variables in non-randomised settings. It involves comparing groups that differ in one or more characteristics to assess the impact of independent variables on dependent variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Unlike experimental research, causal-comparative studies lack random assignment of participants to groups, making it challenging to establish causality definitively. However, this design allows researchers to explore naturally occurring differences between groups and infer causal relationships based on observed differences.

Experimental Research: Experimental research is characterised by the manipulation of one or more variables to assess their effects on another variable while controlling for extraneous factors. It involves the random assignment of participants to experimental and control groups to determine the causal relationship between independent and dependent variables (Trochim, 2006). Experimental studies adhere to strict protocols to ensure internal validity and minimise threats to validity, such as confounding variables and selection bias. This design is considered the gold standard for establishing causality in research and is widely used in various fields, including psychology, medicine, and education. As shown in Table 5.4, each quantitative research design offers unique advantages and limitations, and the choice of design depends on the research questions, objectives, and contextual factors. By selecting the appropriate research design, researchers can effectively address their research aims, draw valid conclusions, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge within their respective fields.

Table 5.4: Summary of the advantages and limitations of each type of research design within the quantitative approach

Research Design	Advantages	Limitations
Descriptive Research	- Provides a comprehensive overview of characteristics, behaviours, or phenomena	- Limited in its ability to establish causality
	- Useful for generating hypotheses and identifying patterns	- Relies on self-report measures, which may be subject to bias
	- Offers insights into the prevalence, distribution, and frequency of variables	- Does not involve manipulation of variables, limiting causal inference
Correlational Research	- Examines relationships between variables without implying causation	- Cannot establish causality definitively
	- Quantifies the strength and direction of associations between variables	- Vulnerable to third-variable confounding, where an unmeasured variable influences both the predictor and outcome
	- Useful for making predictions based on observed patterns	- Requires large sample sizes to detect small or moderate correlations
Causal-Comparative/	- Allows exploration of cause-and-effect relationships in non-randomised settings	- Lack of random assignment limits causal inference
Quasi-Experimental Research	- Compares groups differing in one or more characteristics to assess their effects	- Vulnerable to selection bias and confounding variables
	- Provides insights into naturally occurring differences between groups	- Difficulty in controlling extraneous variables, reducing internal validity
	- Useful for investigating effects when randomisation is not feasible	
Experimental Research	- Establishes causality through manipulation of variables and random assignment	- Requires strict control of extraneous variables to ensure internal validity
	- Gold standard for determining causal relationships	- May be ethically or practically challenging to implement
	- Allows for rigorous testing of hypotheses with high internal validity	- Findings may lack ecological validity if conducted in artificial laboratory settings

(Source: Researcher's own creation)

5.4.3 The research design adopted for this study

The selection of a descriptive and correlational study design that follows a quantitative methodology is grounded in several considerations that align with the study objectives and the nature of its research questions. First, quantitative research methods offer structured data collection techniques, which allow precise measurement of variables. Given the study objectives, including the evaluation of current communication strategies, the determination of the role of internal communication in institutional success, and the exploration of relationships between variables, quantitative methods provide a systematic approach to objectively measure these constructs.

Second, quantitative research facilitates the generalisation of findings to a broader population. As the study aimed to investigate communication strategies and their impact within the context of the DUT, the ability to generalise the findings to similar institutions is paramount. Quantitative approaches enable researchers to gather data from a representative sample and draw inferences about the larger population. In addition, quantitative research involves the application of statistical techniques to analyse data, enabling the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships between variables. This analytical rigour enhances the credibility and validity of the study findings. Through statistical analysis, researchers can test hypotheses, identify significant associations, and draw informed conclusions based on empirical evidence.

Quantitative research prioritises objectivity and replicability. By employing standardised data collection tools and statistical procedures, consistency and reliability are ensured throughout the research process. This objectivity facilitates cross-study comparisons and strengthens the credibility of research outcomes. Additionally, research objectives, which focus on examining current communication strategies, determining their impact on institutional success, and proposing a framework, align well with quantitative inquiry. Quantitative methods enable systematic exploration of relationships between variables and the development of predictive models grounded in empirical evidence.

Overall, the choice of a quantitative research design for this study is justified by its capacity to deliver objective, generalisable, and replicable findings, its suitability for

statistical analysis, and its alignment with the research objectives. Figure 5.1 illustrates the research design for the study, outlining the process and methods that I adopted.

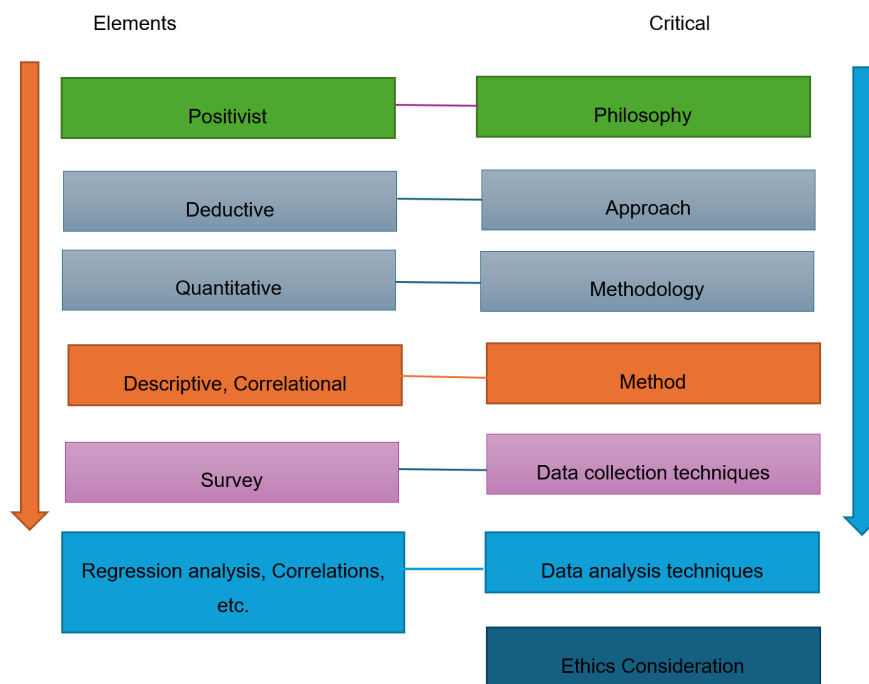


Figure 5.1: The research design adopted for this study

(Source: Researcher's own creation)

5.5 Target population and Sampling Methods

Collis and Hussey (2013: 97) state that a target population is defined as a group of possible respondents that can be used for the purpose of a research study. The target population is the number of people that are of interest to a researcher (Barbour 2014: 206). According to Cooper and Schindler (2014: 388), the study population comprises individuals or objects that share common characteristics and from which the researcher aims to draw conclusions based on the sample. Terre Blanche *et al.* (2010: 133) and Newman (2018: 247) define the population as a large group from which sampling elements are selected and from which the researcher generalises the findings. It is important to note that the research objectives, the questions formulated, and the background of the study guided me in selecting the target population. Alvi (2016: 10) defines the target population as all members who meet the specified criteria for inclusion in a research study.

The target population for this study included full-time academic and administrative staff employed by the DUT. Currently, the DUT employs 1584 academic and administrative staff on its campuses, according to the institution's internal database accessed directly from the Human Resources department.

5.5.1 Sampling process and method

Sampling entails examining a segment of the population to draw conclusions about the entire population (Neuman, 2014). It involves selecting a portion of the population to derive insights that can be generalised to the entire population. The aim of sampling is to approximate the characteristics of a specific population, with a sample representing a subset or fraction of the total population. Simply put, a sample represents a portion of the total population, selected systematically by the researcher from a sampling frame that mirrors the entire population (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013). Sampling involves the identification and selection of individuals to participate in research with the aim of ensuring that the chosen sample is representative of the entire population.

5.5.2 Sampling Techniques

A sample refers to a subset of cases chosen by a researcher from a larger pool and then generalised to the entire population (Newman, 2018: 246). Terre Blanche *et al.* (2010: 48) define sampling as the process of selecting research participants from a complete population, involving decisions about which individuals, settings, events, behaviours, and/or social processes to observe. As emphasised by the aforementioned author, effective sampling ensures that the elements chosen for the sample accurately reflect the characteristics of the population from which they were drawn. Check and Schutt (2012: 96) state that sampling entails selecting a portion of a population that represents the entire population to gather information about the phenomenon of interest. The primary objective was to select a sample that was representative of the population, enabling the researcher to draw conclusions (Newman, 2018: 246).

Sampling techniques can be broadly categorised into non-probability and probability sampling methods (Barbour, 2014: 206). Probability sampling increases the likelihood of selecting each member of the target population, while non-probability methods rely

on the researcher's discretion, with no guarantee that every element of the target population will be included in the sample (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 212).

In this study, probability sampling was used in the selection of respondents. Kumar (2014: 175) outlines that in quantitative research, the researcher opts for a sample selection method that is impartial and reflective of the population it represents. Among various probability sampling techniques, such as stratified, systematic, and cluster sampling, I used simple random sampling to select respondents for the study. According to Denscombe (2012: 341), simple random sampling ensures that each element of the population and each potential sample of a given size have an equal chance of being selected. Given that the respondents were drawn from a list of full-time staff members at DUT, steps were taken to maintain confidentiality by removing all personal identifiers from the data collection instrument. Respondents were randomly selected in a five-name interval from full-time staff lists until I reached the true sample size. This was to reduce any form of bias in the selection of respondents.

5.5.3 Sample size

The sample design outlines the method used to select the sample from the population (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014: 268). Shapiro (2011: 2) explains that the sample size commonly denotes the number of units selected from which the data were collected. Sekaran and Bougie (2014) provided a table to determine an optimal sample size based on factors such as the desired level of precision, confidence, variability in the population, and cost-benefit considerations. Applying their approach, a population size of approximately $N=1584$ at DUT corresponds to a sample size of $n=310$. Therefore, the sample size for this study was 310, according to the guidelines established by Sekaran and Bougie. This sample was drawn from the DUT community, specifically targeting full-time staff members, including both academic and non-academic personnel across the institution.

5.6 Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

The importance of crafting an effective questionnaire cannot be overstated, as it directly contributes to achieving the study objectives. Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2014: 49) suggest that professionals and scholars use measuring instruments to facilitate the evaluation of subjects, enabling the collection of data. Questionnaires serve as the primary data collection method for this study, as defined by Louw (2014: 247) as a list of inquiries devised by a researcher for the purpose of obtaining primary data for a specific investigation. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers and Cronje (2014: 152), questionnaires are advantageous in social science research because of their ability to delve into the depths of individuals' perspectives.

5.6.1 Questionnaire development

Aaker *et al.* (2007) underscored that a well-designed questionnaire facilitates the attainment of research objectives. Although questionnaires offer an efficient and cost-effective means of collecting data, caution is warranted in their design, administration, and data analysis. Singh (2004) cautioned against attributing scientific qualities to questionnaires or conflating them with the respondents' actual experiences, emphasising that they represent perceptions. Structured questionnaires, characterised by closed-ended questions and Likert scales, elicit precise responses from respondents, while unstructured questionnaires, common in qualitative studies, allow for diverse question formulations (Kothari, 2004).

Tailoring the questionnaire design to the specific study context is imperative. In this study, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to collect primary data from each target group. Hair Jr. *et al.* (2010) and Aaker *et al.* (2007) outline key steps for creating an effective questionnaire. These include planning the measurement objectives, formulating research questions, determining question order and wording, conducting pre-testing, and making necessary revisions. Although the questionnaire development process for this research did not strictly adhere to these steps, they provided valuable guidance in crafting a suitable design. The questionnaire was designed to capture data pertinent to the study objectives and consisted of only closed-ended questions that required respondents to select an answer from predefined options. From this closed questionnaire (see Annexure C), the data were collected using a five-point Likert scale

(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The Likert scale, a numerical rating system ranging from 1 for 'strongly agree' to 5 for 'strongly disagree', gauges the sentiments of respondents in response to closed-ended questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2019: 381).

This scale measured current human resource communication strategies and the role that internal communication plays in achieving institutional success, facilitating straightforward coding and analysis. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Section A asked for demographic information, Section B contained closed-ended questions on internal communication and institutional success related to employee engagement, and Section C contained questions related to internal communication and institutional success related to employee relations. Section D contained questions related to internal communication and institutional success in diversity management.

The questionnaire was developed based on an extensive review of the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. Previous studies, coupled with my understanding of the study context, informed its formulation. In particular, the questionnaire was available only in English, as all respondents were proficient in the language.

5.6.2 Piloting the Study

When a researcher conducts a study based on self-completed questionnaires, it is very important to conduct a pilot study. According to Gray (2009: 227), this aims to determine if the questionnaire is adequately formulated. Saunders *et al.* (2009: 212) concur that the aim of the pilot study is to test whether the questions on the questionnaire are clear to the respondents and to determine if the information obtained meets the expectations of the researcher.

To ensure that the questionnaire is understood and that there is no confusion among the selected participants, a pilot study was conducted. The pre-test helped to determine whether the questions are relevant enough for the topic under study. An additional 20 members were consulted for the pilot study, separate from the main respondents. Thereafter, the responses of the 20 respondents were captured to form a data set. Then, this was subjected to the Cronbach coefficient alpha test to determine the reliability of the questionnaire.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha test measures the internal consistency of a set of items to examine the extent of the correlations. The resulting coefficient is shown in numeric form ranging from 0 to 1. A score of 0.7 is considered reliable, and the closer to 1 the correlation, the higher the internal consistency. A high reliability score of 0.912 of the overall Cronbach Alpha tests was obtained from the pilot study ($\alpha=0.912$; $n=61$ items). Pilot respondents were selected from DUT's full time academic and non-academic staff members of the DUT randomly recruited. Respondents who participated in the pilot study were not included in the actual study. No significant problems emerged during the pilot study, as participants grasped the questionnaire well; therefore, no major revisions were needed.

5.6.3 Questionnaire Administration and Data Collection

A significant challenge I encountered during my data collection process was the need to shift my data collection method from the originally planned in-person approach to an online approach due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The online data collection approach posed a few challenges, most notably a low response rate despite repeated efforts and constant reminders to the selected sample. This prolonged the data collection process, however, after persistent follow ups, the response rate eventually started increased.

A closed-ended structured questionnaire was distributed through an online platform, specifically through the email addresses of DUT staff members. Each online questionnaire was accompanied by an information letter and a consent form. The data collection process involved emailing the questionnaire link to the target population. Upon opening the link, respondents were asked to provide consent to participate by selecting either "yes" or "no." Choosing "no" redirected them to a gratitude message and automatic exclusion from the study, while those who chose "yes" proceeded to complete the questionnaire. This procedure ensured that participation was voluntary. My contact details were also provided in the cover letter for further inquiries. As noted by Sekaran and Bougie (2019: 212), the use of questionnaires guarantees the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents. Furthermore, questionnaires allow respondents to respond at their convenience (Sekaran and Bougie, 2019: 212). Moreover, questionnaires are advantageous for reaching a large target population.

5.7 Data Analysis

According to Remenyi and Bannister (2012: 118), data analysis involves processing, testing, and assessing data collected from respondents for meaning in terms of any hypothesis, theory, or formulation of new theory to draw conclusions and recommendations from the current study. For this study, the first step in data analysis was to capture responses from the questionnaire to form a composite data set and thoroughly check before data analysis. This was done to ensure the accuracy of the data and the conversion from raw form to reduced and classified forms that are more appropriate for analysis.

A professional statistician performed the appropriate statistical tests thereafter. Analysis was carried out using the latest version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, IBM) version 29 for Windows. This software package offers a range of tools and techniques to analyse quantitative data, including descriptive and inferential statistics, regression analysis, and correlation analysis (Field, 2013). The use of statistical software enhances the efficiency and accuracy of data analysis, enabling researchers to generate reliable findings and interpretations.

Data analysis is a crucial phase in the research process, involving the examination, interpretation, and synthesis of collected data to derive meaningful insights and draw valid conclusions (Bryman, 2016). The choice of data analysis methods depends on the research questions, the nature of the data, and the research design employed. In this study, quantitative data analysis techniques were used to analyse the collected data. One of the main data analysis techniques used in quantitative research is descriptive statistics, which involves summarising and describing the characteristics of the data set (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of key variables, such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations, allowing researchers to understand the central tendency and variability of the data. In this study, descriptive analysis was performed on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, race, level of education, etc. Results were presented in frequency tables and percentages, while bar charts were used to improve the readability of the data sets. This is in agreement with previous studies, which suggest that descriptive analysis is presented through the use of

frequency distribution tables to show the total number of occurrences (Atiku, 2014; Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). This is also in line with Sekaran and Bougie (2016) that descriptive statistics data may be displayed in a variety of ways, including bar graphs, pie charts, and histograms.

Conclusions and generalisations about the sample population were achieved with the use of inferential statistics. Inferential statistics involve making inferences and generalisations about a population based on sample data (Trochim, 2006). To investigate the role that internal communication plays in achieving institutional success in DUT, factor analysis and structural equation modelling were conducted. All analyses were performed using SPSS and AMOS version 29 were applicable and interpreted at $\alpha=0.05$. Factor analysis was performed to determine the basis of factors' variability or differences in the data set. Finally, to establish the relationship between all variables in this study, Pearson's correlation tests (r , correlation coefficients) were used. Inferential statistics allow researchers to test hypotheses, determine the significance of relationships between variables, and make predictions about the population from which the sample was drawn. This form of statistical analysis aims to draw conclusions about a population by analysing data from a sample drawn from it (Everitt and Skrondal, 2011). During inferential analysis, researchers utilise parametric and nonparametric tests to assess statistical significance when testing hypotheses (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Parametric tests are utilised with interval and ratio data when the sample distribution is normal, while nonparametric tests are preferred with nominal and ordinal data when the distribution is not normal.

5.8 Reliability and Validity

Zikmund *et al.* (2013: 301) argue that to evaluate the effectiveness of the data collection instrument, validity and reliability are measured or considered. Gray (2009: 155) states that validity is the extent to which an instrument measures what it purported to measure and is also measured in terms of the truth of the information collected and the findings that are produced. It ensures that the data collected are relevant, meaningful and applicable to the research questions. Various types of validity can be assessed, including content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity (Bryman, 2016).

Content validity involves ensuring that the items included in a measurement tool adequately represent the construct being measured (Bryman, 2016). Criterion validity assesses the extent to which scores on a measurement tool correlate with an external criterion or gold standard (Bryman, 2016). Construct validity evaluates the degree to which a measurement tool accurately measures the underlying theoretical construct it purports to measure (Bryman, 2016).

In this study, the validity was ensured by aligning the measurement instrument for data collection to the aims and objectives of the research. This was achieved through an extensive review of the literature and expert opinion to ensure that the content of the research questionnaires and questions was in line with the study objectives. In addition, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to further address the validity of the measures. According to Ullman (2006), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) aids in identifying the actual number of variables and their associated construct items within the survey instrument. EFA is utilised to evaluate the validity of the content of a survey instrument, which refers to its ability to adequately address the research questions that guide the study (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

Babbie, Halley, Wagner III and Zaino (2013: 16) define reliability as the extent to which a measuring instrument produces similar results on more than one occasion. Various methods exist to assess internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha being the most utilised (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Tavakol and Dennick (2011: 53) state that the Cronbach coefficient alpha technique measures the internal consistency of a set of items to examine the extent of correlations. For this study, the Cronbach coefficient alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the measuring instrument. The alpha coefficient indicates internal consistency, ranging from zero (0) to one (1). A zero value implies no reliability, while one (1) indicates perfect reliability. Typically, an alpha coefficient of 0.80 is deemed acceptable, although slightly lower values have been deemed acceptable in many studies (Bryman, 2008: 151). George and Mallery (2018) propose that scales with alpha coefficients falling within the ranges of 0.80 to 0.95, 0.70 to 0.80, 0.60 to 0.70, and below 0.60 are considered to have very good, good, fair, and poor reliability, respectively. In the study, internal reliability was benchmarked with values of 0.7 and above.

5.9 Ethical Considerations

Olsen (2012: 87) states that ethics refers to the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become subjects. O'Leary (2014: 64) agrees that ethics are standards of acceptable and professional behaviour that provide guidance to the researcher to act with integrity toward the respondents and throughout the entire research process. Regarding this study, the researcher requested permission to conduct research in the institution (IREC 037/20). The researcher only embarked on primary data collection after receiving the gatekeeper's letter (Annexure D).

When distributing the questionnaires, a cover letter was attached to each questionnaire to introduce the respondents to the research. Several aspects of the study were included in the cover letter for ethical purposes, including the title of the research, the aim of the study, confidentiality, anonymity and other ethical protocols. The researcher assured the respondents that participation in the research is voluntary and ensured that the participants knew that they could withdraw from the research process at any time.

A question that requires participants to indicate whether they want to participate in the research was included in the online questionnaire in accordance with the principle of informed consent. Xu *et al.* (2020) explain that informed consent is a way to ensure that individuals understand the researcher's intentions and willingly agree to participate in the research study. The electronic data obtained was managed by securing them on a protected computer. Data were only made available to the researcher, the supervisor, and the professional statistician. The stored data will only be destroyed after five years of completion of the study, according to the institution's ethics requirement.

5.10 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter details the research methodology used to outline the chosen research design, philosophy, approach, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. The chapter began with a comprehensive discussion of research philosophy exploring various epistemological and ontological considerations such as

positivism, realism, and interpretivism. It highlighted the rationale behind selecting a quantitative research approach, emphasising its suitability for testing hypotheses and analysing numerical data. Subsequently, the chapter reveals the specifics of the research design, detailing the sampling techniques employed, and justifying the sample size chosen. It elucidated the process of questionnaire development and data collection and underscored the importance of reliability and validity in ensuring the robustness of the study findings.

Furthermore, the chapter elucidated the data analysis methods, including exploratory factor analysis and internal consistency testing. In summary, Chapter 5 provided a meticulous overview of the research methodology, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the project's design and analysis techniques. The rigorous approach adopted in selecting the research philosophy, design, and analysis methods underscores the study's commitment to producing valid and reliable results.

Moving forward, the next chapter will focus on presenting and interpreting the findings derived from the data analysis. It will offer insights into the communication strategies at the DUT, the role of internal communication in institutional success, and the relationship between these variables. Additionally, the chapter will discuss the implications of the findings and offer recommendations for enhancing internal communication practices in academic institutions.

CHAPTER SIX

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the analysis of the data collected to investigate how internal communication can be used to improve employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management for institutional success in the context of HEIs, with the DUT in South Africa as a case study. The study was set to achieve key objectives. The first objective was to determine the role that internal communication plays in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management. The second objective was to explore the relationship between internal communication and institutional success. The third and final objective was to propose a Human Resources internal communication framework that can be used to achieve institutional success at a University of Technology.

Following the problem statement and research methodology outlined in Chapters 1 and 5 respectively, the research employed a quantitative approach, utilising questionnaires to gather data across the DUT community, specifically targeting full-time staff members, including both academic and non-academic personnel across all the entire institution. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed during data collection to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. This chapter presents the study findings from the collected data and is structured into four sections. The chapter provides an overview of the research data analysis results, including descriptive and inferential statistics. These analyses aim to uncover how internal communication through employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management could lead to institutional success. The findings offer valuable information on the perceptions of DUT employees, shedding light on the benefits of internal communication at the institution. The results will be discussed in the context of the existing literature, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of internal communication in the context of HEIs, at the DUT in South Africa.

6.2 Descriptive statistics

This section of Chapter 6 provides a narrative summary of the sample characteristics and demographics of the respondents who participated in the survey using descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistics were applied to establish the number of respondents, gender, age, race, faculty, education level, and number of years employed in the institution. Quantitative data was collected from 277 questionnaires distributed to 310 respondents sampled across the survey institution. The number of consented responses returned suggests a response rate of approximately 89%. The descriptive statistics for the data are presented in Table 6.1. The results were presented in frequency tables and percentages to promote readability.

