

Excellent in-house journals in South Africa: case studies of five leading publications

E WOOD

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Abstract

Although companies and organisations worldwide publish in-house journals, there is no comprehensive theory (including technical and normative dimensions) available on this important public relations instrument. In particular, no research is available on what the characteristics of excellent South African in-house journals are or ought to be.

In this study a number of dimensions are thus introduced in order to help create a comprehensive framework for analysing in-house journals, in particular South Africa's leading in-house journals.

Firstly, James Grunig's excellence in public relations theory (published in 1992), which incorporates the concept of two-way symmetrical communication (which in turn is informed by a "symmetric" world view), is put forward as basic point of departure.

Secondly, a set of technical criteria for excellent in-house journals gleaned from a wide range of sources, is compiled.

Furthermore, the internal and external environments in which South African in-house journals function are identified. The role of other new media (such as e-mail, intranet, television and radio) is also taken into account.

Five leading South African in-house journals are then analysed and the views of editors reflected. It was found that *Abacus* (Absa Bank), *Harmonise* (Harmony Gold Mining Company), *Hello the future* (MTN), *Pick 'n Patter* (Pick 'n Pay) and *Sandaba* (Sanlam) all measured up well against the theoretical statements flowing from the said theoretical points of departure. However, the analysis did also bring to the fore deviations from the said statements which give new insight into what is required to publish an excellent in-house journal.

In conclusion, the criteria are evaluated against some of the more detailed findings of the analysis and adapted to create a set of theoretically based guidelines that can be used by South African companies, focusing inter alia on how the unique character and environment of a company influence its internal communication, to create excellent in-house journals.

In final analysis, it is argued that all factors, starting with the philosophical points of departure informing communication strategies, management's attitude toward internal communication, organisation culture, the socio-political environment in which in-house journals function as well as the technical aspects of these publications, need to be considered when formulating criteria for "excellent" in-house journalism.

This study thus endeavours to contribute to the professional integrity of public relations in a sea of asymmetric, marketing-driven internal communication.

Keywords

In-house journals, corporate communication, internal public relations, newsletters, excellence, publishing, James Grunig, two-way symmetrical communication, editor, employees

Opsomming

Hoewel maatskappye en organisasies wêreldwyd huisjoernale publiseer, is daar geen omvattende teorie (wat tegniese en normatiewe dimensies insluit) beskikbaar oor hierdie belangrike skakelkunde-instrument nie. Spesifiek is daar geen navorsing beskikbaar oor wat die kenmerke van Suid-Afrikaanse huisjoernale is, of behoort te wees nie.

In hierdie studie is verskeie dimensies bestudeer in 'n poging om 'n omvattende raamwerk vir die analise van huisjoernale, spesifiek Suid-Afrikaanse huisjoernale, te skep.

Eerstens is James Grunig se teorie vir uitstaande skakelpraktyk (gepubliseer in 1992), wat sy konsep van simmetriese tweerigting-kommunikasie (wat weer rus op 'n "simmetriese" wêreldbeskouing), gebruik as basis vir die studie.

Tweedens is 'n stel kriteria vir uitstaande huisjoernale geskep, gebaseer op verskeie bronne. Verder is die interne en eksterne omgewings waarin Suid-Afrikaanse huisjoernale funksioneer, geïdentifiseer. Die rol van ander nuwe media (byvoorbeeld e-pos, intranet, televisie en radio) is ook in ag geneem.

Vyf vooraanstaande Suid-Afrikaanse huisjoernale is geanaliseer en die menings van die redakteurs word weergegee. Daar is gevind dat *Abacus* (Absa Bank), *Harmonise* (Harmony Gold Mining Company), *Hello the Future* (MTN), *Pick 'n Patter* (Pick 'n Pay) en *Sandaba* (Sanlam) almal goed vergelyk met die teoretiese stellings wat gebaseer is op bogenoemde teorieë. Die analise het egter sekere afwykings van die teorie aangetoon wat nuwe lig werp op watter aspekte betrokke is by die publikasie van huisjoernale.

Die kriteria is geëvalueer volgens sommige van die meer gedetailleerde bevindings van die analise en aangepas om 'n stel teoreties gebaseerde riglyne te skep wat deur Suid-Afrikaanse maatskappye, wat onder andere fokus op die eiesoortige karakter en omgewings wat 'n maatskappy en sy interne kommunikasie beïnvloed, gebruik kan word om uitstaande huisjoernale te skep.

Ten slotte word geargumenteer dat alle faktore, beginnende by die filosofiese uitgangspunte oor kommunikasiestrategieë, bestuur se houding teenoor interne kommunikasie, organisasiekultuur, die sosio-politiese omgewings waarin huisjoernale funksioneer, sowel as die tegniese aspekte van hierdie publikasies, in ag geneem moet word wanneer kriteria vir "uitstekende" huisjoernaaljoernalistiek geskep word.

Hierdie studie poog dus om 'n bydrae te maak tot die professionele integriteit van skakelkunde te midde van asimmetriese, bemarkings-gedrewe interne kommunikasie.

Sleutelwoorde

Huisjoernale, korporatiewe kommunikasie, interne skakelwerk, nuusbriewe, uitstekend, publiseer, James Grunig, tweerigting-kommunikasie, redakteur, werkers

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Part I

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Intellectual capital, specifically employees, has become one of a company's most valuable assets in the modern-day business environment. This is equally true for non-profit organisations. It is hugely important for companies (and other organisations) to attract and retain highly skilled and competent employees to ensure they produce a service or product that will sell, or provides the kind of service expected of non-profit organisations, including government.

This is particularly true for South African companies which not only compete on a business level with international competitors, but must also prevent these competitors from luring away one of their key elements of success – their employees (Oldknow, 2003). What is needed to achieve this is what Oldknow (2003) describes as a “people first culture”.

A people first culture describes an environment in which the critical link between a company's people and its success is understood, appreciated and strengthened in every possible way (Oldknow, 2003).

Better business decisions are made if people, in this case employees, have better information available to them. As international consultancy company Ernst & Young puts it:

Your information strategy should be to ensure employees have ready access to current information about the corporate strategy, about how they are then to achieve the strategy and about how they are doing in executing the strategy. Distributing this information will help ensure that your employees understand what the company is trying to achieve and how they should play a role in achieving the goals. However, a company's information strategy must also tackle the more difficult goal of getting its employees to share their understanding of the business and expertise in working within their day-to-day tasks (Anon, 2005)

Therefore, it can be said that internal corporate communication should be regarded as one of the most important functions that must be upheld to ensure efficient and motivated employees (Anon, 2005, Ferreira & Staude, 1991:5; Hunt & McKie, 2000:20; Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1995:121).

There are, however, two types of internal communication in companies – formal and informal. Informal communication, frequently called the grapevine, is often a major source of information. Various types of information, predominantly office-related information, are discussed on an informal basis and reach a substantially bigger audience than most public relations practitioners can imagine (Anon, 2005; Kreps, 1990:208). As the LRI Management services group of the US aptly describes this process:

For example, an accounting supervisor might be getting more information about his employer from a friend who plays cards with the firm's marketing manager than from his boss (Anon, 2005).

Although informal internal communication, or the grapevine, is a fact of corporate life and will never disappear, it does pose significant opportunities for misinformation to be circulated through a company, especially if there are no other sources of information available to employees to ensure the correct information is spread. In companies where correct information is not made available to employees, the grapevine can fuel anxiety, conflict and misunderstandings among employees and contribute to poor morale. To come back to the first point about the importance of retaining employees in a competitive market; it is obvious

that such a situation could easily lead to substantial loss in intellectual capital as employees firstly do not deliver their best when it comes to their work and secondly might opt to leave the company's employ for what they perceive as a more stable opportunity with a competitor (Anon, 2005). Therefore, it is of crucial importance to use formal internal corporate communication channels, such as meetings, news bulletins, videos, posters and in-house journals to their maximum potential (Anon, 2005) in supplying employees with correct information.

However, as already indicated, communication is ideally not only one-way, from senior management downwards; it must also involve employees by finding out what the issues are that trouble them, and what suggestions they have (Anon, 2005; Grunig, 1992:290). In this way employees will feel valued and part of a company (Anon, 2005; Ferreira & Staude, 1991:6).

The best way to do this, it is argued in this thesis, is through proper internal communication based on a two-way symmetrical public relations model, as explained by Grunig (1992:291) (see 2.3.2.5) in his excellence for public relations theory. Apart from being two-way symmetrical, employee communication needs to be properly managed, by professional managers, and enjoy the support of a company's senior management (Grunig, 1992). In his study, Grunig (1992:223) gives 12 characteristics of an excellent public relations department, viz:

- Public relations is strategically managed
- Public relations is a separate function from marketing
- Excellent public relations depends on being a single/integrated department
- There is a direct reporting relationship to senior management
- Communication is two-way symmetrical
- The senior public relations practitioner fulfils a managerial role
- Public relations practitioners are suitably trained
- Public relations practitioners reflect the society they work in
- An excellent public relations department has a symmetrical world view of its environments
- An excellent public relations department is pro-active
- The department enjoys support from senior management
- The department enjoys a supportive organisational culture.

A key concept of this normative theory by Grunig is that it must be understood and interpreted within a symmetrical world view (Grunig & White, 1992:31) (see 2.3.2.9).

Since the entire thinking behind internal communication is to help employees understand what is happening within as well as outside a company, and how these events are expected to influence the company and employees, communicators need to view internal communication as, on the one hand, part of a bigger picture but on the other as an important aspect in the overall communication process.

There are obviously many ways to communicate with employees, for example meetings, message boards, memoranda, e-mail, intranet and even short message system (SMS) messages delivered directly to employees' cellphones.

However, one of the oldest and most reliable ways of communicating with employees is through a printed in-house journal (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:5; Hunt & Mckie, 2000:65). This

public relations tool is still widely used by companies and organisations in South Africa and elsewhere in the world (Forum, 2004).

There is no set rule on what an in-house journal should look like, and there are probably as many variants as there are companies that publish these journals. In-house journals vary significantly in size and quality – from a photocopied four-page A4 black-and-white newsletter, to a 48-page full-colour glossy magazine, to name but two examples. Technology allows companies to produce smaller in-house journals easily themselves. However, many bigger companies, producing professional-looking journals, outsource the production of their in-house journals to companies that specialise in the writing, editing, design and printing of these publications (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:6; Lubbe & Puth, 2002:279).

1.2 CONTEXTUALISATION

1.2.1 The history of in-house journals

The first journal in the United States (US) that was aimed at employees was published in 1846 and was called the *NCR Factory News* (De Jager, 1977:8). Much later, during World War I, companies became more aware of the fact that they needed to communicate with their employees. The industrial era following the war brought about many new in-house journals – mainly to inform employees about safety features of the new factory equipment they were using, but also to inform them in general about what was happening in the company.

By 1921 there were about 334 in-house journals in the US, of which 91% started between 1917 and 1920 (De Jager, 1977:8).

At the beginning of World War II in 1939, companies not only used in-house journals to inform their employees on internal company issues, but also on sentiments regarding the war. However, once the war was over and the world was engulfed in the great depression, many in-house journals disappeared, due to a lack of funding. Over the years, there was a steady increase in the development of in-house journals and by 1958 US companies spent an estimated US\$100-million on in-house journals (Jackson, 1976:12).

Today, the publication of in-house journals is a major industry across the world reaching billions of people. With the development of technology, and specifically desktop publishing, it has become even easier for companies – big or small – to produce a professional journal at a reasonable cost.

1.2.2 The South African situation

Most sizeable companies in South Africa regularly publish in-house journals reaching thousands of employees and, by implication, their families. Associations such as the South African Association for Industrial Editors as well as the South African Publication Forum (SA Publication Forum) have helped to enhance and professionalise the industry (Lubbe & Puth, 2002:279).

Unfortunately, there is no specific information on the number of in-house journals in South Africa, but it could easily run into many hundreds (Swift, 1999; Forum, 2004). An annual in-house journal competition has been revived by the SA Publication Forum since 2002 (Forum, 2004), indicating renewed interest in publishing in-house journals. Electronic communication has clearly not eliminated printed corporate publications (Van Niekerk, 2004). In 2003, the competition received 94 entries and 80 publications were entered in 2004. However, one could hardly use this as a reference on how many publications exist in

the country. If one assumes that only companies regarding their publications as standing a chance to win an award would enter, one could say that the entries represent only a small minority of the total number of published journals.

Swift (1998) describes the growth of in-house journals in South Africa as follows:

In-house journals, once the Cinderella of the journalistic profession, are being launched like ships on the Spanish Main as companies clamber onto the informational bandwagon and attempt to forge the new consultative values being adopted in the wider South African society. It is not only a quantitative growth. The quality of many of these publications has improved dramatically as seasoned journalists and publication designers abandon the increasingly barren lands of mainstream media for the communication challenges, responsibilities and rewards of corporate journalism.

Even though no statistics are available on South African in-house journals, Lubbe and Puth (2002:279) provide statistics obtained from a survey done in the US that indicate the importance of in-house journals in modern-day companies. The survey found that 70% of all employees read their company publications thoroughly, 95% found these publications easy to read and nearly 90% said that they believed everything that was written in the publication. However, only 36% said that they regarded the in-house journal as their primary source of information on the company, indicating the growing role of other media (see 1.2.3).

1.2.3 In-house journals and new media and radio

Although printed in-house journals used to be one of very few communication tools employed by companies to convey messages to and practise two-way communication with employees, the advent of e-mail and the internet, as well as various other new media, has opened a plethora of new and immediate media that companies now use to communicate with employees (Campbell, 2004:25). These would include e-mail, electronic newsletters, company intranets, the internet, radio and television broadcasts and video newsletters (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:13; Lubbe & Puth, 2002:297).

Most of these communication channels (specifically e-mail, electronic newsletters, intranet and internet) have the advantage that they are immediate communication links to employees. Within seconds after sending an e-mail or uploading an intranet or internet page, employees will receive it. It is also a very cheap communication channel compared to printed media (Lubbe & Puth, 2002:146).

The character of news carried in new media can be described as up-to-date news articles without too much detail or discussion, specifically because it is delivered so quickly to employees (Meyer, 2004:2). If, for example, a major new deal was concluded in Absa Bank (Absa), a large majority of employees can be informed about it within seconds via a company-wide e-mail.

Employees also have the option of giving direct feedback immediately either by replying to an e-mail (that can be sent to all the recipients of the mail or just the sender), or giving feedback to an intranet page (which normally features a feedback link or an e-mail address of the contact person or even just the webmaster responsible for creating the page).

Although they do not offer the same feedback opportunities, radio and television broadcasts and video newsletters are also becoming increasingly popular with bigger companies as they can effectively reach all levels of employees, including illiterate ones. Radio and television broadcasts also have the benefit of being an immediate carrier of news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:13; Lubbe & Puth, 2002:297).

Obviously, two-way symmetrical communication (see Part I Chapter 2) is much easier to achieve by using electronic, or new, media.

A draw-back of conveying messages via new media is that they have a very short “shelf-life”. Radio, television and video broadcasts are over the moment they go off air, while e-mail messages are often deleted after a while to make space for new ones. Intranet pages can be accessed for a longer time, depending on how long the company decides the information should be made available in this form.

Therefore, in some ways, printed in-house journals had to start competing directly against these up-to-date news channels. The question is whether there is still a place for a printed in-house journal to communicate with employees if there are so many other immediate sources of information.

The general opinion of both media practitioners and owners (Meyer, 2004:219; Campbell, 2004:2) and editors of in-house journals (Redelinghuys, 2005; Dower, 2005; Paige, 2005; Stander, 2005; Myburgh, 2005) is that there is still an opportunity for an in-house journal to act as a strategic internal public relations tool, but that its character has changed to accommodate the influence of new media.

For example, articles would have a “softer” focus, rather exploring the “story-behind-the-story” of a news item that has already been communicated via new media, than merely repeating the story. More in-depth information would be communicated.

Printed media are also regarded as more “authoritative” than electronic media since information published in an in-house journal must be regarded as important enough to appear in the journal and must have come from the company’s management. The source of electronic messages is not always clear and could be regarded as less formal “gossip” by some in the company.

Although in-house journals definitely still play an important communication role in companies that employ new media, ones that have employees that do not have access to all these news sources, such as Pick ’n Pay and Harmony Gold Mining Company (Harmony), would rely even more on their in-house journals to convey information to employees.

Some writers point out that although new media has an influence on printed media, printed media can use new media to enhance its own position by, for example, creating an on-line portal to the printed version, enticing readers to get hold of the printed version. The printed publication can also, by using new media, find additional readers (see Part II Chapter 11 on how MTN managed this) (Meyer, 2004:219).

Thus it can be said that although there are various new media that companies use to communicate with employees and these channels do influence the in-house journal, their presence does not necessarily mean the end of the printed in-house journal. On the contrary, by making certain adjustments, as well as using the new media, the in-house journal can establish itself as a very valuable communication tool within a company.

1.3 PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Although the publication of in-house journals is a huge industry in South Africa, until now only one known South Africa academic research project has focused specifically on this issue. This was done in 1977 by Johann de Jager and focused on the overall justification of the existence of in-house journals in South Africa. He then found that there was a definite place for these journals as an information medium in corporate South Africa (De Jager, 1977:171).

This viewpoint is confirmed by the prominent place given to in-house journals by all reputable handbooks on public relations (e.g. Kreps, 1990:212; Skinner & Von Essen, 1992:67; Mersham, Rensburg & Skinner, 1995:145).

In South Africa, Tom Ferreira and Ingrid Staude, two well-known corporate journalists, published a handbook, *Write angles, the ABC of house journals*, in 1991, but this work focused primarily on the pragmatic, technical aspects of producing an in-house journal. It therefore provides no theoretical motivation for what it proposes. Many other books, articles and electronic information have been published on how to publish an in-house journal. These include, inter alia, *Fundamentals of successful newsletters* (Bivins, 1991), *Producing a first class newsletter* (Fanson, 1994) and *How to do leaflets, newsletters and newspapers* (Brigham, 1991). Although these books are informative and used extensively throughout the industry, they all have a technical approach, for example what should be on the news list, important layout criteria, production issues and distribution. What they do not supply, is a theoretical motivation on why and how an in-house journal should be published. Given the large volume of theoretically based research on public relations done in recent years, there is clearly a need to go beyond how-to-do-it handbooks, however useful they may be.

As in-house journals ideally form an integral part of a company's internal communication function, one would expect studies on house journals to be based on acknowledged public relations theories such as Grunig's (1992) excellence in public relations theory, which incorporates the two-way symmetrical model for public relations (cf. Rensburg, Mersham & Skinner, 1995:87; Newsom, Scott & VanslykeTurke, 1992:20).

As far as could be determined (via Nexus, Emerald, Sada, RSAT and Sabinet searches), no such studies have been done specifically with the South African context in mind (or, for that matter, elsewhere). The industry therefore has no well-grounded set of criteria that can inform professionals on the theory as well as the technical aspects of producing an in-house journal. Given the many communication theories explaining journalism, mass media, corporate communication and specifically public relations (e.g. the agenda-setting theory and the uses and gratifications theory), this is clearly problematic.

The problem is compounded by the fact that many journalism students in South Africa end up producing or working on an in-house journal rather than in the mainstream commercial press without any specialised training on this type of publication. Many people producing in-house journals never studied journalism, but come from a public relations, marketing or even human resources background. These people do not have any comprehensive manual giving clear pointers on what the strategy behind an in-house journal should be, combined with technical instructions on how to produce an excellent in-house journal.

The lack of recent research on the topic of in-house journals in itself does not necessarily justify a comprehensive academic research project.

However, from the information above several crucial problems can be identified, which call for in-depth empirically motivated research. These problems are:

- Since employees are not regarded merely as "workers" that do their job without asking any questions anymore, but as stakeholders who participate and contribute to a company's success, it is of concern that there is no empirically motivated information available on how a company's traditionally most reliable source of employee information – the in-house journal – should be used in this new dispensation to improve the relationship between employees and the company (see 1.1).
- Available information on in-house journals looks at these publications in isolation – they only focus on technical criteria. Nowhere (locally or internationally), as far as could be

determined, does an empirically motivated theory exist that offers a holistic view on how all variables – theory, the environment in which it functions, as well as technical criteria – determine not only the quality of the publication, but also the position it fills within a company’s overall communication strategy. Without such information it would be difficult to create, or maintain, a publication that will not only encourage the exchange of suitable information between a company and its employees, but will also be able to withstand or adapt to potential influences from internal and external environments and therefore justify their existence.

- Regardless of the fact that South African companies spend huge amounts of money (some companies are said to spend upwards of R500 000 a month on their in-house journals), no research has been done to determine what the South African standards and criteria are for successful in-house journals. It would be difficult for any company to establish, or even maintain, such a publication without having properly researched information on what the industry standard is (compared to hearsay from other companies producing an in-house journal or just looking at various examples of in-house journals). One could therefore assume that most South African companies implement decisions on their in-house journal on a hit-or-miss basis since many decisions would have no properly researched backing. Although this study in no way intends to justify the money spend on in-house journals, without proper research on this communication tool, it will be difficult for a communication manager to motivate financial spend on what some people might regard as an “old-fashioned” communication tool if he/she cannot offer reliable information on the topic (see 1.2.3). Many editors attending the 2005 SA Publication Forum corporate publication conference expressed the need for such research to aid them in publishing their in-house journals (Dower, 2005; Redelinghuys, 2005).
- There is no known research on the role of an in-house journal in the present company scenario where new media are increasingly used to communicate with employees.
- Tertiary institutions in South Africa (and elsewhere) are training journalists and public relations practitioners to produce in-house journals with not much more than single chapters describing in-house journals in public relations textbooks, or by referring to purely technical works. There is therefore no focus on the holistic management of an in-house journal – from the theory behind why an in-house journal is necessary, to what environmental variables could have an influence on it, to how it should be produced – although it is obvious that in-house journals are not just “by-products” of the public relations department, but a key internal communication tool that can help contribute to the overall success of a company.
- And finally, the strong emphasis on marketing and branding has been threatening a distinct public relations approach to internal communication. Without knowledge of the latter, some marketing practitioners hijack internal communication (including in-house journals) to serve the narrow interests of a purely marketing-driven ethos. In the absence of the different approach supported here, the internal marketing approach could well be accepted as the only available.

1.4 CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF STUDY

By compiling a set of guidelines, backed by established, acknowledged and researched theoretical viewpoints, for the first time a reference work will be available specifically providing detailed information on South African in-house journals. However, the results of this research project should also be applicable to all in-house journals, providing the first

custom-designed set of guidelines on what must be taken into consideration when producing an in-house journal, whether it is produced locally or internationally.

The specific contributions this study will make to the fields of corporate communication, public relations and journalism are therefore that it will:

- Provide a holistic empirically based normative theory describing the management, environmental and technical criteria necessary for an excellent in-house journal – both locally and internationally from the view point that a company must have a symmetrical world view
- Determine exactly what South African in-house journals publish and how they do it
- Provide a benchmark against which South African companies can compare their in-house journals
- Provide empirically researched data that South African companies can use when establishing in-house journals or making decisions on the future of their publications
- Define the role an in-house journal can or should play in a modern-day company, regardless of the use of other communication channels such as internet and e-mail
- Provide academics with a well-researched guideline to teach students in the corporate communications, public relations and journalism fields on what is required to produce an in-house journal in a modern-day company, so that when these students enter industry they can make informed decisions and contributions to crucial communication within a company's overall communication strategy.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Against this background and based on the specific problems as described in 1.3, the following general research question can be asked:

What are the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals?

Specific research questions are:

1. *What guidelines can be drawn from theories such as Grunig's (1992) "excellence" concept of public relations regarding the management of in-house journals?*
2. *What is the internal (vision, mission, cultural, public) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) context in which in-house journals function in South Africa?*
3. *What are the features of an "excellent" in-house journal as suggested by international and local literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?*
4. *How and to what extent does excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?*
5. *What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?*

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To answer the research questions set for this study, the following research objectives were defined:

The central objective of this study is:

To determine what the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals are.

Specific objectives are:

- 1. To determine what guidelines can be drawn from theories such as the excellence concept of public relations regarding the management of in-house journals.*
- 2. To determine what the internal (vision, mission, cultural, public) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) context is in which in-house journals function in South Africa.*
- 3. To determine what the features of an excellent in-house journal are, as suggested by international and local literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.*
- 4. To determine how and to what extent excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.*
- 5. To determine what general and specific theoretical conclusions can be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992).*

1.7 THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

Based on the introduction and acceptance of Grunig's well-known views on public relations, the overall guiding theoretical statement for this study is:

Excellent in-house journals should apply the principles of two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Grunig, 1992) as well as the technical criteria suggested in literature (e.g. Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001; Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Wilcox & Nolte, 1990) and by the SA Publication Forum (Forum, 2004).

Although detailed theoretical statements, supporting the research objectives and questions, are formulated elsewhere based on literature studies focusing on Grunig's excellence theory, the internal and external environments in-house journals function in, and the technical criteria required for these publications (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4), are mentioned here as well:

- 1. Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.*
- 2. An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic,*

ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

3. *An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).*
4. *Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).*

All the above theoretical statements will be used to answer the fifth research question.

1.8 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

This is a predominantly qualitative study in which research methods such as a literature study, content analysis and semi-structured interviews were used to help the researcher understand what is involved in the production of in-house journals in South Africa – including, but not limited to, issues such as management, the influence of environments as well as content and technical criteria. The content analysis was done on in-house journals produced by Absa Bank (*Abacus*), Harmony Gold Mining Company (*Harmonise*), MTN (*Hello the Future* [HTF]), Pick 'n Pay (*Pick 'n Patter* [PnP]) and Sanlam (*Sandaba*) (see 5.4.1.2.3 on how these case studies were selected).

Details with regard to the methodology of this study are discussed in Part I Chapter 5. However, since Part I Chapters 2, 3 and 4 depends on a literature study for the creation of criteria for in-house journals (theoretical, environmentally focused and technical), literature study as a research method will be discussed here, while methods for the empirical part of the study (specifically the five case studies) are discussed in Chapter 5.

1.8.1 Literature study

A literature study was done to ensure that no similar study had been conducted on this topic before (Huyshamen, 1993:197). Literature was also used to compile theoretical guidelines as well as to determine what the context is in which South African in-house journals function. Literature was furthermore studied to obtain background information on the companies that are included in the study. Documentation, such as the vision and mission of in-house journals, was also studied.

Literature (both printed and electronic, local and international) was used to answer research questions 1 to 3.

1.9 DEFINITION AND CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS RELEVANT TO THIS STUDY

For this study there are various concepts that need to be defined:

- **Public relations:** Public relations is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisations' leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisations and the public interest (Skinner & Von Essen, 1992:2). Grunig (1992:4) explains public relations as the "management of communication between an organisation and its stakeholders". He continues to say that public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution and evaluation of an organisation's communication with both

external and internal stakeholders.

The US Institute of Public Relations defines public relations as the “deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public” (Lancaster, 2004). Lancaster also says that the essential features of this definition are that public relations practice should be deliberate, planned and sustained, not haphazard, and that mutual understanding is necessary in order to ensure that the communication between the organisation and its stakeholders (in this case employees) is clear.

- **Internal public relations:** This refers to messages shared among employees and is used to provide them with job instructions, evaluations and co-ordination of activities and to give feedback to management. This consists of both formal (e.g. in-house journals) and informal channels (e.g. the grapevine) (Kreps, 1999:201). There is a relationship between the two to complement each other. It is important to use formal communication channels to their optimum to avoid any informal communication (or rumours/gossip) regarding optimum issues.
It is important to have formal internal communication channels (e.g. in-house journals, memoranda etc) that can be used for directing, co-ordinating and restructuring company activities (Kreps, 1990:77). Through public relations, these communication channels can be used to share information between management and employees (two-way communication).
- **Stakeholders:** Stakeholders are groups that affect the ability of an organisation to meet its goals (Grunig, 1992:4). Newsom *et al.* (1992:39) explain stakeholders as any group (or even individual) that has some involvement with an organisation – its neighbours, customers, employees, competitors and government regulators. They also say that stakeholders encompass any group of people tied together, however loosely, by some common bond of interest or concern. Stakeholders are active in resolving issues, contrary to an audience that only receives information and is passive.
- **The environment:** The public relations environment consists of all the factors outside a company (Kreps, 1990:226). Environmental factors have different degrees of influence on an organisation – therefore the focus is normally only placed on the relevant environment (Rogers & Argwala-Rogers, 1976:114). These are influences that have a direct impact on a company and will differ from company to company.
- **Public relations tools:** These are tools that are used by public relations practitioners to communicate with stakeholders and include newsletters, newspapers, slogans, symbols, press agency and publicity as well as rallies, parades, exhibitions and celebrations (Newsom *et al.*, 1992:37).
- **In-house journal:** This is a publication aimed at communicating with the internal stakeholders of a company. It is normally not for sale (Forum, 2005). The British Association of Industrial Editors describes it as a publication issued periodically, and not primarily for profit, by an industrial undertaking, a business house or public service. The term covers all types of internal magazines, newspapers, bulletins and news sheets for employees (Skinner & Von Essen, 1992:88).
- **Marketing:** Marketing can be described as the:
Process or planning and executing the conception (product), pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational objectives (Newsom *et al.*, 1992:9).

- **Marketing communication:** Communication, including that achieved through public relations and advertising, used to promote marketing objectives (Russell & Lane, 1993:22).

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Research in this study is divided into two main sections. In the first part a literature study was done to create a theoretical base to explain what the characteristics of an excellent in-house journal in South Africa are, what the internal and external environments are in which these journals operate as well as what South African in-house journals should publish and how they should do this. The chapters in this study are as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction, problem description and objectives
- Chapter 2: A philosophy – an “excellent” in-house journal
- Chapter 3: Internal and external environments that influence in-house journals
- Chapter 4: Technical characteristics
- Chapter 5: Research method

In the second part, five leading in-house journals published by South African companies were analysed and their editors interviewed.

The information obtained was measured against five theoretical statements that were set to answer the research questions and reach the research objectives of this study.

The journals that were analysed are *Abacus* (Absa Bank), *Harmonise* (Harmony Gold Mining Company), HTF (MTN), PnP (Pick 'n Pay) and *Sandaba* (Sanlam). These publications were selected based on the fact that they all received awards at either the 2002 or 2003 Corporate Publication Competition presented by the SA Publication Forum (or both).

The chapters in Part II are as follows:

- Part II Introduction
- Chapter 6: *Abacus* – Absa Bank
- Chapter 7: *Harmonise* – Harmony Gold Mining Company
- Chapter 8: *Hello the Future* – MTN
- Chapter 9: *Pick 'n Patter* – Pick 'n Pay
- Chapter 10: *Sandaba* – Sanlam
- Chapter 11: Summary and conclusions

1.11 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the background to the study was given, starting with the history and development of in-house journals, as well as the current scenario in which in-house journals operate, including the role of new media in the overall communication mix. An explanation of why there is a need for this study – the lack of up-to-date formal research on South African in-house journals that could provide guidelines to in-house journal editors and companies in general – was also given. Specific research questions were asked and research objectives set. In the next chapter the main theoretical viewpoint of the study will be explained – Grunig's (cf. 1992) excellence theory for public relations, incorporating two-way symmetrical communication – and it will be explained how this theory can be applied to in-house journals.

Part I

Chapter 2

A PHILOSOPHY – AN 'EXCELLENT' IN-HOUSE JOURNAL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As has been pointed out in Part I Chapter 1 (see 1.2), no existing theory explains specifically how in-house journals should be managed or what they should look like. A theoretical base specifically applicable to in-house journals can be created by “borrowing” from other communication theories and applying the relevant concepts to these journals.

This concept of “borrowing” theoretical concepts from other theories, for example communication, public relations or journalism, is not uncommon, as is evident from the key theoretical public relations study done by Grunig (1992), called “Excellence in public relations and communication management”, where various theories from fields such as communications, psychology, management and journalism were used to create a new theory specific to public relations.

If one departs from the viewpoint that an in-house journal is a public relations tool and forms part of the internal public relations function, one should be able to apply the broad theoretical principles applicable to public relations to in-house journals. This would allow the researcher to create a new theoretical reference specifically applicable to in-house journals.

Although there are many communication theories that could be applied to public relations, there are very few theories that were specifically developed to explain the public relations function. The most prominent one is Grunig's excellence theory, backed by more than ten years of research.

In this chapter Grunig's excellence theory as well as the four well-known models of public relations (as identified and explained by Grunig & Hunt, 1984:27) will be explained, after which their relevance to in-house journals will be discussed. The researcher will then apply the relevant principles of the theories specifically to in-house journals, and in the process create a theoretical motivation for what is needed to create and publish an “excellent” in-house journal.

It is important to remember that Grunig's excellence theory is a normative theory. The implication on this study is that a theory created specifically for in-house journals will also be normative, although it will be tested against empirical research.

2.2 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE IN-HOUSE JOURNAL

The public relations function typically targets two broad groups of audiences – external ones (e.g. community members and clients) and internal ones (employees).

When dealing with internal stakeholders, there are various tools that can be used to communicate with employees. These could include face-to-face communication, memos, videos, notice boards and in-house publications. With the development of technology there is also the option of e-mail and intranets (see 1.2.3). Although the message and stakeholder will determine what strategy will be followed, it has been proved that one of the most effective ways of communicating with employees is through an in-house journal.

The house-journal is the most versatile, adaptable and, in the long run, most cost-effective medium for internal communication. It provides information for reference purposes, can be read in employees' spare time and also includes their families. It is important though to remember that

house journals are not the only form of communication, but complement other ways of communication (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:4).

An added advantage of in-house journals, writes Hunt and McKie (2000:158), is that they have greater potential than many other communication tools (such as memos and leaflets) for a two-way relationship with readers: readers can, inter alia, be invited to contribute letters to the editor, enter competitions and provide suggestions for articles.

Wilcox and Nolte (1995:339) describe the "sponsored periodical" (company newsletter, newspaper or magazine) as a major tool of internal communication. They state that such publications are effective channels of continually supplying information about the company to employees:

In-house journals are created to gratify both management's need to communicate and provide valuable information to employees, as well as employees' need for relevant information. In-house journals that are used for the right reasons can become indispensable in a company (Wilcox & Nolte, 1995:339).

Argenti (2000:178) agrees that while, for example, meetings are an important way to communicate with employees, the most common form of interaction on a regular basis is bound to be through the print medium. Although electronic media (for example e-mail and companies' own intranets) are widely used in the corporate world to communicate with employees, all the editors interviewed for this study agree that the print medium is still preferred as official communication medium. According to the editors, employees feel that because issues are discussed in print (and can therefore be read by anyone and referred back to) the printed information provided on these issues is credible (Dower, 2005; Paige, 2005; Redelinghuys, 2005).

Therefore, in-house journals offer an effective means of communicating with employees. To achieve this, however, an in-house journal should not be a collection of trivia but should contain items of interest regarding the company and its employees (Newsom, Scott & Vanslyke Turk, 1992).

The messages that go into in-house journals will vary by industry and company, but managers must try to achieve the right balance between what employees are most interested in and what they really need to hear from senior management (Argenti, 2000:179).

John McClure, communications manager of the National Data Corporation in the US, said:

The key to success is to be in tune with the key message of management and search for ways to put people at the heart of each message. The publication's power to influence staff is in direct proportion to their confidence that it is keeping them honestly informed, rather than operating as an organ of management (Wilcox & Nolte, 1995:340).

For a communicator, to produce a relevant and interesting in-house journal, he/she must convince management that it is in the best interest of the company to permit open, candid communication. The credibility of the in-house journal as communication channel will depend on the successful integration of two endeavours that are usually not compatible – the accomplishment of company goals and the satisfaction of employee needs (Wilcox & Nolte, 1995:341).

It is therefore important to keep the following in mind:

- Communication policies must be understood by management
- These communication policies must be clearly explained to the team of people employed in the enterprise. Here the in-house journal has an important place among the many skills and techniques of effective communication
- The in-house journal editor must be at the heart of the communications network
- The responsibility for the in-house journal lies with senior management
- The journal must encourage two-way communication
- The overriding aim of the in-house journal is to inform readers (Skinner & Von Esson, 1987:37).

From this one can determine that an in-house journal is one internal public relations tool that can be used to satisfy the need of employees to receive information, allow them to communicate with management and offer management a tool to communicate with employees. The in-house journal is therefore a key element in a company's overall communication strategy (Lubbe & Puth, 2002:279).

2.2.1 In-house journals as part of the public relations strategy

As an internal public relations tool, in-house journals share the aims of the overall public relations function, they just focus specifically on employees.

These shared aims are:

- Both are concerned with what happens throughout the company – from management to the shop floor
- Both can make use of external professional agencies to assist in various programmes
- Both are working with set goals and budgets
- Both are strategic functions within a company
- Both make use of highly skilled professionals.

These similarities allow the researcher to “borrow” from other public relations theories to create a unique theory for in-house journals.

However, although public relations and in-house journals share the same aims, they apply these differently because of their different focus areas.

The aims and roles of an in-house journal compared to the overall public relations strategy:

Public relations

- Has an overall communication strategy for the company
- Deals with both internal and external communication
- Makes use of different communication tools, one of which is an in-house journal
- Forms a separate department
- Has various stakeholders
- The public relations manager is often a senior manager in the company

The in-house journal

- Forms part of a company's communication strategy
- Only deals with internal communication
- Is a tool of public relations
- Is part of the public relations department
- Has one main stakeholder – employees, although they may be subdivided
- The editor does not have the same stature as the public relations manager in a company, except if it is the same person

As can be seen clearly from the above, the aims and roles of an in-house journal differ from the overall public relations strategy, since it is a tool of the latter. Therefore, a theory developed for public relations in general cannot be applied "as is" to an in-house journal, and it is therefore necessary to adapt any such theory to suit in-house journals. It is for this reason that Grunig's theory will be used to serve as a basis for a new normative theory on in-house journals, and not to measure or compare in-house journals specifically to the excellence theory.

2.3 GRUNIG'S EXCELLENCE THEORY

2.3.1 Background

The influential excellence project was led by James E Grunig of the University of Maryland (Grunig, 2001) and funded by the International Association for Business Communicators (IABC). The results of the study were published in 1992. The excellence theory, which was deduced from this study, is still regarded as the most comprehensive and appropriate theory that is specifically aimed at public relations.

The goal of the excellence study was to answer two questions about public relations and communication management:

- What are the characteristics of an excellent communication department?
- How does excellent communication make a company more effective and what is the economic worth of that contribution?

The first phase of the project involved building a comprehensive theory of public relations based on an extensive review of the public relations literature and related literature from fields such as psychology, management, marketing, women's studies, philosophy, anthropology and communication (Grunig, 2001).

In the second phase of the project, researchers surveyed chief executive officers, communication directors and more than 4 500 employees in more than 300 companies in the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada (Grunig, 1992:10). Because of these diverse

sources of information the results of the study can be applied to companies around the world (Grunig, 2001). However, the research was mainly conducted in the developed world, which implies that when applying the excellence theory to companies in a developing society, the theory may need to be adapted.

Grunig (1992) says that the team found 17 characteristics, divided into four groupings, which can be found in excellent communication departments. These groupings are 1) programme level 2) departmental level 3) organisational level and 4) effects of excellent public relations. Consequently, Grunig (2001) summarised these in 12 basic characteristics (see 2.3.2).

Grunig and White (1992:31) points out that it is important to remember that the excellence theory for public relations was developed within the framework of a symmetrical world view (see 2.3.2.9 and 2.3.2.5). This concept, although discussed as part of the theory, must therefore take a centre role when it comes to the interpretation of the theory.

2.3.2 The excellence theory

Lindeborg (1994) summarises the excellence theory as:

Excellent communication is communication that is managed strategically, meets its objectives, and balances the needs of the company and the needs of key stakeholders with two-way symmetrical communication.

If one applies this to in-house journals one should be able to say that:

Excellent in-house journals are journals that are managed strategically, meet their objectives, and balance the needs of the company and the needs of employees (the key public) with two-way symmetrical communication.

To understand this better, and to see if the statement is applicable to in-house journals, the 12 characteristics of "excellent" public relations and communications will be discussed.

- Characteristics of excellent public relations programmes**

 1. Public relations is strategically managed
 2. Separate function from marketing
 3. A single/integrated public relations department
 4. Direct reporting relationship to senior management
 5. The two-way symmetrical model of public relations
 6. Senior public relations person in a managerial role
 7. Professional public relations practitioners
 8. Public relations practitioners represent their society
 9. A symmetrical world view
 10. A pro-active department
 11. Senior management support
 12. Supportive company culture

Figure 2.1: Characteristics of excellent public relations programmes.

2.3.2.1 Public relations is strategically managed

The idea that public relations should be strategic has become popular in recent years among public relations practitioners, writes Grunig (2001).

In the IABC Excellence study, we found that participating in strategic management was the single characteristic that most distinguished excellent public relations from less-excellent public relations functions (Grunig, 2001).

Companies engage in strategic management when they look at the opportunities available in their environment and the extent to which they have characteristics that allow them to capitalise on these opportunities.

Companies must make long-term strategic choices that are feasible in their environments. Grunig (2001) says, however, that in most theories of strategic management, the idea of the environment is general and vague. Public relations theory, however, helps managers to make sense of their environment, because a large part of the environment consists of the stakeholders that are familiar to public relations managers.

In the words of Grunig (1992:240):

Excellent companies plan strategically and excellent public relations departments are those that are integrated into the process of strategic planning.

This would mean that the public relations department should form part of the “dominant coalition” or senior management. The excellence study found that in companies that had excellent public relations departments, the senior public relations manager was considered to be one of the most powerful managers in the company or had access to the most powerful managers in the company.

In excellent public relations departments, the senior public relations manager was part of or easily could make contact with the members of the dominant coalition. When the members of a dominant coalition discuss strategic, long-term decisions, different managers (such as marketing, financial, or human resources managers) provide different kinds of insight into the decision (Grunig, 1994).

The senior public relations person brings the problems and views of stakeholders – both employees and external stakeholders – to the attention of other managers when crucial decisions are made (Grunig, 1994).

By participating in company decisions, excellent public relations departments are in a position to identify the stakeholders who will be affected by company decisions or who will affect those decisions. They would do research and evaluate programmes (see 2.4).

Although one could not expect an in-house journal to play a strategic part in company management as equivalent to the overall public relations function, as it is only a public relations tool, one can apply this concept to in-house journals, saying that they are strategic in that they form an important link between a company and part of its environment – in this case its employees. It can also, well ahead of time, obtain information from employees on how they would feel about certain projects and plans and this can then be communicated to senior management and included in the overall management of the company.

However, against this background it can be said that the in-house journal must form an integral part of a company's overall communication strategy (which should form part of the company's overall strategic management plan). This strategy will determine how the in-house journal is used and what it will communicate.

An in-house journal editor would not normally be a member of senior management, but from this theoretical point it can be deduced that the editor must have easy access to senior management.

2.3.2.2 Separate function from marketing

Grunig (2001) writes that public relations and marketing are both essential to companies. In certain efforts, such as product promotion, these functions may be complementary. However, when one is sublimated to the other, the company loses much of the value of that function.

Grunig (2001) adds that public relations and marketing bring distinct perspectives to the company.

We consider public relations a broader discipline, responsible for developing relationships with consumers but also with governmental agencies, the mass media and trade press, financial stakeholders, the community, the employees and their unions, suppliers and competitors, and – perhaps most important – special interest or activist groups (Grunig, 2001).

Public relations and marketing are therefore both essential functions for a modern company. Marketing managers identify markets for the products and services of the company. They supervise marketing communication programmes to create and sustain demand for products and services. Public relations managers, on the other hand, supervise programmes for communication with stakeholders (groups of people who organise themselves when a company affects them or they affect it). Marketing and public relations thus serve different functions and public relations cannot be excellent if it is subjugated to the marketing function. When a company makes public relations a marketing function, practitioners are reduced to the technician role (Ehling *et al.*, 1992:357).

The excellence team concluded that co-ordination of the two complementary functions of public relations and marketing, rather than integration, seems to provide the best working relationship between them.

However, the marketing and public relations functions in a company do not stand apart from each other (see 1.9). The public relations department can assist the marketing department in communicating marketing messages (Hunt & Grunig, 1992:362-363).

As a public relations tool an in-house journal should therefore, according to this theory, form part of the public relations department, and should stand separate from the marketing/advertising function and/or other department. But, the in-house journal could be used as a marketing communication tool as well. It should, however, not be seen solely as such and must retain its identity as an internal communication tool.

2.3.2.3 A single/integrated public relations department

Public relations in the less-than-excellent company is often splintered into discrete functions that support other departments (primarily marketing, finance or personnel) or respond to different stakeholders (Grunig, 2001). If it is fragmented, the public relations function cannot respond and change, as the strategic nature of its stakeholders fluctuates.

By contrast, the excellent department is an integrated one. It encompasses all communication functions and thus has the flexibility to shift its resources to respond to the inherent dynamism of today's environment.

The in-house journal should form part of an integrated public relations or communication department. The responsibility of the publication must be within the public relations department and not spread over different departments – even though employees throughout the company are encouraged to contribute to it.

2.3.2.4 Direct reporting relationship to senior management

To ensure that the perspectives of a company's diverse stakeholders are factored into all decisions made at senior level, the head of the public relations department must be part of senior management, or at least have ready and direct access to managers making key decisions (Grunig, 2001).

The most effective public relations departments evaluated in the excellence study participated in the making of overall strategic decisions by senior management. By participating in company decisions, excellent public relations departments were in a position to identify the stakeholders who would be affected by company decisions or would affect those decisions. Once they had identified stakeholders, excellent public relations departments strategically developed programmes to communicate with them.

Grunig (2001) writes that although membership of senior management is an important characteristic of an excellent public relations department, it is not a mandatory one.

Therefore, one could say that in-house journal editors should be part of senior management (as head of public relations for example) or must have direct access to these managers.