Table 6.1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency (n=277)	Percentage
Age range		
25 years and below	33	11.9
26 – 35 years	91	32.9
36 – 45 years	53	19.1
46 – 55 years	54	19.5
56 years and older	46	16.6
Number of years employed in the institution		
12 months and below	12	4.3
1 – 5 years	68	24.5
6 –10 years	68	24.5
11 – 15 years	47	17.0
16 – 20 years	17	6.1
21 – 25 years	21	7.6
26 – 30 years	23	8.3
31 – 35	21	7.6
Gender		
Male	136	49.1
Female	131	47.3
Non-binary	10	3.6
Highest educational qualification		
Matric or equivalent	12	4.3
National Diploma or equivalent	48	17.3
Bachelor’s Degree or equivalent	48	17.3
Honours Degree or equivalent	58	20.9
Master’s degree or equivalent	84	30.3
Doctoral degree or equivalent	27	9.7
Race		
Black	161	58.1
Indian	56	20.2
White	35	12.6

Coloured	19	6.9
Others	6	2.2
Faculty/unit		
Faculty of Accounting and Informatics	52	18.8
Faculty of Applied Sciences	38	13.7
Faculty of Arts and Design	36	13.0
Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment	38	13.7
Faculty of Health Sciences	33	11.9
Faculty of Management Sciences	45	16.2
Other	35	12.6

6.2.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

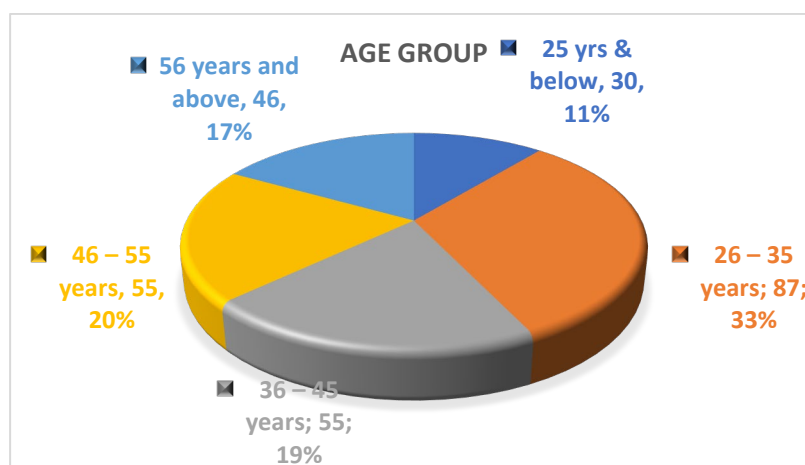


Figure 6.1: Age distribution of respondents according to percentage and value (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

The survey captures a diverse age range among respondents. In particular, the largest proportion falls within the 26-35 age bracket, representing approximately 33% of the sample. This suggests a significant presence of young professionals or those in the early stages of their careers. The prominence of the 26-35 age group in the sample reflects findings from studies such as those by Ng and Feldman (2009) and De Vos *et al.* (2019), which highlight the increasing presence of young professionals in the workforce, particularly in dynamic sectors such as academia. Following closely behind are individuals aged 36 to 45 years, representing about 19% of the respondents, indicating a substantial midcareer cohort, a phase where individuals are typically established in their careers and may be seeking advancement opportunities or career

transitions. The distribution gradually declines with age, with fewer respondents in the 56-year and older category, although still making up a notable 16.6%.

In contrast, research by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2021 underscored a significant concern i.e., a demographic imbalance among staff in South Africa, with more academics nearing retirement age than young academics entering the pipeline to succeed them. It is noteworthy that the DUT may have a higher representation of younger employees due to measures which include targeted recruitment strategies aimed at attracting young professionals, such as offering competitive entry-level positions, providing mentorship and professional development opportunities tailored to early-career researchers, and fostering a supportive work environment conducive to the growth and advancement of young talent. This emphasis on recruiting and supporting younger academics may be attributed to the diverse restructuring and policy interventions within the higher education sector in recent years. Some of these restructuring efforts have emphasised the inclusion of previously marginalised groups, including young academics, as part of broader transformation agendas aimed at fostering diversity and equity in academic institutions (CHE, 2021).

6.2.2 Length of Employment with the Institution

The data reveal a varied tenure among employees at the institution. A considerable portion, approximately 24.5%, have been employed for 1-5 years, indicating a relatively recent influx of staff. Similarly, another 24.5% have worked for 6-10 years, suggesting a stable midterm workforce. Employees who surpass the initial years of employment often exhibit increased job satisfaction and commitment, contributing to a more stable workforce during this mid-term period. However, there is a significant drop in numbers for those employed beyond 15 years, with only a small fraction representing longer tenures of 21 years and above.

6.2.3 Gender distribution of the respondents

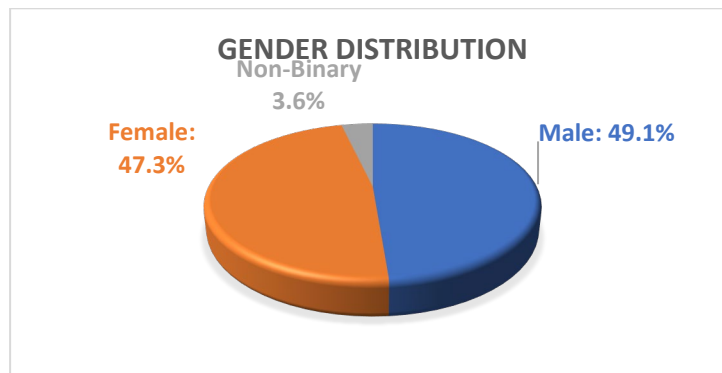


Figure 6.2: Gender distribution of the respondents according to their percentage and value (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

The gender representation in the data set is relatively balanced, with males comprising 49.1% and females 47.3%. Additionally, there is a small percentage (3.6%) identifying as nonbinary, reflecting a diverse workforce in terms of gender identity. Studies such as those by Eagly and Carli (2007) and Powell and Butterfield (2015) have discussed the importance of achieving gender balance in organisations. They emphasise how gender diversity can lead to improved decision-making, innovation, and overall organisational performance. The presence of individuals identifying as nonbinary reflects the growing recognition of diverse gender identities in the workplace.

6.2.4 Educational Qualification Distribution of Respondents

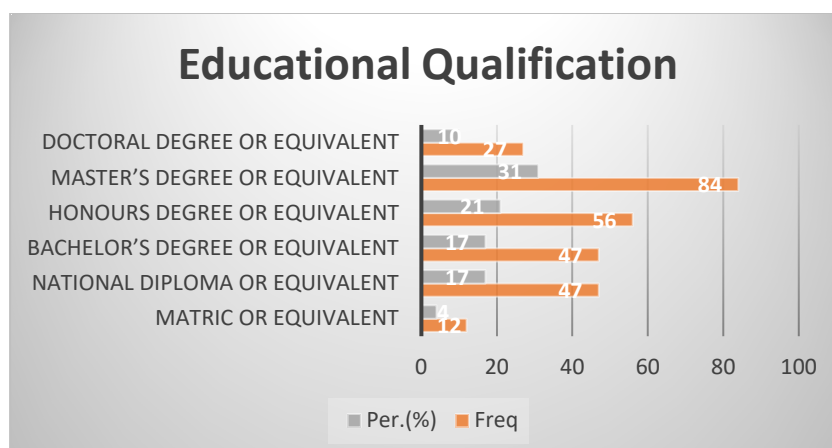


Figure 6.3: Educational qualification distribution among the respondents according to their percentage and value (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

The survey encompasses a broad spectrum of educational qualifications among respondents. The highest proportion holds a master's degree or equivalent (30.3%), followed closely by those with Honours degrees (20.9%). This indicates a highly educated workforce, with a significant number having pursued postgraduate studies. DUT introduced policies mandating that newly recruited academic staff should hold a minimum of a master's degree. Additionally, existing academic staff members who did not possess a master's degree were required to upgrade their qualifications to meet these new standards by 2021. The introduction of policies requiring academic staff to have a minimum of a master's degree reflects broader trends in higher education governance and accreditation standards. Marginson (2016) discusses the implications of such policies on academic career pathways, institutional performance, and student outcomes.

Furthermore, there is a substantial representation of individuals with bachelor's degrees (17.3%) and National Diplomas (17.3%), suggesting a mix of academic backgrounds within the institution. Research by Marginson (2016) and Taylor and Francis (2020) suggest that universities often employ staff members with various educational backgrounds to fulfil different roles within the institution. While policies may prioritise higher qualifications for academic positions, administrative staff members play a crucial role in supporting the university's operations and may hold qualifications such as bachelor's degrees or National Diplomas.

6.2.5 Distribution of racial diversity among respondents

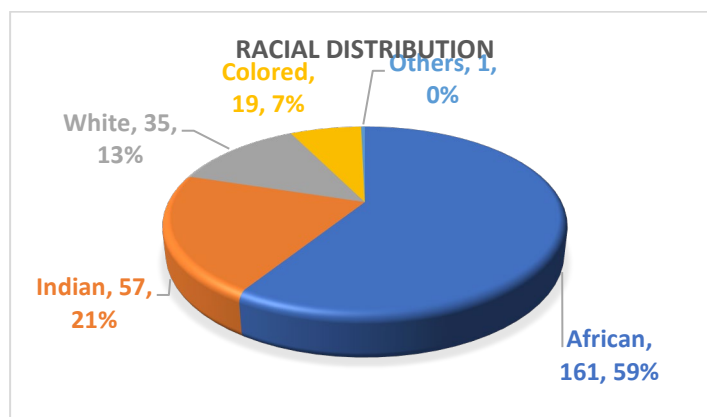


Figure 6.4: Distribution of racial diversity among respondents according to their percentage and value (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

The data set reflects a predominantly Black demographic, constituting 58.1% of the respondents. This aligns with the racial demographics of the province, which is known for its predominantly Black population. According to Wale, Seekings and Nattrass (2006), KwaZulu-Natal has historically been dominated by Black inhabitants, with their presence strongly influencing various aspects of the province's socio-political and economic landscape. This is followed by individuals identified as Indian constituting (20.2%). KwaZulu-Natal has a notable Indian community, with a rich history dating back to the colonial period and further shaped by waves of migration and settlement (Waetjen and Vahed, 2014). Individuals identified as White constitute (12.6%) of the respondents, indicating a diverse racial composition within the institution. However, the representation of Coloured individuals (6.9%) and those categorised as Others (2.2%) is comparatively smaller. Research by Adonis and Silinda (2021) discusses the complexities of racial dynamics in South African HEIs, emphasising the importance of fostering inclusivity and addressing historical inequalities in representation.

6.2.6 Faculty / Unit distribution among respondents

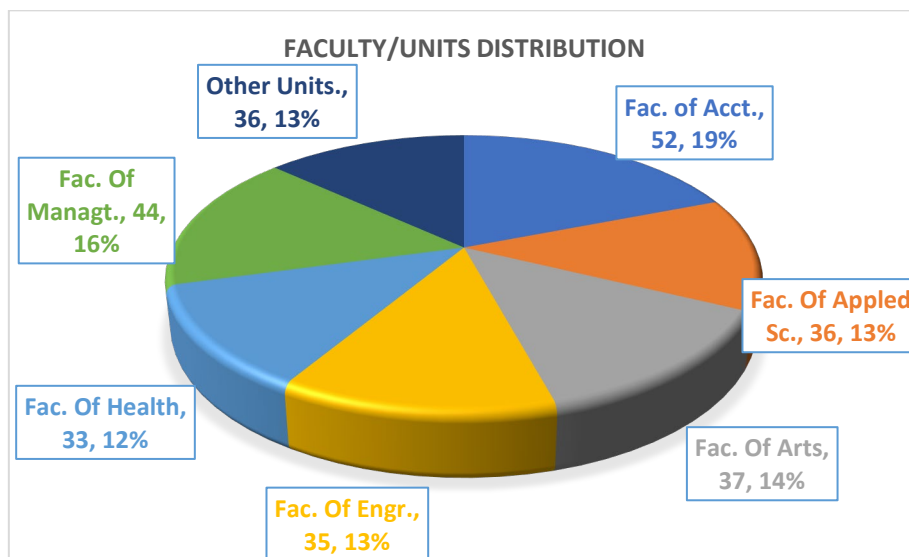


Figure 6.5: Faculty / units distribution among respondents according to their percentage and value (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

Respondents are distributed across various faculties or units within the institution. The Faculty of Accounting and Informatics has the highest representation, comprising 18.8% of the sample. This is closely followed by the Faculties of Management

Sciences (16.2%) and Applied Sciences (13.7%). The data suggest a spread of employees across different academic disciplines or administrative units within the institution. Research by Taylor and Francis (2020) discusses the strategic allocation of staff across faculties in HEIs, highlighting the importance of aligning faculty composition with institutional goals and priorities. By ensuring a balanced distribution of staff across faculties, institutions can effectively address the needs of diverse student populations and maintain academic excellence across different disciplines.

6.2.7 Distribution of language spoken among respondents

Figure 6.6 shows the language distribution of the respondents. Respondents had the option to select multiple languages, contributing to the broader language representation in the dataset. The data suggest that English was predominantly spoken by 95.8% of the respondents, indicating a high level of proficiency in the English language. This high prevalence of English usage aligns with its status as a primary medium of instruction in South African HEIs (Brock-Utne, 2018). This was followed by isiZulu spoken by 41.7% of the respondents, indicating a significant presence of Zulu speakers among the surveyed population. According to Khumalo (2019), Zulu is the most widely spoken language in KwaZulu-Natal, reflecting the regional linguistic landscape and cultural heritage. Additionally, Xhosa was spoken by 20.1% of the respondents, highlighting the linguistic diversity within the institution. Overall, the data suggest the presence of a diverse workforce in the institution.

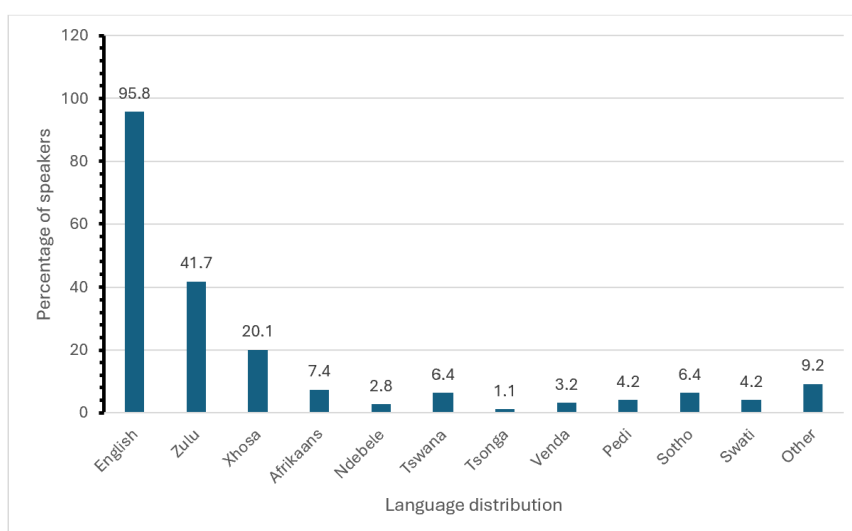


Figure 6.6: Responses language distribution. (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

6.3 Perception of internal communication and institutional success related to employee engagement

Respondents were asked to share their thoughts about employee engagement based on internal communication of the institution. Seventeen (17) questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale with the options 'strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree'. This section presents results on the opinions of the respondents on the state of employee engagement at the institution in relation to internal communication and institutional success. The section is organised into four subsections. First, it presents a one-sample t-test to determine if there is significant agreement/disagreement to each item. The average agreement score is tested against the central score of '3' to determine whether it differs significantly from '3'. The results are considered significant when $p < .05$. Second, it outlines the distribution of response frequencies. Thereafter, it provides an analysis of the data using principal component analysis (PCA), and finally a reliability assessment of the questions.

6.3.1 Perception of employee engagement

This section highlights the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with statements measuring employee engagement in the institution from internal communication. The survey results in Table 6.2 indicate a strong perception of effective internal communication within the institution, with respondents expressing positive sentiments regarding information sharing and idea exchange. On average, respondents reported a mean score of 2.44 (SD=1.180) for the statement 'My workplace allows me to freely share and exchange information and ideas' (EE1). Similarly, they feel constantly informed about departmental and institutional goals (EE2), with a mean score of 2.45 (SD=1.064). The mean score for EE3 is 2.32 with a standard deviation of 0.972. This suggests that on average, employees perceive that they are being updated somewhat regularly about the development of departmental goals.

On average, respondents reported a mean score of 2.44 (SD=1.057) for the statement 'I am engaged and put effort towards my job as a result of effective internal communication within my department' (EE4). This statement suggests that employees feel somewhat engaged and motivated in their roles due to effective internal

communication within their department. Employees feel engaged and motivated in their roles due to effective communication practices, with mean scores ranging from 2.90 to 3.22 for statements related to incorporating suggestions into departmental plans (EE6), participating in management decisions (EE7) and receiving updates and feedback on their work and performance (EE8). These findings suggest a culture of inclusion and feedback within the institution.

Respondents also feel a strong understanding of how their roles contribute to the institution vision, with a mean score of 2.34 (SD=0.985) for the statement 'I understand how my role fits within the institution vision due to effective communication by institutional management' (EE14). This indicates that employees perceive effective communication from institutional management about the alignment of their roles with broader organisational objectives. The data further suggests that effective communication positively impacts performance and engagement. Employees reported higher levels of job performance and satisfaction when adequately informed about their roles and tasks requirements. Conversely, feeling disengaged when not adequately informed (EE13) indicates the importance of clear communication to maintain employee morale and productivity (M=2.11; SD=1.160).

Most of the respondents perceive the communication strategies used by the institution as effective, as indicated by mean scores ranging from 2.27 to 2.90 for various statements related to communication practices and mechanisms (EE5, EE10). This suggests that employees are generally satisfied with how communication is managed within the institution.

The mean score for this statement is 2.87, with a standard deviation of 1.200. This indicates that on average, employees perceive that they receive constant updates and feedback on the performance of the institution (EE9). On average, the respondents reported a mean score of 2.59 (SD=1.058) for the statement 'I perform well due to the fact that I am often informed about the requirements of the role I play and how it fits in the institution, I perform well/ relate well with my seniors' (E11). This statement suggests that employees feel somewhat informed about the requirements of their roles and how they fit within the institution.

On average, respondents reported a mean score of 2.63 (SD=1.127) for the statement ‘The work environment satisfies my work-related needs whilst I work towards attaining the institutional goals’ (EE12). This indicates that on average, employees feel somewhat satisfied with the work environment in terms of meeting their work-related needs while striving to achieve institutional goals.

In general, all reported mean scores have statistically significant p-values (<.001), indicating a high level of confidence in the observed relationships between effective communication and various aspects of employee engagement and performance.

Table 6.2: Respondents’ level of agreement on employee engagement questions

Construct		Mean (SD)	T	df	p-value
My workplace allows me to freely share and exchange information and ideas.	EE1	2.44(1.180)	34,468	276	<.001*
I am constantly informed about the department and the institutional goals.	EE2	2.45(1.064)	38,285	276	<.001*
I am being constantly updated regarding the development in departmental goals.	EE3	2.32(0.972)	39,809	276	<.001*
I am engaged and put effort towards my job as a result of effective internal communication within my department.	EE4	2.44(1.057)	38,482	276	<.001*
I am aware of the communication practices/mechanisms in place in the institution.	EE5	2.27(0.952)	39,628	276	<.001*
My contributions/suggestions are incorporated into the departmental plans,	EE6	2.90(1.245)	38,698	276	<.001*
I am given a platform to participate/contribute to management decisions that directly or indirectly affect my work.	EE7	3.22(1.367)	39,214	276	<.001*
I get constant updates and feedback on my work and performance.	EE8	2.88(1.166)	41,130	276	<.001*
I get constant updates and feedback on the performance of the institution..	EE9	2.87(1.200)	39,812	276	<.001*
The communication strategies employed by the institution are effective.	EE10	2.78(1.152)	40,117	276	<.001*

I perform well due to the fact that I am often informed about the requirements of the role I play and how it fits in the institution, I perform well/ relate well with my seniors.	EE11	2.59(1.058)	40,710	276	<.001*
The work environment satisfies my work related needs whilst I work towards attaining the institutional goals.	EE12	2.63(1.127)	38,872	276	<.001*
I feel disengaged when I am not adequately informed of the requirements of a task.	EE13	2.11(1.160)	30,295	276	<.001*
I understand how my role fits within the vision of the institution due to effective communication by the institutional management.	EE14	2.34(0.985)	39,467	276	<.001*

6.3.2 Frequency distribution of responses on employee engagement

This subsection presents the frequency distribution of respondents' responses to the fourteen (14) questions measuring employee engagement. A stacked bar graph was used to represent the frequency of responses where the frequency of each Likert scale option (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) for each question is presented in each bar. Figure 6.7 presents the frequencies (i.e., the percentage of each option for each question).

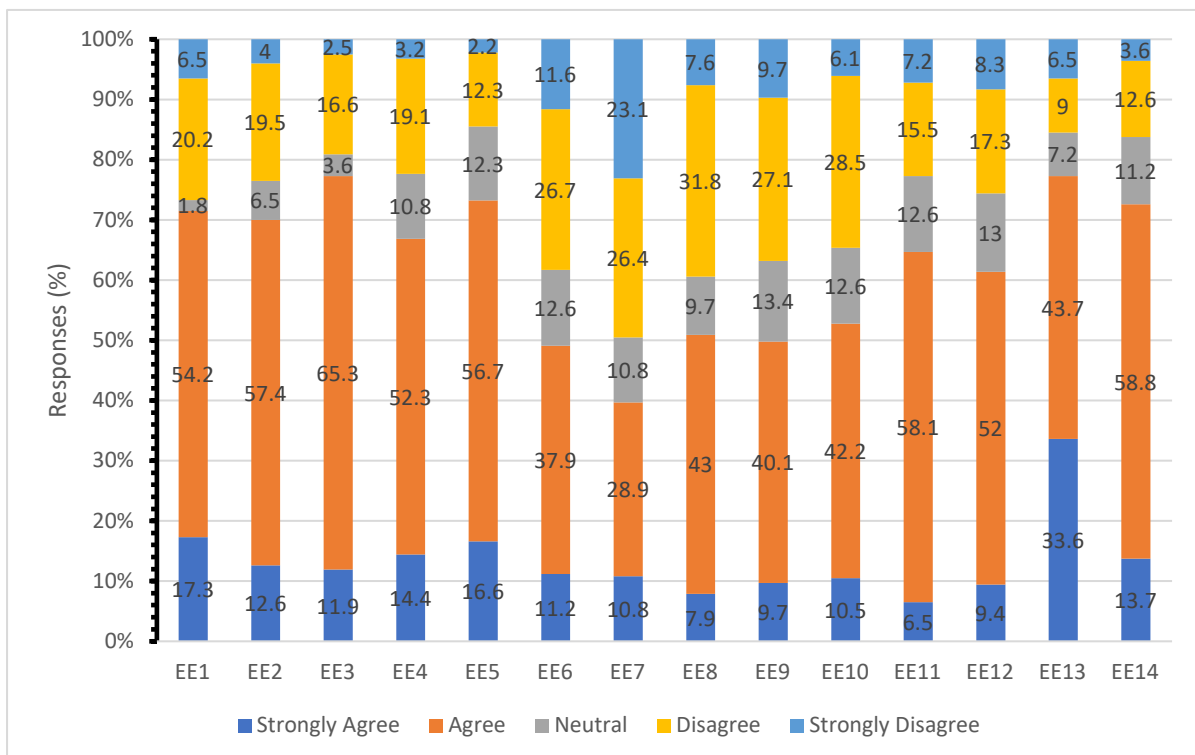


Figure 6.7: Responses to employee engagement. (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

Figure 6.7 shows the responses of the respondents regarding employee engagement. Most of the respondents (71.5%) either agree or strongly agree that their workplace facilitates free sharing and exchange of information and ideas, indicating a positive perception of the communication environment (EE1). However, there is a notable portion (26.7%) who disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting that there may be room for improvement in fostering a more open communication culture. Similarly, a significant proportion (70%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they are constantly informed about departmental and institutional goals (EE2). However, there is still a sizable portion (23.5%) who either disagree or strongly disagree, indicating potential communication gaps with respect to organisational objectives.