2.3.2.5 The two-way symmetrical model of public relations

The type (or style) of communication a company has with its stakeholders will influence its relationship with them. Grunig and Hunt (1984:27) identified four different communication styles, or as they call it, models of public relations, that developed in the history of public relations and are still used in at least some companies and organisations.

These models are:

- **Press-agentry/publicity model (1850-1900):** In this model the aim is to publicise the company, its products and services in any way possible. It is one-way communication initiated by the company. Fourie (2003:18) writes that this model has a propaganda function and that the information could be incomplete or misleading (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:21, 23, 25, 27-30; Grunig & Grunig, 1992:287-288; Newsom *et al.*, 1992:20).
- **Public information model (1900-1920):** In this model information is disseminated to stakeholders as truthfully as possible. The views of both parties (sender and receiver) are kept in mind. This is normally found in government-type communication. The public information model was created in reaction to "attacks" made on companies either by outsiders or by employees, writes Fourie (2003:17). The goal was to give audiences information about the company and its activities without damaging its image. It works from a viewpoint that the company's stakeholders have the right to know what the company does. The goal of this is not necessarily to convince stakeholders but to rather inform audiences of what is going on. The public relations manager is seen as an in-house journalist that has to report positively on the company and its activities. Communication is still one-way, but an improvement on the publicity model in that it conveys the truth (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:21-22, 23, 25, 30-37; Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288, 305; Newsom *et al.*, 1992:20).
- **Two-way asymmetrical model (1920-):** This model was created after the World War II (Fourie, 2003:18). Public relations is seen as scientific persuasion. The public relations department makes use of scientific information on stakeholders and their behaviour as well as scientific methods to change the behaviour of stakeholders. Communication is in favour of the company and tries to persuade stakeholders to accept the company's point of view on various issues. There is a power imbalance in

this two-way model, as the company has more power than the stakeholders. This is still a popular model with public relations agencies (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:22-23, 25-16, 37-38; Grunig, 1992:288; Newsom *et al.*, 1992:20).

- **Two-way symmetrical model (1960/70-):** In this case the aim of communication is to reach a state of affairs acceptable to both sides – for example, company and employees in the case of an employee publication. There is an effort to create mutual understanding between the two parties, as both parties participate in the communication process.

Public relations practitioners make use of communication strategies, rather than persuasive communication to change the behaviour of audiences. It is more about facilitating understanding between a company and its stakeholders than about the company conveying information about itself. In this scenario the company could also be making changes. The relationship between a company and its stakeholders takes the form of a dialogue (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:22-23, 25, 41-43; Newsom *et al.*, 1992:20; Seitel, 2001:157; Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1995:8).

According to Grunig (2001), research has shown that the two-way symmetrical model is more effective than the others when it comes to establishing long-term relationships with a target audience. It is also concluded that this model is inherently ethical and socially responsible. Both of the first two models see public relations as a monologue. The press-agentry model describes public relations programmes with the sole purpose of getting favourable publicity for a company in the mass media. While the public information model is similar to the press agentry model (as it too is a one-way model that sees public relations only as the dissemination of information) it is regarded as a model supplying “truthful” information that is disseminated through controlled (newsletters) and uncontrolled (mass) media. Although “truthful”, the information is not necessarily complete, as the company will choose what it wants published and what not.

Both these models do not use research and strategic planning. They are also asymmetrical as they try to change the behaviour of their stakeholders but not that of the company. In this case, public relations always tries to make the company look good. The two-way asymmetrical model uses research to develop messages, to persuade strategic audiences to behave as the company wants. The model is seen as a dialogue, but it is dominated by one party – the company. Although it often reaches its objectives, it is seen as a selfish model, since the company regards itself as the only one that is right in the relationship and is of the opinion that only its stakeholders, and not the company as well, need to change. Grunig (2001) says that this model works reasonably well if there is no conflict, but fails in moments of crisis.

Grunig and Grunig (1992:301) believe that public relations should, ideally, be practised as a two-way symmetrical function. When it comes to ethics and strategic management, two-way symmetrical communication is the best option and also the most likely one to contribute to organisational effectiveness. The reason is that the company accepts responsibility for the need to change, based on the feedback given by the audience. The company therefore admits that it is not always right and acknowledges the importance of its target audience's opinion.

2.3.2.5.1 Mixed motives

Critics say that the two-way symmetrical approach is too idealistic and cannot work, as companies would typically want the public relations person to promote their concerns,

without giving in to the demands of their stakeholders – especially not if the company believes it is right (Fourie, 2003:20). This means that the public relations practitioner often has mixed loyalties. On the one hand there is loyalty to the company, but on the other hand there is loyalty to society.

This is also relevant to in-house journals as on the one hand such a journal wants to promote the company's viewpoint, but on the other wants to air the concerns of employees. This "battle" between where the public relations practitioner's loyalty must lie, is known as mixed motives.

However, although both parties want to further their own goals, they do realise that it will be to the benefit of both sides to find mutual agreement. The in-house journal must therefore carry both the interests of the company and of employees to allow a mutual approach and balance between interests.

Grunig and White (1992:47-48) write that it is not a problem if a mutual approach is used, as the company will then treat its employees as equals, even though it has more power. In an in-house journal scenario, this will mean that employees' opinions are respected and also published, as is information supplied by senior management.

To incorporate the concept of "mixed motives" better, Grunig and Grunig (1992:311-313) suggested a new symmetrical model, which can be illustrated as follows:

Grunig and Grunig's (1992) new symmetrical model

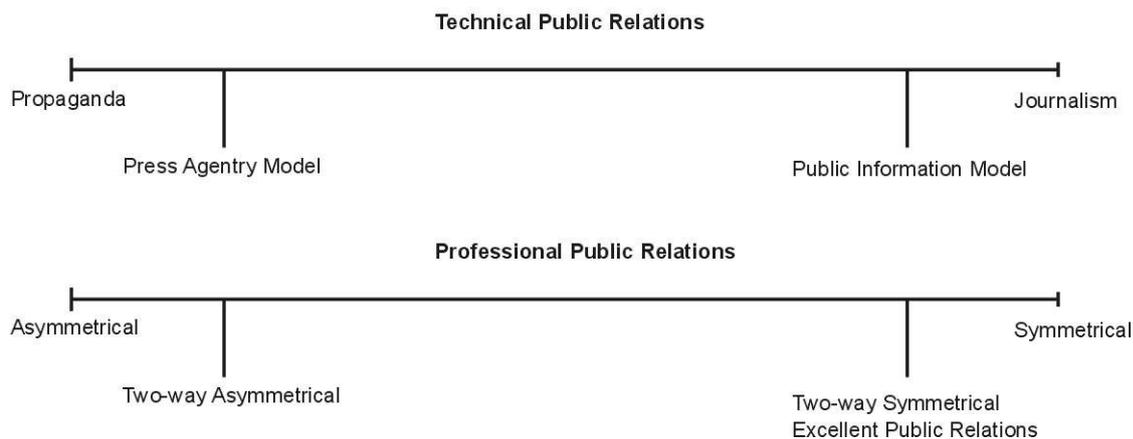


Figure 2.2: The two continuums explaining communication according to the new model of two-way symmetrical communication.

This new model of two-way symmetrical communication uses two continuums to explain communication. The one continuum is for technical public relations and the other for professional public relations. Practitioners of technical public relations see public relations as the application of communication techniques. The goal with this type of public relations is to obtain publicity or to inform stakeholders. Practitioners of professional public relations see public relations as a strategic function to manage conflict, build relationships and limit the autonomy of the company. Professional public relations practitioners use both background knowledge and communication techniques in their programmes.

Grunig and Grunig (1992:312) conclude that professional public relations has both symmetrical and asymmetrical elements, but it is closer to symmetrical public relations on the continuum. Their opinion is that symmetrical public relations is equivalent to excellent public relations.

In the case of an in-house journal one could say that it must aim to practise professional public relations, practising two-way symmetrical communication, and not merely a technical function, aiming to inform employees about events in the company.

2.3.2.5.2 Symmetrical internal communication

Grunig (1992:534) attaches such importance to internal communication within a company that he includes it as a separate aspect of the excellence study. He says that internal communication activities are generally part of the larger public relations function of a company and should therefore reflect the same characteristics as the overall communication strategy, even though the objectives of the communication are different.

Most internal communication divisions report to the public relations function and not to human resources, although they work closely with the latter (Grunig, 1992:353).

In his research, Grunig also points out specifically that the four models of public relations mentioned earlier are totally applicable to internal communication.

From this it can be concluded that an in-house journal must form part of the two-way symmetrical communication of public relations and be managed strategically with a specific purpose in mind. However, the role and influence of new media in a company will play a significant role in how this two-way communication is encouraged and achieved through in-house journals (see 1.6).

2.3.2.6 Senior public relations person in a managerial role

Public relations practitioners may play one of two roles in a company – that of a manager or that of a technician. Managers plan and supervise programmes, while technicians write, edit and design publications and projects but are not involved in the strategic planning of the publication.

Grunig and Grunig (1992:225) say that a public relations department should be headed by a manager and staffed by highly trained and skilled technicians. The IABC study also found that chief executive officers (CEOs) prefer that their public relations departments to be headed by a manager and not only a technician (Grunig, 1992:227).

Since an in-house journal forms part of the public relations function, it can be deduced that it must also be headed by a manager who can plan the publication strategically. However, such a manager should be supported by qualified technicians in the practical aspects of producing an in-house journal.

2.3.2.7 Professional public relations practitioners

Excellent public relations departments need excellent public relations practitioners (Grunig, 2001). The potential of a public relations department therefore depends on how well trained and skilled staff are. The IABC study found that excellent public relations departments employ well-educated and highly trained and skilled professionals. The study also encourages professionalism and encourages membership of professional companies.

Grunig (2001) says that having the expertise required of a strategic manager is the single greatest determinant of communication excellence. Being an expert in his/her field also allows the manager more independence and freedom.

In many companies the in-house journal is the responsibility of a junior employee who is not necessarily adequately trained, or has the skills, to publish such a journal. There is often the

opinion that an in-house journal is “easy” to publish (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:1). However, it is of vital importance – since the in-house journal forms a central link between management and its most important audience – to have a trained and skilled person to manage the publication, as well as other skilled people to produce it. However, most companies are not equipped to produce in-house journals professionally. There are many professional consultancies, employing highly skilled and trained public relations technicians, which can be contracted to assist the in-house journal editor. It is important though to note that a professional publishing consultancy – and not just a public relations company, or even worse, an advertising agency – must be contracted. The concept of public relations not falling under the marketing/advertising function is particularly relevant in this case.

2.3.2.8 Public relations practitioners represent their society

Although public relations cannot be considered female-dominated, it clearly is female-intensive in the US, UK and Canada (Grunig, 2001). The excellence study found that in the countries involved, women were not represented in managerial positions to the extent that their numbers would suggest. Because of the large and growing numbers of women participating in public relations, the department that discriminates against women will fail to capitalise on its human resources. The Public Relations Institute of South Africa's (Prisa's) statistics with regard to public relations practitioners do not divulge this detail, since a large number of public relations practitioners in South Africa are not registered with the association and it would therefore be difficult to make any assumptions (Prisa, 2005).

Grunig (2001) suggests that women are often the best educated in public relations. She also says that excellent public relations departments develop mechanisms to help women gain the power they need to advance from the technician's role to the managerial role and to implement their knowledge of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations.

Apart from offering equal opportunities to women, Grunig (2001) stresses that the growing multiculturalism of both the workforce and the environment means the successful public relations department of the future will be equally heterogeneous. Without what social psychologist Karl Weick called this “requisite variety”, companies will fail to consider the concerns of all of their diverse stakeholders adequately.

Grunig (1992:242) goes as far as to say that companies that value the contributions of women and minorities are more likely to have excellent public relations than those that do not.

In the in-house journal industry this is also very true. Many companies employ women to produce the in-house journal – although this is by no means the rule. In this study, only one of the five editors interviewed is a man.

In South Africa the case of employing people from all backgrounds is very relevant against a government policy of employment equity and equal opportunities. By involving people from different backgrounds and races in the production of a company newsletter, the editorial staff will be enabled to produce a more balanced publication reflecting the views and information needs of all the employees.

2.3.2.9 A symmetrical world view

The concept of a world view is common in both the humanities and social sciences, write Grunig and White (1992:33). They explain it as the set of images and assumptions a person, or company, has about the world, or the environment around it. These world views are shaped by people's (or companies') cultures, beliefs and value systems. For example, if

a company does not acknowledge its stakeholders as important participants in its communication process (its world view), it will influence how such a company will communicate with these stakeholders.

Scholars have identified two distinct world views in public relations (see Grunig & White, 1992:38). These are the asymmetrical and symmetrical world views (see 2.3.2.5). If a company or organisation has an asymmetrical world view, it has the following characteristics:

- It has an internal orientation – company employees look out from the company and do not see it as outsiders see it
- Information flows from a company to outside stakeholders, and thus a one-way flow of information exists
- There is greater emphasis on efficiency and control of costs than on innovation
- The company has an elitist approach, believing it is better than its environment
- It is conservative – change is undesirable and the status quo is preferred
- Value is attached to company traditions
- There is a central authority that makes all the decisions (Grunig & White, 1992:43).

The symmetrical world view has the following characteristics:

- The company and its environment are interdependent
- The company is open to input, receptive to information from the company's stakeholders
- There is a moving equilibrium – the relationship between the company and its stakeholders is always in a state of flux, and the company is constantly trying to find an equilibrium
- The company regards itself and its environment as equals
- Innovation is supported
- There is decentralised management
- Conflict resolution is achieved through negotiation (Grunig & White, 1992:43-44).

According to Grunig (as quoted by Fourie, 2003:19), a symmetrical view sees public relations as a win-win situation where both sides can win, in this case a company and its employees. It is therefore the preferred world view if a company wants to practice excellent public relations. Grunig (1992:54) adds to this by saying that a symmetrical world view will differ from an asymmetrical one in that it does not only focus on the technical character of public relations, but also on the managerial aspects of it. This concept is supported in this study in that not only are the managerial aspects of an in-house journal studied, but the technical aspects are incorporated as well.

A company's world view will therefore have a major influence on its overall communication strategy and therefore on its in-house journal. The more symmetrical a company's world view, the more it will involve its stakeholders, and therefore its employees, in the communication process. By implication, a company's world view will also determine to what extent symmetrical communication will be enabled through public relations tools such as an in-house journal.

In-house journals' editors should therefore also have a symmetrical world view as well as publish the in-house journal from such a world view to be able to enable symmetrical two-way communication through the in-house journal.

2.3.2.10 A pro-active department

Grunig (2001) found that activism pushes companies toward excellence. Activist groups put pressure on companies; excellent public relations are most successful in contending with that pressure.

Threats to organisational autonomy can come even from small groups, including employees. Listening to such groups and attending to their concerns acknowledges that a company's stakeholders are important. It may also result in shared intelligence that, in turn, helps the company make better decisions. Communicating openly with activists and demonstrating willingness to change, rather than simply trying to dominate them, may also result in all-important credibility for the company.

An in-house journal is a very useful tool in communicating with one specific such activist group – employees. Increased participation and issues brought forward by employees will only make the in-house journal a better one.

2.3.2.11 Senior management support

Excellent public relations departments are valued and supported by senior management. Members of senior management are more likely to include the senior public relations person in companies with excellent communication initiatives than in more average programmes (Grunig, 2001; Lubbe & Puth, 2002:273). The most effective programmes the excellence team studied, were characterised by a state of equilibrium between senior management's expectation of public relations and the potential of that department (Grunig, 2001).

Furthermore, if the head of public relations does not understand the demands or perceptions of senior management, frustration and miscommunication are likely, and therefore excellent communication is unlikely.

2.3.2.12 Supportive company culture

According to Grunig (1992:245) companies will be excellent more often in societies whose cultures emphasise collaboration, participation, trust and mutual responsibility (a balanced world view – see 2.3.2.9). He stresses that excellent management and excellent public relations can flourish only in collaborative, participative cultures. He also adds that culture, like structure, is one of the most important underlying conditions that facilitate excellent public relations (Grunig, 1992:237).

This is very true for in-house journals. If the editorial team does not encourage collaboration and participation, it will battle to achieve two-way symmetrical communication with employees. It will battle to produce a publication that reflects both management and employees' view without employees taking part in the production of the journal. Therefore, a combination of a supportive company culture and a symmetrical world view is needed to enable two-way symmetrical communication through a public relations tool such as an in-house journal.

Grunig (in Grunig & Hunt, 1984:179) as well as several other authors point out, however, that one cannot just apply a theory to a public relations programme without evaluating it. Therefore, the importance and role of evaluating a public relations programme are discussed next.

2.4 EVALUATION

As is the case with any public relations programme, an in-house journal must be evaluated regularly to ensure that it continues to serve the information needs of both the company and employees (Lubbe & Puth, 2002:275). It needs to prove its worth in terms of employee and management relations as well as employee performance and awareness of key issues. Regular evaluations will also be able to guide the editorial team, should changes need to be made (Lubbe & Puth, 2002:275). Ferreira and Staude (1991:123) say that it is quite common for any publication to lose touch with its readers gradually. The only way to determine how to adjust the focus of a publication, is by finding out from readers what they want.

There are various ways in which editors can conduct surveys.

Spontaneous reactions from readers are an important measure. If they react to articles by writing letters, or regularly contributing to the in-house journal, it is a good indication that they do read the journal and find it informative (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:123).

However, informal judgements are not enough to evaluate a publication, which serves as an important communication tool for a company and on which a company spends a noticeable part of its internal communication budget. The claim that it is too difficult, or that proper scientific research is not necessary on something such as an in-house journal, is regarded as unacceptable by many (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:123; Grunig & Hunt, 1984:179).

Research can either be done completely internally (especially if the company has a research department) or it can be outsourced. It must therefore be determined whether inside resources are suitable to conduct valid research. If not, then input in some form or another will be needed from outside sources (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:123; Grunig & Hunt, 1984:183).

The evaluation process needs to consist of 1) creating a set of objectives 2) measuring these objectives 3) collecting and analysing the data 4) report the results and 5) acting on the results (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:183).

The most common research method used to evaluate in-house journals is readers' surveys. These surveys can be published in the in-house journal, but the problem there would be to get sufficient response to be able to consider the results of the survey valid. This could be overcome by offering a lucky draw with prizes (Arnold, 1982:37).

One-on-one interviews (by telephone, for example) could offer a much better feedback rate. Questionnaires sent via e-mail or posted on the intranet can also be used. Some incentive to respond via the latter two methods might be needed.

Evaluation can also be done by entering a publication in a competition such as the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition. In this way an editor can see how his/her publication compares to others, as well as receive feedback from judges who are normally well-informed on the topic.

2.5 SUMMARY

In conclusion, one could say that Grunig's excellence theory (Grunig, 1992) could be applied to in-house journals in the following manner:

- An excellent in-house journal is strategically managed and is also included in the strategic planning of the rest of the company of which its editor is aware. The in-house journal contributes to strategic planning of the company in that it links it to its

environment – its employees. It has a unique position in the overall communication strategy of a company.

- The in-house journal is a separate function within the overall public relations department, standing separate from any marketing/advertising function.
- The responsibility for an in-house journal must be centred within the public relations department and not spread over several departments.
- The in-house journal editor is either part of senior management (as head of the public relations department) or has direct access to members of senior management.
- In-house journals should form part of professional public relations, which practises symmetrical two-way communication and not merely follows a technical approach where communication strategies are used to inform employees about what the company is doing without allowing or encouraging any interaction.
- In-house journals should be headed by a manager who has skilled technicians to support him/her in producing the publication.
- The people producing in-house journals should be suitably trained and highly skilled. If a company does not employ such people, then it is advisable to contract a professional publishing agency.
- An in-house journal should give equal opportunities to all people – regardless of race or gender – to enable it to publish information relevant to the company and its diverse workforce.
- An in-house journal should be aware of its environment through a symmetrical world view that will also allow and encourage two-way symmetrical communication.
- An in-house journal should be pro-active and will improve when dealing actively with issues brought forward by employees.
- An in-house journal should have the support of senior management.
- An in-house journal should encourage collaboration and participation between its editorial staff and employees through a supportive company culture.

A last criteria could be added to these, based on the fact that it is clear that regular evaluation is needed:

- The editor (or company publishing the in-house journal) must regularly evaluate the publication to ensure that it continues to communicate the correct message in a suitable way to employees.

In view of the above, the following theoretical statement can be formulated:

Theoretical statement 1:

Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.

One of the characteristics Grunig (1992:38) says is important for a good public relations department – and in this case, therefore, for a good in-house journal – is a symmetrical world view in which not only the company's communication needs are addressed, but also those of the environment in which the company finds itself (see 2.3.2.9).

In the next chapter, the internal and external environments in which South African in-house journal editors find themselves, will be discussed.

Part I

Chapter 3

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT INFLUENCE IN-HOUSE JOURNALS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

No company operates in isolation, but rather forms part of a complex system involving not only the people that work for the company, but also a host of other “entities” such as clients, competitors, government and the society in which it operates, to name but a few.

The company’s view on both internal and external environments will influence how it interprets these. Grunig (1992:38) refers to this as the company’s world view (see 2.3.2.9). A company’s world view will not only influence what issues companies communicate, but also how they communicate them.

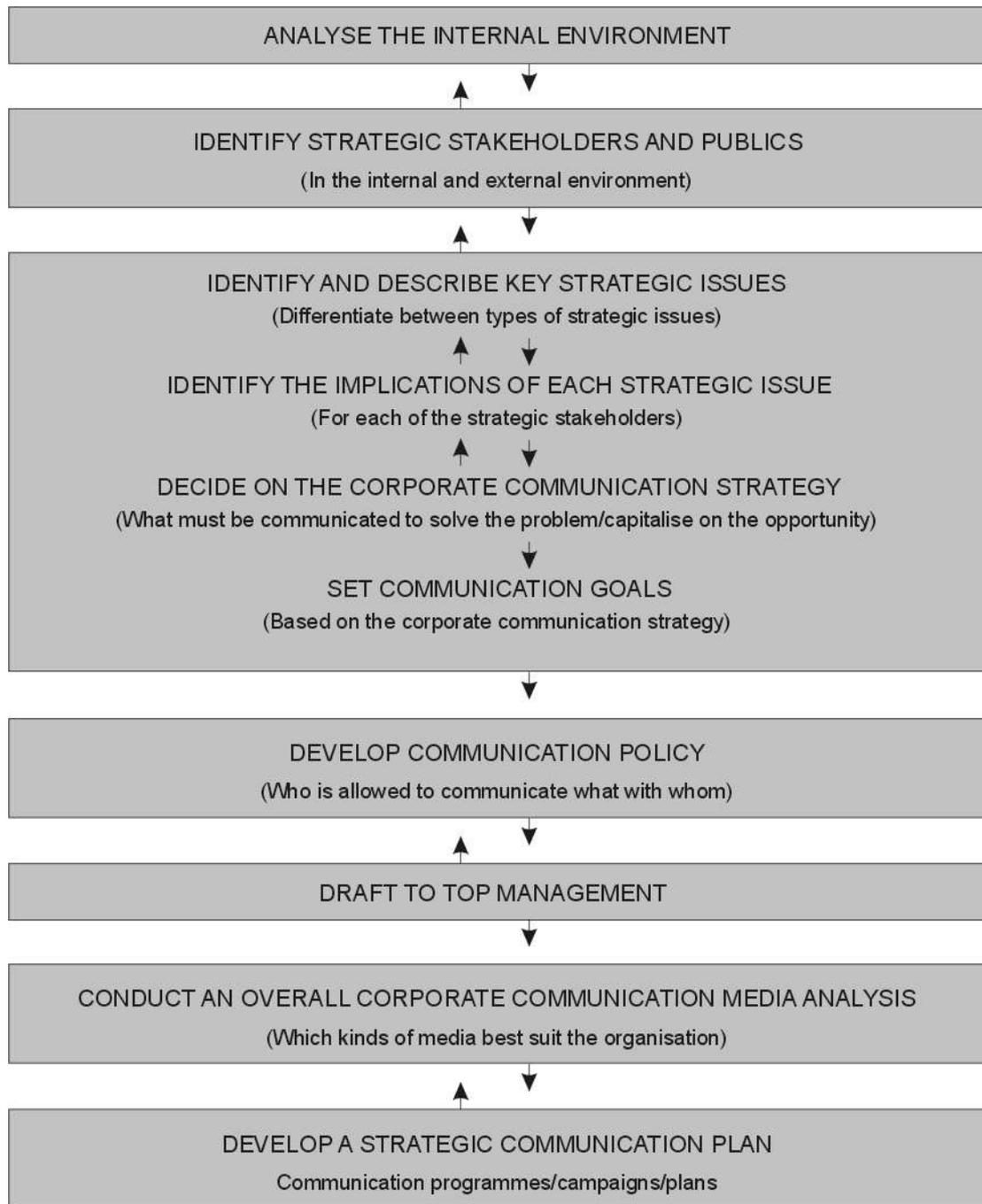
As both internal and external factors will have an influence on how a company operates, one could assume that these factors will also influence a company’s communication strategy.

Before developing a corporate communication strategy, or in this case a publishing strategy, the in-house journal editor must be familiar with the company’s internal environment – the corporate profile, vision, values, philosophy, mission, corporate culture, corporate policies and the management/employee component (Steyn & Puth, 2000:54). Steyn and Puth (2000:54) add that stakeholders and other influences in the external environment that have an impact on the company, such as political, economic, social, technological, ecological and legal issues, should also be identified, prioritised and analysed.

Once the strategic issues, as well as the stakeholders and their issues and concerns, have been identified, the implications of these issues for the stakeholders become the subject that has to be addressed by the company in its communication with them (Steyn & Nunes, 2001:37).

According to them, a corporate strategy should support the enterprise, corporate and business strategies, thereby contributing to organisational effectiveness by identifying what should be communicated to stakeholders to solve organisational and communication problems, or to capitalise on opportunities that are presented by the strategic vision (see Figure 3.1).

Model for developing corporate communication strategy



Source: Steyn (2000a); Steyn & Puth (2000:63)

Figure 3.1: A model for developing corporate communication strategies.

In this chapter the overall context in which South African companies operate will be discussed, looking separately at the internal and external environments to understand how these might influence individual companies' communication strategies. This information will help to explain what in-house journal editors have to keep in mind when publishing an in-house journal in this country, as it will not only influence what they publish, but could also have an overall influence on the publication itself.

3.2 INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

A company's internal environment is influenced by its vision, mission, culture, values, philosophy and its stakeholders (employees) and management (Steyn & Puth, 2000:54).

3.2.1 Vision and mission

When compiling an internal communication strategy, the starting point would be the vision and the mission of the company. The vision, mission and goals of the company determine the overall company strategy (Marx, Van Rooyen, Bosh & Reinders, 1998:111).

The above authors define the vision of a company as the broad statement defining what the company wants to achieve, while the mission is the reason for the company's existence. The company's goals would be specific results aimed for (Marx *et al.*, 1998:113). The vision and mission must be the starting point when it comes to any planning, organisation and co-ordination within a company, as these determine the type, scope and direction of a company's activities.

Based on a company's mission statement, an overall communication strategy can be formulated that should aim to:

- Enhance employees' pride in their jobs and the company
- Promote understanding of the character of the company, the challenges it faces and the needs that exist
- Encourage employees to participate in company activities and projects
- Improve productivity
- Promote safety awareness
- Inform employees of plans and decisions
- Maintain good labour relations (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:17).

3.2.2 Company culture – values and philosophy

According to Brown (1963:3-4) culture refers to all the accepted and patterned ways of behaviour of given people – in this case employees working for a specific company. Thus "company culture is a body of common understandings".

Kreps (1990:125) argues that culture serves to inform employees how to interpret and respond to life within a company. According to him, every company has its own cultural identity, made up of the history and unique combination of individuals who are part of it. In the case of companies, the primary ingredient of organisational culture is the collective interpretations that employees make about company activities and outcomes. It also influences the way employees communicate with one another.

Company culture, therefore, has a huge influence on internal communication (see Grunig's opinion on world view [company culture] and public relations in 2.3.2.9).

3.2.3 Stakeholders – employees

In public relations, the stakeholder at which communication is aimed will determine the messages and the manner (strategy) in which these are communicated.

For this study the focus is exclusively on the internal stakeholder (employees). One can hardly say that just because one knows that the stakeholders consist of employees of the

company the communicator (in this case the in-house journal editor) knows who this stakeholder is (Skinner & Von Essen, 1987:89).

Employees differ vastly from one another – especially in big companies such as Absa or Pick 'n Pay. Some employees may be highly qualified, working in cities, while others might only have basic schooling, working in a small town. Once it has been determined exactly what the stakeholder looks like (e.g. age, education, income and where they live), the communicator will be able to determine what their information needs are and can then decide on how to meet these needs.

However, although the internal stakeholder (employees) might differ substantially from one division to another, one can still manage to find common ground. The fact that all members of the public, regardless of income, age, ethnicity or education, work for the same company, binds them together. In really big companies it is even recommended to focus messages and communication strategies on certain divisions to ensure there is enough common interest.

Another aspect that the communicator must remember when identifying who the stakeholder is, is that today's employee is a sophisticated consumer of information. With the tremendous development and growth in the media industry, people are now conscious of information and have a great need of relevant information to help them in their daily lives. This includes events that occur in the world, their own country or even their local community; it involves all areas where they find themselves, including the workplace (Lubbe & Puth, 2002:279).

To summarise: the first step for internal communication would be to identify exactly who the internal stakeholder or stakeholders are – for example their age and background. The communicator must also take note of the fact that some employees are better users of information.

3.2.3.1 Employees' information needs

It is important for a communicator to know what employees think of the company they work for. A company must create a certain image and live up to it (Grunig, in Newsom *et al.*, 1992:170). The best way of achieving this is to make employees feel involved in what the company does.

Grunig (1992:172) argues that a person who is involved in a certain situation tends to seek information about it and feels motivated to communicate about the situation. Individuals are more likely to seek and process information if they anticipate that it will help them solve a problem and if they are personally involved in the situation (Grunig, 1992:223). By involving employees directly in certain issues, in-house journal editors will be able to encourage them to participate in the communication process as well (Grunig, 1992:224).

Employees tend to see communication from management as propaganda. It is therefore necessary to ensure that employees do not experience messages from senior management as propaganda and to keep internal communication straight and honest.

Employees have an increased need to know exactly what is expected of them, what the company is doing, where it is heading and what their overall role is. By communicating with employees, companies empower their employees effectively. If employees do not understand business issues and what is happening in the business, they are unable to add value (Corrado, 1994:5). The markets companies operate in and legislation ruling their actions (see 3.3.2.1 and 3.3.6), are examples of issues employees need to understand.

In a study conducted among 45 000 employees in the US by the IABC and Towers (in Wilcox & Nolte, 1995:345) it was found that the most important issues that employees want information on are:

- The company's future plans
- Personnel policies and procedures
- Productivity improvement
- Job-related information
- Job-advancement information.

The five topics they were least interested to receive information on are:

- Personnel changes and promotions
- Financial results
- Advertisement and promotional plans
- Stories on other employees
- Birthdays and other celebrations.

Stephenson (1960:448) adds to this by stating that employees want to receive information on:

- Their work
- The company
- Procedures at work
- Educational opportunities
- Negatives in the company.

It is, therefore, important to determine exactly what the employees of a particular publication want to receive – taking cognisance of these guidelines – to ensure their information needs are met. South African employers may, however, have different priorities influenced by the developing society they work in (see 3.3.3).

3.2.4 Management's communication needs

Just as employees have certain communication needs, so does management. Management wants to keep the workforce happy and therefore needs to communicate with it. Today, companies must explain complicated health and benefit packages, changes in laws that affect employees, and changes in the marketplace that might affect the company in the future. In addition, training programmes need to be explained, new employees need to receive orientation and employees expect to be acknowledged for their efforts. Human resources must use professional communicators to assist them in this (Argenti, 1998:60).

Argenti (1998:173) suggests that the goals with a good internal communication strategy would be to:

- Improve morale and foster goodwill
- Inform employees about internal changes such as reorganisation or staff promotions
- Explain compensation and benefit plans
- Increase employee understanding of the company and its products
- Change employee behaviour toward becoming more productive, quality-oriented and entrepreneurial

- Increase employee understanding of major health/social issues or trends affecting them, such as child care or Aids
- Encourage employee participation in community activities.

The communication needs of both employees and management will differ from company to company. However, once the communicator knows what the communication needs of both the employees and management are, a comprehensive communication plan can be drawn up.

3.2.5 Internal environment – effects

The internal environment has an effect not only on what companies communicate to their employees, but also on *how* they communicate it. In a company where there is a more open and relaxed culture (see 2.3.2.12), one could expect more frank, truthful and open communication. However, in a more closed culture the opposite could be true. The internal environment will also influence what type of communication channels are used and how they are used.

In this case, where the study focuses solely on in-house journals, the following scenarios could be created:

- A company could have a journal where only management decides what is published, and strictly manages that (one-way asymmetrical communication)
- A company could allow all employees to contribute to the journal, even though they do not necessarily agree with management, and in that way encourage a dialogue (two-way symmetrical communication).

Based on the two-way symmetrical model of communication (see 2.3.2.5) used in this study, the second scenario is the preferred one, allowing management really to communicate with employees and vice versa.

3.3 EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

When it comes to the external environment, only the environment relevant to a specific company should be taken into consideration. The external environment relevant to companies operating in South Africa would involve political, economic, social, technological, ecological and legal issues (Steyn & Puth, 2000:54).

3.3.1 Politics – a democratic South Africa

South Africa is a democracy, allowing all political parties to participate in elections. The current ruling party is the African National Congress. A new constitution was created after the 1994 election that is said to be one of the most liberal constitutions in the world (Microsoft Encarta, 2004).

Since the elections in 1994, South Africa has been re-admitted to the international political arena and is a member of various international organisations such as the United Nations, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). South Africa participates actively in international politics in many ways, notably as negotiator (Anon2, 2001).

The relevance of the changed political environment on companies is that because South Africa again participates in the international arena, so can companies. A more democratic

political environment also allows greater freedom for companies, as a democratically chosen government is not expected to interfere too much in a free-market economy.

Companies might report on the political situation or events in the country in their in-house journals (for example, an election or the visit of a prominent politician) if they feel it has a direct connection to itself and/or employees.

3.3.2 Economy

South Africa's economy can be described as a developing economy. On the one hand it has world-class features such as sophisticated financial and physical infrastructure, good telecommunications and energy supply networks as well as a well-developed stock exchange. On the other hand it faces typical third world challenges such as poverty, a lack of manufacturing technology in many sectors and an unskilled labour force, to name but a few (Anon, 2004).

South Africa is therefore highly susceptible to trends in the economies of its major trading partners – the US, UK, Europe and the Far East.

Africa forms the focus of South Africa's global strategy, within which government pursues a strong developmental agenda. The view is that South Africa's own success is inextricably linked to the economic recovery of the continent. The developmental challenges must be viewed in light of the opportunities for South African economic agents. In 1999, about 30% of South Africa's exports were destined for Africa (Anon, 2001).

In southern Africa, South Africa seeks to restructure regional arrangements promoting industrialisation. Much focus is placed on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to which South Africa's trade totalled R22 billion in 1998-2000 (Anon, 2004). Further a field, South Africa trades with Europe, the Americas and the Far East.

The economic environment companies in South Africa find themselves in is a challenging one. Since the 1994 elections and the cancellation of trade sanctions, the South African economy has been exposed to many international influences. Companies must compete with much bigger and technologically better competitors from abroad who can often offer products at better prices.

The focus in the South African economy has therefore been much more strongly on productivity, employing a skilled workforce while at the same time delivering high-quality products on time.

Government's focus on black economic empowerment (BEE) forces companies to employ people from previously disadvantaged areas and groups to all levels in their organisations. Government has set specific targets companies must adhere to. Companies are expected to employ more people from previously disadvantaged groupings, as required by the Black Economic Employment Charter. This tends to place strain on companies, as they need to find candidates that not only have the skills required for a specific job, but also meet empowerment goals. BEE has a huge impact on companies, as it could lead to discontent about who is appointed in a specific position and how companies are structured, among others (Vaida, 2003). An in-house journal would therefore be an ideal tool not only to communicate a company's BEE policy, but also its effects and progress.

A huge challenge faces companies in this effort. Since many people have been deprived of proper education, they are not suitably trained and experienced to take up a place in an established economy. So, although companies are expected to employ these people, they must train and educate them as well.

Another economic problem is that suddenly there is a massive demand from people looking for work, with not as many positions available.

3.3.2.1 Markets

The general state of the markets in which companies operate, will also influence companies. This will therefore not only influence what is reported to both internal and external audiences, but could also influence the in-house journal itself. For example, if markets weaken, companies could reconsider budgets, including communication budgets. Less money could, in such a situation, be available for the production of the in-house journal.

It is important to keep in mind that companies will most probably only report on markets that have a direct influence on their core business. A telecoms practitioner (MTN) will most likely report on different issues than a bank (Absa) or a mining company (Harmony).

3.3.2.2 Industry sectors

There is an extensive list of industry sectors that the government handbook (Anon, 2004) discusses as being major industries in South Africa. In most cases, these sectors would probably only be relevant to what a company communicates to its employees if it specifically operates in them. Typical industry sectors are agriculture, housing, land affairs, minerals and energy, science and technology, tourism, transport and water affairs and forestry.

It would be relevant for companies to report on general economic issues such as markets and industry sectors, as these have a direct impact, not only on the company, but also on its employees.

3.3.3 Society – a new era

South Africa has seen major social changes over the years since the 1994 election.

Different ethnic groups had to learn to interact with one another. Unlike specific industry sectors that would only be relevant to a company if it operates in them, the social context is relevant to all companies, as it involves all kinds of people.

3.3.3.1 Arts and culture

The South African society comprises a large number of different ethnic and language groups. Each of these groups has its own arts and culture. The aim of government is to ensure a greater awareness of the different arts as well as their proper maintenance and development.

An in-house journal could be used to inform and educate employees on the different cultures a company's employees represent. It can also be used to inform employees if, and how, a company supports the local arts and culture initiatives as part of its corporate social investment (CSI) initiative.

3.3.3.2 Education and training

A major focus of government is human resources development. In his state of the nation address delivered on 9 February 2001, President Mbeki pointed out that government had approved a human resource development strategy that would enable it to launch an accelerated skills development programme to focus on issues such as improving the quality of education, including Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) (Anon, 2004).

This strategy quotes the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which declared that:

Our people, with their aspirations and collective determination, are our most important resources. The RDP is focused on our people's most immediate needs, and it relies in turn, on their energies to drive the process of meeting these needs. Development is not about the delivery of goods to citizenry. It is about active involvement and growing empowerment.

Education is not only pivotal to economic prosperity, but it also plays a crucial role in enabling South Africans to improve the quality of their lives and contribute to a peaceful, productive and democratic nation (Anon, 2004).

Apart from a huge focus on the education of school-going learners, there is also a focus on ABET. Census 1996 indicated that almost 24 million adults between the ages of 16 and 65 did not have access to basic schooling or did not complete Grade 9.

Illiteracy is a huge problem in South Africa. Three million people in the country cannot read or write, and millions more are semi-literate. This can have devastating negative consequences for their ability to participate fully in the political, economic and social spheres of life.

Educational level is a significant determinant of how one is affected positively or negatively by changes in employment. The largest increase in employment was for individuals with tertiary education, for whom the demand rose by 2 000% from 1990 to 1995.

An HSRC Baseline Survey of Industrial Training done in 2000 found that training done by companies benefited between 20 and 30% of the formal workforce of eight million employees. That means that between 1,6 million and 2,4 million employees benefited from some form of training in 1999. Most of this training was, however, part-time, in-house and short-course in orientation.

The education level of employees will have a huge influence on what an in-house journal looks like. The less educated its readers, the simpler the language use and easier to understand the publication needs to be. The in-house journal can also be used to promote education and training programmes inside the company.

3.3.3.3 Health

Many South Africans face serious health issues because of a lack of basic medical services in many parts of the country. Government is focusing on several of these issues to ensure that diseases are brought under control, bringing about a healthy nation that can work towards greater prosperity (Anon, 2001).

This was supported by President Mbeki in his 2001 state of the nation address in which he said that in addition to the continuing campaign against HIV/Aids, the focus would also be placed on other infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), cholera and hepatitis.

By educating employees on health issues through the in-house journal, companies can reduce days lost owing to illness.

3.3.3.3.1 General health

General health issues in South Africa include childhood illnesses, youth and adolescent health, tobacco control, violence against women and children, containing illnesses such as polio and measles, mental health, drug and substance abuse and nutrition.

3.3.3.3.2 HIV/Aids and sexually transmitted diseases

One of the biggest issues in the South African society is that of HIV/Aids. South Africa has the single biggest HIV-positive population in the world, estimated at five million – or about 11% of the population. The CSI Handbook states that not since the end of apartheid has an issue stirred corporate emotion as profoundly as HIV/Aids has done (Anon, 2002:179). It says that HIV/Aids is not just a health issue and that it has become integral to South Africa's societal fabric and as such has woven itself into all development plans and projects.

In December 2000 the International Labour Organisation projected that South Africa would lose 10,8% of its labour force by 2005 because of Aids, and by 2020 an estimated 24,9%.

An ING Barings report released in April 2000 concluded that Aids would reduce South Africa's annual growth rate by 0,3 to 0,4% over the next 15 years. The report estimated that annually for every 100 non-Aids deaths, 88 highly skilled workers, 176 skilled workers and 308 semi- and unskilled workers would die as a result of Aids (Anon2, 2000).

The International Labour Office in Geneva released a report in June 2000 focusing on the Aids pandemic in Southern Africa. It said HIV/Aids was a serious threat to development. The pandemic had a profoundly negative impact on the economy, the workforce, business, individual workers and their families. It continued to say that economic growth could be as much as 25% lower than it might otherwise have been over a 20-year period in high-prevalence countries.

In a study done in 1999 by The Futures Group International on the economic impact of HIV/Aids in South Africa, it was said that HIV/Aids might have a significant impact on some companies. Aids-related illnesses and deaths of employees affect a company by both increasing expenditure and reducing revenue.

Expenditure is increased for health care costs, burial fees and training and recruitment of replacement employees. Revenue may be decreased because of absenteeism due to illness or attendance of funerals and time spent on training. Labour turnover may lead to a less experienced labour force that is less productive.

The report advised that an effective national response should include information, education and communication, voluntary counselling and testing, condom promotion and availability, and an effort to protect human rights and reduce stigma and discrimination.

Retired president Nelson Mandela said at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland in 1997 that the severity of the economic impact of the disease was directly related to the fact that most infected persons were in the peak productive and reproductive age group. Aids kills those whom society relies on to grow the crops, work in the mines and factories, run the schools and hospitals and govern nations, increasing the number of dependent persons (Mandela, 1997).

All sectors and all spheres of society have to be involved as equal partners. We have to join hands to develop programmes and share information and research that will halt the spread of the disease, and help develop support networks for those who are affected (Mandela:1997).

Communicating how HIV/Aids infection can be avoided and/or how people suffering from the disease should look after themselves, could, and probably should be, conveyed in an in-house journal.

3.3.3.3.3 Diseases

There are several diseases in South Africa that enjoy specific attention from government in terms of awareness campaigns. These include tuberculosis (TB), malaria and chronic diseases such as diabetes.

The duet of infection with HIV/Aids and TB has reduced optimism about controlling TB worldwide, and has created a public health emergency with regard to the prevention, management and control of HIV-TB. In view of the state of TB and HIV/Aids in South Africa, the management of contagious diseases is going to become important issues.

Malaria is endemic in the low-altitude areas of the Northern Province, Mpumalanga and North-east KwaZulu-Natal. In 2000, a total of 61 934 cases of malaria and 423 related deaths were reported.

Many South Africans unknowingly suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma, while many also suffer from a disability, which can all severely influence their ability to work and earn a living (Anon, 2004).

3.3.3.3.4 Occupational health and safety

Occupational health is an issue that has recently enjoyed more attention from both government and the general business sector. Companies are expected to ensure that their employees do not fall ill because of their work environment (an example is the banning of smoking in public places by the Department of Health in 2002), nor get injured during the performance of their duties. Needless to say, it is also to the economic benefit of companies to prevent illness and injury.

3.3.3.4 Crime

South Africa has a reputation for being a country plagued by crime and government will have to continue paying attention to this problem. "We are conscious of the fact that the safety and security of all our citizens is a fundamental right and a critical element in our continuing efforts to improve the quality of life for all our people," said President Mbeki in his 2001 state of the nation address (Mbeki, 2001). Crime happens in all aspects of life, also within companies, and it is important to ensure that employees remain law-abiding citizens and that corporate crime is eliminated (Anon, 2004).

3.3.3.5 Social development

One of the biggest aims of government is poverty relief and the general upliftment of the citizens of South Africa, especially in the rural areas. Other issues that influence social development and that government considers as serious include HIV/Aids and the treatment of women and children.

Already in the eighties, it was said that companies should have a look at their roles as corporate citizens. "It is not good enough for a corporation to do good – it must be seen to be doing good" (Skinner & Von Essen, 1987:255). This phenomenon of "doing good" in the community is called CSI. They continue to say that the aims of any company should be to earn profits, but also to earn it in such a way as to make a real and permanent contribution to the well-being of the people and to the development of southern Africa. This involves various issues such as personnel relations, employment practices, ethics and environmental responsibility.

Just as a company seeks to conserve its assets and ensure its future survival by re-investing part of its profits, so it should seek to conserve and improve the social environment in which it does business in the hope that it will be able to continue to do business in the future, preferably in a better environment than at present (Skinner & Von Essen, 1987:255).

Newsom *et al.* (1992:22) agree, stating that companies are being held accountable not just for their profitability, but also for what they do about an endless agenda of social problems. According to them, CSI means producing sound products or reliable services that do not threaten the environment and contribute positively to the social, political and economic health of society.

They point out that this is a world-wide trend, but one can apply this specifically to South Africa where companies are encouraged to take part in the development of the country. The direct impact that this will have on employee communication and newsletters is that companies will communicate what they do for their employees, as well as the rest of society and the community they operate in, to prove that they are responsible corporate citizens.