The majority (77.2%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they are constantly updated with respect to the development of departmental goals (EE3). This indicates a relatively positive perception of communication regarding departmental objectives, although there is still a notable portion (19.1%) who disagree or strongly disagree. The majority (66.7%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that effective internal communication within their department fosters engagement and effort in their job (EE4). However, there is a notable portion (22.3%) who either disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting that there may be areas for improvement in enhancing communication to further enhance employee engagement.

The majority (73.3%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they are aware of the communication practices and mechanisms in place within the institution (EE5). This indicates a positive perception of the transparency and accessibility of communication channels. However, there is still a portion (14.5%) who either disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting potential areas for improvement in communication clarity. A minority (49.1%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that their contributions and suggestions are incorporated into departmental plans, indicating potential room for improvement in inclusive decision-making processes (EE6). A significant proportion (38.3%) either disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting that there may be perceptions of limited opportunity for employee input in decision making.

A minority (39.7%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they are given a platform to participate or contribute to management decisions that affect their work. This suggests potential opportunities for improvement in the promotion of a more

inclusive decision-making process within the organisation (EE7). A significant portion (49.5%) either disagrees or strongly disagrees, indicating perceptions of limited involvement in decision-making processes.

The majority (50.9%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they receive constant updates and feedback on their work and performance (EE8). However, there is a sizable portion (39.4%) who either disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting potential areas for improvement in providing regular and constructive feedback to employees. The majority (49.8%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they receive constant updates and feedback on the performance of the institution (EE9). This indicates a relatively positive perception of communication about institutional performance. However, there is still a significant portion (36.8%) who disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting potential areas for improvement in transparency and communication with respect to institutional performance.

A majority (52.7%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that the communication strategies employed by the institution are effective (EE10). However, there is still a large proportion (34.6%) who disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting potential areas for improvement in communication effectiveness and clarity. Most (64.6%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that being informed about the requirements of their role and how it fits within the institution contributes to their performance (EE11). However, there is still a notable portion (22.7%) who disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting potential areas for improvement in clarifying role expectations and alignment with organisational goals.

A majority (61.4%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that the work environment satisfies their work-related needs while working towards institutional goals (EE12). However, there is still a significant portion (25.6%) who disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting potential areas for improvement in aligning the workplace with employee needs and organisational objectives. Most (77.3%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel disengaged when they are not adequately informed about the requirements of a task (EE13). This suggests the importance of clear communication in maintaining employee engagement and productivity.

A majority (72.5%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they understand how their role fits within the institution vision due to effective communication by institutional management (EE14). This indicates a positive perception of communication clarity with respect to organisational vision and employee roles. However, there is still a portion (16.2%) who disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting potential areas for improvement in communication regarding organisational vision and attainment of institutional goals.

6.3.3 Factor analysis of respondent opinions on employee engagement

In this section, the relationship between variables derived from respondents' opinions on employee engagement was examined. Factor analysis, a statistical method, was used to represent the variance among related measurable variables in relation to a reduced set of latent variables referred to as factors (Taherdoost *et al.* 2022). The discussion in this subsection encompasses correlation matrices for employee engagement variables (N = 277), results of principal component analysis for these variables, loadings of principal components for employee engagement variables, and the KMO measure assessing the adequacy of sampling for employee engagement variables.

6.3.4 Variable correlation for employee engagement

This assesses the connection between two variables, indicating both the strength and direction of their relationship. The correlation coefficients are on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no relationship, and 1 representing a strong relationship between the variables (Saunders *et al.* 2019). Thus, a correlation coefficient of 0.5 or higher suggests a reasonably strong relationship between variables, while anything lower indicates a weak relationship. A negative coefficient indicates an inverse relationship, while a positive coefficient signifies a positive relationship. A Pearson correlation test was conducted for the questions related to employee engagement, and the results are detailed in Table 6.3

Table 6.3: Correlation matrices community level of employee engagement variable

Correlation Matrix

	EE1	EE2	EE3	EE4	EE5	EE6	EE7	EE8	EE9	EE10	EE11	EE12	EE13	EE14
Correlation EE1	1,000													
EE2	,513	1,000												
EE3	,278	,556	1,000											
EE4	,382	,399	,540	1,000										
EE5	,229	,418	,395	,306	1,000									
EE6	,557	,462	,438	,525	,393	1,000								
EE7	,512	,375	,303	,506	,356	,720	1,000							
EE8	,297	,344	,520	,428	,316	,438	,440	1,000						
EE9	,368	,369	,428	,400	,338	,529	,468	,559	1,000					
EE10	,231	,316	,279	,296	,474	,375	,390	,398	,587	1,000				
EE11	,338	,380	,324	,316	,372	,327	,521	,342	,317	,465	1,000			
EE12	,347	,265	,335	,393	,301	,388	,368	,193	,283	,207	,468	1,000		
EE13	,114	,106	,276	,172	,097	,199	,108	,112	,164	-,019	,055	,306	1,000	
EE14	,183	,267	,408	,204	,437	,209	,276	,303	,356	,332	,342	,344	,262	1,000

Table 6.3 shows that some of the variables exhibited correlation coefficients of 0.5 or higher, suggesting a certain level of association between them (Hadd and Rodgers, 2020; Wagavkar, 2023). Consequently, considering the notable correlations among certain variables within the set of questions regarding employee engagement, a principal component analysis can be conducted. Hence, the subsequent section detailed the outcomes derived from the principal component analysis.

6.3.5 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of the Variables

Successful factor extraction is determined by two criteria: a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) exceeding 0.6 and a significant result in Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Shrestha 2021). In this instance, a KMO of .807 and a significant Bartlett’s test imply that the data were suitable for reliable extraction of factors (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: KMO and Bartlett's Test for employee engagement variables

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		,837
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	1643,537
	Df	91
	Sig.	<,001

6.3.6 Principal component analysis results for employee engagement

This section details the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) applied to the 14 variables measuring employee engagement. The results of the principal component analysis (PCA) are provided in this subsection. PCA serves as a technique to condense variables while retaining a significant portion of the original variability (Ghojogh *et al.* 2023; Labrín and Urdinez 2020). Eigenvalues are produced through PCA, with a common guideline suggesting the selection of components with eigenvalues greater than 1. Furthermore, PCA offers insights into the proportion of variance explained by each component and the cumulative variance across subsequent components. Varimax rotation was applied to the 14 items during PCA. From the PCA analysis, four factors were identified, which collectively explain 65.37% of the variability within the dataset (refer to Table 6.5).

Table 6.5: Total variance extracted in items measuring employee engagement

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5,672	40,513	40,513	5,672	40,513	40,513	2,905	20,747	20,747
2	1,249	8,923	49,437	1,249	8,923	49,437	2,530	18,071	38,818
3	1,212	8,656	58,093	1,212	8,656	58,093	2,277	16,264	55,082
4	1,019	7,280	65,373	1,019	7,280	65,373	1,441	10,291	65,373

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The rotated component matrix represents the results of factor analysis, specifically the rotated loadings of each item on the extracted components. In this analysis, a varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation was applied to improve the interpretability of the

factors. The results are presented in Table 6.6. The rotated component matrix reveals the relationships between the observed variables (items) and the extracted components. Each component represents an underlying factor or dimension that explains the variation in the observed variable.

Table 6.6: Rotated component matrix of extracted factors to measure employee engagement

Rotated Component Matrix^a				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
EE1	,782			
EE2				
EE3		,685		
EE4	,542			
EE5			,645	
EE6	,734			
EE7	,750			
EE8		,749		
EE9		,656		
EE10			,658	
EE11			,689	
EE12				,505
EE13				,827
EE14			,657	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.				
a. The rotation converged in 11 iterations.				

Component 1 is linked to internal communication and engagement. This component seems to revolve around the effectiveness of internal communication within the workplace and its impact on employee engagement and involvement in decision-making processes. It indicates that when employees feel they can freely share ideas and information (EE1), are engaged due to effective communication ((EE4), see their contributions being integrated into departmental plans (EE6), and have opportunities

to participate in management decisions (EE67), they tend to be more engaged and committed to their jobs.

Component 2 is related to items linked to continuous feedback and goal attainment. This component appears to emphasise the importance of regular updates and feedback provided to employees regarding departmental goals (EE3), individual work performance (EE8), and institutional performance (EE9). It suggests that when employees receive consistent updates and feedback on these aspects, they are likely to feel more informed, engaged, and aligned with organisational objectives.

Component 3 is related to clarity and goal attainment. This component appears to focus on the effectiveness and awareness of communication practices within the institution and their impact on employee performance and attainment of the organisational objectives. It suggests that when employees are aware of communication mechanisms (EE5), perceive them to be effective (EE10), receive clear information about their roles and how they contribute to the institution (EE11), and understand how their roles align with the institution's vision (EE14), they are likely to perform well and relate positively with their seniors.

Component 4 is linked to items related to work environment satisfaction and engagement. This component revolves around the satisfaction of work-related needs within the work environment and the impact of inadequate information on employee engagement. It suggests that when employees feel that their work-related needs are met within the work environment as they strive toward institutional goals, they are likely to feel satisfied and engaged (EE12). In contrast, when they lack adequate information about task requirements, it can lead to disengagement (EE13).

6.3.7 Likert scale reliability test on perception of employee engagement

A reliability test was performed on the 14 Likert scale items that measure employee engagement dimensions extracted from the PCA analysis. The reliability of the summative questions was assessed using the Cronbach alpha test, as proposed by George and Mallery (2019). This test yields a scale that encompasses an unweighted total of items. The typical interpretation of Cronbach's alpha (α) is as follows: a value greater than 0.8 suggests high (excellent) dependability, while values between 0.5 and 0.8 indicate moderate (acceptable) reliability. Conversely, the results yielding α values

below 0.5 indicate low reliability (Ekolu and Quainoo 2019). Table 6.7 presents the results of the Cronbach alpha test for the four dimensions uncovered from the PCA analysis for the 14 items measuring employee engagement.

Table 6.7: Cronbach's alpha results for employee engagement questions

Emerged Factors	Number of items	Items	Cronbach's alpha score
Internal Communication and Engagement	4	EE1, EE4, EE6, EE7	0.822
Continuous Feedback and Goal Attainment	3	EE3, EE8, EE9	0.750
Clarity and Alignment of communication	4	EE5, EE10, EE11, EE14	0.729
Work Environment Satisfaction and Engagement	2	EE12, EE13	0.468

Table 6.7 shows that Component 1 linked to internal communication and engagement (EE1, EE4, EE6, and EE7) had Cronbach's alpha value of 0.822, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, indicating excellent (acceptable) reliability of the scale. Component 2 linked to continuous feedback and goal attainment (EE3, EE8, and EE9) and Component 3 linked to communication clarity and attainment (EE5, EE10, EE11, and EE14) had Cronbach's alpha value of 0.750 and 0.729, respectively, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, indicating moderate (acceptable) reliability of the scale. Component 4 linked to work environment satisfaction and engagement (EE12 and EE13) had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.468, which is lower than the threshold of 0.5 implying a poor (unacceptable) reliability scale.

6.4 Perception of internal communication and institutional success related to employee relations

Respondents were asked to share their thoughts on employee relations based on internal communication from the institution. Fifteen (15) questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale with the options 'strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree'. This section presents results on the opinions of the respondents on

the state of employee relations at the institution in relation to internal communication for the purpose of institutional success. The section is organised into four subsections. First, it presents a one-sample t-test to determine if there is significant agreement/disagreement to each item. The average agreement score is tested against the central score of '3' to determine whether it differs significantly from '3'. The results are considered significant when $p < .05$. Second, it outlines the distribution of response frequencies. Thereafter, it provides an analysis of the data utilising principal component analysis (PCA), and finally a reliability assessment of the questions.

6.4.1 Perception on Employee Relations

This section highlights the extent to which the respondents agree or disagree with the statements measuring employee relations in the institution from internal communication. The results of the survey in Table 4.8 indicate a strong perception of effective internal communication within the institution, with respondents expressing positive sentiments about employee relations. The findings are detailed in the following:

Effective Communication Channels (ER1): The mean score of 2.61 (SD 1.242) indicates that respondents generally agree that there are effective communication channels in place to promote relationships between employees, immediate leaders, and management in the workplace. The p-value ($t(276)=35.028$; $p=0.001$) suggests strong statistical significance.

Transparency in Workplace Communication (ER2): With a mean score of 3.05 (SD 1.272), respondents tend to disagree rather than agree that there is transparency in workplace communication due to an open communication system. The p-value ($t(276)=39.875$; $p=0.001$) indicates significant disagreement than agreement between the respondents.

Encouragement of Upward Communication (EER3): The respondents show a higher level of disagreement than agreement (mean 3.33, SD 1.315) that the institution values upward communication as much as downward communication. The p-value ($t(276)=42.135$; $p=0.001$) reinforces the significance of this finding.

Communication's Role in Good Employee Relations (ER4): Respondents generally agree (mean 2.29, SD 1.086) that effective communication in the institution helps to foster good employee relations. The statistical significance is supported by the high p-value ($t(276)=35.143$; $p=0.001$).

Relationship with Immediate Senior (ER5): The mean score of 2.49 (SD 1.102) suggests that the respondents easily relate to their immediate seniors due to good communication systems. This finding is statistically significant ($t(276)=37.618$; $p=0.001$).

Relationship with Immediate Colleagues (ER6): Similarly, respondents indicate a strong agreement (mean 2.20, SD 0.926) that they relate effectively with their immediate colleagues due to good communication systems ($t(276)=39.579$; $p=0.001$).

Courteous Association among Employees (ER7): Respondents generally agree (mean 2.68, SD 1.053) that the nature of communication in the institution fosters a courteous association among all employees working together. This finding is statistically significant ($t(276)=42.395$; $p=0.001$).

Flow of information and meeting objectives (ER8): The respondents believe (mean 2.68, SD 1.074) that the ease of information flow between management and employees makes it easy to meet the objectives of the institution. This finding is supported by a high T-value ($t(276)=41.508$; $p=0.001$).

Promotion of Two-Way Feedback (ER9): With a mean score of 2.16 (SD 0.891), participants agree that internal communication promotes a two-way feedback system between employees and management. The statistical significance is evident (T-value 40.335, p-value $<.001$).

Promotion of Mutual Respect (ER10): The respondents agree (mean 2.20, SD 0.953) that effective communication promotes mutual respect between management and employees. This finding is statistically significant ($t(276)=38.458$; $p=0.001$).

Strengthening Workplace Relationships (ER11): The mean score of 2.12 (SD 0.891) indicates that respondents believe that effective communication leads to strong workplace relationships between management and employees. This finding is statistically significant ($t(276)=39.588$; $p=0.001$).

Influence on Institutional Success (ER12): The respondents agree (mean 2.23, SD 0.963) that effective internal communication and good relations between management and employees positively influence the success of the institution. This finding is statistically significant The p-value ($t(276)=38.637$; $p=0.001$).

Relationship with Immediate Colleagues for Institutional Goals (ER13): With a mean score of 2.07 (SD 0.701), respondents strongly agree that they relate well with their immediate colleagues to advance institutional goals. This finding is statistically significant ($t(276)=49.100$; $p=0.001$).

Relationship with Management Sharing Institutional Goals (ER14): The respondents generally agree (mean 2.64, SD 1.155) that they have a good relationship with the management, as they share the goals of the institution in equal measure. The statistical significance is evident ($t(276)=38.042$; $p=0.001$).

Understanding Role in the Institution (ER15): The mean score of 2.74 (SD 1.227) suggests that the respondents relate well to the management because they clearly understand how their role fits into the institution. This finding is statistically significant ($t(276)=37.178$; $p=0.001$).

Table 6.8: Respondents' level of agreement on employee relations questions

Construct		Mean (SD)	T	df	p-value
There are effective communication channels to promote the relationship between the employees, immediate leaders, and management in the workplace.	ER1	2,61(1.242)	35,028	276	<.001*
There is transparency in the workplace between management and employees due to an open communication system.	ER2	3,05(1.272)	39,875	276	<.001*
The institution encourages upward communication as much as there is downward communication.	EER3	3,33(1.315)	42,135	276	<.001*
Effective communication within the institution aids in good employee relations.	ER4	2,29(1.086)	35,143	276	<.001*
I can easily relate to my immediate senior because of the good communication systems in place.	ER5	2,49(1.102)	37,618	276	<.001*

I relate effectively with my immediate colleagues due to the good communication systems that are in place.	ER6	2,20(0.926)	39,579	276	<.001*
Due to the nature of communication in the institution, a courteous association has been built between all employees who work together.	ER7	2,68(1.053)	42,395	276	<.001*
The ease of flow of information between management and employees makes it easy to meet the institution's objectives.	ER8	2,68(1.074)	41,508	276	<.001*
Internal communication promotes a two-way feedback system between employees and management.	ER9	2,16(0.891)	40,335	276	<.001*
Effective communication within the institution promotes mutual respect between management and employees.	ER10	2,20(0.953)	38,458	276	<.001*
Effective communication leads to a strong workplace relationship between management and employees.	ER11	2,12(0.891)	39,588	276	<.001*
Effective internal communication and good relations between management and the employee positively influence the success of the institution.	ER12	2,23(0.963)	38,637	276	<.001*
I relate well to my immediate colleagues to advance the institutional goals.	ER13	2,07(0.701)	49,100	276	<.001*
I have a good relationship with the management, as we share the goals of the institution equally.	ER14	2,64(1.155)	38,042	276	<.001*
I have a good relationship with management because I clearly understand how my role fits into the institution.	ER15	2,74(1.227)	37,178	276	<.001*

6.4.2 Frequency distribution of responses on employee engagement

This subsection presents the frequency distribution of respondents' responses to the fifteen (15) questions that measure employee relations. A stacked bar graph was used to represent the frequency of responses where the frequency of each Likert scale option (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) for each question is presented in each bar. Figure 4.3 presents the frequencies (i.e., the percentage of each option for each question).

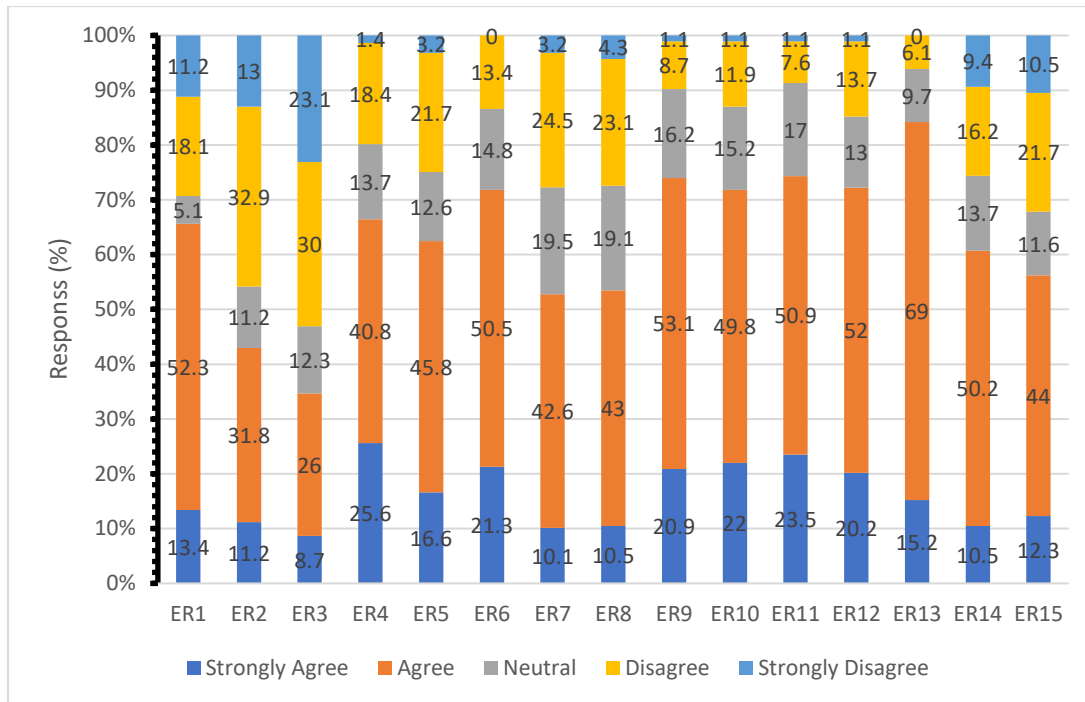


Figure 6.8: Responses to employee relations. (N=277)

Source: Survey, 2024

Figure 6.8 shows that most of the respondents surveyed on the 15 questions measuring employee relations. The results show that the majority of the respondents (65.7%) either strongly agree or agree that effective communication channels exist to promote relationships between employees, immediate leaders, and management (ER1). However, a notable portion (29.3%) express some level of disagreement, suggesting that there may be room for improvement in communication practices to improve relationships within the workplace.

A significant proportion of the respondents (43%) express agreement or strong agreement with respect to transparency in the workplace, indicating that they perceive an open communication system between management and employees (ER2). However, nearly half of the respondents (46.9%) express some level of disagreement, suggesting potential challenges in achieving transparency and openness in communication.

Although some respondents (34.7%) express agreement or strong agreement that the institution encourages upward communication as much as downward communication, a larger proportion (53.1%) express some level of disagreement (ER3). This indicates

a perceived imbalance in the encouragement of upward communication, which may hinder effective information flow within the organisation.

A significant majority of the respondents (66.4%) agree or strongly agree that effective communication aids in good employee relations, highlighting the perceived importance of communication in fostering positive relationships within the workplace (ER4). The low percentage of strong disagreements (1.4%) further supports the notion that communication plays a vital role in maintaining employee relations.

Most of the respondents (62.4%) agree or strongly agree that they can relate easily with their immediate seniors due to effective communication systems (ER5). However, a notable portion (25%) express some level of disagreement, suggesting that there may be challenges in communication dynamics between employees and their immediate supervisors.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (71.8%) either agree or strongly agree that they relate effectively with their immediate colleagues due to good communication systems. The absence of responses in the 'Strongly disagree' category suggests a high level of satisfaction with communication dynamics among colleagues.

Although a significant portion of the respondents (52.7%) express agreement or strong agreement with respect to the courteous association built through communication, a considerable proportion (27.7%) express some level of disagreement (ER7). This indicates potential challenges in fostering a courteous working environment through communication practices. The majority of respondents (53.5%) agree or strongly agree that the ease of information flow between management and employees facilitates meeting institutional objectives (ER8). However, a significant portion (27.4%) express some level of disagreement, suggesting potential obstacles in achieving organisational goals due to communication challenges.

The data indicates a strong agreement (74%) that internal communication promotes a two-way feedback system between employees and management (ER9). The low percentage of disagreement (9.8%) further suggests that respondents perceive effective communication channels to provide feedback within the organisation. The majority of respondents (71.8%) agree or strongly agree that effective communication promotes mutual respect between management and employees (ER10). This

suggests that respondents perceive communication as a key factor in fostering respectful relationships within the workplace.

Most of the respondents (74.4%) agree or strongly agree that effective communication leads to strong workplace relationships between management and employees (ER11). This underscores the perceived importance of communication in building positive relationships within the organisational hierarchy. Many of the respondents (72.2%) agree or strongly agree that effective internal communication and good relations between management and employees positively influence the institution's success (ER12). This indicates a strong belief among respondents in the correlation between communication, employee relations, and organisational success.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (84.2%) agree or strongly agree that they relate well with their immediate colleagues to advance institutional goals (ER13). This suggests a strong alignment of individual and collective efforts toward organisational objectives facilitated by positive colleague relationships. Although a majority of the respondents (60.7%) express agreement or strong agreement with respect to their relationship with management, a considerable portion (25.6%) express disagreement to some extent (ER14). This indicates potential variations in perceptions of goal attainment and relationship quality between employees and management. The data suggests that while a significant portion of respondents (56.3%) feel they relate well with management due to understanding their role's fit in the institution, a substantial proportion (32.2%) express some level of disagreement (ER15). This highlights potential challenges in role clarity and communication between employees and management.

In summary, the data reflect varying perceptions about communication effectiveness, relationship dynamics, and attainment of goals within the organisation. Although there is generally positive sentiment toward communication practices and their impact on employee relations and organisational success, there are also areas for improvement, particularly in fostering transparency, encouraging upward communication, and enhancing mutual understanding between employees and management.

6.4.3 Factor analysis of the opinions of the respondents about employee relations

In this section, the relationship between variables derived from the opinions of the respondents on employee relations was examined. Factor analysis, a statistical method, was used to represent the variance among related measurable variables in relation to a reduced set of latent variables referred to as factors (Taherdoost, Sahibuddin and Jalaliyoon, 2022). The discussion in this subsection includes correlation matrices for employee engagement variables (N = 277), results of principal component analysis for these variables, loadings of principal components for employee relations variables, and the KMO measure evaluating the adequacy of sampling for employee engagement variables.

6.4.4 Variable correlation for employee relations

This evaluates the connection between two variables, indicating both the strength and direction of their relationship. The correlation coefficients are on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no relationship and 1 representing a strong relationship between the variables (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Thus, a correlation coefficient of 0.5 or higher suggests a reasonably strong relationship between variables, while anything lower indicates a weak relationship. A negative coefficient indicates an inverse relationship, while a positive coefficient signifies a positive relationship. A Pearson correlation test was conducted for the questions related to employee relations, and the results are detailed in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9: Correlation matrices community level of employee engagement variable

Correlation Matrix

	ER1	ER2	ER3	ER4	ER5	ER6	ER7	ER8	ER9	ER10	ER11	ER12	ER13	ER14	ER15
Correlation ER1	1,000														
ER2	,622	1,000													
ER3	,557	,654	1,000												
ER4	,307	,234	,425	1,000											
ER5	,361	,503	,441	,304	1,000										
ER6	,355	,358	,398	,330	,580	1,000									
ER7	,283	,325	,403	,446	,244	,575	1,000								
ER8	,368	,369	,398	,395	,293	,273	,342	1,000							
ER9	,305	,185	,265	,428	,223	,312	,313	,478	1,000						
ER10	,210	,237	,305	,359	,160	,151	,259	,265	,645	1,000					
ER11	,258	,222	,220	,466	,121	,221	,369	,305	,579	,680	1,000				
ER12	,243	,228	,446	,416	,174	,195	,378	,371	,603	,576	,495	1,000			
ER13	,276	,358	,361	,192	,256	,503	,432	,179	,226	,229	,196	,293	1,000		
ER14	,203	,305	,386	,108	,302	,187	,373	,245	,123	,231	,215	,275	,322	1,000	
ER15	,295	,431	,397	,267	,400	,391	,446	,368	,197	,225	,217	,383	,375	,609	1,000

Table 6.9 shows that some of the variables exhibited correlation coefficients of 0.5 or higher, suggesting a certain level of association between them (Hadd and Rodgers, 2020; Wagavkar, 2023). Consequently, considering the notable correlations among certain variables within the set of questions regarding employee engagement, a principal component analysis can be performed. Therefore, the subsequent section delves into a discourse on the outcomes derived from the principal component analysis.

6.4.5 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of the Variables

Successful factor extraction is determined by two criteria: a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) exceeding 0.6 and a significant result in Bartlett's test of sphericity (Shrestha, 2021). In this instance, a KMO of .784 and a significant Bartlett test imply that the data were suitable for a reliable factor extraction (Table 6.10).

Table 6.10: KMO and Bartlett's Test for employee relations variables

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,784
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	2002,072
	Df	105
	Sig.	<,001

6.4.6 Principal component analysis results for employee relations variables

This section details the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) applied to the fifteen variables measuring employee relations. The results of the principal component analysis (PCA) are provided in this subsection. PCA serves as a technique to condense variables while retaining a significant portion of the original variability (Labrín and Urdinez 2020; Ghogh *et al.* 2023). Eigenvalues are produced through PCA, with a common guideline suggesting the selection of components with eigenvalues greater than 1. Furthermore, PCA offers insights into the proportion of variance explained by each component and the cumulative variance across subsequent components. Varimax rotation was applied to the 15 items during PCA. From the PCA analysis, four factors were identified, which collectively explain 66.69% of the variability within the dataset (refer to Table 6.11).

Table 6.11: Total variance extracted from items measuring employee relations

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5,778	38,520	38,520	5,778	38,520	38,520	3,276	21,842	21,842
2	1,971	13,141	51,661	1,971	13,141	51,661	2,770	18,470	40,311
3	1,191	7,938	59,598	1,191	7,938	59,598	2,195	14,633	54,944
4	1,063	7,090	66,688	1,063	7,090	66,688	1,762	11,744	66,688

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The rotated component matrix represents the results of factor analysis, specifically the rotated loadings of each element in the extracted components. In this analysis, a varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation was applied to improve the interpretability of the factors. The results are presented in Table 6.12. The rotated component matrix reveals the relationships between the observed variables (items) and the extracted

components. Each component represents an underlying factor or dimension that explains the variation in the observed variable.

Table 6.12: Rotated component matrix of extracted factors to measure employee relations variables

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
ER1		,797		
ER2		,821		
ER3		,723		
ER4	,552			
ER5		,582		
ER6			,864	
ER7			,688	
ER8				
ER9	,819			
ER10	,825			
ER11	,809			
ER12	,734			
ER13			,625	
ER14				,872
ER15				,717
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.				
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.				

Component 1 is linked to statements measuring Communication and Relationship Dynamics. This component focuses on the relationship between effective communication within the institution and positive employee relations. It suggests that when communication is effective (ER4), it fosters good relations between employees and management by promoting a two-way feedback system (ER9), mutual respect (ER10), and strong workplace relationships (ER11). Furthermore, it implies that these

positive employee relations influenced by effective communication contribute positively to the success of the institution (ER12).

Component 2 is related to items linked to Communication Infrastructure and Relationship Facilitation. This component focuses on the presence and effectiveness of communication channels within the workplace, particularly between employees, immediate leaders, and management (ER1). It emphasises the importance of transparency facilitated by an open communication system (ER2) and encourages both upward and downward communication (ER3). Additionally, it highlights the positive impact of good communication systems on relationships between employees and their immediate seniors (ER5), suggesting that these systems facilitate easy interaction and understanding.

Component 3 is related to items linked with Interpersonal Communication and Collegial Relationships. This construct focuses on the relationship dynamics between immediate colleagues within the institution and how communication systems contribute to effective interaction (ER6). It suggests that good communication systems foster effective relationships among colleagues, promoting courteous association (ER7) and collaboration in achieving institutional goals (ER13).

Component 4 is linked to items related with 'Attainment of Organisational Goals and Positive Management Relations'. This component focuses on the relationship between employees and management within the institution, particularly with regard to the alignment of individual roles with organisational goals. It suggests that when employees feel that they share the institution's goals with management (ER14) and understand how their roles contribute to the institution (ER15), they tend to have positive relationships with management.

6.4.7 Reliability test for the Likert scale on perception of employee relations

A reliability test was performed on the 15 Likert scale that measures the dimensions of employee relations as extracted from the PCA analysis. The reliability of the summative questions was assessed using the Cronbach alpha test, as proposed by George and Mallery (2019). This test yields a scale that encompasses an unweighted total of those items. The typical interpretation of Cronbach's alpha (α) is as follows: a value greater than 0.8 suggests high (excellent) dependability, while values between

0.5 and 0.8 indicate moderate (acceptable) reliability. On the contrary, results yielding α values below 0.5 indicate low reliability (Ekolu and Quainoo, 2019). Table 6.13 presents the results of the Cronbach alpha test for the 15 Likert scale questions measuring employee relations.

Table 6.13 : Cronbach alpha results for employee relations questions

Emerged factors	Number of items	Items	Cronbach's alpha score
Communication and Relationship Dynamics	5	ER4, ER9, ER10, ER11, ER12	0.841
Communication Infrastructure and Relationship Facilitation	4	ER1, ER2, ER3, ER5	0.817
Interpersonal Communication and Collegial Relationships	3	ER6, ER7, ER13	0.743
Attainment of Organisational Goals and Positive Management Relations	2	ER14, ER15	0.756

Table 6.13 shows that Component 1 linked to Communication and Relationship Dynamics (ER4, ER9, ER10, ER11, and ER12), and Component 2 linked to Communication Infrastructure and Relationship Facilitation (ER1, ER2, ER3, and ER5) had Cronbach's alpha value of 0.841, and 0.817, respectively, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, indicating excellent (acceptable) reliability of the scale. Component 3 linked to Interpersonal Communication and Collegial Relationships (ER6, ER7, and ER13) and Component 4 linked to Attainment of Organisational Goals and Positive Management Relations (ER14, and ER15) had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.743 and 0.756, respectively, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, indicating moderate (acceptable) reliability of the scale.

6.5 Perception of internal communication and institutional success related to diversity management

Respondents were asked to share their thoughts about the diversity management based on internal communication in the institution. Fifteen (15) questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale with the options 'strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree,

and strongly disagree'.. This section presents results on the opinions of the respondents on the state of diversity management at the institution in relation to internal communication for the purpose of institutional success. The section is organised into four subsections. First, it presents a one-sample t-test to determine if there is significant agreement/disagreement to each item. The average agreement score is tested against the central score of '3' to determine whether it differs significantly from '3'. The results are considered significant when $p < .05$. Second, it outlines the distribution of response frequencies. Thereafter, it provides an analysis of the data using principal component analysis (PCA), and finally a reliability assessment of the questions.

6.5.1 Perception of Diversity Management

This section highlights the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with statements measuring diversity management in the institution from internal communication. On average, the mean value measures for all the items except DM9 were above the cut-off point of 3, implying significant agreement with these items.

First, respondents generally feel that messages are conveyed in a language they understand, with a mean score of 1.62 and a standard deviation of 0.680 for the statement 'Messages are conveyed in a language that I understand' (DM1). This indicates a positive aspect of communication within the organisation, where language barriers are not a significant issue. However, there is room for improvement in fostering a sense of community through communication mechanisms, as indicated by a mean score of 2.39 (SD=1.122) for the statement 'The communication mechanisms in the organisation create a sense of community by establishing good relationships across all employees' (DM2). This suggests that while efforts are being made, there is still work to be done in strengthening relationships among employees through communication channels.

Respondents reported a mean score of 2.52 and a standard deviation of 1.055 for the statement 'My differences in terms of diversity related to my individual identities are considered in the communication system.' (DM3). This indicates that respondents generally perceive that their individual differences related to diversity are considered within the organisation's communication system. This suggests that there is some level

of awareness and recognition of diversity among employees, indicating an inclusive approach to communication practices. Respondents generally feel empowered to air their diverse views, with a mean score of 2.94 (SD=1.301) for the statement 'I feel empowered to air my diverse views' (DM4). This indicates a positive atmosphere where employees feel encouraged to express their opinions and perspectives freely.

Furthermore, the communication strategy in the institution is perceived to recognise the diversity of the staff, with a mean score of 2.78 (SD=1.150) for the statement 'The communication strategy in the institution recognises the diversity of the staff' (DM5). This suggests that organisational communication efforts are inclusive and acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of employees.

Respondents reported a mean score of 2.56 (SD=1.145) for the statement 'I have equal opportunities to information as other employees (DM6)'. This indicates that on average, respondents feel that they have relatively equal access to information compared to other employees within the organisation. However, the variability in the responses suggests that there may be instances where access to information is perceived as unequal, highlighting a potential area for improvement in communication practices.

Respondents reported a mean score of 2.27 and a standard deviation of 1.004 for the statement 'My background is not a barrier in communicating with other employees.' (DM7), which implies that respondents generally feel that their background is not a significant barrier to communicating with other employees. This suggests a positive perception of inclusivity within the organisation, where employees feel able to communicate effectively regardless of their background.

DM8: 'Through effective communication, I seem to understand more about the differences and similarities of my colleagues.' The mean score for this statement is 2.19, with a standard deviation of 0.760. This suggests that respondents perceive effective communication within the organisation as facilitating a greater understanding of their colleagues' differences and similarities. This indicates a positive aspect of communication practices that fosters empathy and mutual understanding among employees.

However, it is concerning that some respondents feel their diverse backgrounds pose communication challenges, as indicated by a mean score of 3.52 (SD=1.178) for the statement 'I avoid communicating with my colleagues because my diverse background always poses communication challenges' (DM9). This highlights a potential area of concern where efforts should be directed towards mitigating communication barriers arising from diverse backgrounds.

DM10: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to each other's gender.' With a mean score of 2.39 and a standard deviation of 1.046, respondents generally perceive that communication within the organisation is somewhat sensitive to the gender of each other. While this indicates some level of awareness and consideration of gender-related communication dynamics, there may still be room for improvement in ensuring that communication practices are fully inclusive and sensitive to diverse gender identities.

DM11: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to one another's culture.' The mean score for this statement is 2.57, with a standard deviation of 1.148. This suggests that respondents generally perceive communication within the organisation as being somewhat sensitive to each other's cultures. While this indicates a positive aspect of communication practices, there may be opportunities to further improve cultural sensitivity to ensure that communication is fully inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural backgrounds.

DM12: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to one another's religion.' With a mean score of 2.58 and a standard deviation of 1.191, respondents generally perceive communication within the organisation as somewhat sensitive to each other's religious beliefs. This suggests a positive aspect of communication practices, which fosters an environment where employees feel respected and valued for their religious diversity.

DM13: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to one another's race.' The mean score for this statement is 2.47, with a standard deviation of 1.118. This suggests that respondents generally perceive communication within the organisation as somewhat sensitive to each other's racial backgrounds. Although this indicates a positive aspect of communication practices, there may be opportunities to

further enhance racial sensitivity to ensure that communication is fully inclusive and respectful of diverse racial identities.

DM14: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to the differences of one another.' With a mean score of 2.46 and a standard deviation of 1.065, respondents generally perceive communication within the organisation as somewhat sensitive to each other's differences. This suggests a positive aspect of communication practices, fostering an environment where employees feel respected and valued for their diverse identities and experiences.

DM15: 'We achieve our goals by communicating with mutual respect for our differences.' The mean score for this statement is 2.16, with a standard deviation of 0.892. This suggests that respondents generally perceive communication within the organisation to contribute to the achievement of goals through mutual respect for differences. This indicates a positive aspect of communication practices that fosters collaboration and teamwork among employees with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

DM16: 'I feel that my workplace is a safe space to express myself in any way.' The mean score for this statement is 2.58, with a standard deviation of 1.135. This indicates that on average, respondents feel that their workplace is a relatively safe space to express themselves in any way.

In general, the data suggest that while there are positive aspects to diversity management communication within the organisation, there are also areas that require attention and improvement.

Table 6.14: Respondents' level of agreement on diversity management questions

Construct		Mean (SD)	T	df	p-value
Messages are conveyed in a language that I understand.	DM1	1,62(0.680)	39,614	276	<.001*
The communication mechanisms in the organisation create a sense of community by establishing good relationship across all employees.	DM2	2,39(1.122)	35,386	276	<.001*

My differences in terms of diversity related to my individual identities are considered in the communication system.	DM3	2,52(1.055)	39,816	276	<.001*
I feel empowered to air my diverse views.	DM4	2,94(1.301)	37,643	276	<.001*
The communication strategy in the institution recognises the diversity of the staff.	DM5	2,78(1.150)	40,283	276	<.001*
I have equal opportunities to information as other employees.	DM6	2,56(1.145)	37,242	276	<.001*
My background is not a barrier in communicating with other employees.	DM7	2,27(1.004)	37,581	276	<.001*
Through effective communication, I seem to understand more about my colleagues' differences and similarities.	DM8	2,19(0.760)	48,059	276	<.001*
I avoid communicating with my colleagues because my diverse background always poses communication challenges.	DM9	3,52(1.178)	49,668	276	<.001*
My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to each other's gender.	DM10	2,39(1.046)	38,076	276	<.001*
My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's culture.	DM11	2,57(1.148)	37,258	276	<.001*
My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's religion.	DM12	2,58(1.191)	36,017	276	<.001*
My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's race.	DM13	2,47(1.118)	36,759	276	<.001*
My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to one another's differences.	DM14	2,46(1.065)	38,437	276	<.001*
We achieve our goals by communicating with mutual respect for our differences.	DM15	2,16(0.892)	40,340	276	<.001*
I feel my workplace is a safe space to express myself in any way.	DM16	2,58(1.135)	37,796	276	<.001*

6.5.2 Frequency distribution of responses on diversity management

This subsection presents the frequency distribution of respondents' responses to the sixteen (16) questions measuring diversity management. A stacked bar graph was used to represent the frequency of responses where the frequency of each Likert scale option (i.e., strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) for each

question is presented in each bar. Figure 6.9 presents the frequencies (i.e., the percentage of each option for each question).

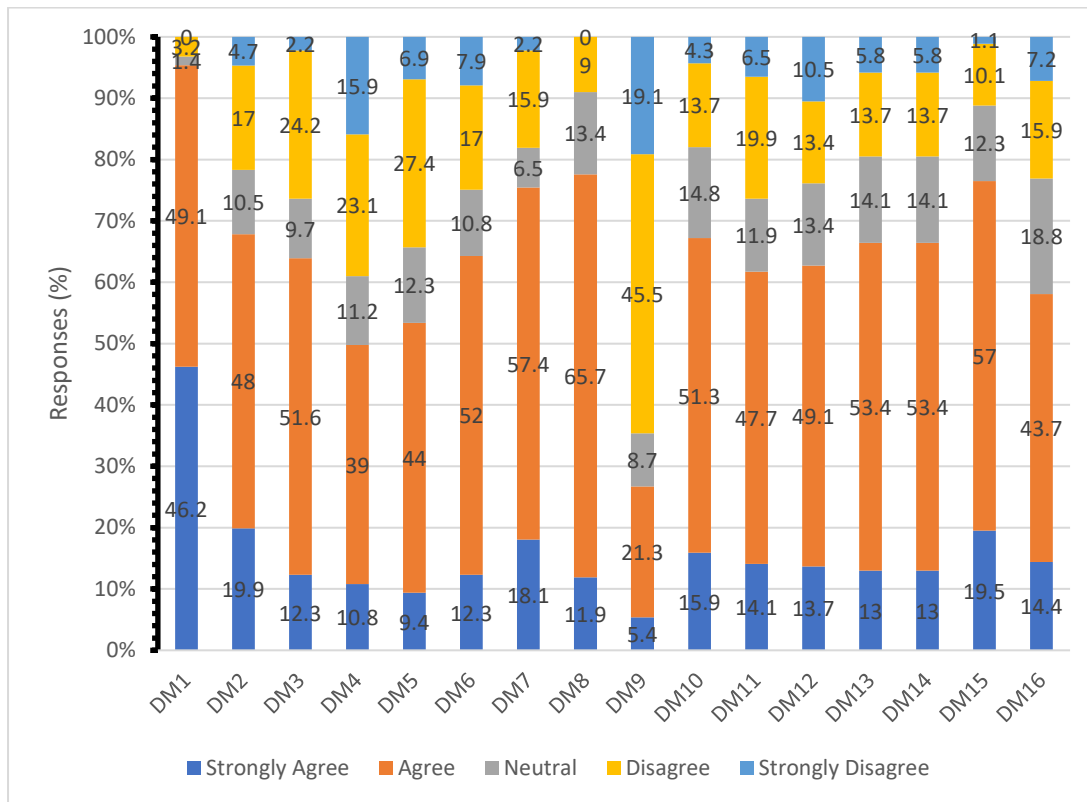


Figure 6.9: Responses regarding diversity management. (N=277)

Source: Author's own diagram

Figure 6.9 shows that most of the respondents (95.3% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) feel that messages in the workplace are conveyed in a language they understand (DM1). The low percentage of disagreement indicates that only a small proportion of respondents feel otherwise.

DM2: 'The communication mechanisms in the organisation create a sense of community by establishing good relationships across all employees.' These data indicate that a significant portion of respondents (68.9% - Strongly Agree and Strongly Agree combined) believe that the communication mechanisms in the organisation contribute to fostering a sense of community and good relationships among employees. However, there is also a notable proportion who either disagree or strongly disagree.

DM3: 'My differences in terms of diversity related to my individual identities are considered in the communication system.' The data show that a majority of respondents (63.9% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) believe that their differences related to diversity are considered in the communication system. However, a significant minority (26.4%) either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

DM4: 'I feel empowered to air my diverse views.' These data indicate that a combined 49.8% of respondents feel empowered to air their diverse views, while a significant proportion (39%) do not express agreement with this statement.

DM5: 'The communication strategy in the institution recognises the diversity of the staff.' While a considerable portion of the respondents (53.4% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) feel that the communication strategy acknowledges staff diversity, a notable proportion (34.3%) expresses disagreement with this statement.

DM6: 'I have equal opportunities to information as other employees.' A majority of respondents (64.3% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) feel that they have equal access to information compared to other employees, although a notable minority (24.9%) express disagreement.

DM7: 'My background is not a barrier in communicating with other employees.' Most of the respondents (75.5% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) feel that their background is not a barrier to communication with other employees, indicating a positive perception of inclusivity in communication practices.

DM8: 'Through effective communication, I seem to understand more about my colleagues' differences and similarities.' An overwhelming majority of the respondents (77.6% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) believe that effective communication helps them understand their colleagues' differences and similarities, highlighting the importance of communication in fostering understanding and agreement.

DM9: 'I avoid communicating with my colleagues because my diverse background always poses communication challenges.'

These data reveal that a notable portion of respondents (26.7%) either strongly agree or agree that they avoid communicating with colleagues due to perceived challenges stemming from diverse backgrounds, while most were in disagreement (64.6%). This

suggests that there may be barriers to effective communication related to diversity within the workplace that need to be addressed to promote better collaboration and understanding among colleagues.

DM10: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to each other's culture.' A majority of respondents (67.2% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) believe that communication among colleagues is sensitive to each other's culture, indicating a positive perception of cultural inclusivity in communication.

DM11: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's religion.' While a significant portion of respondents (61.8% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) believe that communication among colleagues is sensitive to each other's religion, there is also a notable minority (26.4%) who express disagreement.

DM12: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's race.' Similar to the previous statement, a majority of respondents (62.8% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) believe that communication among colleagues is sensitive to each other's race, although there is also a considerable proportion (23.9%) who express disagreement.

DM13: 'My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to one another's differences.' The majority of respondents (68.6% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) feel that communication among colleagues is sensitive to each other's differences, indicating a positive perception of inclusivity in communication practices.

DM14: 'We achieve our goals by communicating with mutual respect for our differences.' Most respondents (66.4% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) believe that achieving goals involves communicating with mutual respect for differences, highlighting the importance of respect and inclusivity in goal attainment through communication.

DM15: 'I feel my workplace is a safe space to express myself in any way.' The majority of respondents (76.5% - Strongly Agree and Agree combined) feel that their workplace is a safe space to express themselves in any way, indicating a positive perception of the workplace environment and communication culture.

DM16: 'I feel my workplace is a safe space to express myself in any way.' About 58.1% of the respondents (Strongly Agree and Agree combined) feel that their workplace is a safe environment to express themselves freely. However, there is a considerable proportion (23.1%) who express disagreement or strong disagreement, suggesting that there may be areas for improvement in fostering a sense of safety and openness in communication within the workplace.