3.3.3.6 Sport and recreation

South Africa is a sport-loving country, in particular soccer, rugby and cricket. During the apartheid years athletes were banned from international participation. However, now they can participate in all events, including the Olympic Games. Much development takes place in the world of sport, encouraging people from previously disadvantaged areas to participate competitively in sports that were traditionally only accessible to whites such as rugby, cricket, golf and tennis.

Sport and recreation news adds to the lighter side of an in-house journal's news agenda.

3.3.4 Ecological issues

One of the bigger challenges facing South Africa is improving the economy as well as its citizens' lives without depleting its natural capital. This can only be achieved through a healthy natural environment, which supplies raw materials, absorbs and treats waste products, and maintains water, soil and air quality (Anon, 2004).

Many companies are very much involved in ecological issues, such as nature conservation, and publicise their actions to improve their overall image, even to employees.

3.3.5 Technology

Technology not only influences how companies operate, but also how an in-house journal is produced.

Technology has changed vastly over the last few years and continues to do so. Where years ago the design and lay-out of newspapers and magazines were done exclusively by reproduction houses, it can now easily be done on a computer using any of a number of desktop publishing programs. However, more specialised programs will require professionally trained people.

Keeping employees up to date on what technological developments are taking place might make the implementation of new technologies easier as employees already know what the new technology would offer.

3.3.6 Legal issues

Since the change in political dispensation in South Africa in 1994, the legal framework in which companies operate has seen several changes. Many of these changes have a significant influence on how companies operate. An example of this is the Black Economic Empowerment Bill of 2003 (Bill, 2003), which stipulates what the government insists companies must do to incorporate South Africans who were previously disadvantaged, especially in terms of being employed in major companies.

A bill such as this one could well be created with good intentions and for realistic reasons, but it could cause unhappiness within companies if employees feel that they are discriminated against.

It is necessary for companies to communicate delicate issues, such as BEE, to ensure that correct information is disseminated and rumours are limited to ensure employees are kept as happy and as informed as possible.

Another issue that has an impact on how companies operate, and specifically on what is reported within companies, is that of corporate governance. Although not legally compulsory, most big companies have to commit to the strict regulations of the King Commission on Corporate Governance II (King II, 2002) as compliance to King II is a prerequisite for companies listed on the JSE Securities Exchange (Bauer & Sinclair, 2003). Absa, Harmony, MTN, Pick 'n Pay and Sanlam therefore all comply with it.

It is important for companies to ensure that employees are well informed on what legal issues are relevant to ensure compliance.

Legal issues can be reported on and explained in an in-house journal. However, the journal can also be used to help ensure compliance to requirements such as corporate governance by reporting on company results, for example.

3.3.7 External environment – effects

From the above it is easy to see why the external environment will have a significant influence on how a company operates. Judiciary issues are compulsory, while the general economic environment will have an influence on the overall business of the company. However, social issues in South Africa are also of the utmost importance, as these influence employees in a significant way.

Companies in South Africa are also expected to be “responsible corporate citizens” and to invest in their employees and their direct communities. All these imperatives have a direct impact on an in-house journal and what it publishes.

In view of the above, the following theoretical statement can be formulated:

Theoretical statement 2

An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

3.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter it was explained how both the internal and external environment in which companies operate have an influence on how and what they will communicate with their employees.

Internally, there is the vision, mission and culture of a company that influence internal communication, while one must also keep in mind the specific communication needs of both employees and management.

Externally, one can say that there are various influences such as legal, political, economic, social, technological and ecological issues that will uniquely influence what and how companies communicate with employees.

In the next chapter the technical aspects needed for an excellent in-house journal will be discussed.

Part I

Chapter 4

TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the focus of this study is not merely on what the technical requirements for an excellent in-house journal should be, there is also justification to look at what technical requirements should be met to ensure an excellent in-house journal based on the theoretical viewpoints set out in Part 1 Chapter 2. This is especially important if in-house journals are studied with a symmetrical world view in mind where both the managerial and technical criteria of an in-house journal are important (see 2.3.2.9). The reason why specific focus should be placed on technical aspects, is that good content, acknowledging all relevant environments, on its own is not enough to ensure that employees will read an in-house journal. It should also look professional. An excellent in-house journal should therefore adhere to technical requirements as set out in literature and stipulated by the SA Publication Forum.

4.2 TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EXCELLENT IN-HOUSE JOURNAL

Companies that produce in-house journals tend to do it in one of three ways:

- Produce it entirely in-house with the help of desktop publishing technology
- Employ a professional publishing consultant who manages certain aspects of production (such as design, layout and printing) while the in-house journal editor manages other aspects (for example, planning, supplying copy and visuals and distribution)
- Completely outsource the production of the in-house journal to a professional publishing consultant.

Although the production of an in-house journal may vary from company to company, just as the actual journal will differ, it still needs to satisfy certain criteria to ensure that it is not only a high-quality publication that looks good, but that it is above all read by employees.

From the literature studied (Bivins, 1991; Fanson, 1994; Brigham, 1991; Kandler, 2003; Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Swift, 1999) the following technical criteria on how to publish a good in-house journal have been compiled.

4.2.1 Planning

Regardless of where one sources information on publishing in-house journals, be it from published works or from the internet, one of the most important criteria for success is that the journal must be planned properly (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:1; Brigham, 1991:77). There is a myriad of issues to keep in mind when planning an in-house journal. It starts with why it is published, who the target audience is and what content will be published.

When a company decides to publish an in-house journal, it is important that the editor has good knowledge of the mission, values and objectives of the company (see 3.2). The most successful editor understands the purpose of his/her publication and has a clear mission statement with set goals for it (Wilcox & Nolte, 1995:346).

The editor must be sure of the company's central message and the journal's policy should therefore be linked to the objectives of the company (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:7; De Jager, 1977:119).

Since the aim of an in-house journal is to improve communication within a company, one assumes that the editor knows who the readers are (see 3.2.3). It is unfortunately not that simple.

Once the audience of the publication is known, specific aims and objectives can be created. Objectives must be long-term and should be reviewed annually. An objective could be to inform and educate readers on a particular issue such as education (Fanson, 1994:9).

Irvine (1970:254) writes that an effective in-house journal has seven objectives. These are:

- To disseminate relevant company information as quickly as is reasonable
- To keep employees informed of the more general environment in which the enterprise is functioning
- To obtain commitment to the objectives of the company by keeping employees alert to factors such as profitable manufacture, quality control, waste, good housekeeping and safety, attitude to change and the impact of the company's products
- To create a corporate spirit
- To provide a "flying notice board" for the enterprise
- To act as a feedback channel
- To create a good image in the eyes of outsiders who also manage to see the publication, although this last objective is not very important.

In the short term, specific goals must be set that are definite and measurable, for example, specifically featuring articles on safety at the workplace. The overall idea remains though, to remember that the publication must carry a unique message that these specific readers will not find anywhere else.

When planning an in-house journal, the editor must take care to not make it look like company propaganda (see 3.2.3.1). It is important to communicate not only information from management but also from the employees' side, thereby improving understanding and good relations between management and employees (two-way communication) (De Jager, 1977:117).

Fanson (1994:10) correctly points out that when planning an in-house journal, one must keep in mind that even though it is only distributed to employees, it must look professional and be dealt with professionally. This involves not only the writing and presentation of the journal, but also how often it is published, how it is circulated, the way in which the budget is managed, who participates in putting it together and how it is managed.

When planning a journal, the editor (or editorial board) must also decide in what format it will be. The actual look of the journal will depend on the company's corporate image, culture and budget. Editors can choose from a wide variety of formats including a conventional A3 newspaper or a glossy A4 magazine. Fanson (1994:25) writes that publications that are not properly planned, fail.

She lists the most common reasons for failure as:

- An unattractive appearance
- Boring headlines
- Too much type and not enough visuals

- Distribution to the wrong audience
- Too many errors
- A writing style that does not suit the readership
- Articles that are not interesting
- A publication that has an amateurish appearance
- A publication that does not use colour
- A publication that does not feature interesting or effective articles.

Planning also involves the finer details such as setting up a detailed production schedule, budgeting, creating a distribution channel, as well as planning the sourcing of material (copy and visuals), layout, design, production and printing.

4.2.2 Content

Using an in-house journal effectively is one of the most demanding communication jobs in a company. An editor must be constantly aware of what is happening in the company. If the editor feels that a certain report should be published in the interest of the company, he/she has to be able to persuade senior management to do so (Kandler, 2001).

Even though an in-house journal is paid for by the company, this does not justify using it as a propaganda tool for management. It is important to write articles that are as unbiased as possible and not promotional items. Editors must write to reflect and express and not to impress (cf. Kandler, 2001).

Irvine (1970:257) suggests that content-wise an effective in-house journal would be:

- A tool of management and aid communication
- A publication with a format and general appearance subordinate to topicality and relevance
- As topical as modern techniques will allow
- Relevant to the situation in the company
- A reinforcement of authority of senior management
- Written in straightforward language.

The writing style must be kept casual, non-technical and conversational. Editors must never assume that readers know things such as abbreviations or dates.

Articles must be written with a specific objective. Articles in an in-house journal are used to rally employees toward a common goal, provide recognition, improve morale and reduce turnover, for example. Kandler (2001) adds that articles can also be used to educate readers (see 3.3.3.2).

Abbott (2002), author of *A manager's guide to newsletters* and founder of The Newsletter Company based in the US, says the following are ways of using an in-house journal:

- Promote a company's philosophy or vision (see 3.2.1)
- Report changes in such a philosophy or vision
- Announce changes in company policy and procedure
- Inform employees of changes in management or staff
- Recognise special contributions or achievements by employees
- Welcome new employees
- Report on any changes in benefit packages

- Deal with frequent questions or complaints about benefits
- Explain the introduction and implementation of new technology (see 3.3.5)
- Improve job-related skills or expertise
- Introduce or encourage employee ownership of their work
- Prepare staff for new sales initiatives
- Help employees handle sensitive enquiries
- Introduce new products and services
- Maintain contact with distant branches
- Encourage health and fitness improvement
- Focus on safety issues and awareness
- Provide information about customers
- Gather ideas for productivity improvement
- Improve inter-office co-operation and co-ordination (communication).

When it comes to contents, Ferreira and Staude (1991:42) say that humour, competitions and an editorial column will help to create interest in the publication.

They also argue that employee profiles could provide interesting information (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:42). Another easy way to get copy is to have a letters page where readers can really air their view on contentious decisions or tricky situations within the company (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:42).

Abbott (2002) adds that an in-house journal must:

- Be appealing to readers. Since they don't pay for it, it must be interesting enough for them to pick it up and read it
- Convey messages from senior management without it sounding like marketing propaganda (see 3.2.3.1). It must be information that employees can use and that inform them on what is happening within the company
- Inform employees about their colleagues' successes. The focus must be placed on all employees, not only on either managers or workers
- Report on the company's progress. Employees need facts to be able to work at their best, even if the information is negative
- Be informative on general issues. An employee newsletter must not only focus on work. It can include several additional articles focusing on topics such as lifestyle, entertainment and sport
- Report back on issues previously covered
- Be professional in its layout and presentation
- Present appealing front page articles – not the CEO's message
- Be used as a company asset. Articles must have results, be it to motivate, educate or to inform employees
- Be suitable to the company: the correct size, layout and look
- Be distributed effectively
- Be published regularly.

However, just as there are aspects that must be covered in a journal, so there are topics to avoid (Adler, 2002). These would include issues such as the history of the company, minutes of the annual meeting and recipes and household hints.

In view of the above, the following theoretical statement can be formulated:

Theoretical statement 3

An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).

4.2.3 Budget

Just like any other publication, an in-house journal must have a budget (Brigham, 1991:25). Blake and Stein (1992:5) identify the following considerations for an in-house journal budget:

- Time spent on the publication: Staff must be paid a salary while working on the in-house journal
- Production costs: Producing an in-house journal within a company can be cost-effective if employees have the appropriate skills to publish the desired quality publication. But should a company decide, for example, to produce a 48-page glossy colour magazine, it either needs to employ a qualified person or to outsource the publication to a professional consultant. Both are more expensive options, but in the long run can be more cost-effective, as those involved will know the production processes and produce a publication without any major problems
- The quality of the publication: A four-page black and white A4 newsletter is significantly cheaper to produce than a 32-page glossy full-colour A4 magazine. The use of photographs and illustrations could also add to the cost.

4.2.4 Production schedule

An in-house journal should have a set production schedule to ensure that it is published on the dates it promised to be out (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:101). This production schedule should include when copy must be in, when it must be subbed, when the layout must be done (or copy sent to the production company for layout), dates for first and second proofs, deadlines when to go to print as well as a final delivery deadline. Without such a detailed production schedule, the in-house journal is at risk of appearing late – especially if publishing it is just one aspect of the responsible person's job.

4.2.5 Language

A company must decide what language it will use for its in-house journal (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:26). In most cases in South Africa English is used as the official business language of a company since most people normally understand the language and therefore the in-house journal is published in English. It is too expensive to produce in-house journals in all the languages that people speak (where there are 11 official languages in South Africa). However, in some cases, because of history, companies tend to have the majority of people speaking another language – for example, Afrikaans. The possibility is therefore either to use both languages in the publication (as Absa did in *Abacus* between 1999 and 2003) or to produce a publication entirely in both the preferred languages (as is the case with Sanlam's *Sandaba* (see 10.3.3.1). This, however, places significant strain on a publication's budget,

as additional language practitioners will have to be employed and the design and printing would be doubled.

Care must be taken to ensure that all employees will be able to understand both languages if more than one are used in a publication.

4.2.6 Title

Too often, editors decide to base their journal's title on the company's name, rather than something that might draw in more readers (Kandler, 2001).

The selection of the in-house journal's name has a definite influence on defining its style and character (Fanson, 1994:8). When deciding on a name, the editor must keep the publication's format, look and feel, as well as the intended audience in mind. The name should immediately bring to mind the subject or the source of the in-house journal. Original, short, lively names are easier to remember.

Ferreira and Staude (1990:24-25) give certain guidelines on choosing a name for a newsletter. It must:

- Be unique
- Preferably be a simple, single, short word
- Have a bearing on the company
- Indicate its connection with publication or communication
- Lend itself to good graphic design.

The next step would be to design an appropriate mast-head incorporating this name. A masthead should include the name of the journal, publication date, volume and issue number. Naming the journal and designing the masthead are two of the most important decisions that must be made, as it will set the tone for the publication (Blake & Stein, 1992:13).

4.2.7 Paper

Paper can have a significant influence not only on the look of the publication, but also on the production cost. Bivins (1993:17) writes that weight, texture and colour all combine to give an in-house journal a specific "look". Heavy, textured papers usually impart higher quality. Bivins warns against using dark or brightly coloured paper, saying it is difficult to read and overall it looks unprofessional.

A study in Finland in 2004 by paper manufacturers M-Real found that readers unconsciously evaluate the quality of a magazine based on the quality of paper used (Anon, 1998).

Other issues that influence paper quality are brightness (the paper's ability to reflect light), whiteness (the ability to reflect all colours of light equally), holdout (the ability to hold ink uniformly on the paper's surface), opacity (the ability to hold an image without it showing through on the other side of the sheet) and finish (the smoothness of the paper, or gloss or matte finish for example) (Sappi, 2005).

4.2.8 Design

When designing an in-house journal, one of the most important considerations is that it must look professional. The layout and design must also suit the culture of the company (see 2.3.2.12). Kandler (2001) summarises this important truth as follows:

Decide ahead of time on the design and then stick to it. Create a style guide if necessary to assist in maintaining the style and the “look” of the magazine.

In-house journals offer a wide variety of design possibilities. Design is one of the most important elements when publishing an in-house journal. However, “designing an in-house journal is a matter of understatement, not overstatement” (Bivins, 1993:32).

The designer must keep the audience in mind, so that the design suits them. There must be a good balance between copy, visuals and white space.

The proportion of photographs/graphics can also make or break a design.

In the end all the different design elements must form a unity.

Studies show that headlines are the second-strongest design element on a page (Swift, 1999). They are there to attract and introduce readers to an article. They must motivate people to read the story.

For example, consideration must be given to how headlines will be used: will they only form part of the text or will they also contribute to the overall design of a page? (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Examples of headlines not only conveying the essence of the article, but also contributing to the overall design of the pages.

It is, however, not only the design that makes or breaks a headline. Swift (1999) argues that a badly written headline could mean that people do not read the article, whereas a good one will attract their attention.

Design incorporates all issues such as a predefined style (how layout will be done in a consistent manner). This would involve the use of elements such as headlines, sub-headlines, introductory paragraphs, fact boxes, pictures, pull quotes and cross-headlines (Garcia, 1993:16). Cross-headlines specifically would help to ensure that the reader does not get “bored” with just copy. They also provide more information on articles (Garcia, 1993:16). These cross-headlines help readers find information in a long article (Froneman, 2002:169). The specific combination of all these different design elements will create a certain look and feel which is unique to every publication. As one can see from the samples below, the design of all five publications studied differs significantly in that some were A3 newspapers while others were A4 magazines.



Figure 4.2: The cover pages of the five different in-house journals used in this study, showing the different designs depending on whether they were newspapers (*Harmonise*, *Sandaba* and *Abacus*) or magazines (*PnP* and *HTF*).

4.2.8.1 Size and grid

The first thing that must be decided before publishing an in-house journal is what size it is going to be. Is it going to be a standard A3 newspaper, a glossy A4 magazine or any other format, for example a square layout, such as the one *Sandaba* uses (see Figure 4.3)? The budget for the newsletter will also have an impact on this decision. An A4 glossy magazine is more expensive to produce than an A3 black-and-white newspaper.



Figure 4.3: *Sandaba*'s square format.



Figure 4.4: The magazine look of *HTF* compared to the newspaper look of *Abacus*.

Once a decision has been made on the size, the basic design of the newsletter can be done. Absa's *Abacus* is an A3 newspaper with a typical newspaper design, while MTN opted for an A4 magazine in *HTF* (see Figure 4.4).

The smaller the journal, the fewer columns are needed, or else the publication will look too cluttered. Ferreira and Staude (1991:29) explain that wider columns give a more relaxed feeling, but that columns that are too wide can become boring. For an A4 publication they recommend two, three or four columns, but never one. The best option, according to them, is three columns. Some publications, such as MTN's *HTF*, uses an "in-between" grid of two-and-a-half columns, using the half column either for quotes, graphics or white space (see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: The five-column grid of *Harmonise* compared to the three-and-a-half column grid of HTF.

A3 publications typically have more columns, between five and seven, such as *Harmonise* (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:29). The same grid need not be used throughout a publication, it can be alternated as part of the overall design plan (Bivins, 1993:23).

4.2.8.2 Colour

Colour is another important design element. Brigham (1991:147) writes that colour must be used sparingly. It must be used to highlight layout, not disrupt it. Colour must also be used consistently – especially when it comes to body copy, which she insists should be black.

In-house journals can be printed in full colour, with colour only on certain pages with the remainder in black, or only in black. The size, style, and once again budget, will have a significant impact on this decision. The more colour is used, the more expensive it is.

Although the use of full colour throughout the entire publication is definitely more attractive, it must be used with careful consideration. Studies in the US have proved that readers prefer black and white above too colourful pages (Froneman, 2002:171). Too much colour can also destroy the look and feel of a publication (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23).

Colour must be used for distinction, identification, status, symbolism and direction, making it easier for the reader to understand the articles.

Many companies these days prefer to use their corporate colour(s) as the dominant colour of the publication, as is evident in *Harmonise* and *Sandaba*. However, careful consideration should be given to this to avoid looking like a marketing brochure (see Part II Introduction) (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: Examples of the obvious use of corporate colours in in-house journals.

4.2.8.3 Visuals

The first thing to attract a reader would be the visual elements – be it photographs, illustrations or graphics (Fanson, 1994:113; Froneman, 2002:184). Fanson (1994:113) says that a good story-telling photograph can express more than a page full of text – it adds interest and tone to a publication, helps establish priorities, and reinforces important ideas. Studies (Garcia, 1993:4; Ferreira & Staude, 1991:89) show that when readers view a page, they usually look at photographs first, headlines second and captions third.

Some photographic ideas for in-house journals could include:

- A day in the life of an employee
- A picture essay on some of the company's achievers
- A picture essay on how products are made
- A photograph explaining service procedures
- Comparison of photos from ten years previously with current ones
- New employees
- Photos of competition winners
- Sport teams
- Before and after photographs (buildings).

There are many ways of using visuals in an in-house journal, as can be seen from Figure 4.7.



Figure 4.7: Examples of different ways to use visuals. Pictures can be used in a square format (left) or creative uses, such as deep-etching (right), can be incorporated.

It is also advisable that one should use at least one graphic per page – and that pictures and graphics should be enhanced if necessary to make them visually more appealing (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:100). The current trend seems to be to use fewer, but more prominent visuals.

Bivins (1993:81) mentions several design elements that improve the look of an in-house journal that are not necessarily “graphic”. These include drop capitals, pull quotes, type as art, reverse blocks as well as rules, boxes and tinted boxes.

4.2.8.3.1 Captions

Since pictures normally attract readers' attention first, the accompanying caption must be well written to ensure that the reader would continue to be interested and read the article. Caption writing, however, is a difficult craft that is often neglected by journalists and designers (Swift, 1999; Harris, Leiter & Johnson, 1992:181). Captions must not just state the obvious, but must be well thought out, on the one hand, to tell the reader what is going on in the photograph, and on the other, to link it to the article. All people appearing in a photograph must be correctly identified. Caption writing can be made significantly easier if all the correct information is supplied to the journalist or editor by the photographer responsible for the photograph (Swift, 1999).

4.2.8.4 Typeface

There are thousands of different typefaces that could be used in an in-house journal (Bivins, 1993:62). These are broadly divided into serif and sans serif fonts. Bivins recommends using only one typeface for body copy. However, some publications use a serif font for normal body copy, while a sans serif is used on blocks and for captions (Davis, 1993:18; Froneman, 2002:176) (see Figure 4.8). Garcia (1993:52) adds to this by saying that the typeface creates the first impression of a page. It is therefore important to choose one that portrays the image of the publication. Typeface must be consistent throughout the publication. He also says that a huge contributing factor in the choice of typeface is what people are used to see, which is often a serif typeface (Garcia, 1993:65).



Figure 4.8: Examples of different fonts used in some of the publications studied.

The size (normally around 10 pt) and leading of the typeface (which should not be too much or too little) will have an impact on the overall look of a page as well as the readability of text (Froneman, 2002:177). Certain typefaces are more suitable for body copy than others, while the same is true of headlines (see Figure 4.8). Justification of text will also have an effect on the overall look of the publication (Froneman, 2002:177).

Some of the more popular fonts, according to Bivins (1993:62), are:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Times Roman | Body copy and display |
| Bookman | Body copy and display |
| Goudy | Body copy and display |
| Baskerville | Body copy and display |
| Palatino | Body copy |
| Avant Garde | Display |
| Futura | Display |
| Helvetica Regular | Body copy and display |
| Helvetica Light | Body copy |
| <i>Helvetica Oblique</i> | Body copy |
| Helvetica Black | Display |
| Helvetica Condensed | Display |
| Helvetica Black Condensed | Display |

4.2.8.5 Layout

Layout differs from design in that it refers to the actual bringing together of the various elements of a newsletter (Bivins, 1993:135). With today's desktop layout programmes, layout has become much easier.

It is good to have a sound perception of what one expects from layout before one even starts. Bivins (1993:144) recommends first creating a "dummy" layout of the journal before finalising what the layout will look like.

4.2.8.6 Headlines

An article's headline is one of the most important elements, since it attracts a reader to a story or not. As Harriss *et al.* (1992:506) put it, "headlines are, in a sense, an advertisement for the story". A magazine can be very well designed, but if the headlines are not well written, then readers will not read the articles (Swift, 1999). As Swift (1999) says: "the basic idea is to hook readers and draw them into the story".

Headlines should be short, written in the present tense, reflect the story and be specific. Therefore, a good headline tells accurately what a story is about and it draws the reader's attention to the story (Swift, 1999; Harriss *et al.*, 1992:506).

4.2.8.7 Sub-editing

Every publication must be edited to ensure that typographical, spelling and grammatical errors are corrected, and that articles are written in the predetermined style of the publication. Good sub-editing will also ensure that articles read easily and their messages are clear (Froneman, 2002:136). Sub-editing must also include headlines, captions and graphics that include text.

4.2.9 Reproduction and printing

Deciding on the reproduction and printing process will also have an influence on what the final product will look like.

A company can decide to produce an in-house journal completely in-house, making use of desktop publishing software and printing the journal on a local printer, or a professional reproduction company can be employed to do the final layout and professional printers used to print the publication.

If professional printers are used, sheet-fed litho printing is normally used, as web printing would not be suitable for the smaller runs that are typical of in-house journals.

4.2.10 Distribution

One can have the best publication in the world, with outstanding articles and brilliant design, but if people do not receive it, all the effort goes to waste. Distribution can make or break a publication. It is important that an effective and timeous way of distributing the journal is implemented (Bivins, 1993:160).

Journals can be distributed to employees in the following ways:

- Hand it to them personally
- Attach it to their payslips
- Place it in pigeonholes
- Mail it to their homes
- Leave it at certain points for employees to take copies for themselves.

Each of these methods has its pros and cons. Some are more costly than others, but management can then be sure that employees do receive the in-house journal (attaching it to payslips), while others are cheaper (leaving it at certain collection points) but it relies on the individual to take a publication.

4.3. SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLICATION FORUM IN-HOUSE JOURNAL CRITERIA

The SA Publication Forum uses a set list of criteria for judging in-house journals (Forum, 2004). Many of these criteria have already been discussed.

The first aspect the judges look at when analysing a publication entered in the annual corporate publication competition, is the quality of writing. The judges require proper language use and originality and creativity in headlines, captions and introductory paragraphs.

The judges also consider how effectively (in their judgement) the publication communicates issues. They specifically look at how the general image of the company is portrayed, if articles reflect the publication's objectives, whether articles are original, newsworthy and appropriate, if there is a balance between articles (e.g. long vs. short, serious vs. funny), if the publication keeps the target audience in mind and if the publication invites reader participation.

When it comes to layout and design, the major focus areas would be whether a combination of design elements are used creatively to attract readers to articles, in what way layout contributes to the understanding of the articles, if layout and design make articles more accessible to readers and whether the publication has an original style and personality.

The forum's judges also specifically look at the quality of photographs, how they are used and whether they contribute to the understanding of the articles they accompany.

4.4 SUMMARY

From the literature studied (both local and international), one can create a list of technical criteria for an excellent in-house journal. These could be summarised as follows:

- It is properly planned
- It has a detailed budget
- It has a pre-planned production schedule
- It has appropriate content
- It has an appropriate title
- Suitable paper is used
- Its design is attractive and suitable
- Appropriate typefaces are used for headlines and body copy
- Its layout is professional
- It features creative headlines and captions
- It uses good quality visuals
- It is well edited
- It is distributed efficiently.

The following points can be added from the contribution made by the SA Publication Forum:

- Proper writing skills and editing are important
- The publication must communicate company matters efficiently
- Design and layout must suit the publication
- Proper use must be made of visual elements.

In view of the above, the following theoretical statement can be made:

Theoretical statement 4

Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).

In the next chapter, the research methods used will be explained, as well as why they are suitable for this study.

Part I

Chapter 5

RESEARCH METHOD

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a description of the various research methods used in this study as well as the reason why they were chosen, will be discussed.

This is a qualitative study where research methods such as a literature study, content analysis and semi-structured interviews were used to help the researcher understand what is involved in the production of in-house journals in South Africa – including, but not limited to, issues such as management, the influence of environments as well as content and technical criteria.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was conducted in two very distinct phases. Firstly, literature was studied to compile the theoretical base for the study and to compile certain theoretical statements that had to be tested in the empirical part of the project.

The five specific theoretical statements based on the literature study that had to be tested were:

1. *Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.*
2. *An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).*
3. *An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).*
4. *Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).*

In the next phase of the research project, the five case studies (see 5.4.1.2.2) were analysed using content analysis (see 5.4.1). Once this information had been interpreted, interviews were conducted with the various editors since this allowed the researcher to discuss all the relevant issues pertaining to a specific publication.

5.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research methods were chosen, since the aim of the study was not only to determine what South African in-house journals publish, but why they do it and how they do it. This could only be done by looking at all aspects influencing the publication of an in-house journal – from the management of the publication as well as the environmental influences on it, to the content and technical aspects of publishing an in-house journal.

5.3.1 Towards defining qualitative research

Qualitative research methods can be defined as:

An enquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 1994:1).

Qualitative research makes use of observations that are difficult to quantify (Babbie, 1989:261). For example, the number of times a certain issue appeared in a journal is not necessarily important, but rather whether it was covered and what level of prominence it was given. Qualitative observation techniques usually involve intensive observation of only a few units – meaning an intense analysis of only a selected number of issues of each publication (Broom & Dozier, 1990:143). Therefore, the aim of qualitative research is to understand a specific phenomenon (Naudé, 2001).

However, because only a few issues are involved, reliable representative sampling might be difficult to achieve. Most qualitative observation techniques nevertheless gather detailed information from a few cases studied, which often gives a more comprehensive overview of what is studied. This is exactly what was done in this study, where only selected issues of the five publications were analysed.

Qualitative research also has as an aim not to test theory but rather to “build” or attribute to theory as it evolves from the qualitative research process. Naudé (2001:96) writes that the end product of qualitative research could therefore often be a new theory or an addition to existing theory. Geertz (1973:27) points out, however, that the qualitative researcher does not always begin “intellectually empty-handed”, meaning that the researcher cannot disregard existing theories or theoretical ideas developed by other researchers. Although a qualitative study could therefore include theory from the start, it is important to ensure that the research process is not constrained by the theory (Naudé, 2001:96). Naudé adds that:

The theory need not fit a particular situation perfectly in order to be useful for a qualitative research project. Rather, a theory could be adapted and elaborated on, or applied in a new situation to contribute to theory building.

This is the scenario in this study. Although the researcher created a theoretical base in Part I by using a literature study, the qualitative research done in Part II will add to and adapt this initial theory to one that suits the research topic – in-house journals.

5.3.2 Challenges

Qualitative research poses two major challenges – reliability and validity.

5.3.2.1 Reliability

Reliability is probably the biggest challenge that has to be overcome in any qualitative study. Reliability refers to whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object (in this case an analysis of in-house journals), would yield the same results each time.

Therefore, should another researcher repeat this study using the same methods, datasheets and questionnaire (Smith, 1988:263-264; Holsti, 1988:264), he/she must achieve (at least to a significant extent) the same results.

There are three factors that influence reliability – the timing of the research, the research method used and the researcher (Huysamen, 1993:123).

- *Timing*

Timing refers to the fact that a researcher must focus on one aspect of the research at a time. If this is not done, the researcher could fall in the trap of not using exactly the same method throughout (Huysamen, 1993:123). In this study, each publication was analysed in its totality before the next one was started, thereby striving to ensure that the same process was followed with each publication.

- *Triangulation*

To ensure reliability in terms of research method, triangulation was used. Triangulation can be explained as subjecting a hypothesis to a series of complementary methods of testing (Campbell & Fiske, 1959:56). Triangulation can also be described as referring, for example, to the inclusion of multiple sources of data collection in a research project, to increase the reliability and validity of the results. By using more than one source of data, it becomes possible to compensate for the limitation of one method (Fortner & Christians, 1981:380-381; Janesick, 1994:215; Fielding & Fielding, 1986:24). The aim of triangulation is to build a fully rounded analysis of a research phenomenon by combining all the lines of attack, each one only revealing certain aspects of the issue at hand (De Beer, 1980:28).

In this study, triangulation was achieved by using various research methods (interviews, literature study and content analysis) and sources (the in-house journals, local and international literature, the SA Publication Forum and editors). Reliable research methods that overlapped (and could therefore verify results obtained from one another) were therefore used.

- *The researcher*

In qualitative research, writes Naudé (2001:95), the researcher can be described as a research instrument. For example, the researcher had to conduct the literature study, content analysis and conduct the interviews with the editors. Throughout these various processes the researcher could adapt the methods, which would not have been possible if assistants had been used, since they would have needed specific instructions (Naudé, 2001:96).

Because the researcher conducted all the research, several steps were taken to ensure that the information obtained was reliable. By having only one researcher, all the research methods were applied in the same manner to all the in-house journals studied. A predetermined datasheet for every publication and a set of predetermined questions for the interviews were also used to ensure that the researcher analysed all the issues in the same manner, and obtained the same type of information from the editors (see Appendix A and

B). The researcher had to classify articles based on specific characteristics. Articles were classified based on their overall meaning/topic.

Throughout the research process, the researcher had to remain “objective” to ensure reliability. Social research can probably never be totally objective, since researchers are humanly subjective. According to Babbie (1989:485), various steps can, however, be taken to ensure research is as objective as possible. Kirk and Millar (1986:20) define objectivity as the “simultaneous realisation of as much reliability and validity as possible”. They recommend careful documentation of research procedures, as well as a systematic progression through certain basic phases of research to remain objective.

The only publication where there was a real possibility of the researcher not being objective, is MTN’s HTF. The researcher was personally responsible for the editing and production of HTF between 2001 and 2002, when she worked for publishing consultancy Fox Publishing. By clearly explaining to the editor that he had to assume that she did not know any details with regard to how HTF was managed and published, the researcher tried to be as unbiased and accurate as possible by assuming she knew the details from the editor’s explanation. HTF’s editor agreed to this and explained everything in detail, as all the other editors did.

5.3.2.2 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which a measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration (Babbie, 1989:124). As Huysamen (1993:117) puts it, the research tools must measure what they are supposed to measure.

One could use very reliable research methods and obtain reliable and objective results without these being valid. For example, the most important validity criteria for this study would be whether the information obtained is really proof of how excellent in-house journals in South Africa are managed, what they publish and how they do it.

It is for this reason that the five case studies were carefully selected from a group of publications (all SA Publication Forum award winners) that had been acknowledged by industry as being “excellent” and leaders in their field (see 5.4.1.2.2).

The various research instruments used also contributed to validity, since they were deduced from a sound theoretical base as well as from guidelines by practitioners stated in literature (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001). These instruments can therefore be described as valid, since according to literature, the issues that they investigate/measure are relevant to the industry. The content analysis determined publishing trends (both content and technical), while the interviews provided detailed information on issues such as publication management. The literature study provided information on theoretical criteria and the environment in which South African in-house journals function.

5.3.2.3 Other challenges

The other major challenge experienced in this study (apart from drawing samples, which is explained in 5.4.1.2.2), was the fact that in the period between the time when approval was received from Harmony to be included in the project and collecting the magazines for analysis and setting up the interview with the editor, the publication was closed down. *Harmonise* could not be used as a case study if a reliable source on the management and production of the publication could not be found. However, once publishing consultancy WordsWorth agreed to assist by giving all the information it had, it was decided to keep the publication as a case study since it proved to be a good in-house journal, regardless of the fact that Harmony decided to cease publication of *Harmonise*.

5.4 METHOD

For the empirical part of the study qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews were used.

5.4.1 Content analysis

A content analysis was used to determine publishing trends in the five in-house journals. These trends were then used to answer the fourth and fifth research questions:

4. How and to what extent do excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?

5. What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

Content analysis is a formal research tool that can be used to reach more scientific conclusions about content of newspapers, books, advertising, magazines or television. This research tool can be used to determine the presence of certain words, themes or concepts and to make inferences about their meaning (Stempel & Westley, 1981).

Content analysis is essentially a coding operation. Communications are coded or classified according to some conceptual framework (Huysamen, 1993:146). In this study, the criteria were set out for an excellent in-house journal, using literature as well as the judging criteria of the SA Publication Forum.

Content analysis coding can focus on latent or manifest content. Manifest content is the visible surface content, while latent content is the underlying meaning of the communication/messages/articles (Babbie, 1989:298). In this study, the focus was on both the manifest and latent content. The reason for this is that the researcher is of the opinion that one cannot only count certain manifest words to obtain the latent meaning of the articles. For that reason, the focus in this study was not only on simply counting articles, but on determining the latent meaning of these articles. In this study, the content was not the only focus of the analysis, but how the content was presented was also studied.

Babbie (1989:300) writes that no coding scheme should be used in content analysis until it has been carefully pre-tested. He suggests that one determines the coding rules and then does some actual coding before going ahead with the study. In this study exactly this was done.

Although, in many cases, the end result of a content analysis is to have a numerical representation of what was analysed (Babbie, 1989:300), it is not the case in this study. Qualitative content analysis differs from quantitative content analysis because of different techniques of measuring and less emphasis that is placed on frequency as the only indicator of meaning (Naudé, 2001:100). For example, the mere presence or absence of a certain element can have very specific meaning. The aim would therefore be to determine how these results support or differ from the theory that was used as guideline for the analysis (Naudé, 2001:101).

Certain results from the content analysis are indeed reflected numerically (a rounded-off percentage was used to indicate how many articles focused on a specific topic), but the numbers were used to determine publishing trends and not to stipulate specifically what was published. Other contributing factors, such as the prominence of the topics (printed on the cover or used on a full page, for example) were rather taken into account. The results from the technical analysis, for example, did not make use at all of numerical representation.

5.4.1.1 Strengths and weaknesses of content analysis

According to Babbie (1989:308) the greatest advantage of content analysis is its economy in terms of both time and money especially if a sample is drawn. A single researcher can conduct an analysis and there is no requirement for a large staff or special equipment.

It is repeatable, which is helpful if a mistake happens. That specific element can be re-analysed instead of travelling or interviewing a person again (which implies additional cost). Content analysis also allows processes occurring over a long period of time to be studied. In this case only five years were studied, but it made it easier to structure the research to cover the entire period. Furthermore, content analysis is an unintrusive research method, allowing the researcher to work on the analysis without being dependent on publishers or editors.

On the downside content analysis could have reliability and validity problems. In this study several steps were taken to avoid these problems, such as working chronologically and having a set analysis sheet for every individual publication studied.

5.4.1.2 Sampling

To ensure that content analysis retains its time-saving character (see 5.4.1.1), sampling can be used to clearly define which aspects of the topic at hand will be studied or even, which publications will be studied.

In this study, not all the publications published by the five companies between 1999 and 2003 were analysed. Instead, only a selected number of journals was analysed to ensure the analysis was limited to a workable amount. The reason why only a sample was used, was that the intention of the study was to determine publishing trends and not exact statistical data on what issues appeared. Sampling is a suitable way of limiting the number of publications analysed. A sample is a subset of a population, stakeholders or in this case, journals. Boskin and Aronoff (1988:110) write that public relations researchers use samples because in most instances, it is impractical to collect information from all sources, as is relevant to this study.

5.4.1.2.1 Methods of sampling

There are numerous sampling techniques, but the best methods, Boskin and Aronoff (1988:111) write, rely on the theory of probability to provide a miniature version of the research topic.

Stratified random sampling is a two-stage process that offers an equal chance for each member (or journal) to be selected, but from a numbered list.

Boskin and Aronoff (1988:112) write that stratified random sampling first divides stakeholders into mutually exclusive categories (for example the five different publishing years – as was done in this study) and then randomly selects samples from each stratum (Huysamen, 1993:42). This method is used to ensure that each subgroup of a particular stakeholder group is adequately represented in the sample.

Random sampling refers to the fact that any publication must have the same chance of being selected as any other one. Huysamen (1993:41) argues that to be able to draw a random sample, two elements must be present. The first must be that each member (or in this case issue) must be numbered chronologically. Secondly the issues must be selected through a mechanism that will ensure an equal chance of being selected.

5.4.1.2.2 Drawing the sample

In this study, stratified random sampling was used to select the issues for the content analysis. Issues did not need to be numbered as they already had issue numbers based on their date of issue (dates are chronological as well). The random sampling function in Microsoft Excel was then used to select the issues. Since a computer program was used to draw it, each issue had an equal chance of being selected.

There is no pre-described correct size for samples, which makes selecting the sample size very difficult. It was decided to select three issues a year of four of the case studies (*Harmonise*, HTF, PnP and *Sandaba*) (each publishing 11 issues a year). Although *Abacus* published more issues (23 a year), it was decided to select only four issues a year, as the intention of the analysis, as already pointed out, was to determine overall publication trends and not detailed statistics.

5.4.1.2.3 The selection of the five case studies

Since the aim of this study was to determine what the characteristics of excellent in-house journals in South Africa are, it was necessary to use in-house journals that could be described as “excellent” or “leaders” in the industry. By analysing publications that are regarded, or acknowledged, as leaders in their field, the information obtained can then be presented to the rest of the industry as what can/or should be done to produce an “excellent” in-house journal in South Africa. The decision was made to select only publications that received awards at the SA Publication Forum’s annual corporate publication competition in 2002 and/or 2003 (the only two years during the study period that these awards were given), as this was the only formal measure of excellence for in-house journals in South Africa at the time of the study. Five publications were randomly chosen, from different sectors of the industry. Editors were then contacted and the ones who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study. These are Absa’s *Abacus* (a bank), Harmony’s *Harmonise* (a mining company), MTN’s HTF (a cellphone operator), Pick ’n Pay’s PnP (a supermarket chain) and Sanlam’s *Sandaba* (a financial services provider). Only publications published after 1999 until the end of 2003 were used in this study. If a company only started publishing a newsletter after 1999, the study started from there. The reason for this period is that it involved recent issues, but with a workable and specific cut-off date.

5.4.1.2.4 Challenges

The major challenge with regard to sampling was that once a sample was drawn, it proved in some cases that an individual issue that was selected by the computer, was not available. In such a case, the following, or prior, edition was used. This was to ensure that the number of copies analysed per year remained the same. In the case of *Abacus*, some issues of 2003 were not available, although more than half were. Four issues from this year were selected randomly for the analysis.

5.4.1.3 The datasheet

A datasheet was compiled for the content analysis. The datasheet is based on information collected from the chapters on the internal and external environments companies operate in, as well as the technical aspects relevant to publishing in-house journals (see Chapters 3 and 4).

A datasheet was created and tested on several in-house journals published by leading companies operating in South Africa. These include *Eskom News* (Eskom), *Bambanani* (Total), *Inflow* (Sasol) and *Forum* (Nedcor). The datasheet was adapted several times to include all the relevant elements and issues.

The researcher found, through testing the datasheet, that, in some cases certain categories were too broad (too many different articles could fall in the same category, for example). Consequently, the categories were better defined. When it came to measuring references to the external environment, it was found that the initial sub-categories were too detailed. These smaller categories were then combined, which simplified the coding process and also eliminated the problem of a host of categories that were not used.

By testing the datasheet, technical aspects, such as design elements, were recorded. In this case as well, certain elements such as pull quotes, which were originally omitted, were added to the sheet.

- *Category guidelines for the content analysis*

The category guidelines helped the researcher to take all relevant aspects of in-house journals into account. No codes were given to any of these categories. The criteria used, for both the internal and external categories included in the content analysis, were based on the findings from the literature study (see 3.3 and 4.2.2).

In the case of the management, internal environment, company and two-way communication categories, articles of which the overall theme covered one of the issues were categorised as such.

These categories included:

- Vision/mission – focus on the vision/mission of the company, or any changes
- Policy/procedure – focus on policy and procedure issues as well as any changes
- Strategic planning – explanation of any changes or decisions made by senior management
- Staff/management changes/appointments – focus on any staff change, from only mentioning changes to publishing more comprehensive articles
- Employee contributions – focus on any contributions employees make to the company, its operations, products or services
- Package changes – explanation of what changes are made and why
- Technology in use – explanation of new technology used in the company, how it works and how it will influence operations and help employees
- Skills – focus on specific skills needed for specific tasks
- New initiatives – explanation of new initiatives by senior management to improve the company, its services or products
- Sensitive queries – discussion of sensitive queries such as the company dress code
- Products/services – introduction or discussion of new or existing products and services
- Branches – focus on what is happening in branches and divisions
- Customer information/service – focus on customer-related issues
- Productivity improvement – focus on ways to improve productivity
- Editorials
- Letters

- Competitions – any competition hosted by either the publication or the company
- Company projects – updates on new or existing projects
- Message from the CEO
- Company news/achievements – report on overall company news and achievements (not at branch or division level)
- Humour – humorous articles or cartoons
- Employee profile – articles profiling individual employees
- Communication – focus on internal company communication
- Marketing – focus on marketing events, initiatives or projects
- Safety – focus on safety measures and achievements relevant to company operations

The same coding criteria used for internal environmental issues were used for external environment issues

- Arts and culture – all references to these topics, especially projects in which companies were involved
- Education and training – report on employee education and training projects as well as external ones in the community
- General health – report on issues such as medical aid and healthy living
- HIV/Aids and STDs – report on projects and awareness campaigns
- Diseases – report on diseases such as cancer and TB
- Occupational health – report on health issues relevant to people’s jobs
- Crime – any crime-related article
- Social development – articles referring to social development in general, and specifically initiatives in which the company was involved
- Sport and recreation – sport and recreation events inside and outside (sponsored by) the company
- Politics – report on the country’s political news and how it influences the company
- Economy – focus on the general South African economy
- Industry sectors – focus on the specific industry sector in which the company operates
- Ecological matters – report on projects related to the environment
- Technology – report on technology available (but not specifically used in the company)
- Legal matters – report on any legal and regulatory issues

When it came to the technical aspects of in-house journals, the use of certain elements was noted, but not counted. Any unique use – for example the use of colour in pull quotes, or a change in headline design – was specifically noted. This information was later compiled and discussed in the relevant chapters. The technical categories were (see 4.2):

- Fact boxes – text boxes accompanying articles that explain, or elaborate, on a specific aspect or issue in the articles
- Pictures – photographs used – be it photographs taken specifically for the publication, or stock photography
- Graphics – all other visuals used in the publication

- Headlines style – specifically focusing on the type, colour and size used as well as any other creative usage of headlines
- Main colour on cover
- Subheads – whether these are used or not, and if they are used appropriately. Their style, in terms of type, colour and size, was also noted
- Introductory paragraphs – their use or absence was noted, as well as whether they were used appropriately
- Colours used – in both text, frames, graphics and pictures
- Size and grid – the actual size and grid of the publication were noted
- Teasers – it was noted whether these were used on the front cover of the publication, and how many, to attract readers to the inside copy
- Pull quotes – quotes inserted in copy as a visual element. Their presence or absence was noted, as well as their style in terms of type, colour and size.