6.5.3 Factor analysis of the opinions of the respondents on diversity management

In this section, the relationship between variables derived from respondents' opinions on diversity management was examined. Factor analysis, a statistical method, was used to represent the variance among related measurable variables in relation to a reduced set of latent variables referred to as factors (Taherdoost, Sahibuddin and Jalaliyoon, 2022). The discussion in this subsection encompasses correlation matrices for employee engagement variables (N = 277), results of principal component analysis for these variables, loadings of principal components for diversity management variables, and the KMO measure assessing the adequacy of sampling for diversity management variables.

6.5.4 Variable correlation for diversity management variables

This evaluates the connection between two variables, indicating both the strength and direction of their relationship. The correlation coefficients are on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no relationship and 1 representing a strong relationship between the variables (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Thus, a correlation coefficient of 0.5 or higher suggests a reasonably strong relationship between variables, while anything lower indicates a weak relationship. A negative coefficient indicates an inverse relationship, while a positive coefficient signifies a positive relationship. A Pearson correlation test was conducted for the diversity management questions, and the results are detailed in Table 6.15.

Table 6.15: Correlation matrices community level of diversity management variable

Correlation Matrix

	DM1	DM2	DM3	DM4	DM5	DM6	DM7	DM8	DM9	DM10	DM11	DM12	DM13	DM14	DM15	DM16
Correlation DM1	1,000															
DM2	,385	1,000														
DM3	,189	,496	1,000													
DM4	,254	,561	,437	1,000												
DM5	,056	,371	,530	,532	1,000											
DM6	,217	,253	,370	,399	,382	1,000										
DM7	,235	,210	,309	,256	,254	,429	1,000									
DM8	,299	,294	,437	,374	,442	,410	,402	1,000								
DM9	-,078	,090	,021	,057	,000	,090	-,117	,178	1,000							
DM10	,085	,031	,256	-,036	-,040	,077	,234	,254	,090	1,000						
DM11	,160	,143	,144	,177	,119	,240	,273	,237	,015	,464	1,000					
DM12	-,017	,057	,197	,050	,031	,310	,207	,231	,099	,480	,534	1,000				
DM13	,046	,040	,258	-,021	,054	,240	,217	,199	-,028	,573	,462	,636	1,000			
DM14	,143	,161	,140	,111	,013	,245	,265	,301	,149	,563	,680	,702	,732	1,000		
DM15	,264	,281	,310	,214	,271	,275	,125	,381	,006	,153	,312	,358	,312	,261	1,000	
DM16	,311	,532	,361	,459	,335	,264	,354	,352	,047	,082	,338	,181	,137	,299	,490	1,000

Table 6.15 shows that some of the variables exhibited correlation coefficients of 0.5 or higher, suggesting a certain level of association between them (Hadd and Rodgers, 2020; Wagavkar, 2023). Consequently, considering the notable correlations among certain variables within the set of questions regarding diversity management, a principal component analysis can be conducted. Therefore, the subsequent section delves into a discourse on the outcomes derived from the principal component analysis.

6.5.5 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of the Variables

Successful factor extraction is determined by two criteria: a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) exceeding 0.6 and a significant result in Bartlett's test of sphericity (Shrestha, 2021). In this instance, a KMO of .779 and a

significant Bartlett test imply that the data were suitable for the reliable extraction of factors (Table 6.16).

Table 6.16: KMO and Bartlett's Test for diversity management

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,779
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	1914,030
	Df	120
	Sig.	<,001

6.5.6 Results of the principal component analysis for diversity management

This section details the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) applied to the 16 variables measuring diversity management. The results of the principal component analysis (PCA) are provided in this subsection. PCA serves as a technique to condense variables while retaining a significant portion of the original variability (Labrín and Urdinez, 2020; Ghogh et al., 2023). Eigenvalues are produced through PCA, with a common guideline suggesting the selection of components with eigenvalues greater than 1. Furthermore, PCA offers insights into the proportion of variance explained by each component and the cumulative variance across subsequent components. Varimax rotation was applied to the 16 items during PCA. From the PCA analysis, four factors were identified, which collectively explain 62.38% of the variability within the dataset (refer to Table 6.17).

Table 6.17: Total variance extracted from items measuring diversity management

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5,002	31,262	31,262	5,002	31,262	31,262	3,572	22,322	22,322
2	2,691	16,822	48,084	2,691	16,822	48,084	3,002	18,762	41,084
3	1,173	7,329	55,413	1,173	7,329	55,413	2,263	14,141	55,225
4	1,114	6,965	62,378	1,114	6,965	62,378	1,144	7,153	62,378

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The rotated component matrix represents the results of factor analysis, specifically the rotated loadings of each item on the extracted components. In this analysis, a varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation was applied to improve the interpretability of the

factors. The results are presented in Table 6.18. The rotated component matrix reveals the relationships between the observed variables (items) and the extracted components. Each component represents an underlying factor or dimension that explains the variation in the observed variable.

Table 6.18: Rotated component matrix of extracted factors to measure diversity management

Rotated Component Matrix^a				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
DM1			,725	
DM2			,690	
DM3		,710		
DM4		,626		
DM5		,808		
DM6		,672		
DM7		,518		
DM8		,620		
DM9				,884
DM10	,746			
DM11	,712			
DM12	,823			
DM13	,835			
DM14	,878			
DM15			,530	
DM16			,722	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.				
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.				

Component 1 is linked to statements measuring 'Respectful and Inclusive Communication'. This component focuses on the sensitivity of communication among

colleagues towards various aspects of diversity, including gender (DM10), culture (DM11), religion (DM12), race (DM13), and differences in general (DM14). It suggests that effective communication within the workplace involves being sensitive and respectful of each other's diverse backgrounds and identities.

Component 2 is related to items linked to 'Inclusive Communication and Diversity Empowerment.' This component focuses on the consideration of diversity in the communication system within the institution and its impact on employees. It suggests that when communication systems acknowledge and accommodate individual differences related to diversity (DM3), employees feel empowered to express diverse views (DM4), perceive equal access to information (DM6), and do not encounter barriers based on their background (DM7). Additionally, effective communication fosters understanding among employees about each other's differences and similarities (DM8).

Component 3 is related to items linked with 'Inclusive and Supportive Communication Environment'. This component focuses on various aspects of communication within the organisation that contribute to a positive and inclusive work environment. It suggests that when messages are conveyed in a language that all employees understand (DM1), communication mechanisms foster a sense of community and good relationships (DM2), goals are achieved through respectful communication that acknowledges differences (DM15), and the workplace is perceived as a safe space for expression (DM16), leading to a conducive and supportive communication environment.

6.5.7 Reliability test for the Likert scale on perception of diversity management

A reliability test was performed on the 16 Likert scale that measures the dimensions of employee relations as extracted from the PCA analysis. The reliability of the summative questions was assessed using the Cronbach alpha test, as proposed by George and Mallery (2019). This test yields a scale that encompasses an unweighted total of items. The typical interpretation of Cronbach's alpha (α) is as follows: a value greater than 0.8 suggests high (excellent) dependability, while values between 0.5 and 0.8 indicate moderate (acceptable) reliability. On the contrary, results yielding α values

below 0.5 indicate low reliability (Ekolu and Quainoo, 2019). Table 6.19 presents the results of the Cronbach alpha test for the 16 Likert scale questions measuring diversity management.

Table 6.19: Cronbach alpha results for diversity management questions

Emergед Factors	Number of items	Items	Cronbach's alpha score
Respectful and Inclusive Communication	5	DM10-DM14	0.874
Inclusive Communication and Diversity Empowerment	6	DM3-DM8	0.791
Inclusive and Supportive Communication Environment	4	DM1, DM2, DM15, DM16	0.707

Table 6.19 shows that Component 1 linked to Respectful and Inclusive Communication (DM10-DM14) had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.874, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, indicating excellent (acceptable) reliability of the scale. Component 2 linked to Inclusive Communication and Diversity Empowerment (DM3-DM8), and Component 3 linked to Inclusive and Supportive Communication Environment (DM1, DM2, DM15, and DM16) had the Cronbach alpha value of 0.791 and 0.707, respectively, surpassing the threshold of 0.5, indicating moderate (acceptable) reliability of the scale.

6.6 Theoretical Contribution and Hypotheses Testing

This section presents the theoretical contribution of the study based on the proposed conceptual framework. This was in line with the objective which aims to propose a Human Resources internal communication framework that can be used to achieve organisational success in a University of Technology. The proposed measurement model (concept framework) proposed was tested for validity and reliability. The section is divided into five subsections. First, a PCA analysis was conducted on the variables. The emerging constructs were then subjected to the Cronbach alpha test to reassess the reliability of the constructs. The MM was then checked for convergent and discriminant validity model. Finally, the structural equation model was applied for hypothesis testing.

6.6.1 Principal Component Analysis of the Measurement Model

The conceptual model formulated, and the proposed research hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM). Before the measurement model (MM) analyses, the data was tested to see if it achieved reliability and validity. Exploratory factor analysis making use of Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed on all the reliable constructs explained above. The data converged into five factors. The PCA results suggest that the five components explain a significant portion of the variance (61.88%) in the data, indicating that they are meaningful and capture important aspects of the MM model assessing how internal communication can be used to improve employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management for the purpose of institutional success in the context of HEIs. The high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.794) and the significance of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity further support the robustness of the factor analysis results (Table 6.20).

Table 6.20: EFA analysis for the MM

Rotated Component Matrix ^a					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
EE2				,611	
EE3				,794	
EE4				,730	
EE5		,629			
EE8				,596	
EE10		,702			
EE11					
ER1			,778		
ER2			,779		
ER3			,694		
ER5			,528		

ER7		,815			
ER13		,507			
DM2					,746
DM4					,647
DM6					
DM10	,741				
DM11	,746				
DM12	,826				
DM13	,822				
DM14	,894				
DM16					,724
DM5		,590			
DM8		,550			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation. Variance=61.88% Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=0.794 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity= (p<0.001; X ² =3541,274; df=276)					
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.					

Table 6.21 shows the factors that emerged in the MM and the associated Cronbach alpha score. Factor 1 linked to Respectful and Inclusive Communication (RC). The factor included DM10 to DM14 and explained 31.62% of the variance in the extracted data set. This factor represents the dimension of communication focused on fostering respect and inclusivity among employees. The high Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=0.874$) indicates a strong internal consistency among the items, suggesting that these items effectively measure the construct of respectful and inclusive communication.

Factor 2 is linked to Clarity in Communication (CC). This factor included items EE5, EE10, ER7, and ER13 and explained 13.99% of the variance in the extracted data set.

This factor refers to the clarity and transparency of communication within the organisation. The Cronbach alpha value ($\alpha=0.757$), although slightly lower, still indicates acceptable internal consistency among the included items, suggesting that they collectively capture the construct of clarity in communication.

Factor 3 linked to Communication channels and Relationship Facilitation. This factor included items ER1, ER2, ER3, and ER5 and explained 6.08% of the variance in the extracted data set. This factor focuses on the organisational structures and mechanisms that facilitate communication and building relationships among employees. The high Cronbach alpha ($\alpha=0.817$) suggests that these items are reliable measures of communication channels and relationship facilitation.

Factor 4 linked to Engagement and Goal Attainment. This factor included items EE2, EE3, EE4, and EE8 and explained 5.44% of the variance in the extracted data set. This factor relates to the extent to which communication contributes to employee engagement and attainment of organisational goals. The Cronbach alpha value ($\alpha=0.771$) indicates an acceptable internal consistency among the included items, suggesting they effectively capture the construct of engagement and goal attainment.

Factor 5 is linked to the Supportive Communication Environment. This factor included items DM2, DM4, and DM16 and explained 4.75% of the variance in the extracted data set. This factor represents the communication environment that supports employees, fostering a conducive atmosphere for communication. The Cronbach alpha value ($\alpha=0.760$) indicates acceptable internal consistency among the included items, suggesting that they effectively measure the construct of a supportive communication environment.

Table 6.21: Reliability of the factors extracted in the internal communication measurement model (MM).

Factor	Construct	Items included	Variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha
1	Respectful and Inclusive Communication (RC)	DM10-DM14)	31.617	0.874
2	Clarity in Communication (CC)	EE5, EE10, ER7, and ER13	13.992	0.757
3	Communication Channels and Relationship Facilitation	ER1, 2,3, and 5	6.078	0.817
4	Engagement and Goal Attainment	EE2, 3, 4 and 8	5.439	.771
5	Supportive Communication Environment	DM2, 4, and 16	4.750	0.760

6.6.2 Fitness of the Model

Following Stone's (2021) suggestion to utilise multiple fitness criteria to address the perceived limitations of a single index, various fit indices were employed to assess the overall fit of the MM. The first criterion, the normed chi-square (CMINDF), was calculated by dividing χ^2 by df. It is deemed acceptable when it falls between 1 and 5. In addition, the Bollen incremental fit index (IFI) and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) were used, with recommended thresholds of ≥ 0.9 . Another fit index, the comparative fit index (CFI), was used with an acceptable value of 0.9. Goodness of Fit Index (GFI): A measure of how well the model reproduces the observed covariance matrix, with values closer to 1 indicating a better fit. The GFI value of 0.831 suggests an acceptable model fit.

As highlighted in Table 6.22, the goodness-of-fit indices are as follows: chi-square = 561.070, df = 142, $p < .001$, $\chi^2 / df = 3.951$, CFI = 0.869, IFI = 0.871, GFI = 0.836. In line with Hu and Bentler (1999), all criteria met the recommended values of the measurement model, suggesting that the MM has an acceptable fitness. This is further depicted in Figure 6.10.

Table 6.22: Model fitness indices for the MM

Fit Indices	Fit values	Criteria
χ^2 / df (p-value)	3.951(<.001)	<5
IFI	0.871	>.9
CFI	0.869	>.95
GFI	0.836	>.95

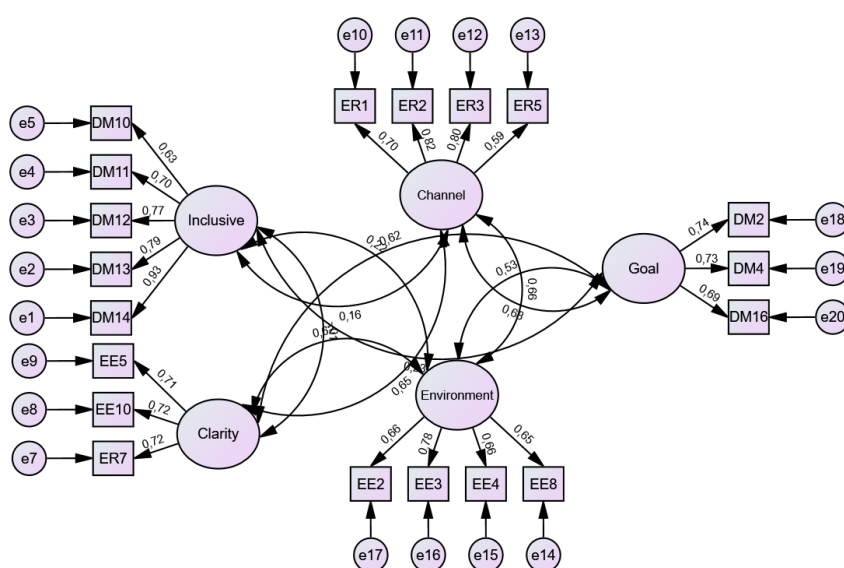


Figure 6.10: Fitness of the MM

$\chi^2 = 1111.542$, $df = 329$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2 / df = 3.379$, CFI = 0.903, IFI = 0.903, RMSEA = 0.079

6.6.3 Measurement Model: Scale Reliability and Construct Validity

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then applied to confirm the MM by evaluating the convergent and discriminant validity using AMOS (version 29, IBM). This was in line with the recommendation of Cheung *et al.* (2023: 14) recommendation that after evaluating the fit of the model, the MM should be evaluated in terms of composite reliability (CR), convergent validity and discriminant validity. Table 6.23 illustrates the reliability and validity assessment of the MM. Convergent validity, as defined by Hair *et al.* (2014), refers to the measure's correlation with other measures of the same

construct. To evaluate the convergent validity, standardised loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were utilised. The CR, which indicates internal consistency, ranged from 0.750 to 0.878, signifying acceptable reliability. For instance, the Composite Reliability for inclusive communication stands at 0.878, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high consistency in measuring changes in respective and inclusive communication.

AVE reflects the proportion of variance captured by the construct relative to measurement error, indicating convergent validity. All constructs show AVE values above 0.50, indicating substantial variance due to the underlying concept rather than measurement error.

MaxR(H) assesses discriminant validity, representing the maximum correlation between a construct and any other construct different from the target. Values above 0.7 are deemed acceptable. In this study, all constructs exhibit MaxR(H) values above 0.7, supporting the discriminant validity. Furthermore, MSV, representing the maximum correlation between a construct and any other construct in the model, is below AVE values, indicating adequate discriminant validity according to the guideline provided by Ronkko and Cho (2022: 17).

Table 6.23: Discriminant, convergent, and composite reliability of the MM

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Inclusive	Clarity	Environment	Channels	Goal
Inclusive	0,878	0,593	0,067	0,915	0,770				
Clarity	0,760	0,513	0,426	0,761	-0,005	0,717			
Environment	0,750	0,500	0,379	0,752	0,258	0,593	0,707		
Channels	0,823	0,541	0,469	0,845	0,158	0,653	0,616	0,736	
Goal	0,764	0,520	0,469	0,765	0,234	0,618	0,596	0,685	0,721

6.6.4 Structural Equation Model (Hypotheses Testing)

The MM model was transformed into a path model, illustrating the connections between the latent variables. An SEM was applied to test all hypothesised relationships that exist among the latent variables. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a statistical technique that is used to examine intricate relationships between observed and unobserved variables (latent). It serves as a multivariate statistical

method, integrating factor analysis and regression analysis. SEM was used to evaluate all the relationships proposed among the latent variables. This approach was chosen because SEM enables the simultaneous examination of multiple interrelated independent and dependent relationships, while also considering measurement estimates between the constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The resulting SEM with estimated standardised relationships is shown in Figure 6.11. The goodness-of-fit indices are as follows: chi square = $\chi^2 = 586.265$, $df = 145$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2 / df = 4.043$, CFI = 0.826, IFI = 0.828, GF1 = 0.831, suggesting that the measurement model is acceptable.

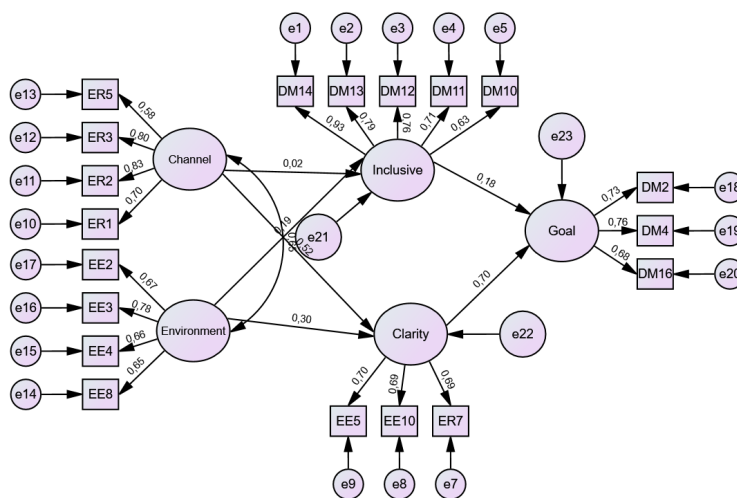


Figure 6.11: SEM model

6.6.4.1 Correlation coefficient

The correlation index was evaluated for all factors included in the SEM, and the findings are presented in Table 6.24. The squared multiple correlations were found to be satisfactory, adhering to the guideline that values closer to 0.850 indicate stronger correlations (Sellar and Arulrajah, 2019). Each row in the table illustrates the association between two constructs. The estimates depict the strength and direction of the relationships between various constructs within the model:

Inclusive communication <--> Clarity of communication: The estimate of -0.005 suggests a very weak negative relationship between inclusive communication and clarity of communication, although it is practically negligible.

Inclusive communication <--> Supportive communication Environment: The estimate of 0.216 indicates a moderate positive relationship between inclusive communication and a supportive communication environment.

Clarity of communication <--> Supportive communication Environment: The estimate of 0.615 shows a strong positive relationship between clarity of communication and a supportive communication environment, indicating that clarity is closely linked with supportiveness.

Inclusive communication <--> Channel: The estimate of 0.158 suggests a small positive relationship between inclusive communication and the communication channel used.

Channel of communication <--> Supportive communication Environment: The estimate of 0.657 reveals a strong positive relationship between the communication channel and a supportive communication environment, indicating that the chosen communication channel significantly influences the perception of supportiveness.

Clarity of communication <--> Channel: The estimate of 0.654 shows a strong positive relationship between clarity of communication and the chosen communication channel, indicating that clear communication tends to be associated with specific communication channels.

Supportive communication Environment <--> Engagement and Goal attainment: The estimate of 0.534 suggests a strong positive relationship between a supportive communication environment and engagement as well as alignment with goals, indicating that a supportive environment fosters higher levels of engagement and attainment of goals.

Channel of communication <--> Engagement and Goal attainment: The estimate of 0.684 indicates a strong positive relationship between the communication channel and engagement, as well as the attainment of goals, suggesting that the chosen communication channel significantly influences both.

Clarity of communication <--> Engagement and Goal attainment: The estimate of 0.622 reveals a strong positive relationship between clarity of communication and

engagement, as well as goal alignment, indicating that clear communication fosters higher levels of engagement and goal attainment.

Inclusive communication <--> Engagement and Goal attainment: The estimate of 0.231 indicates a moderate positive relationship between inclusive communication and engagement as well as goal attainment, suggesting that inclusive communication contributes positively to both outcomes.

Table 6.24: Coefficients Estimation of Constructs in the SEM

			Estimate
Inclusive communication	<-->	Clarity of communication	-,005
Inclusive communication	<-->	Supportive communication Environment	,216
Clarity of communication	<-->	Supportive communication Environment	,615
Inclusive communication	<-->	Channel	,158
Channel of communication	<-->	Supportive communication Environment	,657
Clarity of communication	<-->	Channel	,654
Supportive communication Environment	<-->	Engagement and Goal attainment	,534
Channel of communication	<-->	Engagement and Goal attainment	,684
Clarity of communication	<-->	Engagement and Goal attainment	,622
Inclusive communication	<-->	Engagement and Goal attainment	,231

6.6.4.2 Regression Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

The data in Table 6.25 present the results of a regression analysis where the dependent variable (DV) is engagement and goal attainment and the independent variable (IV) is the communication channel, supporting the communication environment. The variables clarity of communication and inclusive communicating serves as a mediating variable in the path analysis. The standardised coefficient β reflects the magnitude and direction of the relationship between IV and DV. The results are summarised below.

H1: The hypothesis suggests a relationship between inclusive communication and the communication channel. However, the standardised coefficient (β) of 0.022 indicates a weak positive association, which is not statistically significant ($p = 0.827$). Therefore,

we reject this hypothesis, suggesting that inclusive communication is not significantly influenced by the communication channel.

H2: This hypothesis proposes a relationship between communication clarity and the communication channel. The standardised coefficient (β) of 0.516 indicates a strong positive association, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, we accept this hypothesis, which indicates that the clarity of communication is significantly influenced by the communication channel.

H3: The hypothesis explores the connection between inclusive communication and the supportive communication environment. However, the standardised coefficient (β) of 0.187, though positive, is not statistically significant ($p = 0.074$). Thus, we reject this hypothesis, suggesting that inclusive communication is not significantly influenced by the supportive communication environment.