5.4.1.4 Reporting the results

Results of the content analysis (represented in tables in each chapter) were calculated to represent certain percentages. The n-value for both the overall and front cover results is given in brackets to indicate the total number of articles. Results will be given, for example as 25% (25, n=100).

These results were used to determine to what extent the various publications, through their news agenda, complied with the theoretical statements used in this study.

The content of the case studies is discussed in four divisions – content showing management support, covering external and internal (newsletter) matters as well as content encouraging two-way symmetrical communication. The information obtained from the content analysis (as given above) was used, as well as explanations from the editor, to understand why specific trends could be detected.

5.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are used in nearly all qualitative projects. However, the interview in qualitative research should not be viewed as just a list of questions to be asked, but rather as a conversation with a purpose to understand a certain phenomenon. It should be loose, informal, colloquial, interactive, committed and open-ended, writes Naudé (2001:103).

The interview as a data-collection method may vary from an unstructured to a completely structured method. Semi-structured interviews use a basic set of questions, but allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions, whereas structured interviews use a set list of questions asked in exactly the same order without any elaboration (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984:77).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with editors of the five selected in-house journals. The reason why interviews were used in this study is that not all information required to answer the research questions could be obtained from the content analysis alone. Information on the management and role of the publication in a company could only be obtained by interviewing the person responsible for the in-house journal – the editor. The interviews were semi-structured, on the one hand to ensure that consistent information was obtained from all the editors involved, but on the other allowing them to explain unique aspects of the different in-house journals.

A questionnaire was compiled to ensure all the issues relevant to the five research questions were answered (see Appendix B).

The interviews with the in-house journal editors of the five selected journals were conducted to:

- Determine what management wanted to achieve with the publication
- Determine the role and place of the in-house journal in the company
- Determine how the publication was managed
- Obtain additional information that could not be collected through the content analysis to see how the publication lived up to the criteria as set out for excellent in-house journals.
- To serve as a form of triangulation.

The findings of the content analysis were also discussed with and compared to the opinions of the editors. This was done on the one hand to clarify certain issues that came to the fore from the analysis (for example, why was a publication redesigned four times in five years?) and to determine whether what the editor said the company wanted to achieve through the in-house journal, had indeed been achieved. The information obtained from the interviews was used to answer the following questions:

4. How and to what extent do excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?

5. What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

5.4.3.1 Challenges

When it came to actually conducting the interviews, there were additional challenges. Although it was easy to arrange some of the interviews, as most of the editors are based in Johannesburg, close to where the researcher lives, one editor lives in Cape Town (Trudie Myburgh of *Sandaba*). The questions were e-mailed to her. She answered the questions electronically, after which the researcher contacted her by telephone to discuss detail.

In the case of Harmony, the questions were e-mailed to publishing consultant Words'Worth (Sophia Dower), as the publication is no longer published by Harmony (see Part II Chapter 2). Dower contacted Teresa Lee, the editor previously employed by Harmony, and together they answered the questions.

Harmony's marketing director, Ferdi Dippenaar, was contacted several times, but although he promised to give feedback, he never did.

Only the editors were interviewed in this study. The option of interviewing managers responsible for the overall internal communication function was considered, but in practice this did not realise. One of the editors (Pick 'n Pay) was the manager responsible for internal communication in any case and regardless of many efforts to contact the marketing manager of Harmony, he never gave feedback as promised. The other three editors take complete ownership for their publications and did not regard it as necessary for managers to be involved in the detailed interviews. They also felt that the official policies and how the company regarded the in-house journal could be provided accurately, as these were set out in official publishing policies for their publications.

5.5 HOW DOES THE METHODOLOGY LINK WITH THE AIMS OF THE STUDY?

Suitable research methods were used to achieve the aims of the study. This can be motivated by addressing each specific research question:

1. To determine what guidelines can be drawn from theories such as the excellence concept of public relations and the two-way symmetrical communication theory regarding the management of in-house journals.

Grunig's two-way symmetrical model and his excellence concept of public relations were studied from literature as well as other theoretical considerations such as the evaluation of publications.

2. To determine what the internal (vision, mission, cultural, public) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) context is in which in-house journals function in South Africa.

Literature was studied to compile a suitable description of both the internal and external environments that in-house journal editors in South Africa work in. Results from the content analysis were also used to determine the internal and external environments that South African in-house journals regard as important by publishing articles about these environments. Editors were interviewed to obtain their viewpoint and find out what environmental impacts there are on in-house journals.

3. To determine what the features of an excellent in-house journal are, as suggested by international and local literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.

Printed and electronic literature was used to compile a set of criteria on what an excellent in-house journal in South Africa should publish. Ferreira and Staude's *Write Angles* (1992), international literature and the judging criteria of the annual Corporate Publication Competition presented by the SA Publication Forum, supported by Prisa and the South African Press Club, were used.

4. To determine how and to what extent excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.

Printed and electronic literature was used to compile a set of criteria for what an excellent in-house journal in South Africa should technically look like. Ferreira and Staude's *Write Angles* (1992), international literature and the judging criteria of the annual Corporate Publication Competition were used. The publications were studied with the help of the content analysis, and combined with feedback from editors it explained why the publications looked as they did, with reference to technical criteria.

5. To determine what general and specific theoretical conclusions can be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992).

By using information obtained from all the research methods – literature study, content analysis and interviews with editors – certain general and specific theoretical conclusions could be made, all within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig.

To determine what the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals are.

The information obtained to reach the specific research objectives were then used to reach the overall objective.

5.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research methods used in the study were explained. The research methods were also motivated and linked with the research goals set for this study. Challenges were explained as well as how they were overcome. In the concluding chapter the research methods will be revisited in order to pinpoint any other specific problems.

In the next part, the five publications used as case studies will be analysed, using the research methods discussed here.

Part II

Case studies

INTRODUCTION

In this second part of the study, the researcher used various research methods (see Part I Chapter 5) to obtain information on the five in-house journals that are used as case studies.

This introduction again reflects the five research questions, objectives and theoretical statements that are used in the analysis of the case studies.

This introduction also provides definitions of terms commonly used in the next chapters to describe the publications.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OBJECTIVES AND THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

1. **Question:** *What guidelines can be drawn from theories such as Grunig's (1992) "excellence" concept of public relations regarding the management of in-house journals?*

Objective: *To determine what guidelines can be drawn from theories such as the excellence concept of public relations regarding the management of in-house journals.*

Theoretical statement: *Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.*

2. **Question:** *What is the internal (vision, mission, cultural, public) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) context in which in-house journals function in South Africa?*

Objective: *To determine what the internal (vision, mission, cultural, public) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) context is in which in-house journals function in South Africa.*

Theoretical statement: *An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).*

3. **Question:** *What are the features of an "excellent" in-house journal as suggested by international and local literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?*

Objective: *To determine what the features of an excellent in-house journal are, as suggested by international and local literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.*

Theoretical statement: *An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).*

4. **Question:** *How and to what extent do excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?*

Objective: *To determine how and to what extent excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.*

Theoretical statement: *Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).*

5. **Question:** *What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?*

Objective: *To determine what general and specific theoretical conclusions can be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992).*

Theoretical statement: *All the statements above are used to answer this question and reach this objective.*

The main research question, objective and central theoretical statement of the study:

Question: *What are the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals?*

Objective: *To determine what the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals are.*

Central theoretical statement: *Excellent in-house journals should apply the principles of two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Grunig, 1992) as well as the technical criteria suggested in literature (e.g. Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001; Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Wilcox & Nolte, 1990) and by the SA Publication Forum (Forum, 2004).*

DEFINITIONS

In this second part of the research project several concepts are used to describe in-house journals or aspects of in-house journals. Since many of these concepts are industry-related, short definitions are provided below to ensure these concepts are understood in the way the researcher uses them.

Bold colour use: Where bright colours are used extensively on every page.

Brochure: A brochure differs from an in-house journal in that it is aimed at marketing a specific event or product. It is also normally a very concise publication. Brochures tend to offer short, often urgent, written messages presented in a striking manner (Brigham, 1991:5).

Clean design: A design that is easy to read, well-balanced and not too brightly coloured.

Custom-designed graphics: Graphics designed for a specific article by a graphic designer.

Feature style: Articles with a greater human interest and not a hard news story (Harris, Leiter & Johnson, 1992:152).

Headlines: creative: The headline captures the essence of the article in an imaginative manner.

Headlines: well-written: short and concise headlines that reflect the essence of the article.

Magazine: In comparison to a newspaper, a magazine is typically A4 in format and has more pages where type is presented in two or three columns. Magazines typically focus on more in-depth, detailed and longer articles. They are printed on good quality paper (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23-25).

Newspaper: A newspaper is typically bigger in size (A3) than a magazine and prints up-to-date, short, concise news reports stating the facts without elaborating in detail about events. A newspaper is normally cheaper to produce, as it is printed on cheaper paper (compare the paper used to print a daily such as *The Star* to the very white, heavier, thicker, smoother and glossier paper that a consumer magazine such as *Fair Lady* would be printed on). Newspapers typically feature four or five columns with big pictures (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23-25).

Paper quality: The quality of paper has an influence on how a reader would regard the quality of the publication. The higher the paper quality the better the quality of the magazine is often judged to be (Anon, 1998). Issues that influence paper quality are brightness (the paper's ability to reflect light), whiteness (the ability to reflect all colours of light equally), holdout (the ability to hold ink uniformly on the paper's surface), opacity (the ability to hold an image without it showing through on the other side of the sheet) and finish (the smoothness of the paper, or gloss or matte finish for example) (Sappi, 2005).

Pictures: good quality: A good quality picture is one that portrays action (or the topic of the article), where people (and other subject matter) are close enough to each other to form a unity, where the light is balanced (not too bright or too dark) and where the general composition of the picture is well balanced (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:92-93). Cropping pictures well could improve an average picture to a "good" one.

Pictures: poor quality: Poorly composed pictures that do not portray the central concept of the article, and in which lighting is poor.

Pictures: good use: Pictures are big and are cropped in such a manner that they reflect only the essence of what the editor wants to communicate. Pictures can also be used well by being deep-etched and in that way put stronger focus on a very specific aspect of the picture.

Stock photography: Photographs bought from photo libraries that are suitable for an article, taken by a professional photographer.

Well-edited: Proper language use is necessary and no spelling errors are allowed (Forum, 2004).

Part II

Chapter 6

ABACUS – ABSA BANK

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on *Abacus*, the bi-weekly in-house journal of Absa. Absa was founded in 1998 after the merger of Allied Bank, United Bank, TrustBank and Volkskas Bank. The company is one of the biggest banks in South Africa and is listed on the JSE Securities Exchange (Mbendi, 2004). The company employs about 31 000 employees (Absa, 2004) and received the Best Company to Work for award from *Financial Mail* in 2002 and 2003 (FM, 2003).

Abacus is analysed in terms of the criteria discussed in Part I Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Firstly, an overview of the company and publication is given, followed by the data obtained from the content analysis, which indicates overall publishing trends. The current editor, Elna Redelinghuys, was then interviewed to gather additional information on the management, communication and technical issues of the publication. Renate Schraader, the editor during the study period (1999-2003), was also interviewed.

This information was then combined to see how the publication measured up to the four theoretical statements made in Part I.

6.2 PUBLICATION OVERVIEW

Abacus was an A3 newspaper that was first published in 1998 after the merger of four major South African banks. *Abacus* remained in A3 newspaper format throughout the study period (1999-2003). However, in 2005, after the focus of this study, Absa decided to change *Abacus* to an A4 magazine. The reason for this change was that with a host of other communication tools that reached employees much faster, such as e-mail and the intranet, the newspaper's content tended to be out of date. Changing it to a magazine made it possible to publish in-depth articles. Therefore, *Abacus* now serves as a communication tool carrying detailed information on issues already announced to employees in electronic format (Redelinghuys, 2005).

In 2002, the publication received merit certificates for writing and design and was a finalist in the best writing and best newspaper categories of the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate communication competition. In 2003 it received a certificate for excellence in design and was a finalist in the design, best newspaper and best overall corporate publication categories.

6.3 PUBLICATION ANALYSIS

6.3.1 Overview

The following overall comments can be made before the analysis results are discussed in detail:

- The publication covered a wide variety of topics, especially news on branches/subsidiaries (10%, 54, n=567), products and services (8%, 43, n=567), crime (6%, 29, n=567) and sport and recreation (8%, 46, n=567)
- The publication had a strong newspaper look and feel, since it was an A3 publication with a four-column grid (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:28) (see Figure 6.1). The fact that it

was published every two weeks allowed for up-to-date news articles typical of a newspaper (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23)



Figure 6.1: The A3 size and four-column grid that gave Abacus a newspaper look.

- Between 1999 and 2003 the publication saw three redesigns and four masthead redesigns
- *Abacus* encouraged two-way communication by inviting readers to send letters to the publication (which received feedback from management), as well as through suggestion columns and competitions
- Creative design was used to illustrate articles
- The centre spread was always used in its entirety for one article
- The publication used cartoon strips to illustrate particular issues – for example, safety
- If an error appeared in *Abacus*, it is corrected in the next issue (Brickfields [15 October 2002:2], Correction [15 April 2002:2])
- One or two articles appeared in full on the front cover, with four or five others mentioned in teasers. Because of this, a large number of articles, covering a wide variety of topics, appeared on *Abacus*'s cover
- Although most articles were published in English, some articles did appear in Afrikaans, as a large number of Absa employees have Afrikaans as home language.

Below are the results of this content analysis, showing the overall type of content that appeared in *Abacus* (1999 to 2003) (see Appendix C).

The overall results of the publication analysis were as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Branches/subsidiaries | 10% (54, n=567) |
| Sport and recreation | 8% (46, n=567) |
| Products/services | 8% (43, n=567) |
| Social development | 7% (37, n=567) |
| Company news/achievements | 6% (34, n=567) |
| Communication | 6% (32, n=567) |
| Crime | 6% (29, n=567) |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Competitions | 5% (30, n=567) |
| Employee contributions/achievements | 5% (29, n=567) |
| Education and training | 4% (20, n=567) |
| Letters | 4% (20, n=567) |
| Editorial | 4% (20, n=567) |
| Arts and culture | 3% (16, n=567) |
| Customer information/service | 3% (14, n=567) |
| Technology | 2% (11, n=567) |
| General health | 2% (13, n=567) |
| Marketing | 2% (10, n=567) |
| Humour | 2% (10, n=567) |
| Sensitive queries | 2% (9, n=567) |
| New initiatives | 2% (11, n=567) |
| Technology in use | 2% (12, n=567) |
| Ecology | 1% (4, n=567) |
| General economy | 1% (8, n=567) |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | 1% (3, n=567) |
| Employee profile | 1% (5, n=567) |
| Vision/mission | 1% (7, n=567) |
| Productivity improvement | 1% (4, n=567) |
| Package changes | 1% (5, n=567) |
| Staff/management changes/appointments | 1% (6, n=567) |
| Legal | 1% (6, n=567) |
| Industry sectors | <1% (2, n=567) |
| Occupational health | <1% (1, n=567) |
| Diseases | <1% (2, n=567) |
| Message from CEO | <1% (2, n=567) |
| Strategic planning | <1% (2, n=567) |
| Policy/procedure | <1% (1, n=567) |
| Company projects | <1% (2, n=567) |

As the front cover of a publication is typically the strongest page in a newspaper, articles appearing on a front cover are normally regarded as more important (cf. Bradley, 1997:20). For this reason the researcher also looked at what type of article would typically appear on *Abacus's* front cover to understand what issues are regarded as important in Absa.

The following issues appeared on the cover:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Company news/achievements | 28% (17, n=60) |
| Employee contributions/achievements | 13% (8, n=60) |
| Products/services | 8% (5, n=60) |
| Branches/subsidiaries | 7% (4, n=60) |
| Sensitive queries | 5% (3, n=60) |
| Package changes | 5% (3, n=60) |
| Vision/mission | 5% (3, n=60) |
| Communication | 5% (3, n=60) |
| New initiatives | 3% (2, n=60) |
| Technology in use | 3% (2, n=60) |
| Staff/management changes/appointments | 3% (2, n=60) |
| Strategic planning | 3% (2, n=60) |
| Employee profile | 2% (1, n=60) |
| Message from CEO | 2% (1, n=60) |
| Company projects | 2% (1, n=60) |
| Productivity improvement | 2% (1, n=60) |
| Customer information/service | 2% (1, n=60) |
| Competition | 2% (1, n=60) |

6.3.2 Content

Abacus's aim (during the study period as well as afterwards), was to be a factual, topical and timeous employee newspaper. Between 1999 and 2003 it was regarded as an official communication tool of the Absa group and was therefore used to communicate issues relevant to employees. It did not focus specifically on individuals or smaller divisions. *Abacus* is specifically described as an employee communication tool and not a marketing tool in its publishing policy (Redelinghuys, 2005).

The editor aimed (and still does) to include articles that covered the banking industry, new laws and regulations, work-related issues, corporate social investment, sponsorships, arts, employee issues such as health and wellbeing, as well as entertainment. However, the biggest focus was on publishing articles directly related to the operations of Absa (Redelinghuys, 2005). From the results (see tables above) it can be seen that the publication indeed managed to achieve this. For example, sport and recreation represented 8% (46, n=567), arts and culture 3% (16, n=567) and legal issues 1% (6, n=567).

Abacus's audience included all Absa employees. Their educational level varied between Grade 12 and tertiary qualifications, and incomes differed vastly. The editor stated:

We find that the publication is mostly read by mid- and lower-level employees who typically have a slightly lower education level. However, this does not mean that high-level employees (who are typically very highly qualified) do not read *Abacus* as well (Redelinghuys, 2005).

6.3.2.1 Content indicating management support

Members of Absa's senior management featured in *Abacus*, by either granting interviews or being part of an article. However, reporting on management's activities was low-key and did not dominate the publication.

Absa CEO at the time (1999-2003), Nallie Bosman, contributed messages to employees when he had a specific message for them. However, these messages (<1%, 2, n=567) were limited and only appeared when linked to a specific event or decision. For example: Message from Nallie (15 December 2002:2) and We did it (31 May 2002:1).

Another sign that Absa's management supported *Abacus* is the fact that they responded to letters written to *Abacus*. All letters published in *Abacus* received feedback from either the editor or a management member.

Most letters received feedback from management. For example: Static kilometre allowance (15 October 2003:15) (feedback given by people management department), Bonus nie deel van salaris (15 April 2002:2) (feedback given by human resources) and Benoude oomblik (15 May 2001:2) (feedback given by provincial property management).

Members of senior management also, from time to time, appeared in the publication (The who's who of group corporate and public affairs [15 February 2001:6-7], Simplifying hedge funds [15 December 2001:6], We are proud of our CEO [15 October 2002:1], Zanelle is new group general manager: BEE [15 July 2003:3]). However, articles featuring members of senior management were not overpowering.

Members of senior management supported *Abacus*. They regarded it as an important communication tool within the company. They were also helpful when they were requested to contribute to the magazine (Redelinghuys, 2005).

6.3.2.2 Content covering the external environment

Based on the content analysis (see tables), *Abacus* seemed to have had a relatively balanced world view (see 2.3.2.9) in that 35% (198, n=567) of articles focused on external issues in which the bank was involved. The company therefore acknowledged its external environment and the role it played in its operations.

The external issues on which *Abacus* reported, were all events or projects that the company sponsored, or was directly involved in.

Sport and recreation (8%, 46, n=567) was the external topic that enjoyed most coverage in *Abacus*, for example: Absa 2003 Rugby World Cup campaign (30 June 2003:11), We're supporting the Bokke (15 October 2003:13) and Men and their magnificent machines (15 October 2002:12).

Apart from articles, *Abacus* also published inserts focusing solely on sporting events, specifically the bank's athletics sponsorship, for example: Absa National Athletics team (insert in 31 July 2001 edition).

Social development (7%, 37, n=567) was another external issue that enjoyed significant coverage because of Absa sponsorships. Absa's casual day (A record amount for Casual Day [15 December 2002:10-11], No casual affair [15 December 2001:8-9]) is an annual fund-raising event aimed at social development that takes place not only inside Absa, but is also extended to customers as well, as any member of the general public who wants to may participate in the initiative. *Abacus* reported on other social development issues apart from casual day as well, for example: Kinderdrome bewaarheid (15 December 2002:16), Absa weaves Madiba magic (15 April 2002:1), Absaniete woeker weer vir welsyn (31 January 1999:3).

Apart from the fact that Absa was proud of its social development programmes and wanted to inform employees of what the company was doing in this regard, employees also liked to read these articles (Redelinghuys, 2005).

An external issue that, compared to other case studies, enjoyed significant coverage was crime (6%, 29, n=567). *Abacus* published a regular column on crime towards the back of every issue. It also published regular articles on typical crime and safety issues, such as Internet Banking safety measures (15 August 2003:3), Make information security a part of the way you work (30 June 2003:13) and New focus to forensic fight (31 July 2001:11 – full page). This made sense, as fraud, security and theft can be a major problem in a bank.

The crime column was not always a written one, but was often a cartoon illustrating a specific issue (see Figure 6.3). The cartoons gave Absa a more light-hearted channel of informing employees of the crime issues in the company.

Abacus focused on various health issues, be it HIV/Aids (1%, 3, n=567) (The care we can give [30 June 2003:1], Free State launches flagship Aids project [31 July 2003:3]), diseases such as cancer (<1%, 2, n=567) (Prevention is better than cure [15 October 2003:4], Confronting cancer [15 October 2002:11]) or general health issues (2%, 13, n=567) (Cover to help conquer the odds [15 August 2003:18], A closer look at increases [15 October 2002:11]), indicating an interest in the well-being of employees.

Education and training articles (4%, 20, n=567) focused on employees (WFE empowers Absa people [15 October 2002:4]) as well as education and training projects outside the company, but which it sponsored or was involved in (Cutside – firm maths foundation for KZN [15 February 2001:3], Leerwerk nou makliker in Bloem [15 November 2000:4], Maths and science gets boost [15 December 2001:4]).

Arts and culture (3% 16, n=567) articles covered projects sponsored by Absa (Larger than life puppets guard Absa gallery [5 October 2003:4], Feesgangers oorleef Aardklop met Absa [15 October 2002:1]) or general South African issues such as heritage day (Still proud to be South African [15 October 2002:5]).

Legal issues (<1%, 6, n=567) were also covered in *Abacus*, for example, explaining new banking laws (Fraudsters have reason to fear the FIC Act [15 October 2003:3], Cheque law changing [15 February 2001:5], New Act under the spotlight [15 August 2003:10-11]).

6.3.2.3 Content covering the internal environment

Abacus covered a range of internal environment issues in Absa. Of the 25 topics identified on the data sheet (see Appendix A), *Abacus* covered 22.

It was *Abacus's* aim to discuss internal issues that had a direct impact on the company and its employees regularly.

We have found that even if there has been no significant change in the status of certain issues, employees still want to read that in the publication. They feel that even by confirming there is no new development on a certain issue, the company at least formally communicates that to them (Redelinghuys, 2005).

The issue enjoying most attention was branches/subsidiaries (10%, 54, n=567) (Behind the scenes with portfolio managers [30 June 2003:6], Agribusiness shows how the land lies for farmers [15 December 2002:13], Cape region is cooking [15 May 2001:6]) followed by products and services (8%, 43, n=567) offered by the company, for example: Pay at an Absa ATM and go (31 October 2000:9), Rugby cards change face (15 July 2003:6), A credit card campaign with wheels (15 October 2002:9) and Get customers to go for gold (15 August 2003:17).

Another internal issue that enjoyed significant coverage was company news and achievements (6%, 34, n=567) (New dispensation promises good times [30 June 2003:8-9], What a year [15 December 2002:1], Open marriage for Absa and IBM [15 February 2001:1]).

Company results were always covered extensively as employees had a need to know how the company was performing (see Figure 6.2). *Abacus* would typically spend at least two A3 pages on the issue using detailed graphics to illustrate articles (Sound results [15 December 2002:8-9], Strong results for the interim [15 December 2001:10-11]).

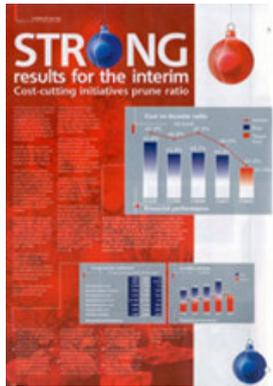


Figure 6.2: An example of extensive reporting on company results.



Figure 6.3: An example of cartoons used to illustrate safety and security issues (crime).

Customer information and service (3%, 14, n=567) (Getting closer to my customer [15 August 2000:4], CRMO, an essential partner in the customer value chain [15 December 2001:4], Know the customer, know everything [31 May 2002:5]) as well as articles on the vision and mission of the company (1%, 7, n=567) (Read-e, stead-e, go! [15 May 2001:1, 8-9]), also featured regularly in *Abacus*.

An internal issue that was covered more regularly than in the other case studies was sensitive queries (2%, 9, n=567) and specifically articles on wearing the correct clothing to work (Brighten up [31 July 2001:8-9], Clothing debate rages on [31 October 2001:6-7], Step out in style [31 January 1999:4-5]). This shows Absa's focus on encouraging employees not only to deliver a professional service, but also to look the part when they were dealing with customers.

The results of the content analysis (which showed significant coverage of internal issues), correlated with the editor's aim of regularly discussing internal issues that have a direct impact on the company and its employees.

6.3.2.4 Content encouraging two-way symmetrical communication

The editor believes that *Abacus* achieved two-way symmetrical communication during the study period as employees were encouraged in various ways to use the publication as a communication tool. (Although Redelinghuys was not the editor during this period, she did contribute to the publication of the magazine. The editor at the time, Renate Schraader, confirmed that the publication did endeavour to encourage two-way symmetrical communication through the in-house journal. The aim is still to encourage two-way symmetrical communication.)

A total of 21% (87, n=567) of articles (employee contributions/achievements, employee profiles, communication, staff/management changes/appointments, competitions and letters) encouraged two-way communication.

Although employees were encouraged to contribute to the publication, the editor tended not to use news articles on matters of only local interest, as the company is very big (about 30 000 employees across the country) and what might have been news in one branch, would not be so for the others.

Employees were encouraged to write letters (4%, 20, n=567) not only by knowing that they would receive feedback from management, but also by standing a chance to win R500, which was given to the best letter published in every edition. *Abacus* published letters in every edition.

Competitions (5%, 30, n=567) in *Abacus* were predominantly used to encourage feedback from employees. A good example is the Service Sizzlers competition that was published from 2003. In this competition, a certain service topic was communicated in *Abacus* and employees were invited to suggest ideas on how to improve it. The winning idea received R2 500.

Apart from competitions such as Service Sizzlers, there were also articles that reported on the winners of competitions held within, and outside, Absa, for example: Excellence in Absa (15 November 2001:1).

Abacus realised that communication (6%, 32, n=567) was important and covered it regularly (Our gateway to knowledge sharing [15 December 2002:7], Information drives business results [15 April 2002:4], The who's who of group corporate and public affairs [15 February 2001:6-7]).

Employee profiles (1%, 5, n=567) were few and far between and tended to have a more social character (Martha has what it takes [15 August 2000:3]).

6.3.3 Technical aspects

The present editor works full-time for Absa. She has a degree in communication studies. During the period on which this study focuses, the editor was Renate Schraader. She was a permanent Absa employee with a degree in journalism and worked in the internal communications department. She was assisted by two writers also employed by Absa, as well as a freelance writer and photographer. A design house was contracted to produce the layout of the publication.

This trend to employ professionals has continued and at present (in 2005), apart from the editor, various people are employed in Absa's marketing department (which is now responsible for *Abacus* – see 6.4.1) to support the editor. Freelance journalists (which include the previous editor), are all highly experienced and work for established South African publications. DoG Creative is the design house employed to undertake graphic design and layout.

6.3.3.1 Language

From 1999 to 2003 articles in *Abacus* were published either in English or in Afrikaans to accommodate the large number of Afrikaans employees.

After the redesign of the publication, it was decided to publish the magazine in English in its entirety to ensure that there was no problem with people who do not speak Afrikaans, therefore not understanding articles written in that language (Redelinghuys, 2005).

6.3.3.2 Title

The title *Abacus* was suggested by an employee in a competition held to name the publication when it was first launched in 1998 (Redelinghuys, 2005).

6.3.3.3 Paper

Although *Abacus* looked like a newspaper (size and grid), it was printed on a good quality paper (90 gsm Chrystal Gloss), creating the impression of a high-quality publication that was professionally produced and printed. The good quality paper tended to give the newspaper a slight magazine look (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23).

6.3.3.4 Design

Abacus's size (A3 between 1999 and 2002 and 291 mm x 375 mm in 2003) and grid (four columns) was typical of a newspaper (Ferreira & Staude, 1991: 23).

In the five years studied (1999 – 2003) *Abacus* saw three redesigns and four masthead designs (see Figure 6.5). Initially (1999-2000) *Abacus* used strong, bright colours and a unique grid system (one column was irregularly shaped – see Figure 6.4). Although this was a creative element allowing a clear distinction between columns, it made the publication look more like a brochure (described by Brigham [1991:5] as a “glorified leaflet” with a bold layout and short, easy-to-read messages) than a newspaper (see Part II Introduction).



Figure 6.4: The irregularly shaped grid used by *Abacus* in 1999 and 2000.

In 2001 the publication was completely redesigned. Although a very open and clean layout was employed using white space to create style, the publication in general looked more like a newspaper with a set four-column grid.

In 2003 the publication again saw a redesign. It became slightly smaller than A3 (291 mm x 375 mm). The almost square size, combined with the introduction of increased colour use, made *Abacus* look slightly more like a magazine. This redesign (2003) was done to bring the overall look of the publication in line with the corporate identity of Absa.



Figure 6.5: The various designs of Abacus from 1999 (left), 2000 (middle) and 2003 (right).

As the design changed, so did the masthead design, except for small modifications introduced in 2000, which were done without an overall design change.



Fig 6.6: The change in masthead design.

Abacus used various design elements to enhance the publication. These included pull-quotes, cross headings, creative use of visuals, introductory paragraphs and fact boxes (see Figure 6.7).



Figure 6.7: Examples of design elements used in Abacus.



Figure 6.8: Examples of the good balance of longer and shorter articles published in Abacus.

Abacus offered a good balance between longer articles (covering company issues) and shorter ones (typically covering social events, but also other issues) (see Figure 6.8).

The publication used the centre spread for a main article and created a specific design for each issue.



Figure 6.9: An example of a centre spread.

In 2005 (after the period of this study) *Abacus* was changed into an A4 72-page perfect-bound magazine that is published monthly (see Figure 6.10). The reason for this change is that since there are various other immediate information sources (such as e-mail and intranet) a newspaper was not regarded as being suitable to the company anymore. The decision to change to a magazine was that it can now offer more in-depth and detailed articles.



Fig 6.10: The new-look *Abacus* magazine in 2005.

The design of the new magazine was done independently and without any link to Absa's corporate style stipulated for publications. The reason for this was that the editorial team wanted to create a publication that did not look like a corporate brochure or an official management information tool, but rather like a unique magazine aimed at employees (Redelinghuys, 2005). The new design was, however, approved by the relevant senior managers.

6.3.3.4.1 Size and grid

Initially *Abacus* was an A3 newspaper (from its inception in 1998 until the end of 2002). In 2003 it changed to a more square size (291 mm x 375 mm) with a strong magazine look and feel. A four column grid was used throughout (see Figure 6.11).



Figure 6.11: A set grid was used by Abacus for most of the pages (left), although picture-intensive pages did not use a strict grid.

6.3.3.4.2 Colour

Abacus's colour use was well-balanced. Although red and blue – the company's corporate colours – were used throughout, it did not create the look of a brochure (as described by Brigham [1991:5]).

Colour was used extensively in the presentation of main articles published on the centre spread. Although the initial colour use in *Abacus* (1999-2000) was very bright and bold, it was toned down in 2001-2002, with a much cleaner and open look (limited use of colour and not too many pictures). In 2003, more colour was again introduced in the design (see Figure 6.12).



Figure 6.12: An example of creative colour use in *Abacus* without allowing corporate colours to dominate.



Figure 6.13: An example of good quality visuals used in *Abacus*.

6.3.3.4.3 Visuals

The visuals used in *Abacus* were creative and of very good quality (see Figure 6.13). Professional photographers and graphic artists were employed to create customised visuals for the publication (see Figure 6.15).

Apart from visuals created specifically for *Abacus*, the publication also used stock photography (professional pictures obtainable from commercial photographic libraries) to illustrate articles (see Figure 6.14).



Figure 6.14: Stock photography illustrated articles.

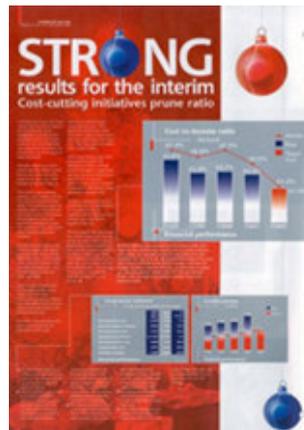


Figure 6.15: Custom-created visuals for Abacus.



Figure 6.16: Good quality pictures taken of employees.

Pictures depicting Absa employees were of very good quality and were used well (see Figure 6.16).

6.3.3.4.4 Captions

Captions in *Abacus* were not very creative. However, they were well written and communicated clearly what was going on in the visual. For example: Nallie Bosman (group chief executive) with his trophy as one of the Top 12 Business Personalities in South Africa (a picture of Bosman with the trophy) (15 October 2002:1), They are waiting for your call: Staff man the new help desk at the Absa Support Centre (a group of Absa employees sitting in the call centre) (15 February 2001:5) and Springbok Rugby fans brought everything they could lay their hands on for the autograph session at Absa Sandton City (a group of fans holding different items that they wanted autographed by the rugby players) (15 October 2003:13).

6.3.3.4.5 Typeface

Abacus (1999-2003) used *Quebec* (used for headlines, teasers and page numbers), *Stone Serif* (used for the body copy) and *Stone Sans* (used for body copy placed in a panel) (see Figure 6.17). These were the company's corporate fonts (Redelinghuys, 2005).



Figure 6.17: A sample of the fonts used for headlines in *Abacus*.

After the redesign in 2005, *Abacus* now uses *Eurostile* (used for the masthead and pulled through in the signposting of the sections, page numbers and icons), *Syntax* (used for headlines and body copy) and *Minion* (used for blurbs and introductory paragraphs). These

are not corporate fonts, as the publication does not follow the corporate branding style anymore.

6.3.3.4.6 Layout

Abacus's layout was consistent from one edition to the next, as a set design and layout style had been created for the graphic designer.

6.3.3.4.7 Headlines

Headlines in *Abacus* were well written. They were short and creative and conveyed the essence of the articles. For example: Employees do Absa the honours (an article on Absa's overall achievements for 2003) (15 October 2003:1), Absa funds fish for profit (an article on an empowerment deal involving fish farming) (15 May 2001:1) and Bird's eyeview on SA's future (general overview of SA's financial sector) (15 December 2001:2).

6.3.3.5 Sub-editing

All pages were well-edited and good quality copy was used. Spelling and grammatical errors were eliminated and articles were easy to read and understand. It is obvious that a predetermined style was used for the publication.

The copy in *Abacus* was edited in such a way that graphics and visuals could be used to illustrate and explain more detailed articles such as those on company results.

6.3.3.6 Budget

Abacus had a predetermined budget. It was an overall budget that did not specify in detail how much money was available for specific services, for example photography. The editor often made minor changes to the budget to incorporate specific work for an issue, for example rather paying a journalist to write an article than using another expensive stock photograph. Overall, the editor kept spending within the limits of the budget (Redelinghuys, 2005).

6.3.3.7 Production schedule

Abacus was published every second week during the study period. The bi-weekly interval was chosen to ensure the newspaper character of *Abacus* by publishing it regularly (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23). The decision to change to a monthly interval, was made since various other communication channels (such as e-mail and internet) competed directly with the printed in-house journal (Redelinghuys, 2005). Up-to-date news could be provided through electronic channels, while the in-house journal changed to a "softer" focus by providing detailed information on issues that had already been announced via electronic resources.

6.3.3.8 Reproduction and printing

Reproduction and printing were overseen by the editor. The print run for the magazine was, and still is 34 000.

6.3.3.9 Distribution

Abacus was delivered to Absa's head office, from where it was distributed internally to employees at head office. Branches across the country received their copies through Absa's courier service. This distribution channel is still in place.

6.4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

6.4.1 Public relations tool

Abacus was one of various internal public relations tools that the company used to communicate with its employees between 1999 and 2003. Apart from *Abacus*, the company made use of e-mail (especially aimed at targeted groups), the intranet and Absa's own internal television programme to communicate information to employees.

The increased use of new media in Absa to communicate with employees led the company's marketing department (which has been responsible for the printing of the publication since 2004), to re-evaluate the publication's position as part of the overall communication strategy of the company as well as how to use it best in conjunction with new media instead of competing with these.

It was decided that *Abacus* would remain a very important communication tool within the overall communication strategy of the company, but that its focus would change from a newspaper bringing the latest information to employees to a magazine with a more detailed and "feature" style. By implementing this change, *Abacus* would no longer compete with electronic media in bringing new information to employees. Instead, it would follow up in detail on events already conveyed to employees via new media.

It further embraced new technology by having its own site on the company's intranet. This site was used to inform readers of what they could read in an edition, as well as offering them the opportunity to give quick and easy feedback to the editor. Although these changes were only implemented after the focus period of this study (1999-2003), they indicate Absa's awareness of the importance of keeping the in-house journal and adapting it to suit the current environment.

6.4.2 Communication culture

Absa has an open and relaxed communication culture where management not only regularly communicates with employees, but where employees are encouraged to communicate with management (Redelinghuys, 2005) (see 2.3.2.12). The open culture encourages employees to raise sensitive issues through internal communication tools such as *Abacus*, knowing they will receive feedback from management (Redelinghuys, 2005).

The open communication culture supports two-way symmetrical communication between senior management and employees (Redelinghuys, 2005; Grunig, 1992).

6.4.3 Involvement in strategic management

Abacus did not have any direct influence on the strategic management decisions taken within Absa. However, as it was the aim of *Abacus* to implement the company's internal communication strategy, the publication definitely supported it by informing employees about all aspects of the vision, mission and strategic decisions (Redelinghuys, 2005).

Abacus was closely involved with senior management to communicate any new strategic decisions and explain how these would, or could, influence employees.

6.4.4 Management

During the research period, *Abacus* was managed and edited by Schraader and since 2004 by Redelinghuys. Although neither formed part of senior management, they had easy access to senior managers. “I have never encountered any problem to obtain inputs from any member of senior management.” (Redelinghuys, 2005).

As already discussed, Absa’s senior management supported *Abacus* and used it extensively to communicate with employees.

During the study period, the publication of *Abacus* was the responsibility of the internal communications department (Schraader, 2005). However, in 2004, Absa restructured and now the marketing department has the responsibility of publishing *Abacus*.

This is one of two publications included in this study that became the responsibility of the marketing department and not that of the public relations or internal communications departments, as recommended by Grunig (1992). The editor explains this by stating that the current (2005) head of the marketing department regards all communication – be it public relations or marketing – as marketing (Redelinghuys, 2005). In Absa’s case, however, a clear distinction remains between external and internal communication, which bodes well for the in-house journal regardless of Grunig’s (cf. 1992) opinions on the in-house journal being the responsibility of the public relations department (see 2.3.2.2).

6.5 EVALUATION

Absa, through its internal communications (1999-2004) and now its marketing department, conducted regular surveys on how employees experienced the company’s in-house journal. Previous surveys would be bound into the publication, with the results published in *Abacus*, whereas now the company conducts surveys via e-mail and *Abacus*’s website. Feedback is then used to guide the editorial team on how to adjust the publication to best fulfil readers’ information needs. In the last feedback session, the majority of employees gave positive feedback on the change from A3 to A4 format of the magazine (Redelinghuys, 2005).

Absa also entered *Abacus* in the SA Publication Forum’s annual corporate publication competition and used the remarks received from the judges (who are all professionally trained journalists and communicators working in the corporate communication field), to improve the publication. Taking part in the competition was (and still is) regarded as a peer-review mechanism. The fact that the publication has received several awards over the past few years, is an indication that outsiders regard it as a good publication.

6.6 THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

Based on the results of the content analysis as well as the information supplied by both the current and former editors, *Abacus* will now be measured against the four theoretical statements made in Part I of this study, as well as against the overall guiding theoretical statement of the study.

Statement 1

Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.

During the research period (1999-2003), Absa's *Abacus* measured up well against this first statement.

As an in-house journal, *Abacus* had the aim to encourage two-way communication with employees. The editorial team realised that there were various other feedback mechanisms for employees (such as the intranet and e-mail) and did not try to compete with these. Instead, it embraced these technologies to increase feedback to the publication by encouraging employees to use it.

In the publication itself, *Abacus* encouraged two-way symmetrical communication by offering various opportunities to employees to contribute to the magazine by way of letters, opinion pieces, competitions, articles, photographs and suggestions. Although prizes were offered in some cases to contribute to *Abacus*, the company's overall open communication culture had a big influence on encouraging employees to contribute to the newspaper. The publication's site on the company's intranet also encouraged two-way symmetrical communication. Management used the publication extensively to communicate events/developments within the company. The publication's communication style was in line with Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model of communication.

As one of various communication tools to convey information to employees, *Abacus* formed an integral part of Absa's overall communication strategy. As other media developed in the company, *Abacus* was adjusted to retain a unique character and remain a unique source of information to employees.

The publication was the responsibility of a single integrated department (internal communications). However, since 2004, *Abacus* has been the responsibility of the marketing department – a move which Grunig (cf. 1992) warns against, as the in-house journal has a unique role as internal public relations tool that can be clearly separated from the marketing function. However, in this case, the move of *Abacus* to the marketing department did not seem to have any effect on its quality and pure internal communications focus.

The editor did (and still does) have easy access to senior management. Both the editor and the rest of the editorial team have specific training and years of experience in journalism that they apply when producing *Abacus* (Grunig, cf. 1992).

Absa conducted various internal surveys to determine if its in-house journal was still meeting readers' needs, and also participated in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition, on the one hand to obtain an opinion from external professionals and, on the other, to see how the magazine measured up to those published by other companies in South Africa.

Statement 2

An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Abacus's overall world view in the period 1999 to 2003 can be described as symmetrical, acknowledging that it will have to adapt to both internal and external environments to ensure that it remains a relevant information source (see Grunig, 1992:40-41).

Although, as far as could be determined, there were no external issues that had a direct impact on *Abacus*, there were internal issues that did. For example, the increased use of new media necessitated a change in the publication's format and focus after 2004. The internal company structure, which was changed in 2004, also influenced *Abacus* as it moved from the internal communications department to the marketing department.

Apart from these influences, *Abacus* reported extensively on both its internal and external environments. The environmental issues that it reported on (between 1999 and 2003), all had a direct link to Absa, either because Absa or its employees organised the event/programme, or because the bank sponsored the event/programme. It also reported extensively on issues outside the company (such as new laws) that had a specific – but still direct – impact on the bank and/or its employees.

Abacus reported extensively on its internal environment focusing on branches, products and services, and company news and achievements.

Statement 3

An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).

Abacus was a very well-balanced publication reporting extensively on issues such as branches, products and services, company news and achievements, and customer service information. The company therefore managed to keep employees up to date with what was taking place in the company.

Statement 4

Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).

Abacus was strategically planned and managed with a set budget and a pre-determined production schedule. Most of the material used in *Abacus* was created by a team of highly trained and skilled professionals. Contributions made by employees were also of high quality. Professional technology was used to produce and print *Abacus*. Absa used the company's internal mail as well as a contracted courier service to distribute the publication.

Content analysis shows the publication made use of high-quality paper, a pre-determined style that is easily readable, used well-written articles supported by good headlines and clear captions and very good quality visuals.

Based on these findings the fifth research question

What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

can be answered as follows:

- As pointed out above (see 6.4.1), during the study period *Abacus* was the responsibility of the internal communications department, as recommended by Grunig (cf. 1992) (see 2.3.2.2). However, although the move of *Abacus* from this department to the marketing department took place after the focus period of this study in 2005, it does offer criticism of Grunig's theory simply because, although no detailed analysis was conducted on the publication after 2003 analysing all the criteria involved when publishing an in-house journal, the change in responsible department did not seem to have any negative effect on at least one aspect of the publication – that of technical excellence. This can be motivated by the fact that the publication was a finalist in the category: best internal magazine, in the SA Publication Forum's 2005 corporate publication competition. Although one can assume that a publication would not change its communication strategy drastically in a short time (e.g. immediately after the change of responsibility from the internal communications to the marketing department), there is a possibility that this strategy might change over time to better suit the overall marketing strategy. However, such changes, and the possible impact they could have on the in-house journal, could only be determined once the publication is analysed again following some time under management of the marketing department. The theoretical conclusion one can draw from this is that, although it is probably still better for an in-house journal to be the responsibility of the public relations department (since it is classified in literature as a public relations tool – see 2.2), it could also be based in a relevant department (such as marketing) as is the case of *Abacus*, if the focus is retained on internal (and not marketing) communication. The key issue, therefore, would be that the in-house journal retain its identity as internal communications tool even though one could start questioning the role the in-house journal could play in the overall internal marketing mix (see 11.3.1).
- The second specific theoretical issue raised in this chapter is the effect of the environment on the in-house journal. Once again – although the actual change was only seen after the study period, the fact that it changed from a bi-weekly A3 newspaper to a monthly A4 magazine confirms the theoretical assumption that a company's internal and external environments could influence the publication (see Chapter 3). In *Abacus*'s case, the increased use of technology (both internally and externally) to communicate with employees, forced Absa to reconsider its in-house journal strategy (see 6.4.1).
- A third theoretical assumption, which links closely to the second, is what the role of the in-house journal should be in an environment where there is increased use of new media to communicate with employees. New media, and a changed role of the in-house journal, could also have an impact on the latter's ability to enable two-way communication between a company and its employees (see 6.4.1). Even after its change to a magazine focusing on in-depth articles that do not compete with new media, *Abacus* still supports the concept of symmetrical two-way communication. It

seeks to determine how it can use new media to assist it in this task by offering feedback opportunities to the magazine via e-mail and the intranet.