H4: This hypothesis examines the relationship between clarity of communication and the supportive communication environment. With a standardised coefficient (β) of 0.303, indicating a moderate positive association and a statistically significant p-value ($p = 0.001$), we accept this hypothesis. It suggests that the clarity of communication is significantly influenced by the supportive communication environment.

H5: The hypothesis proposes a link between engagement, goal attainment, and inclusive communication. The standardised coefficient (β) of 0.181, together with a statistically significant p-value ($p = 0.002$), supports a positive association. Thus, we accept this hypothesis, indicating that engagement and goal attainment are significantly influenced by inclusive communication.

H6: Finally, this hypothesis explores the relationship between engagement and goal attainment, and clarity of communication. The standardised coefficient (β) of 0.699, a high value, along with a highly statistically significant p-value ($p < 0.001$), indicates a strong positive association. Therefore, we accept this hypothesis, suggesting that engagement and goal attainment are significantly influenced by clarity of communication.

Table 6.25: Path regression estimate of the proposed model

Hypotheses	Dependent variable (DV)		Independent Variable (IV)	Standardised Coefficient β	S.E.	Critical Ratio. (CR)	P	Decision
H1	Inclusive communication	<---	Communication channel	0.022	.114	.219	0.827	Rejected
H2	Clarity of communication	<---	Communication channel	0.516	.083	5.222	<0.001	Accepted
H3	Inclusive communication	<---	Supportive communication Environment	0.187	.137	1.789	0.074	Rejected
H4	Clarity of communication	<---	Supportive communication Environment	0.303	.092	3.203	0.001	Accepted
H5	Engagement and Goal attainment	<---	Inclusive communication	0.181	.050	3.038	0.002	Accepted
H6	Engagement and Goal attainment	<---	Clarity of communication	0.699	.100	7.904	<0.001	Accepted

6.7 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher conducted a comprehensive analysis of data related to employee relations, diversity management, internal communication and institutional success within a University of Technology setting. Through various statistical techniques such as factor analysis, reliability testing, and structural equation modelling, the study aimed to understand the complex relationships between these variables and their impact on organisational success.

Respondents generally perceived communication in the workplace as respectful and inclusive, and a majority expressing agreement that their differences related to diversity are considered in the communication system. However, there were areas for improvement, particularly in empowering employees to express diverse opinions and recognising employee diversity in communication strategies.

Factor analysis identified distinct dimensions within employee relations, including respectful and inclusive communication, clarity in communication, communication channels and relationship facilitation, engagement and goal attainment, and a supportive communication environment. These dimensions collectively explained a significant portion of the variance in the data, highlighting their importance in shaping employee experiences and organisational outcomes.

Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the validity and reliability of the measurement model, demonstrating acceptable fit indices and supporting convergent and discriminant validity. Hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling provided insights into the relationships between different constructs, confirming the influence of clarity and inclusivity in communication on employee engagement and goal attainment.

Overall, the findings suggest that fostering inclusive communication, ensuring clarity in communication channels, and cultivating a supportive communication environment are crucial for enhancing employee engagement, aligning goals, and ultimately achieving institutional success in a University of Technology setting. The next chapter will focus on the implications of these findings, discussing how they can inform strategies to improve internal communication practices, improve diversity management initiatives, and foster positive employee relations within the organisation. Additionally, the chapter will explore potential recommendations and practical implications for organisational leaders and HR practitioners based on the insights gained from this analysis.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have meticulously documented the processes of data collection and analysis. In this chapter, a succinct overview of the study is presented, encapsulating the problem statement, research methods, and principal findings. It also examines the alignment between the study's objectives and the findings, considering the relationship between theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. Recognising the pivotal role of effective communication, inclusive diversity practices, and robust employee engagement in shaping organisational culture and success within HEIs, this study aims to contribute to scholarly discourse by unravelling the complexities of these interconnected phenomena and offering insights to inform organisational practice.

Welch (2011: 328) emphasises the global significance of internal communication as a determinant of organisational effectiveness and success. However, within higher education settings, internal communication emerges as a paramount issue affecting the performance and success of HEIs (Selesho and Naile 2014: 295). Govender's research (2015) sheds light on internal communication issues at the Durban University of Technology, particularly in the context of university transitions, highlighting a gap for this study to address regarding the instrumental role of communication in employee relations, engagement, and diversity management for institutional success. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of both theoretical and empirical research on internal communication pertaining to employee engagement, relations, and diversity management within the higher education sector.

This study aimed to fill the above-mentioned gap by investigating how internal communication strategies, diversity management practices, and employee engagement initiatives can be optimised to facilitate organisational success in HEIs. Using a quantitative research approach, data was collected through a survey questionnaire administered to 277 HEI employees, which included statements on employee engagement, relations, and diversity management. Respondents indicated

their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a Likert scale. Building on this groundwork, the chapter systematically presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of the research findings, structured around the thematic areas outlined in the study objectives.

Within each thematic domain, the discussion synthesises key insights from the data analysis and explores their implications for organisational theory and practice, aligning with the study's objectives. Drawing on pertinent literature and theoretical perspectives, the discussion critically assesses the implications for existing theories, identifies gaps in the literature, and provides practical recommendations and strategies for organisational practitioners, thus bridging theory and practice.

7.2 Assessing internal communication success linked to employee engagement for institutional success

Internal communication plays a crucial role in fostering employee engagement, which in turn contributes to organisational success (Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2014). Effective internal communication ensures that employees understand organisational goals, feel valued, and are motivated to contribute their best efforts (Llopis, 2012). In this section, the researcher explores the relationship between internal communication success and employee engagement, drawing insights from both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence.

According to the Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Communication proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), effective communication should be two-way, balanced, and aimed at building mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their stakeholders. This model emphasises the importance of dialogue, feedback, and transparency in communication processes, all of which are conducive to fostering employee engagement (Ki and Lee, 2019). The survey findings reveal a nuanced perspective on employee engagement and internal communication within the institution. Although most respondents perceive effective communication practices and a conducive communication environment, significant proportions express concerns or disagreement in certain areas, indicating potential gaps in communication processes.

Positive perceptions regarding free sharing of information and awareness of organisational goals highlight the importance of fostering a transparent and informative communication culture (Welch, 2011). However, the existence of dissenting views, with 71.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing, and 26.7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing regarding the free sharing of information and ideas, suggests the need for further efforts to promote open communication channels and enhance clarity with respect to institutional objectives.

Moreover, while effective internal communication within departments is perceived to foster engagement and effort in job roles, the presence of dissenting opinions underscores the need for continuous improvement in communication practices to maximise employee engagement levels. For instance, 66.7% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that effective internal communication within their department fosters engagement and effort in their job roles. However, 22.3% either disagree or strongly disagree, indicating potential areas for improvement.

The findings also indicate potential areas for improvement in inclusive decision-making processes and feedback mechanisms. A considerable proportion of respondents expressed concerns about their participation in decision-making and the receipt of regular feedback, suggesting opportunities for organisational leaders to promote participatory approaches and implement more robust feedback mechanisms. For example, only 39.7% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they are given a platform to participate or contribute to management decisions that affect their work, and 49.5% disagree or strongly disagree.

The implications of these findings are significant for organisational leaders and practitioners in higher education institutions. Effective internal communication strategies can serve as a catalyst to foster a culture of engagement, collaboration, and alignment with organisational goals (Delpont *et al.*, 2014). The finding also resonates with the view of Srivastava (2016) that internal communication is the cornerstone of an engaged workforce, which subsequently determines the success or failure of such an organisation. By addressing identified areas for improvement and leveraging communication channels effectively, institutions can enhance employee engagement levels, improve performance outcomes, and ultimately contribute to institutional success (Strydom and Fourie, 2018).

Empirical evidence further supports the notion that organisations with higher levels of internal communication effectiveness experience greater employee engagement and job satisfaction (Men *et al.*, 2016; Ongori and Agolla, 2009). Principal Component Analysis (PCA) conducted on survey data revealed four distinct components related to employee engagement and internal communication within HEI settings. These components provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of employee engagement and the intricate interplay between internal communication practices and organisational dynamics. The first component, internal communication and engagement, encompasses elements such as information sharing, idea exchange, and employee involvement in decision-making processes. This finding aligns with existing literature that highlight the pivotal role of effective internal communication in fostering employee engagement and commitment (Welch, 2011). The second component, continuous feedback and goal attainment, emphasises the importance of regular updates, performance feedback, and attainment of organisational objectives. Research suggests that employees who receive consistent feedback and perceive alignment between their roles and organisational goals are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement and performance (Kaplan and Norton, 1996).

The third component, clarity and attainment of communication, underscores the importance of transparent communication practices and attainment of the institutional goals. Clear communication channels and an understanding of organisational goals contribute to employee clarity and commitment (Delpont *et al.*, 2014). Lastly, the fourth component, satisfaction and engagement in the work environment, reflects employees' perceptions of the work environment and its impact on engagement levels. Studies have shown that a supportive work environment that meets employees' needs fosters higher levels of engagement and satisfaction (Saks, 2006).

The multifaceted nature of employee engagement and its relationship with internal communication has been extensively discussed in the literature. Tourish and Hargie (2009) emphasise the complexity of organisational communication processes and their impact on employee engagement. Similarly, Hall (2017) highlights the importance of aligning communication practices with organisational goals to foster employee engagement and satisfaction. These studies corroborate the findings of the PCA,

suggesting that effective internal communication strategies are crucial to promote employee engagement across different dimensions.

The identification of these four components has several implications for organisational leaders and practitioners. First, it underscores the importance of implementing comprehensive internal communication strategies that address various facets of employee engagement. Organisations should focus on fostering open communication channels, providing regular feedback, clarifying organisational goals, and creating a supportive work environment. The significance of comprehensive internal communication strategies has been highlighted by Welch (2011) and Ruck and Welch (2012), who emphasise the role of communication in facilitating organisational change and enhancing employee engagement. Additionally, Argenti and Forman (2002) discuss the power of corporate communication in shaping organisational identity and fostering employee commitment. These studies provide insight into the importance of aligning internal communication practices with organisational objectives to promote employee engagement and organisational success.

The application of Quirke's Framework provides a structured approach to implement effective communication strategies tailored to the unique context of higher education. It offers a lens through which internal institutional communication practices can be critically examined and enhanced to support institutional goals, foster a positive organisational culture, and improve organisational success.

Moreover, in the context of HEIs such as DUT, the framework's emphasis on involvement and engagement is particularly pertinent. The stages of the framework highlights the importance of engaging academic and administrative staff in dialogues around institutional objectives, thus fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to these goals. This engagement is critical in a sector where the success of initiatives often hinges on the buy-in and active participation of a highly knowledgeable and autonomous workforce. By mapping communication practices with Quirke's framework, gaps and opportunities for enhancing the effectiveness of internal communication within the DUT can be identified.

7.3 Assessing internal communication success linked to employee relations for institutional success

Internal communication plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' perceptions of their organisation, influencing their levels of engagement, satisfaction, and commitment, which in turn impact institutional success. This section of the discussion explores the link between internal communication, employee relations, and institutional success, drawing on the relevant literature to support key points. Verčič and Vokić (2017: 886) assert that ensuring good employee relations has become critical for human resources, and management initiatives such as effective day-to-day communication are the easiest method.

The results of the survey provide valuable insight into the perceptions of employees about internal communication and its impact on employee relations within the institution. Empirical evidence from the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) performed on the survey data revealed four distinct components related to employee relations and internal communication within the HEI setting. The first component, communication, and relationship dynamics, encompasses the intricate relationship between effective communication and positive employee relations within the institution. The finding suggests that effective communication fosters a two-way feedback system where employees feel empowered to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions (ER9). The finding aligns with research by Boselie *et al.* (2005) who emphasises the importance of open communication channels for facilitating constructive feedback loops, which enable continuous improvement and innovation within organisations.

Furthermore, there was agreement among the respondents that positive communication dynamics cultivate mutual respect between employees and management (ER10). Welch (2012) argues that respectful communication fosters a sense of dignity and fairness, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment among employees. This is consistent with the study findings, indicating that when communication is effective, mutual respect is nurtured, contributing to positive employee relations.

In addition, effective communication lays the foundation for strong workplace relationships characterised by trust, cooperation, and camaraderie (ER11). Research by Gomez-Mejia *et al.* (2007) suggests that organisations with open and transparent communication climates experience higher levels of employee engagement and team cohesion. The study findings support this notion, highlighting the role of communication in fostering positive relationships that drive organisational success.

Besides, respondents perceive a positive correlation between effective internal communication, good employee relations, and institutional success. This highlights the strategic importance of communication in driving organisational performance, achieving goals, and maintaining competitive advantage (ER12). Studies have demonstrated a strong link between effective internal communication, employee engagement, and organisational outcomes such as productivity, profitability, and customer satisfaction (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2007). Research suggests that organisations with strong communication cultures outperform their peers in terms of innovation, adaptability, and overall performance (Reichheld, 1996).

In HEIs, effective communication is recognised as a cornerstone for fostering positive employee relations (Hargie and Dickson, 2004). To capitalise on this, organisations must prioritise investment in communication training programmes aimed at honing employees' communication competencies, including active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution (Shockley-Zalabak *et al.*, 2000). Such initiatives empower employees with the necessary tools to engage in constructive dialogue and cultivate mutual understanding, thus fortifying relationships and amplifying productivity (Argenti, 2015).

In the same vein, organisational leaders within HEIs should champion open dialogue as a fundamental practice (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). By instituting mechanisms such as regular town hall meetings, suggestion boxes, and anonymous feedback channels, HEIs provide avenues for employees to voice their concerns and contribute to decision-making processes (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). This culture of open communication not only empowers employees, but also enhances organisational adaptability and effectiveness (Edmondson, 1999).

The second component highlights the structural aspects of communication within the organisation, including the presence and effectiveness of communication channels. Respondents generally agree that there are effective communication channels in place to promote relationships between employees, immediate leaders, and management. This positive perception indicates the presence of a robust communication infrastructure within the institution, which facilitates interaction and collaboration at various organisational levels (ER1). Effective communication channels enable the timely dissemination of information, attainment of goals, and coordination of activities across different levels of the organisation. Effective communication channels have been associated with improved employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organisational performance (Welch, 2012). Research suggests that organisations with strong communication systems experience higher levels of employee commitment and loyalty (Reichheld, 1996). Research by Dainty *et al.* (2001) also emphasises the critical role of communication channels in facilitating information flow and collaboration within organisations.

Although respondents express some level of disagreement, there is a notable proportion that perceives transparency in workplace communication positively. This indicates efforts to foster openness and honesty in communication practices, although challenges may exist in achieving full transparency (ER2). Transparency in communication has been linked to increased trust and credibility within organisations, leading to improved employee morale and engagement (Welch, 2012). Research highlights the importance of transparency in reducing ambiguity and improving employee perceptions of fairness and organisational justice (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2007).

Bidirectional communication, both upwards and downwards, is essential for fostering employee engagement and organisational alignment. The finding suggests a perceived imbalance in the encouragement of upward communication compared to downward communication. This finding underscores the importance of nurturing a culture that values and promotes upward feedback and input from employees (ER3). Research by Morrison (2014) highlights the importance of empowering employees to voice their opinions, concerns, and ideas, while also ensuring that management listens and responds effectively. Organisations that encourage upward communication are

more likely to benefit from valuable insights, ideas, and suggestions from employees, leading to innovation and continuous improvement (Boselie *et al.*, 2005). Research emphasises the role of upward communication in empowering employees, improving job satisfaction, and fostering a sense of ownership and commitment (Welch, 2012).

The quality of communication systems has a direct impact on the relationships between employees and their immediate superiors. Research by Guchait *et al.* (2016) suggests that effective communication between managers and subordinates is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, trust, and organisational commitment. The finding of this study suggests positive perceptions about relationships with immediate seniors and colleagues, attributed to good communication systems. This highlights the role of communication in facilitating understanding, collaboration, and a supportive work environment (ER5). Effective communication between employees and their immediate supervisors has been associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, and organisational commitment (Boselie *et al.*, 2005). Research suggests that strong relationships among colleagues, nurtured by effective communication, contribute to a positive organisational culture and improved teamwork (Welch, 2012).

The third component focuses on the interpersonal dynamics among immediate colleagues within the organisation and how communication systems contribute to effective interaction. The finding suggests that interpersonal communication is essential to build rapport, trust, and cooperation between colleagues within the workplace (ER6). The overwhelming agreement among respondents (71.8%) about their effective relationship with immediate colleagues underscores the pivotal role of good communication systems within the organisation (Argenti, 2015). According to Hargie and Dickson (2004), effective workplace communication fosters cohesion and collaboration among colleagues, leading to higher job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Clear and respectful communication fosters a positive work environment conducive to collaboration and mutual support.

Studies by Erez and Gati (2004) suggest that courteous behaviour improves interpersonal relationships, reduces workplace conflicts, and improves overall job satisfaction. Although a considerable portion of the respondents (52.7%) acknowledge the courteous association built through communication, a notable proportion (27.7%)

expresses some level of disagreement, indicating potential challenges in cultivating a courteous working environment (Edmondson, 1999). Research by Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) suggests that fostering a respectful workplace culture requires more than just effective communication; it necessitates organisational policies and practices that promote mutual respect and inclusivity. Organisations that prioritise courteous communication practices create a harmonious work environment where employees feel valued and appreciated.

The significant agreement among respondents (84.2%) regarding their ability to relate well with immediate colleagues to advance institutional goals reflects a strong alignment of individual and collective efforts toward organisational objectives (Masterson *et al.*, 2000). According to Liden *et al.* (2000), positive colleague relationships foster cooperation, knowledge sharing, and collective problem solving, all of which are essential for achieving organisational goals. This alignment is indicative of a supportive work environment where employees collaborate effectively to drive organisational success (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, research by Salas *et al.* (2015) suggests that cohesive team relationships positively impact performance outcomes, emphasising the importance of positive relationship with colleagues to advance institutional goals. The finding suggests that organisations should facilitate cross-functional collaboration by breaking down silos and promoting inter-departmental communication and cooperation. This can be done through cross-functional projects, task forces, and collaborative initiatives. According to Hansen (2009), cross-functional collaboration allows organisations to leverage diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills from various departments, leading to innovative solutions and improved decision making. This notion is supported by research from Ancona and Caldwell (1992), who found that cross-functional teams enhance organisational effectiveness by integrating specialised expertise and resources from different functional areas.

The fourth component, attainment of organisational goals and positive management relations, explores the relationship between employees and management within the organisation, particularly with respect to the alignment of individual roles with organisational goals. The findings suggest that when employees perceive alignment between their roles and the institution's goals and have positive relations with

management, they tend to be more engaged and committed. Research by Locke and Latham (2019) emphasises the importance of goal alignment in driving employee motivation and performance. When employees understand how their roles contribute to the achievement of organisational goals, they are more likely to be engaged and committed to their work. Effective communication from management about organisational goals and expectations is crucial to foster alignment and clarity. Management must communicate organisational goals and priorities clearly and consistently to all employees. This can be done through town hall meetings, email updates, and strategic planning sessions.

Clarity regarding role expectations and contributions is essential for employee satisfaction and performance (ER15). Studies by Cable and Edwards (2004) suggest that employees who perceive their roles as meaningful and impactful are more likely to experience job satisfaction and commitment. Effective communication from management about role expectations and contributions helps employees understand their value within the organisation. Managers should provide clear and concise expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of employees. This can include regular performance feedback, goal setting sessions, and one-on-one meetings. By clarifying role expectations, managers can help employees understand their contribution to the organisation's success and feel valued in their roles.

Drawing from Quirke's theory, internal communication goes beyond mere information dissemination; it also focuses on creating a shared understanding and aligning employees' relations and consequently enhancing institutional effectiveness which is of interest to this study.

7.4 Assessing internal communication and institutional success linked to diversity management for institutional success

South African HEIs operate within a complex sociopolitical context characterised by historical inequalities, transformation imperatives, and resource constraints (Bhengu, 2019). Efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion require effective communication strategies that foster dialogue, understanding, and collaboration between stakeholders (Mestry and Singh, 2021). Given the diversity of academic

disciplines and the breadth of administrative functions within a university, achieving widespread awareness requires tailored communication strategies that address the specific informational needs of different segments of the university community (Doorley and Garcia, 2007). The finding on the influence of internal communication on diversity management indicates a generally positive perception of internal communication regarding diversity management within the institution (Figure 4.4). Respondents expressed agreement with statements suggesting that their individual differences related to diversity are considered in the communication system (DM3), and they feel empowered to express their diverse views (DM4). In addition, the communication strategy is perceived to recognise the diversity of the staff (DM5), fostering an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued and respected.

While the study reveals several strengths in the institution's communication practices related to diversity management, it also highlights areas for improvement. For example, respondents feel relatively equal opportunities to access information compared to other employees (DM6) and perceive that their background is not a barrier to communicating with others (DM7). However, there are indications that efforts can be made to strengthen relationships between employees through communication channels (DM2) and to improve sensitivity to gender, culture, religion, race, and other differences in communication (DM10-DM14). The finding is highly significant given that language barriers, cultural differences, and technological limitations pose challenges to effective communication and employee engagement in South African higher education (Esterhuyzen and Fourie, 2019). Research by Cox and Blake (1991) emphasises the importance of considering individual differences in communication systems to effectively manage diversity in organisations. Cox suggests that communication strategies that acknowledge and accommodate diversity contribute to creating inclusive work environments where all employees feel valued and respected. This is particularly important as employees view and interpret messages according to their backgrounds, values, emotions, and experiences (Reidhead 2021: 268).

Furthermore, studies by Mor Barak (2014) and Ely and Thomas (2001) highlight the role of communication in empowering employees to express diverse views and promoting cultural competence within organisations. This is supported by most

respondents (77.6%) who believe that effective communication helps them understand their colleagues' differences and similarities. The findings further highlight the importance of communication in fostering understanding. Effective communication practices that encourage open dialogue and respect for differences contribute to the development of an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing themselves and collaborating with colleagues of diverse backgrounds. Encouraging open dialogue and feedback mechanisms can also help address any existing communication barriers and promote a culture of transparency and inclusivity within the institution (Ely and Thomas, 2001).

Based on the findings of the study, organisations must continue to prioritise inclusive communication practices that recognise and respect diversity among employees. This could involve implementing training programmes on cultural sensitivity and diversity awareness for employees and leaders (Mor Barak, 2014). In addition, organisations should regularly assess their communication channels and strategies to ensure that they are inclusive and effective in reaching all employees, regardless of their backgrounds.

7.5 Theoretical contribution of the study

Theoretical frameworks serve as the backbone for scholarly research, offering a structured lens through which phenomena can be examined and understood. The theoretical contribution of the study lies in its application and validation of the Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework in the context of internal communication and employee engagement in HEI settings. The framework, developed by Quirke (2002), outlines a progressive model for effective communication within organisations by illuminating the intricate dynamics that underpin communication processes, employee engagement, employee relations, diversity management, and the resultant institutional performance. Its development was rooted in the recognition of the central role that effective internal communication plays in achieving organisational objectives, fostering employee engagement, and driving change (Quirke, 2008). The study builds on this framework by empirically examining the relationships between communication channels, supportive communication environment, inclusive communication, clarity of communication, and their impact on

employee engagement, employee relations, diversity management and institutional success.

By developing an MM that captures intricate interplay of internal communication in the context of HEIs, the study addresses the unique characteristics of HEIs settings such as DUT with diverse stakeholders, including staff and students and the wider community. Effective internal communication within these institutions is crucial to align efforts, facilitate change, and ensure successful implementation of strategic initiatives (Macnamara, 2016). The application of Quirke's framework provides a structured approach to diagnose, design, and implement effective communication strategies tailored to the unique context of higher education. It offers a lens through which internal institutional communication practices can be critically examined and enhanced to support institutional goals, foster a positive organisational culture, and improve overall institutional success.