6.7 SUMMARY

The editions of *Abacus* published between 1999 and 2003 measured up well to all the criteria set in this study – it formed part of the company’s overall communication strategy, it was supported by management, encouraged two-way symmetrical communication, had a balanced world view, published relevant information and presented it in a professionally produced publication.

Constant evaluation of the publication also ensured that it retained its unique character and place in the overall communication mix of Absa. Evaluation indicated the need to change the focus and character of the publication because of the increased use of new media in the company. The format change to a magazine overcame these problems and offered a new lease of life for the publication.

The fact that *Abacus* is now published by the marketing department and no longer by the internal communication department and is still regarded as an excellent in-house communication tool (both by employees who reacted to an internal survey and the SA Publication Forum giving awards to the publication in 2005 [Forum, 2005]) raises the question whether Grunig’s opinion that it must be vested in an internal communication department, is suitable to in-house journals. This issue will be discussed further in Part II Chapter 11.

Theoretical contributions that can be deduced from this case study are:

- Encouraging two-way symmetrical communication through an in-house journal is relevant, but can be adjusted to incorporate new media channels
- The environment – both internally and externally – has an effect on in-house journals
- The responsibility of the in-house journal does not necessarily need to be vested in the public relations department (it can be vested in the marketing department), but the unique focus and identity of the publication must be maintained
- The printed in-house journal plays an important role in a company’s overall communication strategy, regardless of other new media used. However, this role should be clearly defined to ensure it offers unique information.

In the next chapter, Harmony’s *Harmonise* is analysed.

Part II

Chapter 7

HARMONISE – HARMONY GOLD MINING COMPANY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter *Harmonise*, the monthly in-house journal of Harmony, is analysed. The journal was only published from 2001 until 2004, but it was decided to include it as a case study since it could be regarded as a good journal based on the awards it received from the SA Publication Forum. It would therefore be interesting to see how *Harmonise* measured up to the criteria set in this study to determine if the closure of the magazine was justified or not.

Firstly, an overview of the company and publication is given, followed by the data obtained from the content analysis, which indicates overall publishing trends. The representative of the company employed to assist with the publication of *Harmonise – Words'Worth* (Sophia Dower), was interviewed. Although Harmony (specifically marketing director Ferdi Dippenaar) was contacted several times to obtain the company's view on the matter of closing *Harmonise*, the researcher was not successful in obtaining any official feedback from the company. Although this seems to indicate reluctance to speak about the communication culture in the company, the timing of the study could also be a factor. During the time when the researcher tried to speak to a Harmony employee, the company had just lost a major hostile bid (trying to take over rival Gold Fields), which not only cost it several hundred million rand (Anon, 2005:1), but also forced it to undergo major restructuring (Anon, 2005:7). This bid would definitely had an effect on the company and its employees.

7.2 PUBLICATION OVERVIEW

Harmonise was first published in January/February 2001, to provide a communication channel between Harmony's leaders and its middle management. The company had already established non-written communication channels (industrial theatre groups and verbal communication through the mine officers) to target the bulk of the workforce (miners), many of whom are illiterate or do not understand English. *Harmonise* was launched to fill the perceived communication gap that existed between senior and middle management (including mine manager/officer level) (Dower, 2005).

In 2002, the publication received a merit certificate for best communication from the SA Publication Forum and was also a finalist in the best newspaper category (Forum, 2004). In 2003 the publication received certificates for excellence in writing, communication and design and was a finalist in the categories: best achievement in writing and best newspaper.

7.3 PUBLICATION ANALYSIS

7.3.1 Overview

The following overall comments can be made before the analysis results on the issues published between 2001 and 2003 (see Appendix C) are discussed in detail:

- The paper had a strong newspaper look and feel (see Part II Introduction).
- The main focus of articles was on the company's operations. Issues covered in *Harmonise* were relevant to the mining industry and included HIV/Aids, safety and productivity.

- The publication predominantly used corporate colours – gold and black with spots of red. This tended to create an elegant look for the paper. Regardless of the high quality paper and corporate colours used, *Harmonise* retained a strong newspaper look and feel (because of its size, grid and layout [see Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23]).
- The overall layout and design of *Harmonise* remained the same for the entire period over which the study was done. The only noticeable change was a change in masthead design to incorporate a streamlined version of the company logo. The new masthead had a much cleaner look. The masthead saw a slight cosmetic change once again in September 2003 to incorporate the merger with ARMGold (see Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1: The various mastheads used for Harmonise.

- The use of visuals was limited compared to the other publications used in the study. However, the visuals were used well and one does not get a feeling of being “bored” (see Figure 7.2).



Figure 7.2: Examples of pages with few or no visuals are presented well by using various design elements such as fact boxes.

Overall a very clean, clear-cut layout was used with innovative graphics and pictures (see Figure 7.3).



Figure 7.3: Examples of good graphics use in Harmonise.

Below are the results of the content analysis showing the overall types of content that appeared in *Harmonise* (2001 to 2003) (see Appendix C).

The overall results of the publication analysis are as follows:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Safety | 12% (20, n=161) |
| Sport and recreation | 12% (20, n=161) |
| Branches | 11% (17, n=161) |
| Company news/achievements | 9% (15, n=161) |
| Education and training | 9% (14, n=161) |
| Markets | 7% (11, n=161) |
| General health | 4% (6, n=161) |
| Competitions | 4% (6, n=161) |
| Employee contributions/achievements | 4% (7, n=161) |
| Crime | 3% (5, n=161) |
| Productivity improvement | 3% (5, n=161) |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | 2% (3, n=161) |
| Sensitive queries | 2% (3, n=161) |
| Skills | 2% (3, n=161) |
| Staff/management appointment/changes | 2% (3, n=161) |
| Communication | 2% (4, n=161) |
| Vision/mission | 2% (4, n=161) |
| Legal issues | 1% (1, n=161) |
| Arts/culture | 1% (1, n=161) |
| Package changes | 1% (1, n=161) |
| Technology in use | 1% (1, n=161) |
| Company projects | 1% (1, n=161) |

| | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Message from CEO | 1% (1, n=161) |
| Marketing | 1% (1, n=161) |
| Letters | 1% (2, n=161) |
| Employee profile | 1% (2, n=161) |
| Strategic planning | 1% (2, n=161) |
| Ecology | 1% (1, n=161) |
| Technology | 1% (1, n=161) |

As the front cover of a publication is typically the strongest page in a magazine, articles appearing on a front cover are normally regarded as more important (cf. Bradley, 1997:20). For this reason the researcher also looked at what type of article would typically appear on *Harmonise's* front cover to understand what issues were regarded as important in Harmony.

The following issues appeared on the cover:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Company news/achievements | 31% (5, n=16) |
| Safety | 25% (4, n=16) |
| Communication | 13% (2, n=16) |
| Vision/mission | 13% (2, n=16) |
| Education and training | 6% (1, n=16) |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | 6% (1, n=16) |
| Legal issues | 6% (1, n=16) |

7.3.2 Content

The most important issues in this publication related to a mining company whose management would typically focus on safety, productivity, training and company news (as can be seen from the results above).

One of the main reasons why there was so much company news in the publication is that Harmony, as a company, went through many changes in a few years. Towards the end of 2003, it merged with ARMGold – a move that had a major impact on how the company would function and perform in the future. Management was fully aware of the potential impact this merger would have on employees and published a special edition of *Harmonise* in September 2003 that focused solely on the merger and how it would affect employees.

Harmonise's typical content covered the different areas of the business, which included performance (general issues that are typically covered in the business press), health and safety, individual mine performance, successes, people/skills development and training, social responsibility, HIV/Aids, human resources issues (housing, medical coverage, for example), sponsorships (specifically the Harmony athletic club, plus other sponsored sport and events), strategic initiatives (such as beneficiation, revival of the Free State goldfields), company initiatives (such as Laduma teamwork training and coaching) and general industry trends and issues (gold price movements and issues such as insider trading). The aim was to get buy-in from staff on internal initiatives, to give readers a perspective on where

Harmony fitted into the industry as a whole, and to recognise those who were mining “the Harmony Way” (Dower, 2005).

7.3.2.1 Content indicating management support

The content of *Harmonise* shows that management did support the publication in that they granted interviews and allowed the magazine to publish information on issues that would have a significant impact on employees. For example – Harmony heads in a new, exciting direction (September 2002:1), and The Harmony way explained (April 2002:1).

Interviews with the company CEO also showed that there was direct access to senior management and that the publication enjoyed its support, for example, The Midas touch (January 2003:1) in which company CEO Bernard Swanepoel explained a major deal with African Vanguard Resources; Harmony gives Bendigo R215m cash injection (October 2001:1) as well as the special edition of 23 September 2003 on the ARMGold merger.

According to Dower (2005), Harmony’s management supported *Harmonise* very well.

There was very strong support for the publication – and a great deal of pride associated with it – until the beginning of 2004, when it was decided to cease production. *Harmonise* served management well, and there was recognition of this from senior management.

Interestingly, we had quite a few queries from staff after the publication was stopped. Not only did readers seem to miss the publication, but they had also not been told that the publication was no longer being produced. This was most unfortunate. Just as people felt that things were happening that they needed to know about (a major potential merger which could also include retrenchments, for example), their only source of management news was cancelled (Dower, 2005).

Even though Harmony’s senior management did support the publication of *Harmonise* they decided in 2004 that *Harmonise* either did not serve its purpose any more or that another more suitable communication tool could be used to reach middle management. Be that as it may, management stopped, as far as known, the only formal communication tool between senior and middle management.

The timing of the closure of *Harmonise* is also of concern, as it coincided with the GoldFields takeover bid (see 7.1). In a time of uncertainty with regard to the future of the company, one of reportedly very few formal communication links between senior and middle management – the in-house journal – was closed.

7.3.2.2 Content covering the external environment

Harmonise used a fair amount of space on its external environment (39%, 63, n=161) (as can be seen from the results table in 7.3.1).

The most important external issues covered in *Harmonise* are legal issues (1% inside, 1, n=161; 6% cover, 1, n=16), HIV/Aids/STDs (2% inside, 3, n=161; 6% cover, 1, n=16) and education and training (9% inside, 14, n=161; 6% cover, 1, n=16). Legal issues such as equity were indirectly covered in articles on women in mining or company deals that specifically focused on equity – The Midas touch (January 2003:1) and articles on the ARMGold deal (March 2002:1; 23 September 2003).

With reference to the few articles published on employment equity (analysed as legal issues), Dower (2005) points out that after the ARMGold merger this ceased to be an issue, as Harmony met legislation’s equity requirements. This issue was covered in *Harmonise* both before and after the merger, at a time when the legislation on mines was first tabled.

Articles focusing on HIV/Aids included: We have seen the light (May 2001:1) and Eat your way to health (August/September 2003:5). However, it is noticeable that despite HIV/Aids being a major problem in the mining industry, there was actually very little coverage of the issue.

On the question of why *Harmonise* did not report regularly on HIV/Aids (only 2% of articles), Dower said that this was not the case:

We tried to publish an article on HIV/Aids at least in every second issue of *Harmonise*. However, the bulk of Harmony's HIV/Aids communication was done in the areas where it mattered most – at a miner and hospital/clinic level. Articles on the economic aspects of HIV/Aids and its impact on mining were included in *Harmonise*, and these were the aspects that were most relevant to middle management (Dower, 2005).

Articles covering education and training included: Our teacher learns a (German) lesson or two (April 2002:7), Learners gear up for final test (September 2002:7), Back to the books (January 2003:7).

The publication reported very regularly on what was going on in the gold market. This was relevant to employees in that the market could determine the future of individual mines. Examples of articles focusing on the gold market include: The trouble with gold (April 2002:2), The world of mining column that appeared regularly in the journal (October 2001, April 2002 and September 2002), Will gold measure up in 2003? (January 2003:2) and The different faces of gold (January 2003:4).

Another issue that enjoyed significant coverage in *Harmonise* was sport and recreation. It did not receive prominent coverage, but regular and extensive coverage – normally a full page on page 8. The sport and recreation coverage not only focused on an external issue, but also involved employees by focusing on them personally when an article was on a sporting event at one of the mines.

7.3.2.3 Content covering internal environment

Based on the results of the content analysis, the editor and publishing consultants of *Harmonise* regarded company news and achievements (9%, 15, n=161), safety (12%, 20, n=161), branch news (11%, 17, n=161) and the vision/mission (2%, 4, n=161) of the company as the most important issues. Although the total percentage of vision/mission articles was rather low, a significant number of these articles appeared on the cover, for example: The Harmony way explained (April 2002).

Examples of safety articles (12%, 20, n=161) (a major issue for a mining company) are: Safety honour roll and safety improvement league (May 2001:5, as well as smaller columns in other editions), Overhang is a killer (October 2001:4), Harmony mines kick safety butt (August/September 2002:1), Correct stope drilling means safe ore, safe gold, safe jobs (May 2001:3); Elandsrand plant reaches safety milestone (October 2001:5) and The secret is safety first (September 2002:7).

The publication also made a major effort to inform employees of how changes in company structure would influence them. An example is the special edition published on 23 September 2003 focusing on the ARMGold merger. Articles in this edition focused on exactly what the merger entailed (We all stand together [September 2003:1]) and the influence on employees (What next: implementing best practices [September 2003:6]).

Furthermore, *Harmonise* informed employees about what was happening in the company. Overall company results featured strongly, for example: Quarterly report: growing organically (January 2003:1), Harmony gives Bendigo R215m cash injection (October 2001:1), Competition

commission says yes to Freegold (March 2002:1) The Midas touch (January 2003:1) and Harmony delivers satisfactory performance (May 2001:1).

Branch news (11%, 17, n161), or in this case news from the different mines, formed a huge part of company information published in *Harmonise*. It often involved reports on the contributions of specific groups of employees, for example: Elandsrand plant reaches safety milestone (October 2001:5), Evander 5's stoping champs come first, second and third! (March 2002:4), Phakisa mine gets the green light (August/September 2003:3), Cook(e)ing up a storm (March 2002:7) and Cooke 1 are the national lamp room champions (April 2003:3).

Publishing these articles also encouraged employees from different mines to contribute to the publication to inform the rest of the company of what they were doing.

7.3.2.4 Content encouraging two-way symmetrical communication

Although there were articles that encouraged two-way symmetrical communication in *Harmonise*, they were few and far between.

Harmonise encouraged two-way communication by inviting people to contribute articles (page 8 of every issue) as well as publishing the occasional letter – when it received letters. In the April 2002 edition a letter from one of the mine managers was published. The letter, commenting on an article published in *Harmonise*, was not only published, but feedback was given by the editor as well.

It is noticeable, however, that very few letters were published, regardless of the monthly invitation of the editor and publishing consultant to employees to send contributions to the publication. As far as could be determined, the editorial team did not use any other form of article to obtain readers' views on issues covered in *Harmonise*.

Dower could not say if *Harmonise* achieved two-way symmetrical communication.

She explained that as consultants, they tried to introduce a letters page (to encourage two-way communication), and offered incentives to staff who contributed information or cartoons, or any other material, to the publication. However, staff contributions remained limited.

Dower adds that letters from staff were difficult to elicit.

Past experience on this and other publications has shown that even when an incentive is offered (e.g. a prize/cash), very few employees ever send in letters. Those that do, are often about "pet hates" or personal grudges that are not relevant to the broader company. In general, staff didn't seem to believe that management would take letters published in *Harmonise* seriously, or that having it published would make any difference (Dower, 2005).

One could offer the argument that employees' reluctance to support symmetrical two-way communication stemmed from an internal communication culture where employees were not encouraged to make any contributions and where they felt they would be victimised should they do so, especially if their comments proved to be critical of the company (see 2.3.2.12).

However, letters were not the only way in which employees could contribute to the journal. As the company's operations are widespread and the editor was based at the company's offices in Randfontein, on the far West Rand, one could assume that employees did contribute articles from various operations, since these appeared regularly in the newspaper. Dower confirms that at least two stories per issue were contributed by staff. The junior trainee (employed by Harmony to assist the editor in compiling the publication), used to spend most of the month visiting the mines and talking to staff, in order to source news.

With this approach, there was no need, it was argued, for staff to send in articles of their own – they shared the information directly with the junior trainee (Dower, 2005).

In this respect, the bulk of the news (at least 70% of the content), came directly from staff. Their input determined the news list and content for each issue (Dower, 2005).

At Harmony, staff had a fairly open communication channel with management through the “open door” policy, which, for the most part, obviated the need for a letters column. Because *Harmonise* targeted middle management, most of the issues that needed resolving were dealt with in personal meetings and one-on-one discussions. Knowing that staff seemed to think of *Harmonise* as a management mouthpiece, Dower says she doubts that they considered the journal to be an effective forum for tackling contentious issues (Dower, 2005).

7.3.3 Technical aspects

Harmony employed an editor (Teresa Lee) as well as a trainee to assist with the publication of *Harmonise*. However, a large amount of the work was outsourced to publishing consultants Words’Worth. Words’Worth employs professional editors, journalists and graphic designers. This team assisted the editor in compiling and editing articles, as well as sourcing visuals. It also managed the design and layout of the publication and supervised the reproduction and printing processes.

7.3.3.1 Language

Harmonise was published in its entirety in English. Although one can assume that a variety of languages were spoken by employees, it must be remembered that *Harmonise* was aimed at middle management only. For a person to be able to fill a middle management position one could be sure that such a person could speak, read and understand English well.

7.3.3.2 Title

The name of the publication was derived from the company name. It was presented in a simple way in a masthead that remained predominantly similar throughout the study period. Cosmetic changes were made to incorporate changes to the overall company identity.

The name was decided upon prior to the launch of the first issue, and was chosen because of its obvious link to the company name, but also because it embodied the ultimate aim of a staff newsletter as well as the aim of the company in general: to unite staff, to operate the business in “harmony”, to communicate in such a way that everyone would be “singing the same tune”, that everyone would be “harmonising” (Dower, 2005).

7.3.3.3 Paper

Regardless of *Harmonise*’s newspaper design and layout, it was printed on high-quality paper (135 gsm Art Stock), which gave the publication a durable and professional look (Magazine World, 2005 – see Part I Chapter 4; Bivins, 1993).

7.3.3.4 Design

Harmonise was designed in typical tabloid newspaper style, being A3 with a five-column grid (cf. Ferreira & Staude, 1991:29) (see Figure 7.4).

The design approach was based on accessibility of information presented in strong colours, bold type and clear, easy-to-read text, with plenty of photos and meaningful captions. Spreads were designed so that readers knew where to start reading (i.e. lead stories vs. sidebar information), and so that the pages were visually interesting as well as informative.

Design was functional, carefully structured and neat, rather than the highly creative intricate design one might find in a magazine or marketing document (Dower, 2005).

The paper's design and layout were clean and elegant. It is obvious that there was a very definite style and that it was implemented in every issue. For example, colour – mainly corporate colours – was used consistently throughout the publication (see Figure 7.5).



Figure 7.4: The newspaper design used by *Harmonise*.



Figure 7.5: Corporate colour use in *Harmonise*.

There was also a definite headline style in which the same font was used throughout, but using either gold or black and varying the font size. No odd fonts or colours were used.



Figure 7.6: Pages showing consistent headline, font and colour use.

Other design elements that were used consistently, but well, were cross-headlines, drop capitals, sub-headlines, teasers and pull quotes (see Figure 7.6 and 7.7). Although first paragraphs were not necessarily bigger, they were in most cases printed in bold. The publication also regularly published fact boxes to help explain issues related to specific articles.

Harmonise did not feature a contents list, but this is understandable, as it is not really necessary for an eight-page newsletter and is not associated with newspaper layout.

Overall, the layout of *Harmonise* was consistent and stylish, making it attractive and easy to read.

7.3.3.4.1 Size and grid

Many tabloid newspapers (e.g. *The Citizen* and *The Sowetan*) are A3 in size and have a five-column grid, just like *Harmonise*, and it is for that reason that it reminds one so strongly of a newspaper (see Figure 7.7).

The typical tabloid (or A3) size is widely regarded as an appropriate format for a staff newsletter. It has the “newspaper” feel about it, in terms of size. This size is also practical for design reasons in that it allows the designer to include a large number of articles (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:29; see Part II Introduction). Typically, staff newsletters do not contain long text articles or features, especially in a monthly publication, where news is time-related. A3 allows the designer to accommodate lots of different articles and photos, of varying length, in a way that people can access easily. Readers do not have to turn too many pages and they can view the content quickly (an overall look at six large spreads is quicker than paging through 24 A4 pages) (Dower, 2005; Ferreira & Staude, 1991:29). An A3 format is also a less formal format than A4 magazine style, which is appropriate for a publication that is people-focused, and read at work (e.g. in a canteen, changehouse or coffee area) (Dower, 2005). Dower adds:

Although there is a general trend in publishing to move away from tabloid formats, especially in large corporates (particularly banks and some parastatals), where their internal flagship publication takes the form of a 48-page A4 magazine, the nature and size of Harmony’s business, plus the people-focused approach that their staff seem to want, seem more appropriately managed in an A3 rather than A4 format. Although changing the magazine to A4 format was discussed, it was decided that the bigger A3 format suited the organisation well and it remained so until its closure in 2004 (Dower, 2005).

7.3.3.4.2 Colour

Colour was used conservatively in *Harmonise*. The main colours were black and gold – the company’s corporate colours. Photographs were used in colour as well. Here and there, red design elements were used (see Figure 7.5). The overall impression, when it comes to colour use, is that there was a definite and predetermined style guide. Colour was used well to illustrate articles. It did not distract the reader but rather, subconsciously, attracted readers to articles.



Figure 7.7: Examples of design elements used in *Harmonise*.



Figure 7.8: Good use of visuals.

7.3.3.4.3 Visuals

Harmonise used significantly fewer visuals than the four other publications studied. The visuals used, however, were big and were well placed to enhance articles. Even pages where no visuals were used, did not look boring because of clever design and good use of colour (see Figure 7.8). One must understand that taking pictures of underground mining operations (such as those used by Harmony), is difficult and very often dangerous. Articles in *Harmonise* also often discussed abstract issues, such as new management systems, which are difficult to illustrate. In these cases innovative graphics and stock photographs were used.

7.3.3.4.4 Captions

Captions in *Harmonise* were well written and creative. They clearly aimed not only to state what the visual was about, but also to link it with the article it accompanied, for example: Quarterly competitions keep Cooke 1 teams on their toes, and their safety figures looking good (a picture of the Cooke 1 team) (August/September 2003:5), Pushing it with everything they've got... the Merriespruit 1 teams have consistently made, and even exceeded, production targets since February this year, turning the mine from break-even to profit mode. Well done! (three different pictures of team members) (October 2001:3) and Seeing Evander 9 through its last four production months are Dolf Pienaar, engineer and foreman, and Rot Mundell, mine manager (a picture of the two gentlemen in front of the mine) (April 2002:3).

7.3.3.4.5 Typeface

The same font (Avante Garde Gothic) was used for headlines, although in different sizes and colours. The only two colours used for headlines were black and gold, the company's corporate colours. Body copy (Avante Garde Gothic) was the same throughout and was only used in black. The typeface was clear and easy to read (see Figure 7.9).



Figure 7.9: Fonts used in Harmonise.

7.3.3.4.6 Layout

The company that was responsible for the layout of *Harmonise* (Word'sWorth), clearly kept to a predetermined style.

7.3.3.4.7 Headlines

Headlines were well written and concise, for example: Meet our newest millionaires (an article on a team that achieved a million accident free-hours) (April 2002:1), As blind as a ... bore? (the possibilities of using a new bore) (March 2002:2) and The Midas touch (the new deal between Harmony and African Vanguard Resources) (January 2003:1).

7.3.3.5 Sub-editing

All pages were well edited and good quality copy was used. Spelling errors were eliminated and articles were easy to read and understand. A predetermined style was used for the publication.

7.3.3.6 Budget

Harmonise had a very detailed budget supplied by Words'Worth to Harmony. The budget was based on the size of the publication and included services such as editing, photography, design, production and printing. Both Harmony and Words'Worth kept expenses within budget.

7.3.3.7 Production schedule

A monthly publishing interval was chosen as smaller amounts of communication, more often, are always more effective than producing a bulkier publication every two or three months. News was often time-related and would have been outdated had it been published anything more than monthly (Dower, 2005).

Planning for one issue usually started as soon as the previous issue was in production (at Words'Worth). Upon receipt of the news list, Words'Worth would refer to the annual production schedule and confirm the schedule for that issue. Annual planning was done at the end of each year (Dower, 2005). *Harmonise* went out promptly every month, without fail. The consultants aimed to have it in readers' hands in the first or second week of the month, unless there was a specific issue or "breaking story" that it was decided warranted delaying the publication.

7.3.3.8 Reproduction and printing

Initially, about 8 500 copies of *Harmonise* were printed, but this was increased to about 12 000 after the ARMGold merger (Dower, 2005).

7.3.3.9 Distribution

Copies were packaged in bulk at the printer, and distributed via courier (either private, or the company courier) to the marketing/communications contact person at each mine. This person then distributed copies to the various managers in the mine office (Dower, 2005).

7.4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Regardless of numerous efforts to obtain information on *Harmonise* from Harmony, the researcher received no feedback from the company. Therefore, internal communication issues were discussed, inter alia, with Dower of publishing specialist Words'Worth, the company responsible for producing *Harmonise*. However, the exact reasons for the closure of *Harmonise* would only be possible to determine following a detailed internal communication audit with inputs from the company. It is important to remember though, that the focus of this study was not on determining why the publication was closed, but rather if it was, despite the fact that it was closed, a good in-house journal.

7.4.1 Public relations tool

Harmonise was published as a communication tool to explain senior management's approach to certain business decisions and to show how their decisions supported the "Harmony Way" (the company's main vision). During the time that it was published (2001 until 2004), it formed part of the company's overall communication strategy.

Management needed to reinforce this business approach and culture, and constantly to share with employees how they should/could go about implementing this. In other words, they needed a channel through which they could give people, such as mine managers, practical examples of how to implement the Harmony Way. Management also needed a channel through which they could share examples of teams that had had success, and what the team's "secret to success" was.

As far as we could determine, the company's management also needed/wanted to position Harmony within the broader South African and international gold industry, share trends and strategic information, as well as share performance information on individual mines as well as the company as a whole (Dower, 2005).

From an employee viewpoint (in this case middle management – the target audience of *Harmonise*), Dower says that they needed recognition of performance, information on other teams and the rest of the company, as well as news of the company itself before they read about it in the press.

One of the most popular aspects of the later issues of *Harmonise* was internal performance: comparisons of how the different mines performed. This was a feature of *Free Speak*, the FreeGold newsletter that was incorporated into *Harmonise* after the ARMGold merger.

Free Speak regularly printed performance comparisons, as well as a lot of "people" information (which, because FreeGold was a much smaller group of mines, the company was able to do quite successfully in one newsletter). Once *Free Speak* was incorporated into *Harmonise*, this was not always possible because of the vast number of mines and people involved (Dower, 2005).

Harmony used other internal communication tools as well. These included: *Bernard's Beat* (a bi-weekly or monthly memorandum style A4 page newsletter), industrial theatre at all the mines, whenever a major change was in progress, visual/multilingual posters and bulletin boards at the mines and personal discussions between mine managers/officers and their teams on a continuous basis (particularly at the weekly meetings that every mine team had when planning their operations for the week). Even though various new media resources were available to the company, one wonders how many people working on a mine – even in middle management positions – would have access to information channels such as e-mail and intranets.

New media, in this case radio, seemed to have meant the end of the line for *Harmonise*. Although limited reasons were given for why the company decided to stop publishing *Harmonise*, Words'Worth did come to the conclusion that one of the reasons was that Harmony decided rather to use radio broadcasts. In the case of a mine, a radio broadcast might reach more people (especially illiterate ones), but *Harmonise* was aimed at middle management (who one assumes could read) and replacing it with a radio bulletin that is difficult to give feedback on (workers can hardly telephone while they are working), might not have been a suitable way of continuing to communicate with employees.

7.4.2 Communication culture

Dower (2005) describes Harmony's communication culture as relatively open, since the company had a flat staff structure and focused on a team approach to business. She explained that as far as she experienced communication within Harmony, each mining team worked as a company in itself, in which every person helped to put together their business plan, and in which everyone took responsibility for their performance. Generally there was an open-door policy in terms of communication (Dower, 2005).

The company also produced regular news bulletins (*Bernard's Beat*) in addition to *Harmonise*, which helped to share information with middle management and office staff in a personal, relatively informal way.

7.4.3 Involvement in strategic management

As far as Dower (2005) is aware, *Harmonise* did not have any influence in any way on the strategic management decisions taken in Harmony. She motivates this by pointing out that the newspaper was never invited to strategy discussions, but was informed later of what decisions had been made. However, the publication did support management in its strategic decisions by informing employees about all aspects of the vision, mission and all strategic decisions (Dower, 2005).

Harmonise was closely involved with senior management to communicate any new strategic decisions taken and to explain how these would influence employees.

7.4.4 Management

At the time when *Harmonise* was published, Harmony did not have a dedicated communication or public relations department. Financial/investor relations were handled by the marketing director and one staff member at head office, while all public relations and end-of-line marketing activities, including the production of *Harmonise*, were handled by Theresa Lee at the company's Randfontein offices (Harmony's head office is in Melrose in Johannesburg). The fact that the editor of the company's employee magazine was not based

at head office, also indicates that the company might not have attached as much importance to it as an internal communication tool than the other companies that were studied.)

The editor and the junior trainee were the only people responsible for the production of *Harmonise* at Harmony. The marketing director checked proofs, but was not involved in any other way in the day-to-day running of *Harmonise*. News lists were discussed at management meetings, but the rest of the production (all editing, some research and writing, all layout, design and printing) was done externally, by Words'Worth (Dower, 2005). However, the editor was able to work extremely closely with senior management, including the marketing director and the CEO. The marketing director was also actively involved in the production of *Harmonise* (by controlling proofs) (Dower, 2005).

The magazine itself had a very specific vision and mission, in the form of an editorial policy that outlined the aims and goals of *Harmonise*, and that could be used as a guideline when evaluating content for publication. In a nutshell, this policy strove to ensure that *Harmonise* would reflect the company's main attributes: bold, brave, fighting spirit, committed, enjoyment/sense of humour, honesty (Dower, 2005).

The publication's aim was formulated as follows:

To be a bold, objective and trusted source of information for Harmony employees – one which presents the business of mining as well as the challenges and achievements of Harmony and its people, in a credible and enjoyable way.

The publication's main objectives were to create a broader understanding of the world of mining (national and international mining industry) and more importantly, Harmony's role in it: to build unity, pride, enthusiasm and a sense of ownership among employees, nurturing their commitment to mining the Harmony Way, to increase awareness and understanding of the nature, challenges and needs of Harmony and to build support for and participation in the campaigns/programmes used to help meet these needs, and to reflect the energy, spirit, sense of humour and enjoyment that is part of all Harmony's operations (Dower, 2005).

It is important to note, however, that when Words'Worth took over the production of the publication, there was no written copy of a policy or mission. It was only a year after the company was contracted to publish *Harmonise* that this policy was put in place on behalf of Harmony. The policy was distributed to the editor and marketing director (Dower, 2005). However, Dower has no proof that the policy was ever formally adopted by Harmony.

Regardless of the perception that there was no significant commitment from the company to *Harmonise*, it was well managed by the publishing consultants, Words'Worth. The company implemented the necessary production schedules, vision and mission for the publication, which it adhered to.

7.5 EVALUATION

Words'Worth periodically reviewed *Harmonise*. In May 2002 there was a detailed review session which included members of Harmony's management team and certain changes were implemented after this session. Another session took place in 2003 after Harmony merged with ARMGold to review the publication's mission and vision as well as editorial policy. Changes were implemented. A reader's survey was also inserted in *Harmonise* prior to the redesign that was done in 2003 to determine what readers would like to see in the in-house journal (Dower, 2005).

Words'Worth also entered *Harmonise* in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition on behalf of Harmony and used the remarks received from the judges (who are all professionally trained journalists and communicators working in the corporate communication field), to improve the publication. Taking part in the competition was regarded as a peer-review mechanism. The fact that the publication received several awards over a few years is an indication that outsiders regarded it as a good publication.

7.6 THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

Based on the results from the content analysis as well as the information supplied by the publishing consultant, *Harmonise* will now be measured against the four theoretical statements made in Part I of this study and against the overall guiding theoretical statement of the study.

Statement 1

Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.

During the research period (1999-2003), Harmony's *Harmonise* did not measure up entirely to this first statement.

Although *Harmonise* did enable two-way communication to some extent, the level of its public relations activities is not clear (because of lack of feedback from the company itself). The fact that there was no specific public relations plan or strategy for *Harmonise* (as far as could be determined) is of concern, as one would expect it to influence the publication negatively.

However, the publication, with the help of publishing consultants, addressed issues that would have had an influence on employees and did encourage employees to contribute to the newspaper, showing that although this was not necessarily encouraged or planned by the company, the newspaper did enable two-way communication between senior management and employees.

It is not clear how Harmony employed other media to encourage two-way communication between employees and management.

The best way to describe *Harmonise*'s communication style would be that of a two-way asymmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:27). The two-way asymmetrical model uses research to identify messages most likely to elicit support from stakeholders without having to change the behaviour of the organisation. Practitioners of the public information model change public behaviour and opinions, even though that may not be their intent (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:28).

Since there is no specific public relations department in Harmony, the responsibility of *Harmonise* fell under the investor relations and marketing department. Although it is not clear what the exact focus of this department was, it is clear that it managed all communication, both internally and externally, for the company.

The lack of a public relations department could suggest that there was lack of structured communication with all stakeholders, both internal and external. Ehling, White and Grunig (1992:37) point out that although both the marketing and public relations functions in a company are important, one cannot dominate the other. Grunig (2001) adds that a public relations department must not only be independent, but the function of public relations must fall under a single department (see Part I Chapter 2). However, as was seen in the case of Absa's *Abacus* (Part II Chapter 6), if a company has a clear focus and strategy for both internal and external communication – even if it is the responsibility of the marketing department – it can communicate effectively with all stakeholders.

Since there is a significant lack of information on the management of the publication, it is difficult to assess the exact importance it played in the overall communication strategy of Harmony.

Both the content and information obtained from interviews show that Harmony's senior management did support the publication. The editor did not form part of senior management, but had direct and easy access to members of senior management. The editor and her assistant represented the society they worked in – one being white and one being black.

It is not clear what training, or experience, either the editor or the editorial assistant had (the two people employed by Harmony that were responsible for *Harmonise*). However, the company did (at least for some time) employ highly trained and skilled professionals through consultancy company Words'Worth.

Words'Worth (on behalf of Harmony) conducted various internal surveys (including a readers' survey) to determine if the in-house journal was still meeting readers' needs. These evaluation sessions took place specifically after major changes within the company to ensure these were incorporated in the image and editorial policy of *Harmonise*. *Harmonise* was also entered in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition, on the one hand to obtain an opinion from external professionals and on the other to see how the magazine measured up to those published by other companies in South Africa.

Statement 2

An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Harmonise's overall world view in the period 1999 to 2003 can be described as symmetrical, acknowledging that it would have had to adapt to both internal and external environments to ensure that it remained a relevant information source (Grunig, 1992).

In the case of *Harmonise*, it seems as if external environment issues did have a direct impact on the publication. Towards 2003-2004, the mining industry in South Africa suffered significant losses because of a significantly stronger rand. Harmony was involved in several expansion/takeover projects, some of which were successful and some not. Such projects, successful or not, have significant financial implications for companies. The results of these two issues could have been that the company had to reconsider its overall spending and, combined with the belief (as far as could be determined) that radio was a more suitable means of communicating with the target audience, this led to the closure of the publication.

The company's internal environment could therefore also have had an influence on the publication, as it could have been decided that using a radio station would be a more effective means of communicating with people who work outside on the actual mines.

Regarding the content of *Harmonise*, both the content analysis and the interview with people who worked on *Harmonise* revealed that the newspaper formed an important link between the company and its environment, as it published articles on both the internal and external environment in which the company operated.

Harmonise had a good balance between reporting on external (39%, 63, n=161) and internal (61%, 98, n=161) matters. Its world view can be described as symmetric, since it acknowledged that its environment (e.g. legislation and markets) did have an influence on the company (Grunig, 1992).

Statement 3

An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).

Harmonise was a very well-balanced publication reporting extensively on issues one would typically expect in an in-house journal (as determined by local and international literature). Although the company did not publish regular columns such as letters and opinion pieces, it did convey detailed company information, employee news and profiles. The company therefore managed to keep employees up to date on what was taking place in the company.

Statement 4

Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).

Harmonise was well-planned, with a set budget and a pre-determined production schedule. It was well managed because Harmony employed professional publishers to handle *Harmonise* on its behalf. The publishers (Words'Worth) managed the majority share of the work required to publish *Harmonise*. The publication used the company's internal mailing system for distribution to all its operations.

Content analysis shows the publication made use of high-quality paper, a pre-determined style that was easily readable, used well-written articles supported by good headlines and clear captions and very good quality visuals.

Based on these findings, the fifth research question

What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

can be answered as follows:

- During the study period *Harmonise* was the responsibility of the marketing and investor relations department (see 7.4.4). However, contrary to how *Abacus* was managed once it became the responsibility of the marketing department, it seems as if there was lack of commitment from Harmony's marketing department to its in-house journal. However,

this case study proves that by outsourcing the in-house journal to professional publishing consultants, this problem can be overcome. As a publication, *Harmonise* was well managed and had a vision and mission statement, was professionally produced and appeared on time.

- The second theoretical issue highlighted by this case study, is the importance of the environment for an in-house journal. Although it is not clear what the reason was for the closure of *Harmonise*, it is more than likely that both external (the gold market and rand-dollar exchange) and internal (restructuring and failed take-overs as well as the use of other media such as radio) reasons were contributing factors in the demise of the publication (see 7.1).
- A third issue is that it seems that if an in-house journal does not have a very specific position within the company's overall communication strategy, it could experience substantial competition from other media sources, such as radio. This competition can be of such a scale that it could lead to the closure of a printed in-house journal.
- Lastly, *Harmonise* proves that all the different theoretical focus areas discussed in this study must be incorporated to ensure an excellent in-house journal. A company can have a well-managed publication (even if it is managed by an external company) that publishes relevant information packaged in a professionally produced publication, but if the environment it operates in does not support the publication, it will not be able to continue. One could then also make the assumption that even if the environment supports the publication but it is badly managed and/or does not live up to generally accepted technical requirements, it will not be successful.

7.7 SUMMARY

Although *Harmonise* did not measure up to all the criteria set in this study (the publication was not the responsibility of the internal communications department, and two-way symmetrical communication was not encouraged by the company), the overall result is a professionally produced publication that communicated relevant company issues to its readers. This once again questions the validity of Grunig's (1992) opinion that an in-house journal (as an internal communications tool) must be vested in the internal communications department. Outsourcing a publication to a professional publisher specialising on in-house journals, can ensure that the publication has a strong internal communication character and not a marketing or advertising one, even if it is the responsibility of the marketing department.

Although new media are used extensively in many South African companies to communicate with employees, some of them do not have a suitable internal environment to allow all employees to make use of such channels. A mine where workers are out of the office is a good example of this. In such a scenario a printed in-house journal – and even a newspaper focusing on the latest news – is very much applicable to ensure information reaches employees.

From this one could deduce that a professional-looking in-house journal is not a definite indicator of the type of internal communication in a company.

Theoretical contributions that can be deduced from this case study are:

- Professional publishing consultants can manage an in-house journal effectively on behalf of a company
- The environment in which in-house journals operate is very important and can have a huge influence on the publication

- An in-house journal's role within the overall communication strategy must be clearly defined to ensure it does not compete with other communication channels
- All the different variables discussed in this study – management, the environment and technical requirements – are equally important to ensure the success of an in-house journal.

In the next chapter, MTN's HTF is analysed.

Part II

Chapter 8

HELLO THE FUTURE – MTN

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on HTF, the monthly in-house journal of cellular telecommunications company MTN.

MTN is a South African cellular network operator and is listed on the JSE Securities Exchange under the umbrella of the MTN Group (Mbendi, 2004). Launched in 1994, MTN has close to five million subscribers in the various countries where it operates and its GSM network is one of the largest in the world. Apart from South Africa, the company also has operations in Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Swaziland and Cameroon. It employs about 6 500 people in the group.

HTF is analysed in terms of the criteria discussed in Part I Chapter 2, 3 and 4. Firstly an overview of the company and publication is given, followed by the data obtained from the content analysis, which indicates overall publishing trends. The editor, Roy Paige, was then interviewed to gather additional information on the management, communication and technical issues of the publication.

This information will be combined to see how the publication measures up to the four theoretical statements made in Part I.

8.2 PUBLICATION OVERVIEW

HTF was first published as *The Better Connection* (TBC) in 1996, two years after MTN was founded in 1994. It was initially an in-house journal reflecting mostly the social events taking place within the company. The company at this stage was very small and sociable (Paige, 2005). Naming the first magazine after the company's marketing pay-off line, established a precedent that the magazine would be named according to the pay-off line in future.

Over the years the magazine has changed dramatically to keep up with the changes in the company. Initially, MTN comprised MTN Networks and M-Tel (the service provider). In 1999 these two merged into one company – with a united team in South Africa – and the publication was then aimed at everybody in the group.

In 1998 the company started expanding further into Africa (Paige, 2005) and by 2001 it was recognised that HTF needed to publish more information from operations in other countries. As the editor explains:

We therefore moved away from an MTN South Africa in-house social newsletter to something that would have far more authority, be more industry-related and less social-event oriented. After the 2002 redesign, HTF could rather be described as an internal industry journal compared to a social newsletter (Paige, 2005).

HTF moved away from being produced by only one person working internally at MTN, to employing a professional publishing company – in this case Roodepoort-based Fox Publishing – when it was redesigned. It also changed its name to HTF in 2002.

In 2003, the publication received a certificate for excellence in writing and was a finalist for the best internal magazine at the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition (Forum 2003).

8.3 PUBLICATION ANALYSIS

8.3.1 Overview

Analysing HTF from 1999 to 2003 (see Appendix C) almost equates to analysing two different magazines.

In 1999, the starting period of this study, MTN's in-house journal was called TBC, but in 2002 it changed not only in design and layout, but also in its focus and became HTF.

Overall the following remarks can be made:

- There was a major redesign of the magazine with a slight change in news focus in 2002 (see Figure 8.1).



Figure 8.1: The two different designs used for The Better Connection and Hello the Future

- There were several points (both editorially and technically) that could be improved upon in TBC. Most of these were changed in HTF.
- Although this is an employee magazine, it is difficult to determine from the content what impact employees had on the publication, and to what extent it encouraged two-way symmetrical communication.
- There was a definite editorial and layout style that was followed consistently.

Below are the results of this content analysis showing the overall types of content that appeared in HTF (1999 to 2003). The n-value for both the overall and front cover results is given in brackets to indicate the total number of articles. Results will be given, for example, as 25% (25, n=100).

The overall results of the publication analysis are as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Sport and recreation | 23% (104, n=451) |
| Branches/subsidiaries | 13% (59, n=451) |
| Marketing | 7% (33, n=451) |
| Arts/culture | 7% (31, n=451) |
| Education and training | 5% (24, n=451) |
| Editorial | 4% (17, n=451) |
| New initiatives | 3% (15, n=451) |
| Employee profile | 2% (11, n=451) |
| Products/services | 2% (11, n=451) |
| Ecology | 2% (11, n=451) |
| Humour | 2% (9, n=451) |
| Company news/achievements | 2% (7, n=451) |
| Competitions | 2% (7, n=451) |
| Customer information/service | 2% (8, n=451) |
| Technology in use | 2% (9, n=451) |
| Employee contributions/achievements | 2% (10, n=451) |
| Staff/management changes/appointments | 2% (7, n=451) |
| Technology | 2% (10, n=451) |
| Crime | 2% (8, n=451) |
| Communication | 1% (4, n=451) |
| Message from CEO | 1% (5, n=451) |
| Productivity improvement | 1% (3, n=451) |
| Industry sectors | 1% (5, n=451) |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | 1% (6, n=451) |
| Policy/procedure | <1% (1, n=451) |
| Safety | <1% (1, n=451) |
| Markets | <1% (1, n=451) |
| General health | <1% (1, n=451) |

As the front cover of a publication is typically the strongest page in a magazine, articles appearing on a front cover are normally regarded as more important (cf. Bradley, 1997:20). For this reason the researcher also looked at what type of article would typically appear on HTF's front cover to understand what issues were regarded as important in MTN.

The following issues appeared on the cover:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Branches/subsidiaries | 27% (5, n=18) |
| Education and training | 10% (2, n=18) |
| Technology | 10% (2, n=18) |
| Sport and recreation | 6% (1, n=18) |
| Social development | 6% (1, n=18) |
| Arts/culture | 6% (1, n=18) |
| Marketing | 6% (1, n=18) |
| Company news/achievements | 6% (1, n=18) |
| Message from CEO | 6% (1, n=18) |
| New initiatives | 6% (1, n=18) |
| Employee contributions | 6% (1, n=18) |
| Staff/management changes/appointments | 6% (1, n=18) |

8.3.2 Content

The editor explained that the main target audience of HTF was the permanent staff of MTN. Most permanent employees of the company have tertiary qualifications, which influences the type of content that is published in the in-house journal as well as the way it is presented.

The informal publishing policy for the study period (1999 to 2003) and up to the present time (a guide the editor uses when compiling each issue of HTF) has been to publish:

- industry snippets to inform readers on what is going on worldwide in the cellular telephony industry
- a guest article – either a humorous article to entertain readers, or an article written by an outsider to address any sensitive issue (the reason for this is to avoid a “prescribed” type of article written by a management member that tends to come across as reprimands instead of an informative explanation)
- group news (the aim is to publish an article from each of the six operating units in every issue. However, this did not always happen, as the editor was dependent on the communication personnel in a particular country to forward articles to him)
- MTN Foundation news and articles on corporate social development, technical issues and new sponsorships undertaken by the company.

The magazine published messages from the CEO (1%, 5, n=451), but only when it was necessary. According to the editor, a regular column could have the effect that the CEO would write a message that did not really carry any new information, causing employees not to read it. However, if they knew that messages were only published when there was new and important information, it would give such an article more value (Paige, 2005).

These guidelines given by the editor compare well with the content analysis done on four issues drawn randomly from every year between 1999 and 2003.

8.3.2.1 Content indicating management support

Management’s support for HTF can be seen from the content (see tables above), as senior management contributed by granting interviews. Messages from the CEO also indicated

senior management support for the publication. Overall, 1% (5, n=451) of the articles were messages from the CEO, representing 6% (1, n=18) of cover articles (either company or divisional CEOs), for example: MTN CEO Bob Chapne gearing up for 1999 (February 1999:1), Into the 21st century (January 2001:4-5). However, it is noticeable that these articles all appeared before the design change.

After the design change (in 2002), members of senior management did grant interviews to HTF either in the form of company news or employee profiles (2%, 11, n=451), for example: Signalling strong leadership – an interview with Phuthuma Nhleko (June 2002:9), An outstanding year for customer operations (quoting South African general executive: customer relations Kgabo Bodimo) (February 2003:4-5), One group, one brand, one future (quoting MTN CEO Nhleko) (April 2003:10-11).

In the earlier editions, photographs of senior management also regularly appeared on the front cover (February 1999, November/December 2000, April 2001) (see Figure 8.2).



Figure 8.2: Two examples of management members on the cover of TBC.

The editor believes that senior management members fully supported HTF, not only because they were always willing to participate in articles, but also because they used HTF when interacting with potential business partners or clients (Paige, 2005).

8.3.2.2 Content covering the external environment

MTN is involved in various programmes and events outside the company. It acknowledges its external environment and reports extensively on it.

The external topic that enjoyed most coverage between 1999 and 2003 was sport and recreation (23%, 104, n=451). From the articles it is obvious that MTN was involved in many sponsorships that involved sport and recreational activities, for example: In league with soccer (a countrywide soccer road show sponsored by the company) (February 1999:17), Steffi bids a special farewell (MTN's sponsorship of Steffi Graf's retirement tour to South Africa) (January 2000:18-19), and 111 – what is the unlucky Nelson? (an article published during the 2003 World Cup Cricket hosted in South Africa and partly sponsored by MTN) (February 2003:14-15). Many shorter articles involved functions and events where the MTN-sponsored gladiators appeared (October 1999:22; September 2000:16; January 2001:24, April 2001:21; June 2002:22).

Initially, before the redesign of the publication, TBC published a huge amount of shorter sport and recreation articles. After the redesign, fewer stories were published, but those published used much more space and were more prominent. The editor explains that with the change in focus of the magazine, there was a definite decision to scale down on social-type news about the South African operation, to accommodate more articles from operating units in other countries (Paige, 2005).

The second issue that enjoyed significant coverage was arts and culture (7%, 31, n=451). Once again the company supported arts and cultural events either through its own Arts Foundation, or through sponsorships, for example: African Art in the MTN collection (October 1999:8), Young curators' course at the MTN Art Institute (September 2000:10-11), February 2001:10-11 gives a profile on artist-in-residence at MTN Allinda Ndebele, MTN Art travels to Swaziland – Swaziland Art Society celebrates 30 years (June 2002:16) and Restoring Sara Baartman's identity (August 2002:16).

In a country where there are millions of poor and disadvantaged people, MTN was involved in various social development (7%, 30, n=451) as well as education and training (5%, 24, n=451) projects. Most of these projects were not aimed at employees, but at the general public. The company did, however, report extensively on these issues to employees, for example: MTN and the National Qualifications Framework (explaining what new training requirements were in place) (November/December 2000), Corporate affairs adopts ten schools in South Africa (May 2001:4-5), Nelson Mandela launches MTN Foundation (a foundation specifically focusing on social development) (January 2002:4-7), MTN and Dimension Data sponsor Eastern Cape School (August 2002:4-5), MTN schools connectivity: 'the way is open' (April 2003:12-13). On the cover of the September 2003 edition (and then on page 8-9) Sustainable development is key to growth and long-term success.

Another issue that MTN is very much involved in is the environment (2%, 11, n=451), for example: Ringing trans-border oyster catchers (October 1999:10), MTN boosts Rennie's wetland project (October 1999:11), Poachers and nuclear power – is there a connection? (September 2000:27). After the redesign, HTF regularly published a full page of industry news (1%, 5, n=451) informing employees of what was going on. This feature appeared on page 3 of each issue (see Figure 8.3).



Figure 8.3: The industry snippets page that was introduced in HTF.

HTF also covered – although not in many articles – HIV/Aids (2%, 6, n=451). The articles were all prominently placed with strong visuals, for example MTNers share their views on HIV/Aids (April 2003:16-17). In the same issue – on page 18 – the article, MTN does the listening – and helps out (on helping people suffering from HIV/Aids), was published. Food for

thought (an article on what food is good for HIV/Aids sufferers) (August 2002:17) and HIV/Aids: Conscience through art (January 2002:12) also dealt with this subject.

It is noticeable that there were no specific articles on issues such as employment equity (Judiciary = 0%). The editor believes that HTF did report regularly on both HIV/Aids and issues such as employment equity, but that, as the content analysis only involved a sample, articles in other editions were not recorded (Paige, 2005).

8.3.2.3 Content covering the internal environment

HTF was obviously used to inform different branches and divisions of what was going on in the company (branches/subsidiaries 13% [59, n=451], 27% cover [5, n=18]), for example: All abroad for Uganda (April 2003:14-15), MTN Cameroon's success story (September 2003:14-15), MTN Network Solutions connects the world summit (August 2002:10-11), Topping the service log is the goal (June 2002:8).

Marketing articles (7%, 33, n=451) such as Business over breakfast (June 2002:21), 'Y'ello Africa' takes off (April 2003:1) and Taxi ad puts MTN in the driver's seat (April 2003:8-9), and One group, one brand, one future (April 2003:10-11) aimed to inform employees of what marketing initiatives the company was involved in.

Articles on new initiatives (3%, 15, n=451) included: Make 2003 your best MTN year yet (February 2003:9) and Nelson Mandela launches MTN Foundation (January 2002:1).

When it came to actively dealing with issues that would influence employees as well as publishing relevant company news, HTF measured up very well. Topics included risk management (Managing the risks [February 1999:11]), the influence of technology on the company in 2000 (The MTN network enters the 21st century without a hitch [January 2000:4-6]), new products and services (2%, 11, n=451) (MTN's historic launch of GPRS [November/December 2000:8-9], It's payback time [June 2002:5], An instant office from MTN [August 2002:13], Change the way you see money with ebucks and MTN [February 2001:14-15]), company news and achievements (2%, 7, n=451) (Africa lifts M-Cell results [June 2002:10-11]), staff/management changes/appointments (2%, 7, n=451) (New CEO appointed to lead MTN Uganda [September 2003:16], A real MTN colleague [June 2002:12], Signalling strong leadership [February 2003:17]) and employee profiles (2%, 11, n=451) (Right on the money [April 2003:4-5], A man of many talents [February 2003:17]).

8.3.2.4 Content encouraging two-way symmetrical communication

From the content of HTF, it is obvious that the publication, in a small way, did act as two-way communication medium. Content tends to reflect information supplied by the company to employees, with few articles specifically portraying direct opinions (or feedback) from employees.

One aspect of the magazine that tended to create the impression that information flow was predominantly from the company (and management) to employees, was the regular use of pictures of management on the front cover of earlier editions. As the pictures could often not be clearly linked to a specific article, it seemed that a picture of management was used on the cover simply because it involved management (February 2001, April 2001) (see Figure 8.4). The change after the redesign to abstract pictures eliminated this problem.



Figure 8.4: An example of a picture of management on the cover of TBC vs. the abstract pictures representing a specific article in the magazine used by HTF.

The editor agrees that the magazine did not reflect two-way symmetrical communication but points out that this was done on purpose.

HTF does not intend to be a two-way communication tool between management and employees. The publication rather aims at being a central tool for distributing communication relevant to the entire MTN group. It recognises company achievements and informs employees of what is going on in the group. It is not the role of our magazine to form any base of communication between management and employees. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly it is a monthly magazine, making the publishing interval too long to effectively handle issues highlighted by employees (Paige, 2005).

The editor added that because of the company operating in so many different countries there were six vastly different cultures to deal with, making it even more difficult to try creating an overall two-way communication tool in the form of a magazine. He argued that one can only use an in-house journal effectively as a two-way communication tool when one deals with a smaller audience (preferably restricted to one country). MTN has realised this and has implemented quarterly in-house journals for each of the six operating units that deal specifically with social and internal issues relevant to a specific operating unit as well as allowing two-way communication between management and employees (Paige, 2005).

One can describe the company's approach to HTF as a predominantly press-agentry/publicity model (see 2.3.2.5), since the company's main aim was to publicise the company, its products and services – even though it was just to its own employees.

Another sign that communication was not symmetrical, is the fact that the publication never published letters. The editor explains (Paige, 2005):

We have a policy of not publishing any letters in HTF. I do not believe in it. Firstly if you are going to have a letters column you must be prepared to answer every single one of them and we don't have the capacity to do so. Secondly, letters that are written tend to be letters of complaint and letters that are negative. There are enough avenues within the company – for example through the human resources department – to air any grievances without using the in-house journal. We do not believe it is the role of the in-house journal to solve employee grievances, but rather to inform employees on what is going on in the company.

Paige (2005) elaborated that apart from these two reasons for not publishing letters, there was also the time delay. He said that it was not acceptable to reply only a month after an employee has commented on a problem.

To be a good company and to create a good working environment, problems need to be solved much sooner.

In the earlier editions of HTF (when it was still TBC), two-way symmetrical communication was encouraged by inviting, and then publishing, a significant amount of regional news (February 1999:12-13; January 2000:24-25; November/December 2000:18-19). One would assume that this would encourage employees to contribute articles on what was happening in the regions, as these would be published. The editor explained that when the publication was still called TBC it was mostly a social newsletter for employees and that contributions were then welcomed. However, after the redesign (and the change in focus of the publication), fewer regional news snippets were published (June 2002:24-25; April 2003:24-25) although the articles were better presented. These articles are, however, not contributed by employees, but by marketing managers in the respective areas.

After the redesign, two-way communication was in a way encouraged by offering readers' competitions (2%, 7, n=451) (June 2002:3) in which employees were asked how to improve the publication. However, very few competitions were offered in HTF.

Publishing articles on employee contributions and achievements (2%, 10, n=451) gave recognition to employees, but it also limited two-way communication, as most of these articles were commissioned by the editor and were not contributions by employees themselves (e.g. *Winging to success* [May 2001:23] and *Caribbean blue for sparkling credit assessment* [January 2001:31]). HTF published employee profiles (2%, 11, n=451) where an entire article was devoted to one employee. Employee profiles include *Balancing the scales* (June 2002:13) and *A man of many talents* (February 2003:17).

8.3.3 Technical aspects

Discussing the technical aspects of HTF can be divided in what was done while the magazine was still TBC and how it changed when it became HTF. More focus will be placed on HTF's style, as that is the current style (even though the magazine changed its name again in 2004) and many of the technical problems noted in TBC were eliminated in HTF. Before the redesign, the magazine looked like a company brochure with a lot of short, arbitrary articles – not necessarily newsworthy – haphazardly compiled into a magazine (Brigham, 1991:5). After the redesign, it looked more like a magazine that offered the reader an informative read. For example, in 2002 the magazine started to publish a regular column focusing on industry updates.

8.3.3.1 Language

HTF was published in its entirety in English, the company's official language. However, operation-specific publications would be presented in the predominant language of that country. For example, in Cameroon, French would be the language used for that country's in-house journal (Paige, 2005).

8.3.3.2 Title

The publication's name was derived from the marketing strategy that was current at the time. Therefore *The Better Connection* (the company's original marketing slogan), had to make space in 2002 for *Hello the Future*. This, however, is definitely not the ideal way of naming an in-house journal, as it will necessitate renaming and rebranding every time the

company changes its marketing strategy or slogan (cf. Ferreira & Staude, 1991:24) (see Figure 8.5).

The editor confirmed that the publication's name is linked to the company's marketing slogan. In 2004 (after the study period of this thesis) the publication's name was changed once again from HTF to *Y'ello* to link up with the new marketing slogan (*Y'ello Africa*).

The decision to use the marketing slogan, was set as company policy before the first issue of the company magazine was published in 1996. The policy was also set that the masthead design had to be in line with the corporate branding of the company and this was therefore in a way determined by what the marketing department decided upon as company style. However, the marketing department had no other influence of any kind on the company's in-house journal. This policy is relevant to all publications published by the company, including the various operation units' regional quarterly in-house journals (Paige, 2005).

It is important to reiterate that when HTF was first launched, it was merely a social newsletter published by the marketing department. Since then (2001) the company has realised the value of the publication and changed the focus and priority of HTF to one of an official showcase of the company's activities, achievements and employees. It did, however, decide to keep the policy that the publication must be linked to the overall marketing strategy – which, according to the editor – also indicates the overall direction in which the company focuses its activities.

When the publication's name was changed to *Y'ello*, the design of the front cover changed slightly to incorporate the new masthead, but the remainder of the magazine was kept almost exactly the way it was (layout and design) when it was called HTF, indicating that the marketing department had no further influence on the publication.



Figure 8.5: The cover and inside page of the new magazine: *Y'ello*.

The reason for this was that corporate affairs felt the design and layout as well as the editorial strategy worked well and did not need any change (Paige, 2005).

Small cosmetic changes that were made, include using a flag to indicate from which operating unit an article came instead of a coloured strap. With the new *Y'ello* the editor aims still to use abstract visuals on the front cover. However, should a good picture that is directly related to an article inside become available, it is used on the cover. Pictures of individuals, especially senior executives, are never used on the cover.

8.3.3.3 Paper

Throughout the study period, HTF was published on high-quality gloss paper typically used by magazines (150 gsm Dukuza gloss) (Magazine World, 2005 – see Part I Chapter 4; Bivins, 1993, Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23). The paper creates the impression of a high-quality publication that is well produced and professionally printed.

8.3.3.4 Design

The two designs that the publication had (TBC and HTF), differed vastly from each other. The initial (TBC) design was very bold and busy with very short articles and visuals were not always used creatively, creating an overall brochure look (see Figure 8.6).



Figure 8.6: The short, haphazard layout-style of TBC (left), vs. the longer, more magazine-style layout of HTF (right).

When the publication was redesigned in 2002 (and changed to HTF), most of the design problems were improved upon. With the new layout the magazine featured longer, more magazine-style articles and they are presented as such.

In the second design (HTF), the publication made extensive use of introductory paragraphs, drop capitals, pull quotes and cross headlines, giving structure to articles. In TBC there were hardly any cross-headlines and no pull quotes, which tended to make some pages copy-heavy. However, articles were overall much shorter than in HTF, which eliminated the need for many of these design elements.

Tinted screens and other graphics were also incorporated in the design, giving the publication an overall magazine look (see Figure 8.7).



Figure 8.7: Examples of design elements: an introductory paragraph, a drop capital, a pull quote and creative use of the picture.

8.3.3.4.1 Size and grid

HTF was an A4 publication with a three-column grid that sometimes added a half grid for design reasons. It had anything from 24 to 36 pages.

Although, after the redesign, the publication still mainly used a three-column grid, it sometimes used an additional half column for pull quotations or graphics (see Figure 8.6). This design element was obviously predetermined and was used sparingly, which contributed to the overall look of the magazine.

The magazine's A4 format was chosen by the original editor of TBC (not Paige). The current editor does not know what the original reason for the choice of A4 format was, but says that it was kept as it is the most practical size for the publication. "It packs easily, couriers easily and fits into employees' mailboxes at work." (Paige, 2005).

8.3.3.4.2 Colour

While the publication was TBC, there was very strong use of the company's corporate colours – blue and yellow, which gave it a very bright and bold look – especially with the use of heavy upper case fonts. This was toned down significantly in 2002 with an overall new design. The new look was much more refined and elegant (see Figure 8.8).

Previously, headlines would also be published in colour. After the redesign, all the headlines were in black only, which contributed to a more stylish and less "bright" look (see Part II Introduction). In HTF corporate colours were only used in the masthead, while other colours were used for internal design elements (see Figure 8.8).



Figure 8.8: TBC (left) used bright colours, vs. limited colour use in HTF.

After the redesign, colour was used once in a headline only, but it was done with consideration. The headline was used as a contributing graphic (February 2003:18).

8.3.3.4.3 Visuals

Both before and after the design change, the publication was very visual-intensive. Most of these visuals are photographs with the remainder being graphics – many custom-designed for the publication.

Although pictures add value to articles, they must be used with careful consideration.

In both TBC and HTF, it often happened that the pictures used were very small – either because it was felt that all articles should have pictures, or that since a picture was available, even if the quality was questionable, it would still be used. It is wiser rather to scale down on pictures, and use only good quality ones in a way that contributes to the layout and understanding of the article (see Figure 8.9).



The MTN Stand at the Bloemfontein Show.

Show a success

The annual Bloemfontein Show took place during May and MTN once again used this as a sales opportunity. Although competition was strong and the other networks also made use of this opportunity, MTN came out tops and brought a lot of new customers onto the MTN Network.



The Franchise team manning the stand.

Figure 8.9: Examples of low-quality pictures.



Figure 8.10: An example of a cover picture with no direct link to an inside article.

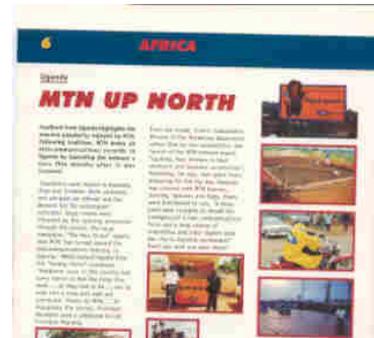


Figure 8.11: Examples of thick frames used in TBC.

TBC tended to publish pictures of people on its cover – mainly members of senior management. The result was, however, that one could often not gather what the cover picture was about, or to which article it was linked (see Figure 8.10). It merely looked like a clumsy effort to place a picture of management on the cover. Because of this, one tends to get the feeling that the publication was there to propagate management's achievements because of the cover pictures (however, content analysis shows that this was not the case and that there was balanced reporting on both management and employees in the magazine).

This was changed drastically after the redesign. After that, in most cases an abstract picture was used on the cover that was directly linked to a specific article in the publication with the help of explanatory teasers (see Figure 8.12). The publication immediately obtained a magazine look offering interesting reading to employees instead of looking like management's mouthpiece. No pictures of management were used on the cover after the redesign.

Even pictures not involving management published on TBC's cover did not always clearly portray a specific concept or were clearly linked to a specific article and readers had to guess what the picture represented. This did not contribute to communication because there was lack of obvious meaning.

Inside the magazine, pictures had thick coloured frames, which contributed to a bold look (see Figure 8.11).

Visuals were used more judiciously in later issues of HTF. Front page pictures are now abstract visuals representing a specific article (see Figure 8.12). A definite teaser on the front cover linked the picture to the article inside, making sure that the meaning of the picture was conveyed to the reader.

Inside, pictures were also used well (see Figure 8.13). They did not have any frames, which created a cleaner look resembling a commercial magazine look (February 2003:14-15; April 2003:14-15). Pictures were also often deep-etched, giving a more creative look (June 2002:9; August 2002:17; April 2003:4).



Figure 8.12: HTF cover design showing an abstract picture with clear links to the contents



Figure 8.13: Picture use in HTF. Pictures tend to be bigger and used more creatively. Lower-quality pictures are used smaller.



Figure 8.14: A sample of Myriad font used in HTF for headlines.

The editor managed the photography personally. This was, understandably, not possible with events taking place in other operating units. In those instances, photographs were submitted to the publication. Unfortunately, these were often of lower quality.

8.3.3.4.4 Captions

Captions in HTF were creative, well written and informative (see Part II Introduction). They were concise and often helped to explain pictures that would otherwise be difficult to link with the article, for example: The MTN Innovation Centre made specific provision for environmental and social concerns (with a picture of the centre) (September 2003:9), Leading a major company has many facets and areas. Here CEO Bob Chaphe shows Dumi Muhlwa, Project Finance Manager, the way forward to success on the golf course (with a picture of the two gentlemen on the golf course) (January 2001:5) and Silvan Sinan catches a ride (a picture of Sinan walking in a street with a vehicle behind him) (January 2002:23).

8.3.3.4.5 Typeface

With redesign body copy was changed from Helvetica to Times, a very readable font that is often used in magazines (Davis, 1993:18). The headline font (Myriad) is MTN's corporate font. Limiting its use to headlines and introductory paragraphs, helps to ensure that the publication strongly resembles MTN's corporate image, but retains its own individuality. It does not look like a company brochure any more (see Figure 8.14).

8.3.3.4.6 Layout

The company that was responsible for the layout of HTF (Fox Communications), clearly kept to a predetermined style, as every edition of the magazine looked similar. Overall it can be said that the technical aspects of HTF contributed to creating a professional and attractive-looking publication that invited readers to read it, as it brought together various design elements, creating a publication that was easy to read (cf. Ferreira & Staude, 1992:70),

8.3.3.4.7 Headlines

HTF's headlines were short and creative. They did not necessarily clearly indicate what the article was about, but were so creative that they did encourage the reader to read the article. For example: It's PayBack time (explaining the new PayBack product) (June 2002:5), All that jazz and much much more (an overview of MTN's sponsorship of the North Sea Jazz Festival) (February 2003:19) and Objection, your honour (explaining the task of MTN's legal specialists) (May 2001:8-9).

8.3.3.5 Sub-editing

All pages were well edited and good quality copy was used (see Part II Introduction). Spelling errors were eliminated and articles were easy to read and understand. Since articles published in HTF were aimed at highly educated and trained employees, language use was more defined, using terms and concepts that might not be well-known outside the company and industry, but that were common within MTN and understood by all. To ensure that this was the case, the company published a list of abbreviations, with their meanings, on the last page of every issue.

8.3.3.6 Budget

The publication had a detailed, pre-determined budget.

8.3.3.7 Production schedule

The monthly publishing interval was chosen as it was easier to compile and fill a 28-page magazine (the standard size for the publication, although this might differ if more or less material was available).

When it came to production schedules, the aim was to have the magazine available by the last week of the month. However, this was not always possible as the editor depended on contributions from operating units in other countries. The other operating units often submitted articles late, with the effect that the publication was sometimes distributed up to ten days late.

Although MTN did not stipulate a set production schedule, Fox Publishing did stick as close as possible to the schedule. As soon as the last proofs had been approved, Fox Publishing would deliver the printed magazine five working days later (Paige, 2005).

8.3.3.8 Reproduction and printing

Reproduction and printing are still handled by professional printers. The magazine's current print run is 4 200 copies and was similar during the study period of 1999 to 2003.

HTF is also published in PDF format on the company's intranet. The electronic version is available on the company's intranet two weeks after the print edition is made available. The reason for providing an electronic version, is that employees in other operating units can all have access to it, as it is too expensive to courier enough printed copies to other African countries.

8.3.3.9 Distribution

Distribution in South Africa is still done through the company's internal mail rooms. Copies to other interested parties in South Africa (such as selected suppliers and government members), are sent by normal surface mail. Copies destined for other operating units in Africa are couriered. However, only a small number of copies are sent to other operating units because of extremely expensive courier costs. It is for this reason that the publication is now also available on the intranet (in PDF format) enabling employees in remote areas (and other operating units) to access a copy easily.

8.4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

8.4.1 Public relations tool

Paige (2005) describes MTN's in-house journal as one mainly aimed at employees (and therefore an important internal public relations tool [Skinner & Von Esson, 1987]), but one that is also distributed to selected members of government associated with communication as well as suppliers. He states:

We realise that it penetrates an audience much further than only employees, and we are therefore very much aware of what we publish in the magazine. It has become very important for the company (including senior management) to portray the correct image of the MTN Group in our in-house journal as it has become an image flag bearer instead of just a social newsletter (Paige, 2005).

HTF had a very prominent role in the company's overall communication strategy. As much importance was attached to it as a tool for conveying important information to employees and other stakeholders (although employees were the main audience).

It is important to note, however, that MTN's in-house journal was not the only internal communication tool available to employees, but, according to the editor, probably the only one that allowed employees from one operation to know what other operational units were doing.

Other means of internal communication in the group include: group intranet, each operating unit's own intranet, the company's own virtual private network, road shows by senior management, global e-mail to all employees, messages from the CEO to staff, the annual global leadership conference attended by all managers, as well as a possible internal television channel that is being planned for MTN.

The fact that there were various other communication avenues for employees to reach senior management, shows that the decision of the company not to use the in-house journal as a means of encouraging two-way communication did not as such deprive them of communication with management. The intranets and e-mail offered employees significant opportunities to communicate with management without using the printed in-house journal. The two-way communication function of the in-house journal was taken over by new media. Since the editor of the in-house journal realised that HTF could not compete with these channels, he rather embraced them as two-way communication channels and focused more on conveying information in the in-house journal. This shows that the position of the printed in-house journal is not a given anymore in modern companies embracing new technologies. In the case of MTN, it also embraces technology to further its in-house journal. The in-house journal is available in PDF format on the company's intranet where employees can download it. Although this might sound like duplication and raises the question whether employees would not rather read the publication on the computer than in print, there is a very specific reason why this is done. In South Africa, employees receive a printed version of the in-house journal and not many of them download it from the intranet, as it takes time to do so. However, the company does not provide all employees in other countries where it operates with printed copies, as it is extremely expensive (and often unreliable) to courier or mail these copies to other African countries. By posting it on the internet, employees in other countries can have access to it (telecommunications infrastructure is not a problem in this case, as this is a specific speciality of the company) (Paige, 2005).

8.4.2 Communication culture

Related to the fact that there are several communication avenues for employees to communicate with management, the editor describes the company's overall communication culture as one that has opened up over the last number of years, allowing employees to communicate freely with management.

The editor explains that about six years ago (1999), there was a period when MTN had a "silo syndrome" in terms of internal communication. The various departments were not communicating with one another. This problem has since been addressed and the company now employs a consultative approach when it comes to employees communicating with management (Paige, 2005).

Even with additional efforts to improve internal communication between employees and management, the editor believes that it is difficult to have one-on-one interaction between employees and the company's senior executive, as the company is very big and geographically spread far apart. Thus, formal communication (such as through HTF), tends to be from management to employees (Paige, 2005).

8.4.3 Involvement in strategic management

Although HTF did not influence any strategic decisions in the company, it conveyed all strategic decisions very strongly. For example, since customer-centricity was an important need and focus at the time, it was covered in some form or another in every issue of the publication. HTF tended to try working according to "a more subliminal approach" by, for example, publishing outside views on customer-centricity. Exactly the same approach was followed with the company's values. They were regularly reported on to enforce them (Paige, 2005).

Be it a new strategy, decision or even product, the publication would start by covering the launch extensively, and then following up regularly on how the project was progressing, or on different views on a particular decision.

Paige (2005) explains the company's vision and mission and how the publication relates to this as follows:

The in-house journal has no influence whatsoever on the vision of the company – however, it strongly supports it and helps to enforce it within the company. The company's current vision is to be the leading telecommunications in developing markets (October 2004). This vision is very relevant in terms of the magazine, especially when it comes to content selection and the way it approaches certain subjects.

The vision of the company is portrayed in articles covering issues from technology, business practice and corporate governance to even the environment. Paige (2005) adds:

Being the leading telecommunications company in developing markets is not only about being the biggest in terms of having the most subscribers, but also to be overall (including aspects such as environmental awareness and social development, for example) the leading company in our areas of operation.

The company selects certain areas to focus on. At the moment the focus is on customer-centricity (Paige, 2005). MTN's in-house journal will therefore focus more readily on articles reporting on customer-centricity.

8.4.4 Management

HTF was managed by Paige (during the study period and up to the present – 2005) and published by the corporate affairs department, which reported directly to the group CEO. This gave the editor access to any member of senior management he wished to speak to. He also communicated regularly with operational CEOs when they visited South Africa, as well as the heads of different divisions inside South Africa. Senior management supported the magazine "very strongly".

The present editor has a background as English teacher and some experience in publishing school magazines. Although he has no internal assistants, he does make use of other MTN departments (such as the marketing department) to supply material for the magazine. However, they do not work directly on the publication.

Corporate communication consultant Fox Publishing handles the design and production of the magazine, as well as the editing of all articles. Fox Publishing also helps source certain articles. For example, if the editor wants to publish an employee profile, a journalist from Fox Publishing will conduct the interview and write the article (Paige, 2005).

HTF is the responsibility of the corporate communications department at MTN. This department is the equivalent of a public relations department, especially since the company does have a separate marketing department.

8.5 EVALUATION

Every year MTN conducts a survey to determine readers' opinion on the in-house journal. The surveys are done electronically as MTN has the necessary infrastructure to do so. The information obtained from the surveys is used to make any changes to the publication if necessary. The latest survey (done in 2004) indicated that readers were very happy with the overall look and feel of the publication. It is for that reason that, even though the publication changed its name to *Y'ello*, it kept the design and general style of the publication (Paige,

2005). Paige reports that the internal survey gave the in-house journal a rating of 90% in terms of content, writing and importance as a communication tool.

Fox Publishing entered HTF in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition on behalf of MTN in 2003. However, this was a once-off entry and neither MTN nor Fox Publishing uses this forum as a peer-review mechanism for the publication.

8.6 THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

Based on the results of the content analysis (which included four randomly selected issues from every year between 1999 and 2003) as well as the information supplied by the editor, HTF will now be measured against the four theoretical statements made in Part I of this study as well as against the overall guiding theoretical statement of the study.

Statement 1

Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.

MTN's HTF in-house journal measured up well against this first statement.

Although MTN's HTF enabled two-way communication, it was not symmetrical and was limited. The editor explained that the company's view was that various other communication channels available within MTN encourage (and achieve) two-way symmetrical communication between management and employees (such as the intranet and e-mail). The in-house journal would therefore not be used for this purpose. The publication's communication style tended to be more in line with Grunig and Hunt's (1984:27) public relations model of communication focusing on disseminating information from the company to employees.

HTF had a very clear and important position within the company's overall communication strategy. It was regarded as the only communication tool to supply company-wide information to all the different operations (regardless in which company they were).

The publication fell under a single integrated department (corporate communications), with the editor having direct access to senior management. The editor confirmed that senior management also supported the magazine, not only through granting interviews (confirmed by content analysis), but also by using the publication as a showcase of the company's achievements.

HTF was one of various communication channels used by MTN. The company evaluated all these channels and decided on specific roles for each of them, with the in-house journal taking the role of an information source on company-wide issues, while other sources only supplied information relevant to their operational unit or division. The in-house journal therefore had a unique role to play without competing with new media.

Although the editor does not have specific training in publishing in-house journals, he has several years' experience in the field (obtained while working on HTF). The company does,

however, employ highly trained consultants to assist with the writing, editing and production of the publication.

MTN is aware of the importance of evaluating its publication and conducts regular surveys to determine whether the in-house journal is still serving its purpose. MTN, however, does not make use of an external review mechanism in the form of the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition to the full extent.

Statement 2

An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

HTF's overall world view in the period 1999 to 2003 can be described as symmetrical, acknowledging that it would have to adapt to both internal and external environments to ensure that it remained a relevant information source (see Grunig, 1992:40-41).

In HTF's case, the geographical spread of the company's operations definitely had an influence on the publication. It not only decided to focus only on overall company news, but also not to encourage two-way communication because of differences in culture and the perceived relevance of issues that might be discussed by different operational units. HTF's spread-out target audience also led to the decision of publishing an electronic version of the magazine on the company's intranet and in the process eliminating the need of printing and couriering (at very high cost) magazines to remote destinations.

Since the editor was based in South Africa, there was also the problem that he could not control the taking of pictures in other countries, which often led to lower quality pictures appearing in HTF.

The company's internal environment also had an influence on the magazine. The ample use of new media (especially e-mail), was a reason why HTF did not encourage two-way symmetrical communication and therefore did not publish features, such as letters.

Apart from these influences, HTF reported extensively on both its internal and external environments.

It can also be said that the magazine showed a balanced world view in that it devoted 47% of articles analysed to the external environment and 53% of articles on issues related to the internal environment of the company.

Statement 3

An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).

HTF was a very well-balanced publication reporting extensively on issues one would typically expect in an in-house journal (as determined by local and international literature). Although the company did not publish regular columns such as letters and opinion pieces, it did convey detailed company information, employee news and profiles. The company

therefore managed to keep employees, regardless of the country in which they were based, up to date with what was taking place in the company.

Statement 4

Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).

HTF was strategically planned and managed with a set budget and pre-determined production schedule and employed professional consultants assisting with writing, editing and production. The publication also used the company's well-established internal mailing system for distribution within South Africa, as well as its other operating units.

Content analysis showed the publication made use of high-quality paper, a pre-determined style that was easily readable, used well-written articles supported by good headlines and clear captions and very good quality visuals.

Based on these findings the fifth research question

What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

can be answered as follows:

- The first major deviation from the theory as set out in Part I Chapter 2 is the fact that HTF was not used to encourage two-way symmetrical communication (see 2.3.2.5). However, this was not due to lack of interest in employees' wellbeing. On the contrary, the company closely studied the role of the in-house journal in its overall communication mix – especially against the use of other new media in the company – and opted rather to adapt its in-house journal to suit the situation. Two-way symmetrical communication was, however, encouraged through operation-based in-house journals. Although the encouragement and achievement of two-way symmetrical communication through an in-house journal is a chief priority, this can be adapted if there are other channels that are used effectively for symmetrical two-way communication between a company and its employees.
- The company's environment had a very specific influence on the in-house journal. The fact that employees are geographically spread far apart, belong to vastly different cultures and speak different languages, forced the company to produce a magazine that predominantly provided information on the company in general, supported by operation-based magazines that provide employees with more specific information on the company's activities in their country.
- A technically sound publication creates familiarity with the product, as can be seen from HTF. Even though it changed its name from HTF to *Y'ello* (but retained the same design), employees still recognised the magazine and continued to support it.
- New media have a huge influence on in-house journals. Although new media could lead to the closure of a printed in-house journal, these could also be used to support the in-house journal. Electronic versions of the in-house journal, made available on the internet for employees in remote areas (as in the case of MTN), is a solution for distributing the publication to all. At this stage the future of the printed version is not yet

threatened, as many employees still prefer the printed version to take home and show their families and friends.

8.7 SUMMARY

Although HTF did not measure up to all the criteria set in this study, the overall result was a professionally produced publication that communicated relevant company issues, both internally and externally, to its readers.

The major point where HTF veered off the suggestions made in this study, is Grunig's (cf. 1992) viewpoint that two-way symmetrical communication is needed which, applied to in-house journals, means that the in-house journal must also do so. Even though MTN did not see HTF as a two-way communication tool between management and employees, this did not mean that the publication was not an excellent one. On the contrary, in the case of HTF, it acknowledged that new media such as e-mail and the company's intranet could be used much more effectively to encourage two-way symmetrical communication than the in-house journal could. Instead of trying to compete with this, the in-house journal's focus was adjusted rather to fulfil a unique function as an overall information source. MTN regularly evaluates its various communication strategies and channels to ensure that they are used to their full potential without one taking over the role of another, as is clear in the strategy decision on HTF (and now also with *Y'ello*).

The following theoretical contributions can be deduced from this case study:

- Although the encouragement and achievement of symmetrical two-way communication are important aims of an in-house journal, the lack thereof is not necessarily to the detriment of the publication if the company uses other two-way communication channels to communicate with employees effectively
- The environment in which in-house journals operate, is very important and can have a huge influence on the publication
- A technically good publication contributes to the overall success of the magazine
- The role of the printed in-house journal is not guaranteed in a company where other new media channels are used. A specific role must be defined for the printed in-house journal to ensure its future.

In the next chapter Pick 'n Pay's PnP will be analysed.

Part II

Chapter 9

PICK 'N PATTERN – PICK 'N PAY

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on PnP - the monthly in-house journal of supermarket chain Pick 'n Pay. Pick 'n Pay is the largest food retailer in the country and occupies a significant position in general merchandise and clothing (Pick 'n Pay, 2004). The company operates different-sized stores. Its primary area of operation is South Africa, but it also has operations in Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

PnP is analysed in terms of the criteria discussed in Part I Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Firstly an overview of the company and publication is given, followed by the data obtained from the content analysis, which indicates overall publishing trends. The present editor, Anita Stander, was interviewed to gather additional information on the management, communication and technical issues of the publication.

This information will be combined to see how the publication measures up to the four theoretical statements made in Part I.

9.2 PUBLICATION OVERVIEW

PnP is an A4 magazine that was first published in 1970 (then in tabloid format) as a staff communication tool (Stander, 2005). In 2002 the publication received a merit certificate for communication and was a finalist in the best internal magazine category of the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate communication competition. In 2003 it received a certificate for excellence in communication and was again a finalist in the best internal magazine category.

9.3 PUBLICATION ANALYSIS

9.3.1 Overview

The following overall comments about PnP can be made before the analysis results and comments from the editor are discussed in detail:

- The most noticeable aspect of PnP during the study period is that in five years, the magazine's design changed four times (see Figure 9.1). However, throughout this time the name and format of the journal remained the same. All four designs remind one more of a brochure than of a magazine because they predominantly use very short articles with many pictures and bold colours.



Figure 9.1: The four different looks of PnP between 1999 and 2003. From left to right: 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2003.

- A noticeable trait in all designs was the use of a picture on the front cover that did not seem to have any relation to any specific article inside the publication (see Figure 9.2). It was also often not clear what the cover picture represented. That explains the small number of front cover articles that were identified. It seems that as long as a picture is of good quality and had some connection with Pick 'n Pay, it was used on the cover.



Figure 9.2: A good quality picture on the front cover with no link to an inside article.

- The publication published letters from readers in every issue, as well as many pictures of employees, which showed a significant interest in encouraging two-way symmetrical communication.

Below are the results of this content analysis showing the overall types of content that appeared in PnP (1999 to 2003 – see Appendix C).

The overall results of the publication analysis are as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Social development | 23% (100, n=443) |
| Branches | 19% (86, n=443) |
| Sport and recreation | 10% (46, n=443) |
| Education and training | 6% (27, n=443) |
| Competitions | 6% (28, n=443) |
| Ecology | 5% (20, n=443) |
| Employee profiles | 3% (12, n=443) |
| Letters | 3% (15, n=443) |
| Editorial | 3% (14, n=443) |
| Employee contributions/achievements | 3% (15, n=443) |
| Marketing | 2% (7, n=443) |
| Company news/achievements | 2% (8, n=443) |
| Products/services | 2% (7, n=443) |
| Staff/management changes/appointments | 2% (8, n=443) |
| General health | 2% (11, n=443) |
| Arts and culture | 2% (8, n=443) |
| Communication | 1% (3, n=443) |
| Customer information/service | 1% (5, n=443) |
| New initiatives | 1% (3, n=443) |
| Vision/mission | 1% (4, n=443) |
| Crime | 1% (4, n=443) |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | 1% (5, n=443) |
| Technology in use | <1% (1, n=443) |
| Sensitive queries | <1% (2, n=443) |
| Safety | <1% (2, n=443) |
| Technology | <1% (1, n=443) |

The following issues appeared on the cover (those that could be identified as being in a specific category):

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Ecology | 25% (3, n=12) |
| Vision/mission | 17% (2, n=12) |
| Customer information/service | 17% (2, n=12) |
| Company news/achievements | 17% (2, n=12) |
| Sport and recreation | 8% (1, n=1) |
| Employee contributions/achievements | 8% (1, n=1) |
| Products/services | 8% (1, n=1) |

9.3.2 Content

Pick 'n Pay's entire workforce was the target audience of PnP. A large number of them did read the publication (Stander, 2005). However, illiteracy in the Pick 'n Pay workforce was a problem, with many employees (for example packers in the stores) not being able to read well or to read at all. To solve this problem and to accommodate them, the publication preferred to publish pictures with short stories attached to them. In this way, employees could see themselves (as well as employees from other stores) and could ask someone to read the captions to them. This format was very popular with employees (Stander, 2005). PnP could therefore be described as a semi-formal magazine (semi-formal as it still conveyed news on company issues such as results, but with the big focus on social news) aimed at employees of Pick 'n Pay. Stander (2005) explains that the greatest communication need of employees was to know what other shops were doing (for example marketing projects or in-store promotions) and what their colleagues are doing. The present editor (Stander, 2005) adds:

It is very important for a great number of our employees to receive recognition from the company by appearing in the magazine. For that reason the magazine's main aim is to inform employees of what is happening throughout the company. For many of our employees it is more important to have their picture in the in-house journal than to read what the new strategic focus of the company is (Stander, 2005).

The unofficial publishing policy for PnP was to include news on issues such as general company news (new store openings, financial results and marketing campaigns), staff news (e.g. choir festivals, soccer and netball tournaments and staff graduations), HIV/Aids, human interest stories, social and environmental issues, the internal rewards and recognition programme as well as news on service standards, staff contributions and BEE initiatives that the company was involved in. The editor argues that:

Therefore we do not aim to educate employees with it by publishing long articles. The magazine is for the staff and about the staff – the focus is more on interesting people news than anything else. I believe this is the reason why it is so popular with employees (Stander, 2005).

9.3.2.1 Content indicating management support

Management's involvement in PnP was not particularly obvious from the content of the publications published between 1999 and 2003, as there were very few articles that featured management members or even involved them.

The two most noticeable articles that showed support for the publication by granting interviews or contributing to articles were: New CEO to lead the way (May 1999:2-3) and a separate insert Executive Bulletin in the June 2001 edition.

However, the mere fact that management did not feature extensively in every edition did not mean they did not support the publication.

On the contrary, by limiting features and articles on senior management and focusing more on employees, the feeling of an "employee magazine" rather than a "management propaganda tool" was created.

The editor says that management fully supported the magazine, but their appearance in PnP was limited (even in editions published after 2003) on purpose to allow a bigger focus on employees (Stander, 2005).

However, the editor admits that management could use the publication better:

There is definitely space for improvement to publish more information on where the company is heading. However, one needs to maintain a good balance, as it is not our priority to use PnP as a top-down management information brochure, but to retain the strong social, employee-driven feel of the publication (Stander, 2005).

9.3.2.2 Content covering the external environment

In reporting on its external environment, PnP reported extensively on issues such as social development (23%) (Cheering up patients in hospital [December 2003:13], General merchandise brightens up life for pensioners [November 2003:4], Toys for tiny tots [April 2002:16]), sport and recreation (10%) (Calypso beach cricket is the best [February 2002:11], The Pick 'n Pay's Choice 702 spinathon [April 2002:7], Ernst van Dyk – born without feet, but with a destiny to inspire [November 2003:6]), education and training (6%) (A brighter future for three promising matriculants [November 2003:15]) and ecological issues (5%) (Arbour week – preserving our heritage [September 2003:6], Our Longbeach store sets the trend for environmentally friendly refrigeration [August 2001:4], National cleanup week [October 2000:6]).

Most of these items were very short – often only a picture with a caption, with the result that a large number of this type of item was published (social development = 100 articles, sport and recreation = 45 articles, education and training = 27 articles and ecological matters = 20 articles), compared to some of the other publications in this study (*Harmonise*: social development = 0, sport and recreation = 20, education and training = 14, ecological matters = 1; *Sandaba*: Social development = 9, sport and recreation = 31, education and training = 27 and ecological matters= 1). All the events covered had Pick 'n Pay as a major sponsor or contributor.

Another external issue that PnP covered regularly between 1999 and 2003, although not by publishing many articles on it (normally only one article per issue), is that of HIV/Aids/STDs. Although some articles on HIV/Aids were only picture caption stories, many of them tended to be longer, giving them more prominence (see Figure 9.3), for example: Khomanani caring together – World Aids Day collection campaign (November 2003:5 – third of a page), Shadrack talks about being HIV/Aids positive (September 2003:5 – full page), Reaching out to young Aids orphans (February 2002:16 – third of a page).



Figure 9.3: An example of extensive coverage on HIV/Aids.

One of the issues that was noticeably absent in the content analysis on PnP was of employment equity.

Stander explains this by saying that on the one hand the specific editions that were analysed just happened not to have articles covering employment equity (she showed the researcher editions in which the topic was covered) and that on the other hand, Pick 'n Pay had such a long history of employment equity that it was not seen as a major issue to be covered. She adds:

We have articles printed in 1974 showing black people's achievements as managers, for example. Employment equity is very much part of the company and we don't feel it is necessary to place any special focus on it as we are already doing it (Stander, 2005).

9.3.2.3 Content covering internal environment

PnP focused on various internal environment issues but especially on branches (19%) (Ottery Hyper reopens [January 1999:10], Lynnwood reopens [October 2000:12], First Pick 'n Pay store opens in Cape Town city centre [February 2002:14]). However, most articles carrying branch news were very short and often only consisted of a picture and caption.

A topic that was covered much less often in numbers but that enjoyed significantly greater coverage (and therefore prominence) was products/services (2%) (Our institute – the heart of service excellence [May 1999:6-7, two full pages], Get excited about the new look of Pick 'n Pay's Choice [August 2001:8-9, two full pages], Striving to deliver an excellent range of safe, quality products [June 2002:6-7, two full pages]).