The proposed framework, based on Quirke's progression framework is depicted in Figure 7.1 and demonstrates the significant influence of communication channels and supportive communication environment on clarity of communication, and therefore, on employee engagement and goal attainment. The SEM analysis conducted in the study validates this framework. This validation improves our understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving effective internal communication and its impact on organisational outcomes. The findings of the SEM model shed light on the mediating role of clarity of communication and inclusive communication in the relationship between communication channels, supportive communication environment, and employee engagement and goal attainment. Although the clarity of communication directly influences the engagement and attainment of goals, inclusive communication indirectly affects these outcomes through its influence on the clarity of communication. This nuanced understanding of the mediating effects provides valuable insight for practitioners aiming to optimise internal communication strategies.

The results of the SEM analysis show that there is a strong positive association between the clarity of communication and the communication channel, indicating that the choice of communication channel significantly influences the clarity of communication within the organisation. The strong association between communication channels and clarity of communication underscores the importance of

selecting the appropriate channels to convey information effectively. Previous research has emphasised the role of various communication channels, such as face-to-face communication, email, and digital platforms, in facilitating clear and comprehensible messages (Shockley-Zalabak *et al.*, 2016). Craemer (2021: 1) indicates that in the communication process, the sender can compromise the effectiveness of a message due to factors such as the use of an inappropriate communication channel, not acknowledging the importance of non-verbal cues, not providing context, and inappropriate choice of words. By leveraging channels that promote clarity, organisations can improve employee understanding and alignment with organisational goals thus leading to institutional success. This assertion aligns with Noro *et al.* (2024) that it is important for institutions to establish clear channels and protocols for disseminating information and soliciting feedback.

The supportive communication environment has a moderate positive association with the clarity of communication, suggesting that a supportive communication climate significantly influences the clarity of communication within the organisation. A supportive communication environment characterised by trust, openness, and accessibility enhances communication clarity by reducing ambiguity and fostering mutual understanding (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2014). Although a supportive communication environment is conducive to effective communication, its direct impact on inclusiveness may vary depending on organisational factors such as leadership style, organisational structure, and cultural norms (Putnam and Nicotera, 2018). Organisations should strive to create a supportive communication climate that values transparency, openness, and employee participation to foster inclusive communication practices. In addition, leaders play a crucial role in creating such an environment by encouraging feedback, providing clear directions, and promoting a culture of collaboration and respect. Research suggests that clear communication is essential for building strong relationships, resolving conflicts, and aligning individual and organisational goals (Shockley-Zalabak, 2014).

Higher education institutions face considerable obstacles in the successful implementation and maintenance of diversity management and inclusive internal communication strategies, despite the potential benefits they offer. The finding from the SEM analysis suggests that inclusive communication practices significantly

influence employee engagement and goal attainment within the organisation. Although the relationship between inclusive communication and the communication channel is not significant ($\beta = 0.022$; $p = 0.827$), inclusive communication positively impacts engagement and goal attainment ($\beta = 0.181$; $p = 0.002$). This suggests that engagement and goal attainment are significantly influenced by inclusive communication practices within the organisation. Inclusive communication practices that encourage employee involvement, feedback, and participation are instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging, commitment, and attainment of organisational goals (Welch and Jackson, 2007). By promoting inclusivity in communication, organisations can enhance employee engagement and facilitate the achievement of shared objectives.

Of particular interest, the lack of significant association between communication channels and inclusive communication aligns with the findings of previous research. While certain communication channels may offer opportunities for inclusivity, such as social media platforms or town hall meetings, the effectiveness of inclusive communication often depends on organisational culture, leadership practices, and employee participation (Welch and Jackson, 2007). Therefore, organisations should focus on fostering a culture of inclusivity irrespective of the communication channels used. This is particularly relevant as employees view and interpret messages according to their backgrounds, values, emotions, and experiences, which make communication fundamentally challenging (Reidhead, 2021: 268).

One of the most crucial aspects for achieving institutional goals and objectives towards organisational success is communication. These goals are achieved by employing internal communication to ensure that employees are aware and aligned with the goals (Razak and Johar, 2019: 3). Quirke's progression of internal communication framework postulates that clarity and comprehension are vital, ensuring that employees not only know about organisational initiatives, but also understand their significance and how they contribute to the bigger picture (Welch and Jackson, 2007). The SEM analysis finding shows a strong positive association between clarity of communication and engagement, as well as goal attainment. Clear and transparent communication significantly influences employee engagement and alignment with organisational goals. Clear and transparent communication is essential to foster

employee engagement and alignment with organisational goals (Shockley-Zalabak *et al.*, 2016). When employees receive clear, consistent, and timely communication, they are more likely to understand their roles, responsibilities, and organisational objectives, leading to higher levels of engagement and commitment. This finding is consistent with Holliday (2023) that when communication is carried out effectively, it ensures that employers and employees are in alignment with each other's expectations, goals, objectives, and strategies. It reduces confusion and minimises mistakes while concentrating everyone's efforts towards the attainment of the same goals.

Based on the results of the MM study, organisations can refine their communication strategies to improve employee engagement and goal attainment. Emphasising the importance of clarity in communication channels and fostering a supportive communication environment can improve clarity of communication, thus positively impacting employee engagement and goal attainment. Moreover, promoting inclusive communication practices can further amplify these effects by facilitating a more transparent and participative communication culture. This study therefore contributes to the advancement of organisational communication theory by empirically validating the relationships posited by the Quirk Communication Progression Framework. By elucidating the mechanisms through which communication channels, supportive communication environment, clarity of communication, and inclusive communication influence employee engagement and goal attainment, the study enriches our theoretical understanding of internal communication dynamics and their implications for organisational success.

In summary, the results of the SEM analysis provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between communication variables and their impact on employee engagement and goal attainment. By understanding these relationships, organisations can develop targeted communication strategies to enhance clarity, inclusivity, and support, thus fostering a more engaged and aligned workforce.

Quirke's framework is relevant for discussing internal communication in a university setting such as the DUT. Universities are complex organisations with diverse stakeholders including staff, students and the wider community. As such, effective internal communication in these institutions is vital to synchronise efforts, facilitate

change and ensure the successful implementation of strategic initiatives which accommodate everyone.

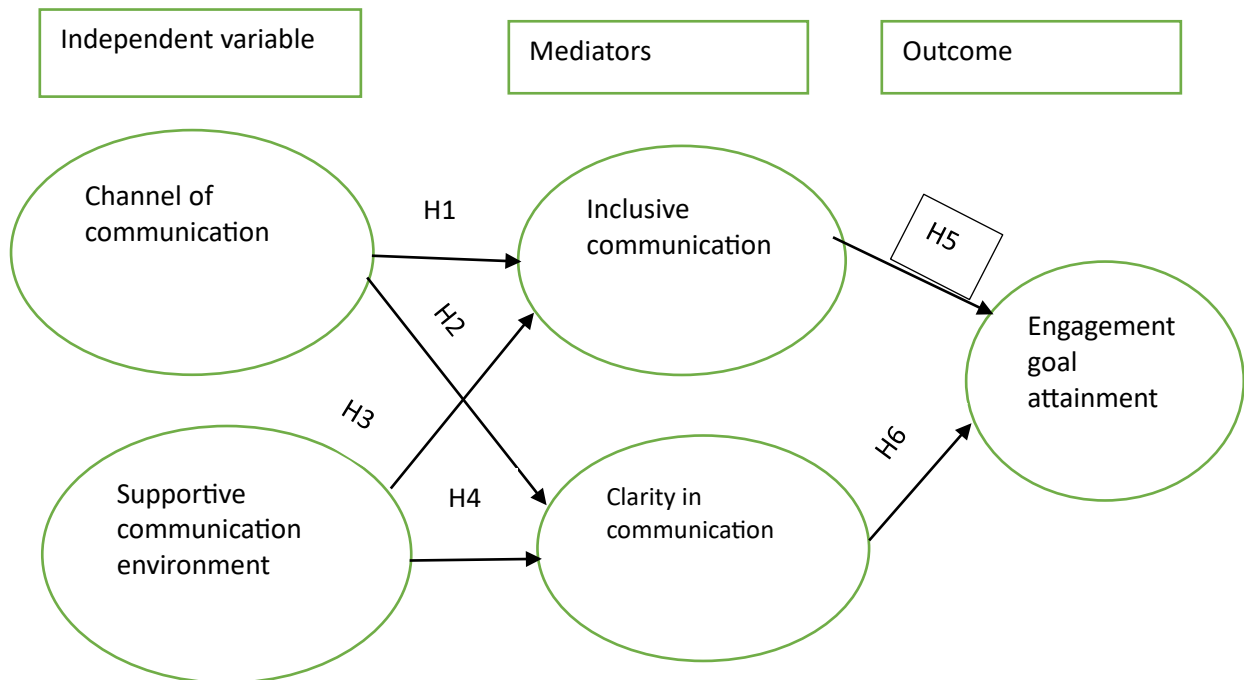


Figure 7.1: Proposed communication model for HEIs

7.6 Conclusion

Drawing on both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, this study has provided a comprehensive understanding of how internal communication practices influence organisational outcomes and employee experiences within the context of higher education.

The study examined the link between internal communication, employee engagement and institutional success. The findings underscored the crucial role of effective internal communication in fostering engagement, collaboration, and alignment with institutional goals. By identifying key components related to internal communication and engagement, this study offers practical insight for leaders who want to optimise communication strategies and enhance employee engagement levels.

Furthermore, the study explored the relationship between internal communication, employee relations and institutional success. The results highlighted the importance of positive communication dynamics, transparency, and mutual respect in fostering

strong workplace relationships. By elucidating the impact of communication channels and supportive communication environments on employee relations, this study provides valuable guidance for organisations seeking to cultivate a culture of trust, cooperation, and inclusivity among employees.

The study also focused on internal communication and institutional success linked to diversity management. The findings emphasised the strategic importance of inclusive communication practices in promoting understanding, collaboration, and diversity management within HEIs. By identifying areas for improvement in communication strategies related to diversity management, this study offers actionable recommendations for organisations striving to create inclusive work environments that value and respect diversity.

The theoretical contribution of the study lies in its application and validation of the Quirke Communication Progression Framework in the context of internal communication and employee engagement in HEI settings. By empirically examining the relationships between communication variables and organisational outcomes, this study enriches our theoretical understanding of internal communication dynamics and their implications for organisational success. The proposed framework offers a structured approach to diagnosing, designing, and implementing effective communication strategies tailored to the unique context of higher education.

In summary, this study advances our knowledge of internal communication within HEIs and provides practical recommendations for institutional and organisational leaders and practitioners. By fostering a culture of effective communication, trust, and inclusivity, HEIs can enhance employee engagement, relations, diversity management, and ultimately institutional success. Moving forward, organisations must prioritise investment in communication training programmes, strengthen feedback mechanisms, and promote inclusive communication practices to foster a positive organisational culture and drive sustainable success. The next chapter provides the recommendation, the conclusions drawn for each objective, and direction for future studies.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The discussion of results was presented in the preceding chapter. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how internal communication strategies, diversity management practices, employee relations, and employee engagement initiatives can be optimised to facilitate institutional success in HEIs. Previous studies such as Govender (2015) hinted that communication can be instrumental in employee relations, employee engagement, and diversity management, which in turn contribute to institutional success.

However, there seems to be a paucity of theoretical and empirical research on internal communication related to employee engagement, employee relations, and diversity management to enhance institutional success in the context of the higher education sector. Given the dearth of empirical and theoretical research on this topic, the study adopted Quirke's progression of internal communication framework in the context of HEIs. Quirke recognises the central role that effective internal communication plays in achieving organisational objectives, fostering employee engagement, and driving change. Bearing this in mind and drawing on Strydom and Fourie (2018: 1) that for institutions to be successful and sustainable, obstacles related to lack of communication should be completely eradicated, the study employs a quantitative research approach to collect data from 277 HEI employees. SEM was applied to test and validate the model. The main findings of the literature review and the key goals of the research have been outlined in the chapter summaries. In line with the achievement of the research objectives, this chapter provides recommendations on how HEIs can achieve the institutional goal and success through effective internal communication. This study provides both practical and theoretical contributions and implications for the application of the proposed communication model in HEI settings.

8.2 Summary of Findings

This section explains the overall findings of the study from the literature review and primary research.

8.2.1 Summary of Literature Data

The findings of the literature review are presented in line with the research objectives.

From the literature review, the evolution of internal organisational communication was traced from Dale Carnegie's teachings to the introduction of feedback loops and two-way communication concepts in the 1940s. The Hawthorne studies highlighted the importance of clear and engaging internal communication in enhancing employee performance and understanding organisational goals (Clemmons, 2022; Hay, 1974).

The literature findings identified two operational levels of internal communication, namely organisation-employee and supervisor-employee communication. Both levels are deemed essential for sharing organisational goals and visions, thus improving employee performance and organisational success (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Karanges *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, the finding of the literature review indicates that effective internal communication is crucial for maintaining goodwill with various stakeholders, enhancing brand equity, and attracting patronage and support. Employees serve as the most significant 'brand ambassadors,' and their informed communication about organisational goals positively impacts external public relations efforts (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003; Bruning, Castle and Schrepfer, 2004; Yang and Grunig, 2005).

The literature review revealed that internal communication is pivotal in HEI settings for both internal relationships between academic management, staff, and students and external relationships with potential students and academic stakeholders. Effective communication ensures visibility and market competitiveness for HEIs (Anyangwe, 2012).

The review of internal communication channels underscores the critical role they play in organisational communication effectiveness (Mazzei, 2010). The distinction between mediated and non-mediated channels highlights the diverse options available

to organisations, each with its advantages and limitations (Thompson, 2020; van Deventer and Snyman, 2004; Yao and Ling, 2020). While mediated channels offer scalability and reach, non-mediated channels such as face-to-face communication facilitate immediate feedback and nuanced understanding (Argenti and Forman, 2002; Daft and Lengel, 1986; Kaur and Sharma, 2015). The importance of feedback in internal communication emerges as a central theme, emphasising its role in fostering dialogue, improving performance, and aligning communication objectives with organisational goals (Blidaru, 2019; Hillman, Schwandt and Bartz, 1990).

From the literature review, it was found that the factors that influence the choice of communication channels, including cost, confidentiality, urgency, distance, resources and recipient dynamics, provide organisations with a framework to select channels that ensure timely, secure, and effective communication (Terzić and Aščić, 2017). Overall, the review underscores the need for organisations to adopt a blended approach to internal communication, using a mix of channels to bridge geographical, technological and interpersonal gaps and improve communication effectiveness, engagement, and organisational success.

The finding from the literature review suggests that the dynamics of internal communication in HEIs present unique challenges and opportunities compared to those in private sector organisations (Mbhele and de Beer, 2021). While private organisations typically follow a top-down communication approach, HEIs often operate with a dual structure, combining collegial decision-making processes with mechanistic operational hierarchies (Mbhele and de Beer, 2021; Mintzberg, 1979). However, despite their critical role as agents of change and innovation, HEIs have been criticised for their slow adaptation to societal and technological advancements, often attributed to ineffective internal communication (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Clark, 1983; Probst and Raisch, 2005; Styhre, 2002).

It emerged from the literature that public scrutiny of HEIs has intensified in recent years, driven by factors such as social media influence and concerns over educational quality and relevance (Campbell, 2018). This heightened scrutiny underscores the need for robust internal communication systems within HEIs, as effective communication is essential to build trust, foster stakeholder engagement, and ensure alignment with organisational goals and societal expectations (Dos Santos and

Ventura, 2021). However, research indicates that internal communication responsibilities within HEIs are often decentralised, with many communication practitioners feeling ill equipped to fulfil their communication duties effectively (Minia *et al.*, 2015).

From the literature review, it was evidence that Quirke's Progression of Internal Communication Framework provides a strategic roadmap for enhancing communication within organisations, emphasising stages of awareness, understanding, involvement, commitment, and advocacy (Quirke, 2008). In higher education institutions like the DUT, effective internal communication is crucial to align efforts, facilitate change, and support institutional goals (Macnamara, 2016). By systematically applying Quirke's framework, the study aimed to identify gaps and propose strategies for improvement, ultimately contributing to institutional success and a vibrant, engaged university community (Johansson and Heide, 2008). This framework serves as a valuable tool for developing communication strategies that foster engagement, alignment with organisational objectives, and overall performance improvement.

8.2.2 Summary of Empirical Data

The findings of the present study are in line with its research objectives.

8.2.2.1 The role of internal communication in achieving institutional success through employee engagement

The objective of this discussion was to determine the role that internal communication plays in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee engagement. The key insights from this study's survey findings reveal positive perceptions of communication practices but also indicate areas of concern, such as decision-making involvement and feedback mechanisms. The results of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) identify four components: internal communication and engagement, continuous feedback and goal attainment, communication clarity and attainment, and work environment satisfaction and engagement. These components highlight the multifaceted nature of engagement and the importance of transparent communication, feedback mechanisms, and supportive work environments (Delpont *et al.*, 2014; Saks, 2006).

8.2.2.2 The Role of Internal Communication in achieving Institutional Success through Employee Relations

The objective of this discussion was to determine the role that internal communication plays in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee relations. The survey's Principal Component Analysis (PCA) identified four key components related to employee relations and internal communication within HEIs. First, effective communication fosters two-way feedback, mutual respect, and trust between employees and management (Boselie *et al.*, 2005; Welch, 2012). Secondly, robust communication channels and transparency promote interaction and collaboration, enhancing engagement and loyalty (Dainty *et al.*, 2001; Reichheld, 1996). Third, bi-directional communication empowers employees to contribute ideas and concerns, fostering innovation and commitment (Morrison, 2014; Welch, 2012). Fourth, interpersonal dynamics among colleagues, facilitated by courteous communication, contribute to a supportive work environment and collective goal attainment (Erez and Gati, 2004; Liden *et al.*, 2000).

Employees perceive alignment between their roles and organisational goals, coupled with positive management relationships, as crucial for engagement and commitment (Locke and Latham, 2019). Clear communication from management regarding expectations and contributions improves role clarity and satisfaction (Cable and Edwards, 2004). Therefore, organisations must prioritise investment in communication training programmes to enhance employees' competencies, foster open dialogue, and promote a supportive work culture (Argenti, 2015; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995).

8.2.2.3 The Role of Internal Communication in achieving Institutional Success Through Diversity Management

The objective of this discussion was to determine the role that internal communication plays in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as diversity management. The key findings reveal positive perceptions of internal communication about diversity management within the institution. Respondents feel empowered to express diverse views and believe that their differences are considered in the communication system, fostering an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued (DM3, DM4, DM5).

However, areas for improvement are identified, including strengthening relationships among employees, enhancing sensitivity to gender, culture, religion, race, and other differences in communication, and addressing language barriers and technological limitations (DM2, DM6, DM7, DM10-DM14). Cox and Blake (1991) emphasise the importance of considering individual differences in communication systems to effectively manage diversity in organisations. Effective communication practices that encourage open dialogue and respect for differences contribute to the development of an inclusive environment (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Mor Barak, 2014).

Organisations should prioritise inclusive communication practices, including training programmes on cultural sensitivity and diversity awareness, and regularly assess communication channels to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness in reaching all employees (Mor Barak, 2014). By fostering understanding and collaboration among diverse employees, HEIs can create an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute to institutional success.

8.2.2.4 Human Resources internal communication theoretical model to achieve organisational success in a University of Technology

The objective of this discussion was to propose a Human Resources internal communication theoretical model that can be used to achieve organisational success in a University of Technology. The application of Quirke's framework provides a structured approach to diagnose, design, and implement effective communication strategies tailored to the unique context of higher education. The study's findings, validated through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis, shed light on the mediating role of clarity of communication and inclusive communication in the relationship between communication variables and employee engagement and goal attainment.

The key findings reveal a strong positive association between communication channels and clarity of communication. Effective selection of communication channels significantly influences the clarity of communication within the organisation, emphasising the importance of choosing appropriate channels to convey information effectively (Quirke, 2008). A supportive communication environment moderately influences the clarity of communication. Trust, openness, and accessibility contribute

to reducing ambiguity and fostering mutual understanding, improving clarity of communication (Eisenberg *et al.*, 2014).

The finding also found that inclusive communication practices significantly influence employee engagement and goal attainment. Although the relationship between communication channels and inclusive communication is not significant, inclusive communication positively impacts engagement and goal attainment, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment among employees (Welch and Jackson, 2007). Clear and transparent communication significantly influences employee engagement and alignment with organisational goals. When employees receive clear, consistent, and timely communication, they are more likely to understand their roles, responsibilities, and organisational objectives, leading to higher levels of engagement and commitment (Shockley-Zalabak *et al.*, 2016).

These findings collectively contribute to the advancement of organisational communication theory by empirically validating the relationships proposed by the Quirke Communication Progression Framework.

8.3 Conclusions from the Study

In line with achieving the research objectives of the study, the following conclusions are drawn.

8.3.1 Conclusions of findings related to the assessment of the role of internal communication in achieving institutional success through employee engagement.

This study has achieved the research objective stated, namely, determining the role internal communication plays in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee engagement. In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of internal communication in achieving institutional success, particularly through enhancing employee engagement. Positive perceptions of communication practices alongside identified areas for improvement emphasise the importance of transparent communication, feedback mechanisms, and supportive work environments to foster engagement and alignment with organisational goals.

8.3.2 Conclusions of findings related to the assessment of the role of internal communication in achieving institutional success through employee relations.

This study has achieved the research objective stated, namely, determining the role internal communication plays in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as employee relations. The study highlights the significant role of internal communication in fostering institutional success through effective employee relations. Furthermore, the PCA analysis identified four key components: two-way feedback and mutual respect, robust communication channels and transparency, empowerment through bidirectional communication, and supportive interpersonal dynamics among colleagues. These components emphasise the importance of clear communication, transparency, and supportive work environments in promoting engagement, loyalty, and alignment with organisational goals. To enhance employee relations, organisations should prioritise communication training programmes and promote open dialogue to cultivate a supportive work culture.

8.3.3 Conclusions of the findings related to the evaluation of the role of internal communication in achieving institutional success through diversity management.

This study has achieved the stated research objective, that is, determining the role that internal communication plays in achieving institutional success through Human Resources premises such as diversity management. In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of internal communication in promoting institutional success through effective diversity management. Although positive perceptions of internal communication regarding diversity management were observed, areas for improvement were identified, including strengthening relationships among employees and improving sensitivity to differences in communication. Prioritising inclusive communication practices, such as cultural sensitivity training and regular assessment of communication channels, is essential to create an environment where all individuals feel valued and empowered to contribute.

8.3.4 Conclusions of findings related to the framework of internal communication of Human Resources to achieve organisational success in a University of Technology.

The objective of this discussion was to propose a framework of internal communication of Human Resources that can be used to achieve organisational success in a University of Technology. The study demonstrates the valuable application of Quirke's framework in diagnosing, designing, and implementing effective communication strategies tailored to the unique context of higher education. The key findings underscore a strong positive association between communication channels and the clarity of communication, emphasising the importance of selecting appropriate channels for effective information dissemination. Additionally, a supportive communication environment moderately influences clarity, highlighting the role of trust, openness, and accessibility in fostering mutual understanding.

Moreover, inclusive communication practices significantly impact employee engagement and goal alignment, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment among employees. Clear and transparent communication is also found to significantly influence engagement and alignment with organisational goals, highlighting the importance of clarity in communication processes.

8.4 Implications of the Study

Implications of the study on theory, practice, methodology, and future research are detailed in the section below.

8.4.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of this study are significant to HEIs in promoting employee engagement, relations, and managing diversity through inclusive communication on both a theoretical and applied level. On a theoretical level, the study findings validate theoretical models such as the Quirke framework by demonstrating how communication channels and supportive communication environments influence clarity and inclusivity in communication. This contributes to the theoretical understanding of internal communication dynamics in higher education institutions. Thus, theoretical contribution of the study lies in extending the Quirke's communication

progression of internal communication framework specifically tailored to the HEIs. This model sheds light on the intricacies and interplay of the internal communication process in promoting employee engagement, relations, and diversity management for institutional success. The study therefore fills the gap in the literature identified by Govender's research (2015). More particularly, the study deepens the understanding of Quirk communication progression framework from both empirical and theoretical perspectives in the HEI context, which is lacking in the literature.