Company news and achievements (2%) were also reported less often but with bigger coverage, for example: Results look good (November 1999:3, half page), Pick 'n Pay is the cheapest – and that's a fact (August 2001:13, half page), and Best financial results in 35 years (April 2002:6, half page).

9.3.2.4 Content encouraging two-way symmetrical communication

The editor believes that PnP encouraged two-way symmetrical communication between management and employees. The editor explains:

I receive contributions in the form of letters, poems, photographs and short articles on a daily basis informing me what is taking place in branches and with employees. I endeavour to include as many as possible of these in the magazine; however, it is not always possible to include everything contributed to the publication. People in Pick 'n Pay are proud of what they are doing and I want to give them the opportunity to share it with their colleagues across the country (Stander, 2005).

She adds that employees know that when they contribute material to PnP it will most probably be used. They also know that everybody in the company receives the magazine and that it is therefore a good tool to inform the rest of the company, from senior management down to fellow employees, of what they are doing (Stander, 2005).

PnP's content confirmed that the editor did make an effort to encourage two-way symmetrical communication in the publications analysed. The publication published letters (3%) in all editions. In most cases, however, there was no feedback to letters since they often consisted of poems or more personal information that did not require feedback. In the isolated cases where feedback was given, it was done by the editor only and not by any other management member. The editor explains:

I used to have a big problem in that employees would not contribute letters, but customers to our stores do. I solved this problem in a big way by offering R100 for every employee-written letter that I publish. Since then, more employees are writing to us (Stander, 2005).

Competitions (6%) were regularly offered by the magazine and were another way of encouraging feedback from employees, for example: Be creative: Express yourself (April 2002:8-9 and June 2002:9), Win R250 in Pick 'n Pay online gift vouchers (accompanying an article on Pick 'n Pay's new online shopping service) (September 2001:9), Make the right Choice and win R500 (accompanying an article on changes in the company's Choice brand) (August 2001:9). These competitions not only informed employees about new products/services/initiatives in the company, but also encouraged them to become involved in the initiatives, as they had to read the article and know the features of the new product before they could enter the competition.

PnP published puzzles (August 2001 and October 2000), and although there was no real communication value for the company in these, there was a huge demand for puzzles from employees and they were therefore published solely as an entertainment feature (Stander, 2005).

Reports on employee contributions and achievements (3%) also encouraged two-way communication, as these showed employees that the magazine was willing to give them credit if they informed the company of what they were doing, for example: Long service in Gauteng (February 2000:9) and Graduation in the Eastern Cape (April 2002:6).

For a while, the publication also ran a column If I were the boss (August 2001, September 2001, February 2002, April 2002, June 2002, September 2003 – all on page 3) where employees could write what they would do if they were the boss for a day (see Figure 9.4). This encouraged employees to tell management what they would like to see done differently. Employees were encouraged to write these columns by being given R150 for each column that was published.



Figure 9.4: *If I were the boss* columns encouraged employees to say what they would do if they were managers.

Employee profiles (3%) also showed the company's interest in who its employees are and what they do, for example: Thembi and Mandla – the friendly focus of one-on-one (February 2002:8-9).

Another feature that PnP often published, but that did not have any tangible value, was word competitions. The reason for continuing to publish them, even though they did not have any communication value, is that employees enjoyed them. The editor included them as an entertainment feature in the publication.

Although employees tended to contribute to the magazine regularly, senior management tended not to use it very extensively.

Pick 'n Pay's employees wanted to know what the company's results were and PnP published the results regularly. However, senior management tended not to use the publication very often to convey other strategic events through the magazine.

9.3.3 Technical aspects

Stander is the only person inside Pick 'n Pay who is responsible for the publication of the magazine. She is also responsible for other internal communication projects, such as the monthly video newsletter.

The editor has a BA (Communication) degree from Potchefstroom University (now North-West University) and has been working for Pick 'n Pay for 14 years.

Because of a heavy workload, she does employ a freelance graphic artist who is responsible for the layout of the magazine. A set style guide was developed to ensure that the freelance designer employed to manage the layout and design of the magazine, produced a similar publication every month.

9.3.3.1 Language

PnP was published in its entirety in English. Although various other languages were used by Pick 'n Pay's employees, all printed company communication was done in English. PnP specifically had a very limited budget that did not allow for the reprinting of the publication in other languages.

9.3.3.2 Title

It is obvious that the name of the publication – *Pick 'n Patter* – was derived from the company's name. It was the original name of the publication (given in 1970) and there is no certainty on exactly why the publication was named this way. The name remained the same throughout the five-year period covered in this study.

9.3.3.3 Paper

A good quality paper (115 gsm Crystal Gloss) was used to print PnP, supporting the magazine look. The good quality paper created the impression of a high-quality publication that was professionally produced and printed.

9.3.3.4 Design

A noticeable technical issue is the four redesigns of the publication between 1999 and 2003. Stander explains that the magazine was redesigned every five or six years when the company's corporate identity was updated. She did not realise that the magazine had been redesigned more often.

The explanation she gave for the regular redesigns was that before she took over as editor of the magazine (in April 2001), the magazine had two other editors in short succession who probably wanted to make the publication "their own" by implementing design changes. As Stander puts it:

Both these editors had their own view of what the magazine should look like and what it should convey. Although one of them was very well qualified and highly skilled, the person editing the publication before I took over had no previous experience of editing an in-house journal. One can see from the design that she tried various things with the magazine. It is during this time that the

decision was made to stick more closely to the corporate identity of the company when it comes to the design and layout of PnP (Stander, 2005).

Between 1999 and 2003 – when the four different magazine designs were used – PnP tended to keep to very short articles – often no more than a picture with a caption (see Figure 9.5). This tended to give the publication a brochure feel (see Part II Introduction), instead of that of a magazine (Brigham, 1991:5).



Figure 9.5: Examples of the large number of picture-caption articles published.

However, having an editorial policy that gave preference to short editorial pieces, did allow the publication to include a larger number of articles, including more on employees (the main aim of the publication). Because of the short articles, PnP did not make use of design elements such as cross headlines, introductory paragraphs, drop capitals or pull quotes.

The redesign of the publication was not always for the better. Sometimes there seemed to be a very specific style, for example for headlines, while at other times there seemed to be no consistent style at all (see Figure 9.6).



Figure 9.6: An example of haphazard use of fonts and colours for headlines (left), vs. only one font used for headlines (although colour is still used extensively) (right).

The last design (introduced in 2003) did introduce slightly longer articles, more in line with a magazine (see Figure 9.7). The bright colours and lack of structure in using them, unfortunately also tended to give the publication a “brochure” instead of a magazine look.



Figure 9.7: An example of a longer article in the latest version of PnP.



Figure 9.8: An example showing the lack of a formal grid to accommodate a large number of pictures.



Figure 9.9: Colour is used extensively in PnP, including in headlines, as this example from the latest version of the magazine shows.

9.3.3.4.1 Size and grid

Throughout all five years on which the study focused, PnP remained an A4 full-colour publication that tended to make use of a two-column grid. However, when a large number of photographs were used, often no formal grid was obvious (see Figure 9.8).

The decision to publish PnP in A4 format was made before Stander took over as editor. In previous years, it used to be an A3 tabloid. The editor prefers the A4 format as she believes it makes the publication look more like a magazine. It is also easier and cheaper to distribute smaller magazines. The current format also conforms with the set style of the company's corporate communication guidelines.

9.3.3.4.2 Colour

PnP used bright colours and not only corporate colours (blue and red). The colour use tended to contribute to the “busy” feel of the publication (see Figure 9.9). Colour is not restricted only to visuals, but stretched to headlines as well.

In the earlier editions, there seemed to have been no decision on what colours to use for what headlines. When compared to the other publications in this study, where colour use in headlines was limited (creating an overall more stylish magazine look), PnP was a brightly coloured magazine. In the latest design (which is still used in 2005), colour is still used extensively, but there is obviously a tendency to balance articles and to move away from too many different colours on the same page.

9.3.3.4.3 Visuals

PnP did not publish a specific picture on the cover (see 9.3.1 and Figure 9.10).

Only in 2003 did the publication start using teasers on the front cover. This helped to attract interest to the inside of the publication. Without that – and the apparently unrelated cover picture – there was nothing on the front cover that would invite/interest people in paging through the publication.

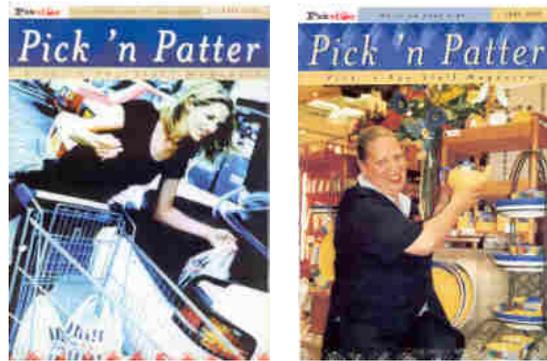


Figure 9.10: Two examples of pictures on the front cover where there is no clear relation to an inside article.

The inside of the magazine was very picture-intensive (see Figure 9.11).



Figure 9.11: Articles illustrated with several pictures, making the publication overall very picture-intensive.

Although not very big, pictures were generally of very good quality (see Part II Introduction). Most of the visuals involved either employees or people (for example, customers or community members) that benefited directly from an action/programme by Pick 'n Pay. This proves that the company had a strong focus on two-way symmetrical communication and was interested in keeping its employees happy (see 1.1).

Visuals used in PnP were sent to the editor by the various shops. The people taking these pictures were often not professionals, which did influence the quality of the pictures. The editor also did not have a budget to employ professional photographers. The result is that often the editor had to make use of pictures that were already available. Good quality pictures of bigger Pick 'n Pay events – such as the Pick 'n Pay Argus Cycle Race – were usually available through the company's marketing department.

The fact that there was no budget for pictures is also the reason why the picture on the cover of the magazine did not always directly reflect a specific article, as the editor would use any good quality picture available from the marketing department for this purpose.

9.3.3.4.4 Captions

Captions in PnP tended to be longer and explain in more detail what was going on in the picture, especially since many news items only consisted of a picture and a caption. There was a problem, though, that group pictures (with many people in them) were often published

with no-one's name mentioned. On the one hand this is not recommended, as readers might wonder who the individuals are, but on the other hand it might be a solution, should the editor not have all the names of the people pictured. In that case it is probably better rather not to name anyone, than to mention some and not others. For example: Our Kwa-Zulu Natal region has embarked on a programme of training fire fighters in each store. The training is now complete and was most successful (a picture of a group of employees holding fire fighting equipment) (June 2002:5) and Ecstatic graduates lining up for the big moment (a group of graduates) (May 1999:5). However, sometimes a key person is named, but not other individuals in the group. For example: Bakery Manager Zola May, gave the students of the Living Link School for Disabled Adults, an enjoyable tour of the bakery, when they visited Victory Park on an educational field trip. Zola thoroughly enjoyed being a teacher for the day, showing them all the secret tricks the bakers use to conjure up all those mouth watering buns, loaves of bread, pizza, muffins and much, much more. The students didn't leave empty handed, as they were each given a snack pack and hot cross buns (May with the group of students) (August 2000:13). This last caption is also a good example of caption stories used in the publication.

9.3.3.4.5 Typeface

The typeface used for headlines in the 2005 version (which was introduced in 2003) of PnP (Impact) is also the corporate font used by the company in all its communication. The publication uses Futura Book as font for the body copy – an easily readable font. Captions are printed in bold, distinguishing them from body copy.

Boardmans finds a new home with Edcon

A few months ago a strategic decision was made to put our Boardmans stores up for sale. This announcement was made by our Group Enterprises Managing Director, Martin Rosen, in the light of a strategic review of the business. The main reason for the decision to sell Boardmans, was that Boardmans did not fit well within Pick 'n Pay's core business.

It was recently announced that the Edcon group had purchased Boardmans from Pick 'n Pay. "The purchase of Boardmans supports our strategy of making select acquisitions of reasonably priced businesses in the non-food retail area and we are very excited about the potential for growth from bringing Boardmans into the PnP."

Figure 9.12: A sample of the fonts used in the latest version of PnP.

9.3.3.4.6 Layout

Although busy, the layout of the latest version of PnP is consistent, not only throughout individual issues, but also from one edition to another.

However, in earlier editions, layout tended to differ from one edition to another, indicating lack of a specific design and layout strategy.

9.3.3.4.7 Headlines

Headlines were creative, short and well-written and conveyed the basic theme of the article, for example Going walkies at the Wiggle Waggle walk-a-thon (article about sponsorship of a dog walk) (February 2002:6), Cleaning up our act (a clean up campaign article) (November 1999:11) and Showing love to others (an article on helping poor communities) (December 2003:12).

9.3.3.5 Sub-editing

All pages were well edited and good quality copy was used (see Part II Introduction). Spelling errors were eliminated and articles were easy to read and understand. PnP's readers included people who had either very limited schooling or were completely illiterate. For this reason, language use was simple and sentences were short and easy to read. This would make it possible for these readers either to read the articles themselves, or to ask someone else to read them a photo caption, for example.

9.3.3.6 Budget

PnP had a very limited budget, which restrained the editor from employing communication consultants to assist with the production of the publication.

The limited budget also influences the pictures that we receive, and we are often dependent on pictures taken for other corporate events instead of the magazine (Stander, 2005).

9.3.3.7 Production schedule

The monthly magazine had a production schedule that the editor tried to keep to as best possible.

9.3.3.8 Reproduction and printing

Reproduction and printing were done by a professional company. The print run for the magazine was 20 000.

9.3.3.9 Distribution

PnP was distributed internally to the various regional support offices from where it went out to all the stores and divisions.

9.4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

9.4.1 Public relations tool

PnP was one of various internal public relations tools that the company used to communicate with its employees. It did enjoy specific attention in the overall communication strategy of the company, but rather as a social information and entertainment tool, than one aimed at conveying important strategic decisions of the company (Stander, 2005).

Other formal communication channels used by Pick 'n Pay, include a monthly video newsletter (supported and hosted by senior management) mainly aimed at the shops, the intranet (mainly aimed at employees working at head office) and various other leaflets, departmental newsletters and bulletins, and e-mail. There were therefore ample "formal" communication tools to convey messages to employees, and it was for this reason that PnP adopted a more informal slant not to compete with these communication channels.

However, as in the case of *Harmonise* (see Part II Chapter 7), many of Pick 'n Pay's employees did not have access to communication channels such as e-mail and the intranet. The in-house journal was specifically aimed at these employees (mostly on the shop floor). These employees also preferred to receive a printed publication that they could take home to show their families and friends (Stander, 2005). PnP therefore had a unique place in the overall communication mix that did not compete with other media used.

9.4.2 Communication culture

Pick 'n Pay has a very open and relaxed communication culture. The editor compares the culture in Pick 'n Pay to a big family.

People tend to see Pick 'n Pay as a long-term employer – and therefore regard their colleagues as part of their family. In a way this enables communication – especially within shops – to be much easier and informal (Stander, 2005).

This open culture makes it relatively easy for employees to communicate with senior management. However, as is the case in most big corporations, there are certain communication channels that are recommended if employees want to communicate with management.

The relaxed communication culture is not limited to store employees only, but also extends to management. Pick 'n Pay's senior management is very much involved in communication programmes and initiatives. For example, Pick 'n Pay CEO Shaun Summers is one of the people (apart from founder Raymond Ackerman) who regularly hosts the weekly video newsletter that is distributed to all stores. They therefore not only support employee communication, but are actively part of the process.

9.4.3 Involvement in strategic management

PnP did not have any influence in any way on the strategic management decisions taken in Pick 'n Pay. However, it would portray messages about new decisions to workers, and support any new directions management might have chosen for the company (Stander, 2005).

PnP actively communicated the company's mission (*We serve. With our hearts we create a great place to be. With our minds we create an excellent place to shop*) and values.

One of the ways in which the company's values were conveyed, was by using them as page straps to categorise articles in.

9.4.4 Management

PnP is managed by Stander, who works in the internal communications department, which forms part of the marketing department. Before moving to head office, the editor worked for eight years in various of the company's stores, giving her good insight into the target audience of PnP. She has been the editor of PnP since April 2001.

Although Stander is not a member of senior management, she has easy access to them. Stander foresees that the publication will remain an important internal communication tool, as employees support it. The publication has also proved to be a very effective communication tool when new projects specifically aimed at employees (such as a student fund for Aids orphans), are launched.

PnP is (and was during the study period) the responsibility of the internal communication department, which forms part of the bigger marketing division.

9.5 EVALUATION

Every two years, the editor of PnP conducted a readers' survey to determine what Pick 'n Pay employees would like to see in the magazine. The survey was published in PnP and employees were encouraged to complete and submit it by awarding prizes for five winners (Stander, 2005).

Pick 'n Pay regularly entered PnP in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition and used the remarks received from the judges (who are all professionally trained journalists and communicators working in the corporate communication field), to improve the publication. Taking part in the competition was regarded as a peer-review mechanism. The fact that the publication received several awards over a number of years, is an indication that outsiders regarded it as a good publication.

9.6 THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

Based on the results from the content analysis as well as the information supplied by the editor, PnP will now be measured against the four theoretical statements made in Part I of this study, as well as against the overall guiding theoretical statement of the study.

Statement 1

Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.

Pick 'n Pay's PnP in-house journal measured up well against this first statement.

PnP encouraged two-way symmetrical communication by offering various opportunities for employees to contribute to the magazine. In most cases money was offered for articles, although employees tended to appreciate the acknowledgement of appearing in the magazine as enough encouragement to submit articles.

Although there would be the chance to use the in-house journal more regularly to communicate important events/developments in the company, other new media were used for this function. Video newsletters do have the disadvantage that employees cannot give easy feedback and cannot refer back to them.

Since many of the readers of PnP do not have access to new media such as e-mail and the intranet, it is desirable for the in-house journal to offer feedback opportunities such as a letters page to encourage two-way communication between management and employees.

The publication's communication style was in line with Grunig and Hunt's (1984:27) two-way symmetrical model of communication by not only supplying information on the company and its environment, but also encouraging employees to contribute to the publication. However, the communication tended to focus on more informal issues.

Although PnP had a very informal character focusing heavily on social and entertainment news, the company regarded it as an important part of its internal communications strategy. It knew that the in-house journal reached employees through this medium and that it boosted employee morale (Stander, 2005).

PnP also enjoyed a very unique position as communication channel without competing with new media such as intranet, e-mail or even video newsletters (that were used to communicate more formal company information to employees).

The publication fell under a single integrated department (Internal Communications Department), with the editor having direct access to senior management. The editor confirmed that senior management also supported the magazine, not only through granting interviews (confirmed by content analysis), but also by using the publication as a showcase for the company's achievements.

The editor had specific training in journalism, which she applied when publishing PnP (writing and editing articles as well as assisting with the layout and design). She also had several years' experience in the field (obtained while working on PnP).

The editor of PnP conducted readers' surveys to determine what the company's employees would like to read in the in-house journal. It was also entered in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition, on the one hand to obtain an opinion from external professionals and on the other to see how the magazine measured up to those published by other companies in South Africa.

Statement 2

An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

PnP's overall world view in the period 1999 to 2003 can be described as symmetrical, acknowledging that it would have to adapt to both internal and external environments to ensure that it remained a relevant information source (Grunig, 1992:40-41).

Although, as far as could be determined, there were no external issues that had a direct impact on PnP, there were internal issues that did. For example, the high level of illiteracy among employees compelled the editor to publish short items that were predominantly visual and easy to be read quickly by someone else.

Both the content analysis and the interview with PnP's editor revealed that the magazine formed an important link between the company and its environment, as it published articles on both the internal and external environment in which the company operated.

It can also be said that the magazine showed a balanced world view in that it devoted 50% of articles analysed to the external environment and 50% of articles to issues related to the internal environment of the company.

Statement 3

An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).

PnP is a very well-balanced publication reporting extensively on issues one would typically expect in an in-house journal (as determined by local and international literature). The company published regular columns such as letters and opinion pieces, as well as competitions, company information, employee news and profiles. However, PnP did have a tendency to publish more articles on social events than on key company information. The

company therefore succeeded in communicating with employees and meeting their communication needs, specifically the need for more informal information.

Statement 4

Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).

PnP was strategically planned and managed, with a set budget and a pre-determined production schedule. Although a professionally trained journalist managed the publication, a large amount of material submitted was generated by people with no journalistic training. This did have the effect that articles tended to be short and without any detailed reporting. The publication used the company's well-established internal mailing system for distribution to all its stores.

Content analysis showed the publication made use of high-quality paper, a pre-determined style that was easily readable, used well-written articles supported by good headlines and clear captions and very good quality visuals.

Based on these findings the fifth research question

What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

can be answered as follows:

- Symmetrical two-way communication is an important goal for an in-house journal. It helps employees feel that they form part of the company and that senior management is interested in them (see 2.3.2.5).
- Regardless of the increased use of new media in companies, a printed in-house journal can still find itself a niche in the company's overall communication strategy. PnP demonstrates that an in-house journal can be used to reach employees that specifically do not have access to communication channels such as e-mail and intranet. Although these employees do have access to other new media channels such as radio broadcasts and video newsletters, they still prefer to receive a printed in-house journal to take home and show to family and friends (see 1.2.3).
- The PnP case study shows that it is very important not only to provide information the company believes employees need, but information that they want (see 3.2.3.1). Although PnP is used in a limited way to communicate formal company information, its main focus is more informal employee news, exactly what the employees want from the company. Therefore it can be said that a company's internal environment will have an influence on what it publishes.
- PnP is essentially also the responsibility of the marketing department (see 2.3.2.2). In this case, it falls under a subdivision that specifically focuses on internal communication. This is again a confirmation that the public relations department is not necessarily the only department within a company that can take responsibility for in-house journals.

9.7 SUMMARY

As can be seen from the results of the analysis, overall PnP measured up very well to the criteria set for excellent in-house journals in South Africa.

It fulfilled a unique role within the overall communication strategy of the company (conveying more informal information and serving as an entertainment medium to boost employee morale) and did not compete with other communication tools used by management.

Pick 'n Pay has been very much aware of the unique environment in which it has been publishing its in-house journal. A vast number of its “readers” are illiterate and face issues such as HIV/Aids in their daily lives. The publication catered for this by presenting a picture-intensive publication that could be enjoyed by illiterate “readers”. Articles also cover a wide range of topics – not only company news, but also general issues prevalent in the South African environment.

It was well-written and professionally produced. A reliable distribution system was used to ensure all employees received their copies.

Theoretical contributions that can be deduced from this case study are:

- An in-house journal should strive to achieve two-way symmetrical communication
- Printed in-house journals can find a niche within a company’s overall communication strategy regardless of the presence of other new media
- A company’s internal environment has an influence on what the in-house journal publishes
- Another, communication orientated, department can be responsible for the publication of an in-house journal. However, there should be strong focus on the aim of the publication to keep it from being used as a marketing tool by management.

In the next chapter, Sanlam’s *Sandaba* will be analysed.

Part II

Chapter 10

SANDABA – SANLAM

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on *Sandaba*, the monthly in-house journal of financial services group Sanlam Life. *Sandaba* is the only in-house journal in this study that, during the study period (1999-2003), was aimed at a division of the company and not the entire company.

Sandaba is analysed in terms of the criteria discussed in Part I Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Firstly an overview of the company and publication is given, followed by the data obtained from the content analysis, which indicates overall publishing trends. The editor (during the study period and currently), Trudie Myburgh, was then interviewed to gather additional information on the management, communication and technical issues of the publication.

This information was then combined to see how the publication measured up to the four theoretical statements made in Part I.

10.2 PUBLICATION OVERVIEW

Sandaba was first published in August 1998 as an internal communication tool to communicate with Sanlam advisors throughout South Africa (In this study, only issues published between 2000 and 2003 were studied, as no copies published in 1999 were available in the archives.). The publication was specifically directed at advisers, as the company (Sanlam Life) believed it needed a focused communication medium. In January 2000 *Sandaba's* audience changed, as it was then aimed at the entire Sanlam Personal Finance division as well as Sanlam Personal Employee Benefits when it became Sanlam Life, which incorporates all the advisors. In 2001 the publication was also distributed to Sanlam's corporate head office, and since 2004 (a year after the study period), *Sandaba* has become the official publication of the Sanlam group of companies, excluding Santam (Myburgh, 2005).

In 2002 *Sandaba* won the awards for best design and best communication at the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate communication competition. It also received the award as the best internal newsletter.

In 2003 *Sandaba* received certificates for excellence in writing, communication and design at the same competition. The publication was also a finalist for best achievements in writing and design, and was named the winner in the communication category. It was named the best internal newsletter and was a finalist for South Africa's best corporate publication.

10.3 PUBLICATION ANALYSIS

10.3.1 Overview

The following overall comments can be made with regard to *Sandaba*:

- The publication was published, in its entirety (two separate magazines), in both English and Afrikaans every month. The company employed people specifically to translate all copy (see Figure 10.1)



Figure 10.1: English and Afrikaans versions of Sandaba.

- It was not a standard size such as A3 or A4, but a square size (278 mm x 297 mm) with a strong newspaper feel because of its size and design (big pictures and a four-column grid) (see Figure 10.2)



Figure 10.2: Sandaba's unique square size.



Figure 10.3: An example of creative presentation of headlines.

- Sandaba retained the same layout and design throughout the study period (2000-2003)
- Although blue (the company's corporate colour) was used strongly, various other colours were also used. However, colour was used wisely and contributed to the overall look of the publication. Colour was also used in headlines to help place focus on certain words or concepts (February 2000:1; August 2003:15)
- Headlines were strong and used creatively. Often the headline became the accompanying graphic (see Figure 10.3)
- The publication made ample use of drop capitals, cross headlines, sub-headlines and teasers
- Although the publication remained the same throughout the study period, the target audience changed slightly. Initially Sandaba was aimed at Sanlam Personal Finance employees, but after October 2001 it was aimed at Sanlam Life, a bigger division, and eventually the entire Sanlam (since 2004).

Below are the results of this content analysis showing the overall types of content that appeared in Sandaba (2000 to 2003 – see Appendix C).

The overall results of the publication analysis are as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Employee contributions/achievements | 12% (57, n=469) |
| Marketing | 9% (41, n=469) |
| Sport and recreation | 7% (31, n=469) |
| Employee profile | 7% (33, n=469) |
| Company news/achievements | 7% (34, n=469) |
| Branches | 7% (35, n=469) |
| Education and training | 6% (27, n=469) |
| Competition | 6% (26, n=469) |
| Humour | 4% (21, n=469) |
| New initiatives | 4% (18, n=469) |
| Technology in use | 4% (17, n=469) |
| Staff/management changes/appointments | 3% (14, n=469) |
| Customer information/service | 3% (14, n=469) |
| Products/services | 3% (14, n=469) |
| Legal matters | 2% (9, n=469) |
| Social development | 2% (9, n=469) |
| Arts and culture | 2% (8, n=469) |
| Letters | 2% (11, n=469) |
| Vision/mission | 1% (6, n=469) |
| Technology | 1% (3, n=469) |
| Markets | 1% (6, n=469) |
| Crime | 1% (3, n=469) |
| General health | 1% (4, n=469) |
| Communication | 1% (6, n=469) |
| Message from CEO | 1% (4, n=469) |
| Sensitive queries | 1% (5, n=469) |
| Package changes | 1% (3, n=469) |
| Strategic planning | <1% (2, n=469) |
| Skills | <1% (2, n=469) |
| Editorial | <1% (1, n=469) |
| Company projects | <1% (1, n=469) |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | <1% (2, n=469) |
| Politics | <1% (1, n=469) |
| Ecology | <1% (1, n=469) |

The following issues appeared on the cover:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Vision/mission | 37% (4, n=11) |
| Company news/achievements | 18% (2, n=11) |
| New initiatives | 18% (2, n=11) |
| Skills | 9% (1, n=11) |
| Strategic planning | 9% (1, n=11) |
| Markets | 9% (1, n=11) |

10.3.2 Content

Sandaba's vision was to be the best possible in-house journal that achieved its goal to communicate by attracting advisors to read the magazine. The aim of the publication was to inform as well as to serve as an effective two-way communication tool between employees and management. *Sandaba* also fulfilled a motivational role by acknowledging employees' achievements. The publication hoped to attract readers by publishing relevant, up-to-date information in an attractive and professional manner. There was a fine balance between formal and informal communication in the publication (Myburgh, 2005).

Sandaba's audience includes all Sanlam employees. Their educational level varies between Grade 12 and tertiary qualifications, and incomes differ vastly. The biggest percentage of readers are Afrikaans speaking (hence the separate Afrikaans and English versions), although English speaking (mostly black) readers have increased during the last couple of years.

Sandaba focuses on relevant and recent issues that would interest the company's advisors. It also reports on company news and strategic issues that must be communicated to advisors, for example repositioning of the brand (Myburgh, 2005).

10.3.2.1 Content indicating management support

It is obvious from the content (see tables above) of *Sandaba* that the publication enjoyed the support of senior management. The first proof is that *Sandaba* was used to convey new strategic changes as well as changes in the vision and mission of the company (Perfect vision – Sanlam's journey into a new era begins [October 2001:1], A year of growth ahead, [February 2000:1]).

Senior management also obviously supported the publication by being actively involved in it, by granting interviews, writing columns or even by responding to readers' letters, for example: Where's the equity (a letter to which Sanlam Life's CEO replied) (May 2000:4), Still a tough path ahead (in which the company's financial director explains the objectives for the year) (June 2001:1), Future options – Leon points the way (an interview with the new sales director) (August 2001:1), Perfect vision – Sanlam's journey into a new era begins (CEO Leon Vermaak explains the company's new vision and strategy) (October 2001:1), and Think South for success (a column by the chief strategist from Sanlam Investment Management) (March 2003:12).

Senior management fully supported the magazine, as it was regarded as one of the most important internal communication tools in the company (Myburgh, 2005).

10.3.2.2 Content covering the external environment

Although *Sandaba* did acknowledge its external environment, it did not have a very balanced world view (see 2.3.2.9). However, this did not necessarily influence the publication negatively (see 10.6). Only 22% (104, n=469) of articles published covered external issues while 78% (365, n=469) covered internal issues. The editor explains that *Sandaba* was regarded as an internal communication tool and therefore articles focused on issues that affected employees directly. The publication did report in a limited way on external issues, specifically sponsorships and other external events that had relevance to the company and employees, but space dedicated to these external issues was limited on purpose. The editorial team preferred to use all available space for issues relevant to employees (Myburgh, 2005).

The content analysis confirmed the editor's comment that most articles covering external issues involved sponsorships, for example Women's soccer gets a kick start (covers the sponsorship for the women's national soccer team) (August 2001:5), The hunt for the bold and the brilliant (June 2002:5) and The new kid on the block (November 2002:5), covered two television programmes that were sponsored by Sanlam.

Education and training (6%, 27, n=469) was one of the external topics covered regularly. Articles focused either on employees receiving training (Now IT's as easy as ABC [August 2001:6]), or on education and training initiatives in which Sanlam was involved, such as Takalani Sesame (The new kid on the block [November 2002:5]).

Sport and recreation (7%, 34, n=469) also enjoyed significant coverage, once again focusing either on employees or on sponsored events (Three records for 'young' athlete [August 2001:17]).

Unlike the other publications used in this study, *Sandaba* reported relatively regularly on legal issues (2%, 9, n=469), especially employment equity, for example: On the road to employment equity (April 2000:11) and The latest employment equity figures (June 2001:14). The only external issue that appeared on the cover, was on markets: A new window of opportunity (August 2003:1).

10.3.2.3 Content covering the internal environment

It is evident from the content analysis that *Sandaba* focused very strongly on the internal environment in the company. A total of 78% (365, n=469) of articles focused on the internal environment (including employees).

The most prominent articles referring to Sanlam Life's internal environment included marketing (11%, 41, n=469) (Marketing recognition in PE [August 2003:18], It pays to think ahead [March 2003:3], Don't stop thinking ahead [October 2001:3]), branches (10%, 35, n=469) (Sanlam Trust fires up its culture [June 2001:6], Sanlam Direct's staff take centre stage [July 2002:18]) and company news and achievements (7%, 34, n=469) (It's the final countdown [November 2002:3], An achievement to smile about [July 2002:7], A boost for business [April 2002:1]).

Other prominent internal environmental issues appearing in *Sandaba* included new initiatives (5%, 18, n=469) (A new window of opportunity [August 2003:1]), technology in use (5%, 17, n=469) (Automation gives solutions GO! [July 2003:6]), customer information and service (4%, 14, n=469) (Our future lies with loyal clients [March 2003:11]), products and services (4%, 14, n=469) (New Lamda, new functions, super service! [July 2002:7]) and vision and mission (2%, 6, n=469) (The view from the top [April 2002:5]). It is interesting to note that

four of the six articles that covered the company's mission and vision appeared on the cover (37% of cover articles, n=11).

From the content analysis it can be seen that *Sandaba* covered a wide variety of internal issues (22 of the 25 issues on the analysis sheet) – more than the other publications in this study. The effect is that a lot of information was conveyed from management to employees, keeping them informed on exactly what was happening in the company. This correlated with the editor's policy of using more space for internal issues than for external issues and of using the publication as an information medium aimed directly at employees.

10.3.2.4 Content encouraging two-way symmetrical communication

The editor believes that *Sandaba* definitely achieved two-way symmetrical communication through the issues published between 1999 and 2003 and that it was also the aim of the magazine to act as a communication channel between management and employees. Apart from significant contributions to the letters page, where employees were not afraid of airing their opinion, they also communicated with management by contributing articles, giving their opinion in opinion polls and submitting pictures of events in the various branches (Myburgh, 2005).

Issues that involved employees directly (employee contributions/achievements, employee profiles, staff/management changes/appointments, competitions and letters) amounted to 30% (141, n=469) of the total newsletter issues covered in the publication. It is obvious that the publication attached huge value to giving employees credit for what they did.

When it came to competitions (6%, 26, n=469), some were readers' competitions offered by *Sandaba*, while others were reports on competitions offered to employees by the company to encourage productivity/increased sales (Win prizes that will drive you wild [May 2000:3], A competition with prizes for Africa [April 2002:1], Choice prizes for the connoisseur [March 2003:4]).

Readers' competitions also encouraged two-way communication as there was a reward for employees who gave feedback to *Sandaba* by way of prizes. Readers' competitions were published in all editions, always with new prizes. The prizes were also significant (a tent, November 2002 or a grill, August 2003, for example), making it worthwhile for employees to enter the competitions.

An analysis of the letters page proved that the editor's view that it encouraged two-way symmetrical communication was true in that letters on various issues were not only published in every edition, but were also answered by a relevant manager. For example, Some thoughts on production (August 2003:4), where the writer gave certain suggestions on how to improve production in the company, with two managers, the senior manager for distribution as well as the head of promotions explaining why the company did certain things and not others. Feedback was given regularly on letters in all editions. Because of this, employees could be sure that they could reach management through *Sandaba* and they would get feedback on the issues highlighted in print.

Sandaba also published regular employee profiles (7%, 33, n=469). These profiles focused on what people did and gave them recognition for their work, for example: A collective driving force (August 2003:19), Yvonne's got a winning hand (March 2003:23) and Meet the man who drives Innofin (April 2002:19).

10.3.3 Technical aspects

Myburgh is a freelance editor employed on contract basis to manage *Sandaba*. Apart from the editor, two sub-editors (one for the English and one for the Afrikaans edition), a graphic designer, photographer, graphic artist and a secretary (employed directly by Sanlam) make up the full editorial team. The entire team, apart from the secretary, are freelance contractors who are not only qualified in their various fields, but also have years of experience in the industry. The reason why Sanlam contracts freelance professionals is that it is a cheaper option, as the company is not responsible for any additional benefits for these contractors, but a highly professional publication is still produced (Myburgh, 2005).

10.3.3.1 Language

Sandaba started off as an Afrikaans publication. However, over the years the number of English employees have increased and the decision was made that rather than running the risk of people not understanding half of the publication if it was printed in both languages, it would be better to produce two identical publications – one in Afrikaans and one in English. The company employs language practitioners to assist specifically with the translation of the publication (Myburgh, 2005).

10.3.3.2 Title

The title *Sandaba* is a combination of “Sanlam” – the company’s name, and “indaba” – a Zulu word meaning discussion group. The name therefore suggests that the journal is a discussion tool for employees. The title was suggested by an employee in a competition to name the publication (Myburgh, 2005). In essence the title also reflects the company’s intention of enabling two-way symmetrical communication through its in-house journal in the name of the publication.

10.3.3.3 Paper

Although *Sandaba* tended to look like a newspaper (format and size) the good quality paper (115 gsm Dukuza matt) that was used helped create a look and feel associated with magazines (Ferreira & Staude, 1991:23). The good quality paper created the impression of a high-quality publication that was professionally produced and printed.

10.3.3.4 Design

Sandaba’s size (278 mm x 297 mm) and grid (usually four columns) tended to be like those of a newspaper (see Part II Introduction). This “odd” format gave the publication a unique character and an interesting look and feel. The newspaper aspect of it made it look relevant, crisp and up-to-date, while the magazine aspects gave the publication style and elegant design.

Throughout the four years of study *Sandaba* retained the same design although small cosmetic changes were implemented to keep the publication’s look updated (see Figure 10.4). This indicates that the editorial team maintained a good style guide. By keeping the design the same readers were given a feeling of familiarity. They knew what to expect in the magazine and where to find certain types of articles.



Figure 10.4: Examples of Sandaba's cover in February 2000 (left) and July 2003 (right).

Sandaba used various design elements to enhance the publication. These included drop capitals, cross headings, creative use of visuals, introductory paragraphs and fact boxes (see Figure 10.5).



Figure 10.5: Examples of design elements used in Sandaba.



Figure 10.6: An example of longer and shorter articles in Sandaba.

Sandaba offered a good balance between longer (covering company issues) and shorter articles (typically covering social events, but also other issues) (see Figure 10.6).

10.3.3.4.1 Size and grid

Throughout all four years on which the study focused Sandaba remained a square-sized (278 mm x 297 mm) publication, which tended to make use of a four-column grid. However, when a large number of photographs were used no formal grid was obvious (see Figure 10.7).



Figure 10.7: A set grid is used by Sandaba for most of the pages (left), although picture-intensive pages do not use a strict grid.

Although *Sandaba* used the unique, smaller format for a long time, it was decided in 2004 (a year after the focus period of this study) to change it to a standard A3 format and give it a definite newspaper feel. It is cheaper to publish a publication in a standard size, as paper is not wasted to cut the publication smaller (Myburgh, 2005).

10.3.3.4.2 Colour

Sandaba's colour use was well balanced. Although blue, the company's corporate colour, was used throughout for set design elements (cross headings and straps, for example), it did not create the look of a brochure which would typically use bright and prominent colours (see Figure 10.8).



Figure 10.8: Examples of creative colour use without allowing corporate colours to dominate.

Although colour was used in drop capitals, and introductory paragraphs and cross headings were often published in dark blue (always the same blue), headlines were always used in black (see Figures 10.5 and 10.6). This helped to create a professional magazine look, as the headlines (different colours, for example) did not distract the reader from the text. (Colour was used in 2000 in a limited way in headlines, but this style was changed in 2001.)

10.3.3.4.3 Visuals

The visuals used in *Sandaba* were creative and of good quality. The fact that a professional photographer and graphic artist were employed to create custom visuals for the publication added to this professional look.

In *Sandaba's* case, the use of an artist to draw visuals for specific articles solved the problem of finding visuals on topics that were difficult to illustrate – for example loyalty (November 2002:9) and investment (March 2003:8) (see Figure 10.9).



Figure 10.9: An example of a custom-drawn illustration.



Figure 10.10: A stock photograph used in Sandaba.



Figure 10.11: Good quality pictures are taken of employees and used well.

Apart from visuals drawn specifically for *Sandaba*, the publication also used stock photography (professional pictures obtainable from commercial photographic libraries) to illustrate articles (see Figure 10.10). Pictures depicting Sanlam employees were of very good quality and were used well (see Figure 10.11).

Certain parts of the publication (towards the front) tended to have fewer pictures per page with a bigger focus on news (more feature-like articles informing employees of what was happening within the company), while other pages were very picture-intensive (specifically focusing on employees) (see Figure 10.12).



Figure 10.12: An example of a picture-intensive page (left) vs. one using only one picture.

Pictures were used creatively, either by being deep-etched or even used in a headline to add creativity to the publication.

10.3.3.4.4 Captions

Captions in *Sandaba* were short and explained what was portrayed in the picture, for example: Fanie du Preez, Harrie Tigelaar, Pierre Koekemoer and Helgaard Truter (with a picture of the four gentlemen) (April 2002:5). Towards the back of the publication *Sandaba* published only pictures with captions to convey branch news. These caption stories were longer and more explanatory, for example: Sanlam sponsored the Sanlam Sprint Challenge swimming gala in Malmesbury, hosted by WP Aquatics. Here are Maresa Langeveldt, advisers' consultant, and Frans Brink, adviser from Westlands (April 2002:17) and The first client help office was opened in Umtata – the first of about 50 client offices to open their doors countrywide. From left are: Dave Inderlall, Mpongwana Phumeza and Matocengwe Pumza (July 2003:20).

10.3.3.4.5 Typeface

Sandaba used Garamond and Rotus as fonts. These are the company's corporate fonts (Myburgh, 2005). The corporate fonts were used to ensure all publications produced by Sanlam conveyed the same corporate identity.



Figure 10.13: A sample of the fonts used in Sandaba.

10.3.3.4.6 Layout

Sandaba's layout was consistent from one edition to the next, as a particular design and layout style had been set for the graphic designer.

10.3.3.4.7 Headlines

Headlines were creative and well written by *Sandaba's* editorial team, for example: *Still a tough path ahead* (with an article on the company's future projections) (June 2001:1), *Share and share alike* (a look at shared services) (March 2003:5) and *A big deal!* (A new rewards competition launched) (May 2000:1).

10.3.3.5 Sub-editing

All pages were well edited and good quality copy was used. Spelling errors were eliminated and articles were easy to read and understand. It is obvious that a predetermined style was used for the publication. Although the articles published in *Sandaba* carried more technical and detailed information (which was suitable for the highly trained and educated audience) it was written and edited in such a manner that someone not working in the industry would also understand the articles. There was, therefore, no chance of misunderstanding any specific details regarding new policies or products, for example.

10.3.3.6 Budget

Sandaba had a predetermined budget that allowed for 11 issues of 16 pages each a year. The budget also allowed for a special four-page edition towards the end of the year in which final competition results of the annual staff competition (which was covered regularly in *Sandaba*), was published (Myburgh, 2005).

10.3.3.7 Production schedule

Sandaba appeared every month (except in December). The reason for publishing a monthly magazine, was that it offered senior management a regular communication interval.

A set production schedule was created at the beginning of the year and both editorial and production teams kept strictly to it. The editorial team believed that part of delivering a professional service was to publish the magazine on the dates promised at the beginning of

the year. However, in rare cases the publication might be delayed to include major announcements by Sanlam's senior management (Myburgh, 2005).

10.3.3.8 Reproduction and printing

Reproduction and printing were done by a professional company. The print run for the Afrikaans edition was 6 200 and for the English edition 3 250.

10.3.3.9 Distribution

At Sanlam's head office, *Sandaba* was distributed by leaving copies of the publication at all entrances for employees to take themselves. Other offices received their copies through the internal mail system, while advisors received theirs by normal surface mail.

10.4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

10.4.1 Public relations tool

Sandaba is one of various internal public relations tools that the company uses to communicate with its employees. The fact that it has grown over the years from being targeted at one division only to the entire company, indicates the company's high regard of it as an internal communication tool within Sanlam. It has a very specific place within the overall communications strategy of the company.

The publication was the specific responsibility of Group Communications, which oversaw all internal public relations programmes. The company, specifically senior management, attached high value to *Sandaba* as communication tool with employees (Myburgh, 2005).

Other formal channels included electronic broadcasts or e-mail, television broadcasts for important issues such as annual results, personal visits to advisors, as well as information sessions at Sanlam's head office. Even though there were all these communication channels, Sanlam still felt that a newspaper was a necessary communication tool within the company that would encourage unique (and formal) two-way communication that could not be achieved by electronic media.

Apart from these channels, *Sandaba* was regarded as one of the most important communication tools within the company (Myburgh, 2005).

10.4.2 Communication culture

Sanlam has a very open and relaxed communication culture. Senior management is easily accessible, not only to the *Sandaba* editorial team, but also to any employee who wishes to communicate with them. This open communication culture has allowed *Sandaba* to publish articles on more sensitive issues as well as letters of employees on any issue without any objection from senior management (Myburgh, 2005).

The open communication culture also allowed sensitive issues to be discussed in *Sandaba* as management did not shy away from interacting with employees. The open communication culture enabled two-way symmetrical communication in Sanlam (Grunig, 1992).

Myburgh foresees that the publication will remain an important internal communication tool as employees, and especially advisors who are not based at Sanlam's head office, support it.

10.4.3 Involvement in strategic management

Sandaba did not have any influence in any way on the strategic management decisions taken in Sanlam. However, as it was the aim of *Sandaba* to implement the company's internal communication strategy (which was coupled to the overall vision, mission and strategy), the publication definitely supported it by informing employees about all aspects of the vision, mission and all strategic decisions (Myburgh, 2005). *Sandaba* actively supported the company's mission (to be the leader in prosperity management) and values.

10.4.4 Management

Sandaba is managed by Myburgh who works closely with the group communication department of Sanlam. Although Myburgh is not a member of senior management, she has easy access to them. Senior management is also closely involved in *Sandaba* and assists the team of freelancers to publish the in-house journal. The fact that Sanlam employs a secretary to deal specifically with the administrative issues regarding *Sandaba* shows that all aspects of producing the publication are consciously managed.