8.4.2 Practical Implications

The study proposes an internal communication framework specifically tailored for HEIs, based on the existing Quirke's progression of internal communication framework. The finding offers practical insights which are broken down into multiple layers.

a. Informing Communication Strategies:

The findings offer practical insights for developing effective communication strategies in higher education institutions. By emphasising the importance of communication channels and supportive environments in improving clarity and inclusivity, organisations can tailor their communication approaches to foster better internal communication practices.

b. Enhancing Employee Engagement:

Understanding the impact of clarity and inclusivity in communication on employee engagement can help HEIs design interventions to improve staff motivation, commitment, and productivity. This is particularly relevant in educational settings where employee engagement directly influences student outcomes and organisational performance.

c. Aligning Organisational Goals:

Furthermore, clear and inclusive communication practices facilitate alignment with organisational goals, promoting a shared sense of purpose and direction among staff members. By prioritising these aspects of communication, higher education institutions

can ensure that all stakeholders are working towards common goals, thus enhancing overall organisational effectiveness.

d. Creating Supportive Communication Environments:

Recognising the importance of supportive communication environments, institutions can focus on fostering a culture of trust, transparency, and collaboration. This can lead to improved relationships between faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as a more positive work environment conducive to innovation and growth.

e. Improving Student Experience:

Effective internal communication is not only beneficial for employees but also enhances the student experience. Clear communication channels and supportive environments contribute to a cohesive institutional culture, which, in turn, positively impacts student satisfaction, retention, and academic success.

Overall, the findings of the study have both theoretical and practical implications for advancing internal communication efficiency in higher education institutions. By aligning communication strategies with organisational goals, fostering supportive communication environments, and prioritising clarity and inclusivity in communication practices, institutions can enhance employee engagement, goal alignment, and overall organisational performance.

8.5 Limitations of the study

Although the research was established on solid literature and methodological foundations, it must be acknowledged that there were certain limitations or weaknesses. Firstly, the study drew data only from a university of technology. This could restrict the generalisability of the findings to other types of universities or colleges. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study are context-specific and can vary between different universities and HEIs, and it is advisable to apply caution when generalising the results. Second, internal communication practices and their effectiveness can be subject to interpretation based on individual experiences and perceptions. The interpretations of communication strategies, clarity and inclusivity of

the respondents may vary depending on their roles, responsibilities, and organisational context, leading to potential biases in the data.

8.6 Recommendations

Part of the objectives that this study sought to address was to propose a Human Resources internal communication framework that can be used to achieve organisational success in a University of Technology. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study on key influential factors in international communication, the following recommendations are made.

8.6.1 Implement Diversity Training Programmes

From the study findings, areas for improvement were identified, including strengthening relationships among employees, improving sensitivity to gender, culture, religion, race, and other differences in communication, and addressing language barriers and technological limitations. In light of this, HEIs should implement diversity training programmes that aim to improve cultural sensitivity and awareness among faculty, staff and administrators. From the literature review findings, it was uncovered that employees view and interpret messages in accordance with their backgrounds, values, emotions, and experiences which make communication fundamentally challenging (Reidhead, 2021: 268).

8.6.2 Enhance Communication Channels for Inclusivity

Institutions should enhance communication channels to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all members of the university community, including those from diverse backgrounds. The study finding emphasises the importance of inclusive communication practices in fostering a sense of belonging and commitment among employees. In addition, the findings of the literature review stress the need to consider individual differences in communication systems to effectively manage diversity in organisations.

8.6.3 Strengthening Feedback Mechanisms

The findings of this study indicate potential areas for improvement in inclusive decision-making processes and feedback mechanisms. A considerable portion of

respondents expressed concerns about their involvement in decision-making and the receipt of regular feedback, suggesting opportunities for organisational leaders to promote participatory approaches and implement more robust feedback mechanisms. In light of this, it is highly recommended that the institution establishes robust feedback mechanisms to facilitate dialogue and engagement among stakeholders, allowing the expression of diverse views and concerns. This is supported by literature such as Morrison (2014), who highlights the importance of empowering employees to voice their opinions and concerns through effective feedback mechanisms.

8.6.4 Promote Transparent Decision-Making Processes

From the study findings, some of the respondents raised concerns about the free exchange of information and ideas. This suggests the need for further efforts to promote open communication channels and improve clarity about institutional objectives. Therefore, the study recommends the promotion of transparency in decision-making processes to build trust and credibility among members of the university community, fostering a culture of openness and inclusivity. The recommendation resonates with Gomez-Mejia *et al.* (2007) who suggested that transparency in communication reduces ambiguity and enhances employee perceptions of fairness and organisational justice.

8.6.5 Invest in Communication Training Programmes

In the communication process, the sender can compromise the effectiveness of a message due to factors such as the use of an inappropriate communication channel, not acknowledging the importance of non-verbal signals, not providing context, and an inappropriate choice of words. On the other hand, the recipient may not interpret the message the way it was intended. Taking this into account, the study recommends communication training programmes that aim to improve employee communication competencies, including active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution. The recommendation is in line with Argenti (2015), who emphasises the importance of communication training programmes in empowering employees with the requisite tools to engage in constructive dialogue.

8.6.6 Regularly Assess and Update Communication Strategies

The study recommends that HEIs regularly evaluate and update communication strategies to ensure they are inclusive, effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of the university community. The recommendation can be supported by Mor Barak (2014), who recommends regularly assessing communication channels to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness in reaching all employees. More so, Macnamara (2016) suggests that effective internal communication strategies must be continuously evaluated and adapted to support institutional goals and objectives.

8.7 Directions for Future Research

Given that communication within higher education is dynamic and intricate, future research could employ longitudinal studies to track the effectiveness of communication strategies and their impact on employee engagement and institutional success over time. Longitudinal research will allow the examination of trends and patterns in communication dynamics, providing deeper insight into their long-term effects.

Future studies can also conduct comparative studies across different types of higher education institutions (e.g., public vs. private, research-focused vs. teaching-focused) to explore variations in internal communication practices and their effects on employee engagement and organisational outcomes. Comparative research can uncover best practices and contextual factors that influence communication effectiveness in diverse institutional settings. Recognising the limitation of the quantitative research approach, future studies should employ qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, to gain a deeper understanding of employees' perceptions, experiences, and preferences regarding internal communication practices. Qualitative research will allow for the exploration of subjective meanings and contextual factors that shape the communication dynamics within HEIs.

8.8 Contributions to Knowledge

In-depth insights generated in this study have contributed to and deepened the application of Quirke's progression of internal communication framework within HEIs. It also provided a unique contribution to the literature, as it offered a structured approach to the diagnosis, design, and implementation of communication strategies

tailored to the unique needs and challenges of HEIs. Validation through SEM enhances our theoretical understanding of internal communication dynamics and its implications for organisational success. Using this framework, institutions can systematically assess their communication practices, identify areas for improvement, and develop targeted interventions to improve internal communication effectiveness and organisational results.

Furthermore, the findings of the study offer actionable insights for HEI practitioners, providing guidance on the development and implementation of effective communication strategies tailored to the unique context of higher education. By emphasising the importance of clarity, inclusion, and supportive communication environments, the study equips organisational leaders and communication professionals with evidence-based approaches to enhance employee engagement, goal alignment, and institutional success.

This study provides empirical evidence that adds to the growing body of knowledge by highlighting the critical role of internal communication in fostering employee engagement, goal alignment, and organisational performance, and the study underscores the strategic importance of effective communication practices within HEIs. Organisations that prioritise transparent communication, feedback mechanisms, and inclusive communication environments are better positioned to achieve their objectives, cultivate positive organisational cultures, and adapt to changing environments effectively.

8.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provided a detailed look at the intricate dynamics of internal communication within HEIs and its pivotal role in achieving institutional success, particularly by fostering employee engagement, relations, and diversity management. Through a comprehensive analysis of survey data and the application of the Quirke Communication Progression Framework validated by Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), several key insights have been uncovered.

First, the study has highlighted the multifaceted nature of internal communication within HEIs, identifying components such as communication clarity, supportive communication environments, continuous feedback mechanisms, and inclusive

communication practices as crucial determinants of employee engagement and goal attainment.

Second, the findings underscore the importance of transparent communication channels, feedback mechanisms, and inclusive communication environments in fostering a culture of engagement, collaboration, and mutual respect among employees. By recognising and valuing the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of employees, organisations can create inclusive communication environments that promote understanding, innovation, and organisational effectiveness.

Third, the study offers actionable recommendations for HEI practitioners to improve internal communication strategies, including investing in communication training programmes, strengthening feedback mechanisms, addressing language barriers, and promoting a supportive communication climate.

The study also contributes to theoretical advancements by empirically validating the Quirke Communication Progression Framework and elucidating the complex interplay between communication variables and organisational outcomes. By providing evidence-based insights and practical recommendations, this study can inform and guide organisational leaders and communication professionals in optimising internal communication practices to drive institutional success within HEIs.

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LIST OF ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A

LETTER OF INFORMATION



Hello Participant,

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: The effects of Internal Communication on Institutional Success: A Case Study of a selected University of Technology

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Linah T. Mahlahla, MMSc: Human Resources Management

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: K.M. Oparinde, PhD: Language Practice

M.E. Lourens, PhD: Human Resources Management

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: This study aims to examine the impact of effective internal communication system in enhancing institutional success while focusing on premises such as employee engagement, employee relations and diversity management at the Durban University of Technology. The study hopes to contribute new data to existing literature on communication in the workplace while at the same time, proposing a model for organisational communication that is more suitable for higher education institutions.

Outline of the Procedures: The questionnaire will be sent out via the institution's staff mail and to ensure anonymity a link will be provided for the participants to follow. There will be no personal interactions with the respondents. Participation is voluntary and you will be expected to answer all questions honestly and truthfully for the research to yield the desired results. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no known and foreseeable risks or discomfort associated with the study.

Benefits: The researcher will benefit through publications and presentations. Key research findings will be made available to the management of the Durban University of Technology.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: Participation will be entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Remuneration: There is no remuneration involved.

Costs of the Study: No costs related to the study shall be incurred.

Confidentiality: In this study, confidentiality is of utmost importance. All information received will be used only for research purposes. The questionnaire does not include names and any personal identification details.

Research-related Injury: There are no known or anticipated risks and discomforts associated to this study.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Should you have any queries regarding this study, do not hesitate to contact:

Researcher: Linah T. Mahlahla, 21143352@dut4life.ac.za
Supervisor: Dr. K.M. Oparinde, kunleo@dut.ac.za
Co-supervisor Prof. M.E. Lourens, melaniel@dut.ac.za
Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2375.
Complaints can be reported to the DVC: RIE at dvcrie@dut.ac.za

ANNEXURE B

CONSENT FORM



CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, _____ (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: _____,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant
Right Thumbprint

Date

Time

Signature /

I, _____ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher **Date** **Signature**

Full Name of Witness (If applicable) **Date** **Signature**

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) **Date** **Signature**

ANNEXURE C

QUESTIONNAIRE



Faculty of Management Sciences

Department of Human Resources Management

Date

Dear Participant

ASSISTANCE: QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETION – RESEARCH THESIS

I kindly request your co-operation in completing the attached questionnaire as you have been identified as one of the potential respondents selected from the entire target population. I am a registered student at the Durban University of Technology and currently pursuing a PhD degree in Human Resources Management. My topic is entitled: The effects of Internal Communication on Institutional Success: A Case Study of a selected University of Technology.

I will be most grateful if you could complete the questionnaire following the link provided. The questionnaire would take approximately 20 minutes to complete and only requires you to select the relevant responses. Please ensure that you have answered all questions. Please rest assured that your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be divulged to any other party. The researcher ensures that the information that you will provide will not be used for any other purpose except for research investigation only. Anonymity will be ensured in this research. Data from the respondents cannot be linked to a specific individual.

In addition, your participation is merely voluntary and there is no coercion or undue influence in completing this questionnaire. Moreover, you may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation at any time. Please kindly note that this study has no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you. Additionally, you will not be remunerated for participating in this study. The data which you will provide will be electronically kept safe in a password protected computer. A summary of the main findings will be made available to the Durban University of Technology. If you have any queries kindly contact me or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Your co-operation in assisting me with this important component of my study is highly appreciated and I look forward to a speedy completion of the questionnaire. If there are any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the contact details below. I take this opportunity to again thank you in advance.

Sincerely

Student

Contact Details

Linah Mahlahla – 21143352@dut4life.ac.za

Student No. 21143352

Supervisor / Promoter

Contact Details

Dr Kunle Oparinde – kunleo@dut.ac.za

Co-Supervisor/Co-Promoter

Contact Details

Prof Melanie Lourens – melaniel@dut.ac.za

Instructions to Respondents

- Answer all questions.
 - Place only one \surd or circle for each answer.
- Please do not leave any question/statement blank.

Section A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1. Please indicate your age range.

1.1	25 years and below	1
1.2	26 – 35 years	2
1.3	36 – 45 years	3
1.4	46 – 55 years	4
1.5	56 years and above	5

2. For how long have you been employed at DUT?

2.1	12 months and below	1
2.2	1 – 5 years	2
2.3	6 – 10 years	3
2.4	11 – 15 years	4
2.5	16 – 20 years	5
2.6	21 – 25 years	6
2.7	26 – 30 years	7
2.8	31 – 35	8
2.9	Over 36	9

3. Please indicate the languages you speak.

3.1	English	1
3.2	Zulu	2
3.3	Xhosa	3
3.4	Afrikaans	4
3.5	Ndebele	5
3.6	Tswana	6
3.7	Tsonga	7
3.8	Venda	8
3.9	Pedi	9
3.10	Sotho	10
3.11	Swati	11
3.12	Others	12

4. Please indicate your highest educational qualification obtained.

4.1	Matric or equivalent	1
4.1	National Diploma or equivalent	2
4.2	Bachelor's Degree or equivalent	3
4.3	Honours Degree or equivalent	4
4.4	Master's degree or equivalent	5
4.5	Doctoral degree or equivalent	6

4.6	Others	7
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5. Which gender do you identify with?

5.1	Male	1
5.2	Female	2
5.3	Non-binary	3

Please answer all questions by filling in the blank spaces.

6. How would you describe yourself in racial terms (for diversity purposes)

6.1	Black	1
6.2	Indian	2
6.3	White	3
6.4	Colored	4
6.6	Others	5

7. Please state your Faculty/Unit

7.1	Faculty of Accounting and Informatics	1
7.2	Faculty of Applied Sciences	2
7.3	Faculty of Arts and Design	3
7.4	Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment	4
7.5	Faculty of Health Sciences	5
7.6	Faculty of Management Sciences	6
7.17	Other	7

SECTION B

In respect to internal communication and institutional success linked to **employee engagement**, which of the following statement best describe your response?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by ticking one number for each question.		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		1	2	3	4	5
8	My workplace allows me to freely share and exchange information and ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I am constantly informed about the department and the institutional strategy and goals.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am being constantly updated regarding the development in departmental goals	1	2	3	4	5
11	Effective internal communication allows me to be engaged and put more effort in my job.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I am aware of the communication practices/mechanisms in place in the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I am familiar with the different forms and channels of communications used to reach me in my department.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I have found having meetings online and online communication to be effective than in person.	1	2	3	4	5
15	My contributions/suggestions are incorporated into the departmental plans.	1	2	3	4	5
16	My contributions/suggestions are incorporated into the institutional plans.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I am given a platform to participate/contribute to management decisions that directly or indirectly affect my work.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I get constant updates and feedback on my work and performance.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I get constant updates and feedback on the performance of the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
20	The communication strategies employed by the institution are effective.	1	2	3	4	5

21	I perform better at my work due to the fact that I am often informed about the requirements of the role I play and how it fits in the institution, I perform better/ relate better with my seniors.	1	2	3	4	5
22	The work environment satisfies my work related needs whilst I work towards attaining the institutional goals.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I feel disengaged when I am not adequately informed of the requirements of a task.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I understand how my role fits within the vision of the institution due to effective communication by the institutional management.	1	2	3	4	5

In respect to internal communication and institutional success linked to **employee relations**, which of the following statement best describe your response?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by ticking one number for each question.		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		1	2	3	4	5
25	There are effective communication channels to promote the relationship between the employees, immediate leaders and management in the workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
26	There is transparency in the workplace between management and employees due to an open communication system.	1	2	3	4	5
27	The institution encourages upwards communication as much as there is downwards communication.	1	2	3	4	5
28	Effective communication in the institution aids good employee relations.	1	2	3	4	5
29	I relate easily with my immediate senior because of the good communication systems that are in place.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I relate effectively with my immediate colleagues because of the good communication systems that are in place.	1	2	3	4	5
31	Due to the nature of communication in the institution, a courteous association across all employees working together has been built.	1	2	3	4	5
32	The ease of flow of information between management and employees makes it easy to meet the objectives of the institution.	1	2	3	4	5
33	Internal communication promotes a two-way feedback system between the employees and management,.	1	2	3	4	5
34	Effective communication in the institution promotes mutual respect between the management and employees.	1	2	3	4	5
35	Effective communication leads to a strong workplace relationship between management and employees.	1	2	3	4	5
36	Effective internal communication and good relations between management and employee are positively influencing the success of the institution.	1	2	3	4	5

37	I relate well with my immediate colleague for the purpose of advancing the institutional goals.	1	2	3	4	5
38	I have a good relationship with the management as we equally share the institution's goals.	1	2	3	4	5
39	I relate well with the management because I clearly understand how my role fits in the institution.	1	2	3	4	5

In respect to internal communication and institutional success linked to **diversity management**, which of the following statement best describe your response?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by ticking one number for each question.		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
40	Messages are conveyed in a language that I understand.	1	2	3	4	5
41	The communication mechanisms in the organisation creates a sense of community by establish good relationship across all employees.	1	2	3	4	5
42	My culture and differences are considered in the communication system.	1	2	3	4	5
43	I feel empowered to air my diverse views.	1	2	3	4	5
44	The communication strategy in the institution recognises the diversity of the staff.	1	2	3	4	5
45	I have equal opportunities to information as other employees.	1	2	3	4	5
46	My different background is not a barrier in communicating with other employees.	1	2	3	4	5
47	Through effective communication, I seem to understand more about my colleagues' differences and similarities	1	2	3	4	5
48	I avoid communicating with my colleagues because my diverse background always poses communication challenges	1	2	3	4	5
49	My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's gender.	1	2	3	4	5
50	My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's culture.	1	2	3	4	5
51	My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's religion.	1	2	3	4	5
52	My colleagues and I communicate in a way that's sensitive to one another's race	1	2	3	4	5
53	My colleagues and I communicate in a way that is sensitive to one another's differences	1	2	3	4	5
54	We achieve our goals by communicating with mutual respect for our differences	1	2	3	4	5

ANNEXURE D

ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



Institutional Research Ethics Committee
Research and Postgraduate Support Directorate
2nd Floor, Berwyn Court
Gate 1, Steve Biko Campus
Durban University of Technology

P O Box 1334, Durban, South Africa, 4001

Tel: 031 373 2375
Email: lavishad@dut.ac.za
http://www.dut.ac.za/research/institutional_research_ethics

www.dut.ac.za

24 March 2021

Ms L T Mahlahla
Elrose Court
75 Currie Road
Musgrave
Durban
4001

Dear Ms Mahlahla

The effects of Internal Communication on Institutional Success: A Case Study of a Selected University of Technology
Ethical Clearance number IREC 037/20

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC SOP's.

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC

ANNEXURE E

GATEKEEPER'S LETTER



*Directorate for Research and Postgraduate Support
Durban University of Technology
Tromso Annexe, Steve Biko Campus
P.O. Box 1334, Durban 4000
Tel.: 031-3732576/7
Fax: 031-3732946*

18th November 2020
Ms Linah T Mahlahla
c/o Department of Human Resources Management
Faculty of Management Sciences
Durban University of Technology

Dear Ms Mahlahla

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research and Innovation Committee (IRIC) has granted **Full Permission** for you to conduct your research "The effects of Internal Communication on Institutional Success: A Case Study of a selected University of Technology" at the Durban University of Technology.

The DUT may impose any other condition it deems appropriate in the circumstances having regard to nature and extent of access to and use of information requested.

We would be grateful if a summary of your key research findings would be submitted to the IRIC on completion of your studies.

Kindest regards.
Yours sincerely

DR LINDA ZIKHONA LINGANISO
DIRECTOR: RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT DIRECTORATE

ANNEXURE F

SAMPLE SIZE SELECTION TABLE

SEKARAN AND BOUGIE'S LIST FOR SELECTING A SAMPLE SIZE FROM
A GIVEN POPULATION SIZE

N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	220	140	1 200	291
15	14	230	144	1 300	297
20	19	240	148	1 400	302
25	24	250	152	1 500	306
30	28	260	155	1 600	310
35	32	270	159	1 700	313
40	36	280	162	1 800	317
45	40	290	165	1 900	320
50	44	300	169	2 000	322
55	48	320	175	2 200	327
60	52	340	181	2 400	331
65	56	360	186	2 600	335
70	59	380	191	2 800	338
75	63	400	196	3 000	341
80	66	420	201	3 500	346
85	70	440	205	4 000	351
90	73	460	210	4 500	354
95	76	480	214	5 000	357
100	80	500	217	6 000	361
110	86	550	226	7 000	364
120	92	600	234	8 000	367
130	97	630	242	9 000	368
140	103	700	248	10 000	370
150	108	750	254	15 000	375
160	113	800	260	20 000	377
170	118	850	265	30 000	379
180	123	900	269	40 000	380
190	127	950	274	50 000	381
200	132	1 000	278	75 000	382
210	136	1 100	285	1 000 000	384

Source: Sekaran, U. and Bougie, R. (2014:268).

ANNEXURE G

ETHICS TRAINING CERTIFICATE



Zertifikat Certificat Certificado Certificate

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants

Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that

Linah Mahlahla

a complété avec succès - has successfully completed

Module 1 (2023) - Introduction to Research Ethics

du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche
of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation



Release Date: 2024/05/07

CID : EoL.EwZU0w

Professeur Dominique Sprumont
Coordinateur TRREE Coordinator



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[REV : 20230217]

ANNEXURE H
STATISTICIAN'S CERTIFICATE

Dr. SC Onwubu

46 Thornon Avenue, Seaview, Durban, 4091
0717930852
Profstan4christ@yahoo.com

STATISTICIAN CERTIFICATE

Date: 7 May 2024

Re: Linah Tanyaradzwa Mahlahla

Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology

PhD Thesis: The effects of internal communication on institutional success: A Case study of a selected University of Technology

I confirm that Ms Linah Mahlahla consulted me regarding her data analysis. I did her statistical work using both descriptive and inferential statistics. I attest that the statistical analysis conducted meets the post-graduate guidelines and addresses her research objectives.

Dr. SC Onwubu

7 May 2024

Per email

ANNEXURE I

EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE



FRANCI CRONJE

(PhD, Media Studies)

Author's Development Editor

Cell: 0825573647

Email: franci.cronje@gmail.com

Editor's Certificate

Date: 1 May 2024

To whom it may concern:

I hereby confirm that I have edited the thesis in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy: Management Sciences: HRM

The Effects of Internal Communication on Institutional Success: A case study of a selected University of Technology

Author: LINAH TANYARADZWA MAHLAHLA

The author ultimately decided whether to accept or decline any recommendations made by the editor, and it always remains the author's responsibility to confirm the accuracy and originality of the completed work.

Signed:

Dr Franci Cronje

PhD (Media Studies); MA(FA); MPhil in Higher Education

Email: franci.cronje@gmail.com