Group communication is the department in Sanlam responsible for producing *Sandaba*. Regardless of this (the department is similar to another company's public relations department), the company still opted to outsource the publication to professional consultants. This, in a way, indicates the commitment of Sanlam to the publication in that it rather employs a consultant with the appropriate expertise than becoming involved in what is often called non-core activities, such as publishing magazines and newspapers.

10.5 EVALUATION

Once a year, Sanlam's market research and information division was commissioned to do a thorough evaluation of *Sandaba*. Telephonic interviews were conducted with a predetermined number of employees (a basic sample is drawn). The same questionnaire was discussed with all of them. A comprehensive research report was then supplied to the editor who used it to make changes to the publication, ensuring it maintained its good points, but improved on ones that were considered less good by readers (Myburgh, 2005). Sanlam also entered *Sandaba* in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition and used the remarks received from the judges (who are all professionally trained journalists and communicators working in the corporate communication field) to improve the publication. Taking part in the competition is regarded as a peer-review mechanism. The fact that the publication received several awards over a few years, is an indication that outsiders regard it as a good publication.

10.6 THEORETICAL STATEMENTS

Based on the results from the content analysis as well as the information supplied by the editor, *Sandaba* will now be measured against the four theoretical statements made in Part I of this study as well as against the overall guiding theoretical statement of the study.

Statement 1

Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.

Sanlam's *Sandaba* measured up well against this first statement.

Although *Sandaba* was not the only communication tool in the company and there were various other quicker channels that enabled two-way symmetrical communication (such as e-mail), Sanlam believed *Sandaba* had a unique communication role to play as a company newspaper and continued to use it as a source of new information and one that encouraged two-way communication.

Sandaba encouraged two-way symmetrical communication by offering various opportunities for employees to contribute to the magazine. Although prizes were offered in some cases to contribute to *Sandaba*, the company's overall open communication culture had a big influence on encouraging employees to contribute to the magazine. Employees working in other areas (not head office) also liked to use the publication as a communication tool to inform senior management of their activities. Management used the publication extensively to communicate events within the company.

The publication's communication style was in line with Grunig and Hunt's (1984:27) two-way symmetrical model of communication by not only supplying information on the company and its environment, but also encouraging employees to contribute to the publication. There was a good balance between company and employee-related information.

It was regarded as a very important internal communications tool within the company's overall communication strategy. The publication fell under a single, integrated department (group communications), with the editor having direct access to senior management. The editor confirmed that senior management also supported the magazine, especially by granting interviews and participating in content (confirmed by content analysis).

The editor, as well as the rest of the editorial team, had specific training and years of experience in journalism which they applied when publishing *Sandaba* (by writing comprehensive articles, sourcing good-quality pictures, editing and compiling the publication).

Every year a professional readers' survey was conducted by the market research and information division to determine what readers' opinion of the publication was. *Sandaba* was also regularly entered in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition, on the one hand to obtain an opinion from external professionals and on the other to see how the magazine measured up to those published by other companies in South Africa.

Statement 2

An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Sandaba's overall world view in the period 2000 to 2003 seemed to be asymmetrical, in that although it acknowledged its external environment (through limited reporting on it), it preferred to focus predominantly on the internal environment (Grunig, 1992:40-41). For example, even though one would expect new media to play a major role in how *Sandaba* functioned, it did not look as if it really acknowledged this, as it continued to play the role of an immediate news source from 1999 until 2003 – regardless of an expected increase in the use of new media. However, in the case of an in-house journal it is understandable that a company may choose to limit its reporting on external issues.

With regard to the influence of the external environment on the publication itself (for example the role new media would play), Sanlam specifically conducted annual in-depth research and evaluation on the publication and if the results of this did not indicate any reason to implement changes, no changes were made.

Statement 3

An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).

Sandaba was a very well-balanced publication reporting extensively on issues one would typically expect in an in-house journal (as determined by local and international literature). The company published regular columns such as letters and opinion pieces, as well as competitions, company information, employee news and profiles. *Sandaba's* content was very well suited to its audience in that it reported extensively on new products and services available from the company, the same products and services that the readers (in this case consultants) sold to their clients. The company's future views and strategies, specifically, were discussed in detail, giving employees a good impression of where the company was heading. One would expect this to contribute to providing employees with a sense of security and belonging (see 1.1).

Statement 4

Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).

Sandaba was strategically planned and managed with a set budget and a pre-determined production schedule. Most of the material used in *Sandaba* was created by a team of highly trained and skilled professionals. Contributions made by employees were also of high quality. Professional technology was used to produce and print *Sandaba*. The publication

used the company's well-established internal mailing system as well as normal surface mail for distribution.

Content analysis shows the publication made use of high-quality paper, a pre-determined style that was easily readable, used well-written articles supported by good headlines and clear captions and very good quality visuals. The physical characteristics of *Sandaba* were obviously successful (which could be determined from the various research projects the company conducted – see 10.5), since it had not made any major changes in these since 1999.

Based on these findings the fifth research question

What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

can be answered as follows:

- The *Sandaba* case study raises the question whether it is really of interest for employees to read about a company's external CSI projects. Although one can argue, as is the case in *Sandaba*, that it actually does not matter, there are arguments for it. The most significant argument in this is that often employees are directly involved in these projects and because of this personal involvement want to receive feedback from the company on how these projects are progressing (Anon, 2002:103). Therefore, the decision to report on such issues lies within each individual company and should be stipulated (and motivated as in the case of *Sandaba*) in its editorial policy.
- Once again a case study highlights the importance of the influence of the internal environment on the in-house journal. In this case the huge number of Afrikaans- and English-speaking employees justifies the publication of two separate magazines, although identical in content.
- The importance of evaluation is brought to the fore in this case study. Regular evaluation (both internally and externally through competitions, for example) indicates that the publication is achieving its goals (to encourage two-way communication with employees) and regardless of the use of other media in the company, the publication has remained the same. The decision not to make any changes was an informed one.
- Although the fact that *Sandaba* is technically well produced is only one reason for its success, it indicates that by having a properly planned and executed initial design, cost can be saved by eliminating future drastic changes.

10.7 SUMMARY

Although *Sandaba* did not measure up to all the criteria set in this study (it did not have a balanced world view), the overall result was a professionally produced publication that communicated relevant company issues to its readers.

The fact that *Sandaba* did not focus very much on external issues that employees had to deal with, did veer off the trend established by the other in-house journals studied to focus specifically on these issues (e.g. crime, legal issues and health). It would probably add value to *Sandaba* as a tool for communication with employees to increase information on external issues, not only to indicate its concern for employees as persons who function outside the company as well, but also to make them aware of the overall context in which the company operates. Regular updates on issues such as legal changes and market changes ought to

be welcomed by the readers, as these will indicate where the company is headed and how not only the company, but also its employees could be influenced in future.

Theoretical contributions that can be deduced from this case study are:

- Reporting extensively on external issues is not necessarily a requirement for an excellent in-house journal. However, a company needs to make a specific decision with regard to its publishing policy to ensure consistency in this matter
- The environment – both internally and externally – has an effect on in-house journals
- Regular evaluation is important to ensure that the publication is still meeting its communication objectives
- By thoroughly investigating all variables when designing an in-house journal, a company can create an excellent in-house journal that remains the same for some time.

This was the last case study in this research project. In the next chapter all the findings from Part I (in which a set of criteria or guidelines were created) will be measured up to the findings from the analysis chapters in Part II to determine how relevant the theories and guidelines discussed are to in-house journals in South Africa. The findings of the analysis will also be used to compile a set of guidelines to assist in-house journal editors in South Africa, as well as elsewhere, to produce excellent in-house journals suited to their unique company scenarios.

Part II

Chapter 11

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

11.1 INTRODUCTION

By using several research methods, it was determined what the salient characteristics of an excellent in-house journal in South Africa should be and how five leading South African in-house journals measure up to these criteria.

A set of theoretically based criteria qualifying what was needed to create an excellent South African in-house journal was compiled by using public relations theory (Grunig's excellence theory for public relations departments [Grunig, 1992]) as well as information obtained from literature (both local and international) and from the SA Publication Forum.

The five in-house journals (*Abacus*, *Harmonise*, HTF, PnP and *Sandaba*) were analysed using content analysis, while additional information on the publications was obtained through interviews with the editors (or publishing consultants).

The overall results of the content analysis are:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Branches | 12% (251, n=2 091) |
| Sport and recreation | 12% (247, n=2 091) |
| Social development | 8% (176, n=2 091) |
| Employee contributions | 6% (118, n=2 091) |
| Education and training | 5% (112, n=2 091) |
| Company news/achievements | 5% (98, n=2 091) |
| Competitions | 5% (97, n=2 091) |
| Marketing | 4% (92, n=2 091) |
| Products and services | 4% (75, n=2 091) |
| Arts and culture | 3% (64, n=2 091) |
| Employee profiles | 3% (63, n=2 091) |
| Crime | 3% (56, n=2 091) |
| Editorial | 2% (52, n=2 091) |
| Letters | 2% (48, n=2 091) |
| Communication | 2% (49, n=2 091) |
| New initiatives | 2% (47, n=2 091) |
| Customer information/service | 2% (41, n=2 091) |
| Technology in use | 2% (40, n=2 091) |
| Humour | 2% (40, n=2 091) |
| Staff/management appointments/changes | 2% (38, n=2 091) |
| General health | 2% (36, n=2 091) |
| Ecology | 2% (37, n=2 091) |
| Technology | 1% (26, n=2 091) |

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Safety | 1% (24, n=2 091) |
| Vision/mission | 1% (21, n=2 091) |
| Sensitive queries | 1% (19, n=2 091) |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | 1% (19, n=2 091) |
| Markets | 1% (18, n=2 091) |
| Legal matters | 1% (16, n=2 091) |
| Message from CEO | 1% (12, n=2 091) |
| Productivity improvement | 1% (12, n=2 091) |
| Package changes | <1% (9, n=2 091) |
| Policy and procedure | <1% (2, n=2 091) |
| Strategic planning | <1% (6, n=2 091) |
| Skills | <1% (5, n=2 091) |
| Company projects | <1% (4, n=2 091) |
| Diseases | <1% (2, n=2 091) |
| Occupational health | <1% (1, n=2 091) |
| Politics | <1% (3, n=2 091) |
| Economy | <1% (8, n=2 091) |
| Industry sectors | <1% (7, n=2 091) |

This table is referred to elsewhere in this chapter (see 11.3.1, 11.3.2 and 11.3.3) and indicates combined general publishing trends in the five publications analysed.

In this chapter it will be discussed how the objectives of the study were achieved and research questions answered, employing suitable theoretical statements. After this discussion, the findings will be evaluated against the criteria set out in Part I. As a final step, a set of guidelines for South African in-house journals will be suggested.

Before the five research objectives are discussed, additional challenges that were encountered in the research will be elaborated on.

11.2 RESEARCH CHALLENGES

The main research challenges encountered were discussed in Part I Chapter 5. In addition to that, a noteworthy problem was that companies would have only one set of in-house journals that were printed between 1999 and 2003. These publications were studied (the originals), after which colour copies were made for later reference. The originals were then returned.

New concepts such as internal marketing and the use of in-house journals to serve this function came to the fore, which necessitated additional literature research on this concept.

11.3 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS BY REACHING THE OBJECTIVES

The research objectives set at the beginning of the study (see 1.6) were achieved by answering the research questions (see 1.5). Detailed answers to these questions will now be discussed.

11.3.1 Research objective 1

The first objective of this study was:

To determine what guidelines can be drawn from theories such as the excellence concept of public relations regarding the management of in-house journals.

This answers the question:

What guidelines can be drawn from theories such as Grunig's (1992) "excellence" concept of public relations regarding the management of in-house journals?

The first theoretical statement was:

Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated public relations department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.

All the publications analysed measured up well against this statement, although certain deviations do offer alternatives in the overall management of an in-house journal when compared to the theory that was discussed. It can therefore be said that an in-house journal should be regarded as a unique internal public relations tool to communicate with employees.

- *Two-way communication*

Three of the five in-house journals used as case studies achieved two-way symmetrical communication between senior management and employees – especially since it was one of the aims of these in-house journals (*Abacus*, *Sandaba* and *PnP*).

Letters (2%, 48, n=2 091) and competitions (5%, 97, n=2 091) were the two most prominent ways in which two-way symmetrical communication was achieved. *Abacus* and *Sandaba* specifically had strong letters pages where letters were not just published, but feedback was given by management (in most cases). Both editors explained that employees knew that they could discuss any issue in their letters to the editors without fear of being victimised. This, they felt, was important to ensure a good interactive letters page. However, they did admit that offering financial rewards for letters published also encouraged employees to write to the publication.

Prizes awarded in competitions were also a big incentive for employees to participate in competitions and contribute (and give feedback) to the in-house journal. Another way of achieving two-way symmetrical communication was encouraging employees to contribute articles to the magazine.

PnP specifically did this, while *Sandaba* also published contributions from employees. Although *Harmonise* had no specific goal to encourage two-way symmetrical communication between readers (middle management) and senior management, it did encourage it by using employees as news sources. *Harmonise's* communication style could be described as asymmetrical in that there was communication from middle to senior management (through articles and sometimes a letter), but management did not give any feedback to these contributions and was also the dominant source of information – communication was not symmetric.

In the case of HTF, the editor explained that the company (MTN) specifically did not want to use the in-house journal as a two-way communication channel between employees and management. Reasons given were that the company is too big and geographically spread too far apart (six different countries in Africa) to use the in-house journal effectively as a two-way communication tool. Therefore, MTN used its in-house journal as an internal information tool.

Apart from what the editors said about two-way communication, and the influence of new media on it, the content of the magazines also show that two-way symmetrical communication was achieved by the majority of the in-house journals. Overall, 19% (389, n=2 091) articles encouraged two-way symmetrical communication (staff/management changes/appointments, employee contributions, letters, competitions, employee profiles and communication).

Employee contributions (5%, 29, n=567), communication (6%, 32, n=567), competitions (5%, 30, n=567) and letters (4%, 20, n=567) were the features used to encourage two-way symmetrical communication in *Abacus*, while PnP used competitions (6%, 15, n=443), employee contributions (3%, 15, n=443), letters (3%, 15, n=443) and employee profiles (3%, 12, n=443). *Sandaba* used articles on employee contributions (12%, 57, n=469) extensively, as well as employee profiles (7%, 33, n=469).

The two publications that did not encourage two-way symmetrical communication as such (*Harmonise* and HTF) did use articles on employee contributions (HTF – 2%, 10, n=451) and employee profiles (*Harmonise* – 3%, 12, n=161).

From these results it is evident that two-way symmetrical communication was a goal for the majority of the in-house journals.

Therefore, based on the theoretical viewpoint of this study, it can be said that an excellent in-house journal should encourage and enable two-way symmetrical communication between senior management and employees (through the use of letters and competitions, for example).

However, as indicated earlier (see Part II Chapter 8 on HTF) there is valid criticism against Grunig's (cf. 1992) requirement that public relations tools, including in-house journals, must encourage and enable two-way symmetrical communication (see 2.3.2.5).

In this study it came to the fore that all the in-house journals were but one of several communication channels within the different companies allowing interaction between management and employees. However, some of the communication channels are much better suited to enable two-way symmetrical communication than a printed in-house journal is (simply because of the long production times that will mean feedback to an issue is given at least a month later in most cases, or even longer). Company intranets and e-mail enable employees to communicate directly with anyone in the company quickly and easily, including senior management. It is for this reason that MTN has decided that it is simply not practical to use the printed in-house journal as a two-way communication tool. It would rather use it as a source of information, and encourage two-way communication with management through more suitable electronic channels.

Although in MTN's case the use of new media channels eliminated the two-way communication function, in HTF's case a combination of strategies can be employed where both the in-house journal and electronic sources are used to encourage feedback, as in the case of *Abacus*. The publication encourages two-way communication and publishes feedback and contributions from employees, but encourages employees to use new media channels to give this feedback to the publication.

In a case where the use of new media is limited (for example among Pick 'n Pay's store workers and Harmony's miners), the in-house journal would be one of very few communication channels (if not the only one) that would allow feedback from employees to management. In such a case it would be necessary for the in-house journal to encourage and enable two-way communication.

In conclusion it can be said that the presence and use of other communication channels will determine to what level an in-house journal would encourage and enable two-way communication between the company and employees.

- *Communication strategy*

In-house journals are, however, not the only channel that can be used to communicate with employees and that can enable two-way communication. New media, and the ease with which such a medium enables communication between everybody that has access to it in a company, would be expected to be the preferred two-way communication tool instead of an in-house journal.

As pointed out earlier, new media are cheap to produce and reach the target audience almost immediately, a huge advantage over a printed in-house journal that appears monthly (see 1.2.3). It would therefore be difficult for a printed publication (with significantly longer production constraints) to compete with the feedback possibilities e-mail and intranets offer. However, the companies analysed in this study acknowledged new media and used these in conjunction with their in-house journals in various ways. In the case of *Abacus*, new media (specifically e-mail and the magazine's own intranet website) are used to encourage feedback to the magazine. On the other side of the spectrum is HTF, which acknowledges the distinct advantages of enabling two-way communication with the use of new media and therefore does not want to compete with these media and does not encourage two-way communication via its in-house journal.

It can be said that symmetrical two-way communication is therefore not necessarily a requirement for an excellent in-house journal, as was deduced from Grunig's (cf. 1992) excellence theory, if the company has other suitable channels for two-way symmetrical communication, such as e-mail and intranets.

From the interviews conducted with the editors, it is evident that most of the publications had a very specific place within their companies' overall communication strategy. For example, Absa evaluated exactly how it wanted to incorporate the in-house journal in an environment where new media are increasingly used to communicate with employees. The company regards *Abacus* as such an important communication channel between management and employees that it invested a substantial amount to redesign it from a newspaper to a magazine once it realised that in its newspaper format (during the study period from 1999 to 2003) it was competing directly with new media such as e-mail and the internet.

In the case of *Sandaba*, Sanlam over time increased the focus of the publication to the entire company instead of just one division. HTF served as the official company wide information source to employees, while PnP is valued as an important employee morale booster.

The only publication where it was unclear what its place in the overall communication strategy was, is *Harmonise*. This was because of the lack of direct feedback from the company.

Most of the companies were fully aware of other media, specifically new media such as e-mail and intranet, and how these channels were used to communicate with employees. In

most cases the in-house journals were either adjusted not to compete with new media, or they embraced new media to help increase their readership. For example, Absa realised that the immediate characteristic of e-mailed newsletters and the intranet seriously compromised *Abacus* as a newspaper (which one would expect from its format to carry the latest news and information). It therefore reconsidered the situation and decided that it was better to harness the benefits of the new media to ensure the future of the printed in-house journal. In this case, *Abacus* was converted into a magazine that would not break new news stories, but would publish feature articles and detailed information on issues already conveyed to employees via new media sources (be it e-mail, intranet or the company's own television programme). *Abacus* has also embraced new media in that it has its own intranet website where employees can see what they can expect in the magazine, as well as give direct feedback to the magazine.

Another publication that embraced technology, is HTF. In this case the magazine appears in full on the company's intranet, which makes it cheap and easy for employees in other African countries to access the magazine. As in the case of *Abacus*, HTF primarily published feature articles, although it did carry shorter news articles on the different operations, as the in-house journal was apparently the only communication channel that employees across the company could use to find out what other operations were doing.

In the case of *Harmonise* and PnP, the use of new media did not have such a big influence on the publications, as a large part of their readers did not have access to these media (miners and store packers). Pick 'n Pay did make use of a video newsletter (which overcame the illiteracy problem) for more formal communication and therefore decided to have a more informal focus in its in-house journal.

Sandaba did acknowledge the use of new media, but the company is of the opinion (based on formal research done by its marketing research department), that it is still suitable for the company to publish a newspaper carrying new information.

On the issue of in-house journals' place in the overall communication mix of a company, it can be said that the unique use of new media in a company will determine what its in-house journal will look like and what its editorial policy will be. Four of the five case studies prove that the printed in-house journal can be an effective employee communication tool if incorporated with other media used in a company. It is only *Harmonise*, which seemed to have bent the knee to radio, that contradicted this.

Therefore, it can be said that the in-house journal must form part of the overall communication strategy of a company, and its role – in terms of other new media such as e-mail and intranets – must be clearly defined.

This study also proves that regardless of the tremendous increase in the use of new media (such as e-mail, intranet, internet, video, television and radio), there is still a place for printed in-house journals in South African companies. It is important though to determine exactly how the new media sources are used and then how the printed in-house journal will be incorporated to ensure it does not compete with these media.

In many cases, the printed in-house journal takes the role of a more detailed and in-depth source of information to support the new media. New media can also be used to support the in-house journal as in the case of *Abacus* and HTF (see Part II Chapters 6 and 8).

- *Management*

When it comes to how the publications were managed, it is clear that all five of them were strategically managed, either by the company that published them or by the consultants

employed to assist with the publishing process (in the case of *Harmonise*). The publications were strategically managed in that they all had definite places in the communication mix and also had specific editorial policies and goals.

All the publications were headed by highly trained and skilled managers who had skilled public relations practitioners and technical staff (either employed by the companies or contracted from outside), to assist them in publishing the in-house journals.

The responsibility for publishing the in-house journal at the time of the study was that of the internal/corporate communication departments for four of the case studies (*Abacus*, *HTF*, *Sandaba* and *PnP*). *Harmonise* was the responsibility of the marketing/investor relations department. Although this might have indicated that the in-house journal did not enjoy recognition as a unique internal communications tool within Harmony, it could just have been because of the overall structure of the company and that the publication could still have been regarded as an important internal public relations tool. However, in the case of *Harmonise* it is difficult to determine how being the responsibility of the marketing department influenced the publication and whether it was a contributing factor in the closing down of the publication, since no feedback was received from the company itself.

In the case of *Abacus*, it moved from the internal communication department to the marketing department (in 2004) when the company was restructured. Absa's marketing department, however, has two distinct focus areas – internal and external communication. Even though *Abacus* is now the responsibility of the marketing department, it is still regarded as a key internal communications tool and it is keeping its independent news-source status in that it is not influenced by the marketing department in how it looks or what it publishes. It must be noted that although the department responsible for PnP was internal communications, this department in turn also reported to the marketing department. The remarks made with reference to *Abacus* are therefore also applicable to PnP.

Grunig's (cf. 1992) requirement that public relations tools, such as in-house journals, need to be the responsibility of the internal communications or public relations department and not that of the marketing department could therefore be questioned. In this case, it could be argued that being part of the marketing department is not necessarily to the detriment of the publication, especially if the entire communication function of a company is centralised into one department. The key would be to have the in-house journal focused in one department and not spread, for example between the marketing and the human resources departments.

An important issue that comes to the fore here is that of internal marketing, a form of relationship marketing (Wikipedia, 2005). Internal marketing refers to using marketing techniques within a company itself. There is a theory that internal audiences are not only service providers to companies, but also a customer of services (from fellow employees) at some point or another. Therefore, the argument goes, by using various traditional marketing techniques employees will be able not only to provide exceptional service, they will also receive it. It will also help employees understand their own roles as well as the roles of their colleagues (George, 1990). Added to this, it can also be said that a company's employees are the ones that actually interface with clients. They are therefore the carriers of the company's brand (Samms, 1999).

This concept of internal marketing was mentioned in Chapter 1, but not discussed further in the study since the main focus was on the journalistic and public relations aspects of in-house journals. However, from the results of this study, it has become evident that internal marketing (as described briefly above) is an important concept to consider when dealing with in-house journals.

The case studies prove that all five the companies (not only the ones where the in-house journals were the responsibility of the marketing department) did, to some extent, use their in-house journals as internal marketing tools. They all used their in-house journals to convey new information on products and services (4%, 75, n=2091), marketing initiatives (4%, 92, n=2091) and company news and achievements (5%, 98, n=2091), for example, to employees. They furthermore did so through publications that used corporate branding strongly (specifically the companies' corporate identities that are incorporated in the publications' design).

It could therefore be added that apart from being a useful internal public relations tool, the in-house journal can also be used for internal marketing. Utmost care must be taken, however, to ensure that the in-house journal retains its editorial integrity and continues to publish primarily non-marketing information to prevent it from becoming an asymmetrical marketing brochure.

All the editors also had easy access to senior management. It remains questionable whether *Harmonise's* editor had easy access to this group, since she was based at an office in Randfontein more than 50 km away from the company's head office in Melrose, whereas all the other editors interviewed in this study were based at head office and could just walk to the office of members of senior management.

Therefore, although Grunig's (cf. 1992) theory states that internal public relations tools must be the responsibility of the public relations department and not that of the marketing department, one can argue that an in-house journal falling under a marketing department is not automatically disqualified from serving the company or organisation (see 2.3.2.2). The issue, however, is firstly to acknowledge the role the in-house journal must play in the company and then to manage it accordingly. Another way of handling this, also after acknowledging the role the publication must play in a company, is to appoint a professional consultant that will handle it on behalf of the marketing department (as in the case of *Harmonise*). This consultant then assists in keeping the publication as an internal communication tool and not as a marketing tool to propagate management's decisions.

It can therefore be said that the company's in-house journal should preferably be the responsibility of the public relations department (and specifically internal communications). However, if the publication is the responsibility of the marketing department (given the structure of the company), then its role as internal information source, and not as management's propaganda tool, must be acknowledged and the publication managed accordingly. In both scenarios, Grunig's (cf. 1992) requirement that the responsibility of the publication must be based in one department, is important.

The study also brought to the fore the potential internal marketing role the in-house journal could assume. It is important, though, to maintain a balance between the marketing and public relations roles of an in-house journal.

This study further proved that an in-house journal should be headed by a manager supported by trained technical professionals. The manager (in this case the editor) should either form part of senior management or should have direct access to them. Senior management should support the publication of the in-house journal, but without taking control over it.

▪ *Evaluation*

To ensure that these publications maintain their high publishing quality and remain in touch with their readers, all the editors (or publishing consultants) conducted regular readers' and internal surveys on their publications.

Most commonly, readers' surveys would be published in the in-house journal and readers would be encouraged to return the completed surveys by offering prizes. In the case of *Sandaba*, the only publication that used professional market researchers to conduct the surveys on behalf of the editor, readers were telephoned to ensure that proper feedback was received. *Abacus* also now makes use of its own intranet website to conduct surveys, allowing employees to give quick and easy feedback.

All the editors used the evaluations that they conducted to adjust their publications in an effort to overcome any possible problems. For example, *Abacus* was changed from an A3 newspaper to an A4 magazine to overcome the problem of competing with new media. Another survey was then done to see what employees thought of the new magazine and if any additional changes were needed.

In the case of HTF, the editor also conducted a survey on what readers thought of the publication before it was changed to *Y'ello*. Based on the feedback, very minor changes were made to the magazine (specifically in respect of editorial content and layout) since readers liked what they saw.

Apart from doing their own evaluations, all the editors (or representatives) entered their publications at least once (in the case of HTF) in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition to obtain outside comment on their publications. Entering these competitions also compared them with similar publications and editors could learn what other companies were doing. From the many awards that these publications have received, it is clear that the competition judges thought that these publications were above standard and could be held as examples to the industry.

Therefore, it can be said that evaluation of an in-house journal is important to ensure it continues to reach its objectives.

This theory is supported, with certain deviations, by the results of the case studies. One could therefore adapt the theoretical statement to read as follows:

*Excellent in-house journals practise professional public relations **preferably** implementing two-way symmetrical communication, form part of a company's overall communication strategy and fall under a single, integrated **communication-focused** department, with the editor either forming part of senior management or having direct access to a supportive senior management, while the rest of the people working on the publication are suitably trained to do so (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). An excellent in-house journal is evaluated regularly and necessary changes are made to ensure it continues to serve its purpose.*

11.3.2 Research objective 2

The second objective of this study was:

To determine what the internal (vision, mission, cultural, public) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) context is in which in-house journals function in South Africa.

This answers the question:

What is the internal (vision, mission, cultural, public) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) context in which in-house journals function in South Africa?

The theoretical statement used to reach this objective is:

An excellent in-house journal forms an important link between a company and its environment. Its world view should be symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and discuss and acknowledge both internal (mission/vision, cultural, policies, employees) and external (political, social, economic, ecological and legal) issues that it anticipates will have an impact on employees or the company (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

The environments, both external and internal, in which companies operate, not only influence what they report on, but how they do it. The environments can also have an overall effect on the in-house journal. Therefore, the researcher not only investigated what issues the in-house journals would typically report on, but also looked at how these issues would influence the in-house journal in a wider scenario.

From Grunig's (cf. 1992) excellence theory it can be said that it is important for in-house journals to have a symmetrical world view in which both the internal and external environments are reported on (Steyn & Puth, 2000:54; Steyn & Nunes, 2001:37).

The issues that would be prominent in companies' internal and external environments were compiled from literature studies.

Reporting on the external environment is very relevant in the South African context where various issues (for example social development, education and training, legal and health issues such as HIV/Aids) have an impact on companies and their employees. The external issues that were reported on most regularly overall are sport and recreation (12%, 247, n=2 091), social development (8%, 176, n=2 091) and education and training (5%, 112, n=2 091). It is noticeable that these external issues were in the top five issues covered overall in the publications.

From the content analysis it can be said that the most important internal issues (based on the number of appearances) are branches (12%, 251, n=2 091), employee contributions (6%, 118, n=2 091) and company news and achievements (5%, 98, n=2 091). Overall 60% (1263, n=2 091) of articles published in the five in-house journals studied covered internal issues while 40% (828, n=2 091) covered external issues.

It is important, though, to note that different companies regard different issues (both internally and externally) as more important than others based on the companies' main line of operation, their structure, culture and size. It is for this reason that there are slight nuances when one in-house journal is compared with another.

In the case of internal issues, *Sandaba*, for example, reported most on employee contributions/achievements (12%, 57, n=469), marketing (9%, 41, n=469) and company news/achievements (7%, 34, n=469), while HTF regarded branches (13%, 59, n=451) and marketing (7%, 33, n=451) as important internal environment issues. *Abacus* also valued branches (10%, 54, n=567). However, the bank also reported regularly on products and services (8%, 43, n=567). In the case of mining company Harmony, branches (11%, 17,

n=161) and company news/achievements (9%, 15, n=161) feature strongly, as well as safety (12%, 20, n=161). By far the most important internal issue covered by PnP was branch news (19%, 86, n=469).

Although the five publications operate in different industries, it is noticeable that several external issues covered are the same – especially since they all operate in the same society – that of South Africa.

In the case of *Abacus*, the external issues that enjoyed most coverage were sport and recreation (8%, 46, n=567), social development (7%, 37, n=567) and crime (6%, 29, n=567). For *Harmonise* legal issues (4%, 1, n=161), HIV/Aids/STDs (2%, 3, n=161) and education and training (9%, 14, n=161) were the external issues covered most often.

Social development (23%, 100, n=443), sport and recreation (10%, 46, n=443) and education and training were the most prominent external issues covered in PnP. Although *Sandaba* limited articles focusing on external issues (22%, 104, n=469), it did focus on sport and recreation (7%, 31, n=469) and education and training (6%, 27, n=469).

Apart from reporting on external issues, the way in which companies acknowledged their external environments also indicated what their world views were (cf. Grunig, 1992). Overall, the companies, judged by their in-house journals, seem to have a symmetrical world view (in which they acknowledge that the environment in which they operate has an influence on the company as well). The only in-house journal that did not portray a symmetrical world view is *Sandaba*. However, this is explained by the editor in that the in-house journal is mainly used to convey employee news.

Apart from reporting on external and internal environments, these could also have an impact on the in-house journal itself. *Harmonise* is a good example of how the external environment could possibly have contributed to the closure of the newspaper. Issues such as a stronger rand (compared to the US dollar) and weaker gold price could have had a significant impact on the overall income of a gold mining company such as Harmony. Combined with failed expansion projects (which can cost a company several million rand), cost cutting within a company becomes a definite reality and management could have decided that it would be cheaper to discontinue the printing of an in-house journal and rather make use of a radio programme.

Although it does not happen very often that external factors have an impact on in-house journals, internal issues regularly do have a major impact on such publications.

For example, in the case of Absa there is a very open communication culture encouraging interaction between management and employees on all company issues (vision, mission, new products, sensitive issues and service, for example). *Abacus* therefore seems to be able to communicate a wide range of issues easily, at the request of both management and employees. *Harmonise*'s communication culture, however, seemed to be less open, but the company did communicate on a broad range of issues influencing the company, especially the various changes and mergers the company went through. HTF's internal communication focus was slightly different from the others since it aimed to deliver news to employees in six different countries with six different cultures. The focus was therefore more on overall events taking place in the company and not so much on operational or even divisional level. PnP's internal focus was predominantly on social and entertainment articles – a definite choice made by the company to boost employee morale. *Sandaba* was also open, with many contributions from both management and employees.

Another important internal environment issue is the role that the audience played in what was communicated and how it was communicated. All five the publications' audiences

differed from one another, compelling the companies to mould their in-house journals to suit these readers. In the case of *Abacus* and *Harmonise*, the publications were aimed at fairly well educated people (most of them have at least Grade 12 schooling), whereas in the case of PnP a large number of “readers” were illiterate and worked in stores as packers or as support staff. HTF and *Sandaba* were both aimed at highly trained employees, most of them with tertiary education.

The influence that the target audience had on the publications could be seen clearly in the actual magazine or newspaper. *Abacus* and *Harmonise* were newspapers during the study period. The shorter, strong news focus of a newspaper, supported by informative graphics, makes it easy to write for a fairly well educated audience. Both publications were of higher quality than a conventional paper (printed in full colour on good quality paper), acknowledging the readership.

HTF’s glossy magazine look is clearly aimed at its highly trained workforce, as is the unique format of *Sandaba*. Although the look is influenced by the readers, the longer, magazine-style articles and use of more detailed graphics in both publications show that they were aimed at a different readership than at companies where literacy would be an issue, for example PnP. In the case of PnP, the illiteracy level of employees clearly influenced the in-house journal to focus strongly on visuals with short captions that could be read quickly by a fellow employee.

Another internal environment variable that could have an impact on an in-house journal is the editor. Editors typically have their own concept of what must be done on an in-house journal. This is very evident in the numerous redesigns of PnP (see Part 2 Chapter 9).

However, in most cases editors seem to be employed in their positions for several years, which would limit this impact. By having a clear-cut communication strategy, vision and mission for its in-house journal, a company should be able to limit the impact of a new editor on the overall look and feel of the publication and maintain a sense of continuity.

From these results it is obvious that every company has very unique internal and external environments, which influence not only the company, its operations and employees, but also the way in which it communicates with its employees. For one company HIV/Aids might be a bigger problem, whereas crime and legal issues were the main focus for another. The solution here would be to define clearly what both the internal and external issues are that the company is dealing with before deciding on an overall editorial policy.

Therefore, it can be said that South African companies function in a very unique internal and external context. Although there are many issues that companies share, there are also differences. Owing to their business focus, location, market and surrounding community, the external and internal environments in which companies function can differ vastly from one another. These environments have an influence not only on the companies, but also on their employees and therefore on what is communicated between a company and its employees.

In the external environment there are various issues that most companies have to deal with and that in-house journal editors have to accommodate in their publications. In South Africa issues such as health, and specifically HIV/Aids, crime, education and training and sport and recreation, regularly feature in in-house journals – regardless of who or what the company is.

However, depending on the individual company, an in-house journal editor might place more or less focus on some of these issues. The editor might also find that there are other external issues that must be considered and that are unique to the company.

The external environment could also have an impact on the actual publication, for example, on the in-house journal's budget.

Just as the external environment differs from one company to another, so does the internal environment. Internal environment issues would include the audience and the overall communication culture. As is evident from this study, the operational focus of a company will have a huge influence on what workers are employed.

Regarding communication culture, a company where there is a more open culture will enable communication in general. It will also specifically enable better two-way communication (see next research question).

The external and internal environments in which companies operate not only influence what their in-house journals look like, but also what they report on. Grunig (cf. 1992) recommends that companies must have a balanced world view (in which both the external and internal environments are accounted for) in their communication strategies. This makes sense, especially since it was just acknowledged what a huge influence this has on a company and its communication tools, such as its in-house journal. However, companies must decide to what extent they want to report on external issues, as these events might not necessarily be of interest to employees.

South African in-house journals (based on the five case studies) generally have a balanced and symmetrical world view as suggested by Grunig (cf. 1992). They therefore not only report extensively and regularly on internal company issues (such as communication, vision and mission and strategy changes, for example), but also on external issues such as health, sport and recreation and crime.

Issues such as branch news and employee contributions, company news and achievements, marketing and products and services are the most prominent internal environment issues in these publications (see the analysis results table in 11.1).

When it came to companies' external environment, issues such as sport and recreation, social development, education and training, arts and culture and crime were reported on most regularly.

11.3.3 Research objective 3

The third research objective of this study was:

To determine what the features of an excellent in-house journal are, as suggested by international and local literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.

This answers the question:

What are the features of an "excellent" in-house journal as suggested by international and local literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?

The theoretical statement to reach this objective is:

An excellent in-house journal disseminates relevant company information, keeping employees informed and alert to issues such as profitability, safety, changes, projects and news (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson 1994; Kandler, 2001).

A set of criteria, incorporating certain types of articles and features that should typically appear in an in-house journal, was compiled from local and international literature as well as the competition criteria of the SA Publication Forum (Steyn & Puth, 2000; Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Fanson, 1994; Kandler, 2001) (see Part 1 Chapter 4).

The five in-house journals' content measured up well to this list of criteria, each publication covering the vast majority of the issues.

The most prominent typical company issues that would have had a direct effect on employees were branches (12%, 251, n=2 091), employee contributions (6%, 118, n=2 091), company news and achievements (5%, 98, n=2 091), products and services (4%, 75, n=2 091) and marketing (4%, 92, n=2 091).

Like the overall coverage of the five in-house journals' environments, the internal company issues covered by the individual publications differ from one another.

Abacus reported mostly on branches (10%, 54, n=567), products and services (8%, 43, n=567) and company news and achievements (6%, 34, n=567) while *Harmonise* focused on safety (12%, 20, n=161), branches (11%, 17, n=161) and company news and achievements (9%, 15, n=161). Both HTF (13%, 59, n=451) and PnP (19%, 86, n=443) gave most attention to branches but not much to other typical internal company issues. *Sandaba* reported most on marketing (9%, 41, n=469), company news and achievements (7%, 34, n=469) and branches (7%, 35, n=469).

In conclusion it can be said that most of the in-house journals studied not only endeavoured to encourage two-way symmetrical communication, but also achieved it through the use of various types of articles and incentives, or by incorporating the feedback possibilities of new media.

All the publications covered internal company issues extensively.

Therefore, it can be said that excellent in-house journals in South Africa report on a wide variety of typical company issues. The list of company issues as developed for the content analyses (see Appendix A) is suitable to use as a guideline on what an in-house journal should cover, as it covers all issues that appeared in the five case studies.

11.3.4 Research objective 4

The fourth objective of this study was:

To determine how and to what extent excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum.

This answers the question:

How and to what extent does excellent South African in-house journals measure up to the technical criteria suggested by literature as well as the SA Publication Forum?

The theoretical statement used to reach this objective is:

Excellent in-house journals conform to high technical standards as described by local and international literature as well as the SA Publication Forum. They are professionally produced, which includes good design, layout, well-written and edited articles, good quality visuals, professional printing and effective distribution (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001).

In-house journals that not only present suitable information, but are also produced professionally, encourage people to read them (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2001).

In all five publications, design is creative and layout consistent, using high-quality visuals (photographs and graphics) with informative captions, well-written and edited articles that have interesting headlines and various other design elements such as drop capitals, introductory paragraphs, pull quotes and cross headlines.

Although English is the language that dominated in the case studies, both *Abacus* and *Sandaba* incorporated Afrikaans in one way or another to reach their large Afrikaans readership.

The vast majority of visuals used were of very high quality. It is obvious that several of the publications (specifically *Abacus*, *Sandaba* and HTF) used professional photographers and graphic artists to create custom visuals for the in-house journals. The only publication that really experienced a problem with below-average quality visuals was HTF when it received visuals from other operating units in Africa. The editor then did not have a choice but to use the visuals, as no others were available.

All the publications also used well written and edited articles that were headed by fairly good headlines. Some of the publications, for example *Abacus* and *Harmonise*, used very creative headlines (see Part II Chapters 6 and 7). The content and language use were suitable for the specific target audiences.

Good quality paper was used and professional printers were contracted to produce full-colour publications. The sizes of the publications varied from A3 (*Harmonise* and *Abacus*), and A4 (PnP and HTF) to custom sizes (*Sandaba* and later issues of *Abacus*). All five publications were designed by experienced technical specialists, and were reproduced and printed professionally.

In most cases the in-house journal's name was deduced from the company name (*Abacus*, *Harmonise*, PnP and *Sandaba*). MTN's in-house journal name is the marketing slogan of the company. It does have the effect that the in-house journal's title is changed every few years, which could have an influence on brand and title recognition by readers. However, the editor is of the opinion that the fact that the basic format (A4 magazine) remains the same ensures that readers know it is the company's in-house journal – even though it has a new name.

All the publications adhered to corporate branding/identity in their design, including using corporate colours, fonts and design styles. *Abacus* was the only publication that veered off this style after the redesign in 2005. The reason for this is that the editorial team wanted to create a magazine that did not look like a company marketing tool (even though it is the responsibility of the marketing department), but like a magazine that really took the interests of employees to heart.

Established distribution channels were used to distribute the in-house journals to employees. Even though the geographical spread of a company might have influenced how distribution was done, all the companies were aware of this issue and made sure that employees did receive the publication. Contributions and survey feedback from all over their distribution areas confirmed this. In the case of HTF, the posting of the publication in PDF format on the internet ensured that employees in other operating units also had access to it, since the company did not send printed copies to them because of the high cost.

Therefore it can be said that excellent in-house journals in South Africa are designed by trained and highly skilled technical specialists who use high quality visuals and creative design elements to create attractive-looking full-colour publications that are printed on high-quality paper.

As has been pointed out earlier, factors such as the company's communication plan with the publication, as well as its audience, have a major influence on what the publication looks like.

The overall communication aim of the in-house journals is also manifested in their appearance.

In conclusion, it can be said that the criteria set out in this study describing the technical aspects of in-house journals are applicable, but should be used according to the needs of every individual publication. It is therefore impossible to prescribe a comprehensive set of rules applicable to all excellent in-house journals.

11.3.5 Research objective 5

The fifth objective of this study was:

To determine what general and specific theoretical conclusions can be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992).

This answers the question:

What general and specific theoretical conclusions could be drawn from the application of the said criteria, all placed within the intellectual framework suggested by Grunig (1992)?

Applying widely accepted criteria for excellence in in-house journals to the five in-house journals confirmed that leading in-house journals measure up exceptionally well (see above) to what could be called the demands of journalism-based professionalism (Froneman, 2005). However, this could not be regarded as sufficient, given the specific demands of excellent internal communication. Therefore a further, more fundamental dimension was introduced in the study, namely the two-way symmetric model of public relations, informed by a symmetrical world view (see 2.3.2.9). This was set out in research question 5 and addressed in each of the chapters reflecting the analysis of the five selected leading in-house journals.

In view of this, these general conclusions can be made:

- Excellent in-house journals have editors who have direct access to their companies' senior management (see 2.3.2.4)
- Suitably trained and highly skilled professionals (either employees or consultants) produce excellent in-house journals (see 2.3.2.7)
- Senior management supports excellent in-house journals (see 2.3.2.11)
- Excellent in-house journals form part and parcel of well-considered and clearly articulated overall communication strategies for the company or organisation as a whole. This enables the editor to work in tandem with other communication practitioners in the company or organisation, thereby achieving measurable objectives (see 2.3.2.1)
- An open and supportive company culture benefits an in-house journal since it enables free flow of information between a company and its employees.

The latter conclusion is of particular importance as it is premised on the most important dimensions of Grunig and White's (1992:33) grounding of the two-way symmetrical model for public relations in a symmetrical world view (see 2.3.2.9).

Some other specific conclusions are:

- An excellent in-house journal is strategically managed either by the company publishing it, or by a professional consultant
- In-house journals can fill a niche in a company's overall communication strategy. However, the role of the in-house journal should be clearly defined to prevent it from competing with other media such as e-mail, internet, video, television and radio.
- The responsibility of an in-house journal is based in a communication-oriented department – be it public relations or marketing. The public relations department is the preferred responsible department because of the nature of an in-house journal. However, by acknowledging the in-house journal's unique function and identity, a marketing department can publish an excellent in-house journal.
- Encouraging and achieving two-way symmetrical communication between a company and its employees is one of the main aims of an in-house journal. Lack of encouragement and achievement of two-way communication can be accepted if clear measures are taken in using other communication channels to interact with employees.
- Both the external and internal environments in which in-house journals function, have an influence on what they publish, how they are managed and what attention is given to physical appearance.

11.4 ACHIEVING THE OVERALL RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall research objectives of this study were to determine what the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals are in order to create an intellectual framework that editors can use and that can serve as a theoretical and intellectual basis from which this important dimension of public relations can continue to grow.

The overall guiding theoretical statement formulated to achieve these objectives is:

Excellent in-house journals should apply the principles of two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Grunig, 1992) as well as the technical criteria suggested in literature (e.g. Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001; Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Wilcox & Nolte, 1990) and by the SA Publication Forum (Forum, 2004).

As has been indicated, the five in-house journals used as case studies in this project are regarded as leading South African in-house journals (see 5.4.1.2.3). Although the research results are based on only these five publications, one could, with some important caveat, present these as an example for other in-house journals because they have already been acknowledged as excellent by being named winners in the SA Publication Forum's annual corporate publication competition. Added to this, one must pose the question whether the said publications also met the requirements of the normative-theoretical framework provided by the Grunig approach.

Only in view of this, one can attempt to answer the general research question, namely:

What are the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals?

and reach the overall goal of the study which is:

To determine what the characteristics of South Africa's leading in-house journals are.

Thus, some answers to the general research question are:

- Excellent South African in-house journals are well managed (see 6.4.4, 8.4.4 and 10.4.4)
- Excellent South African in-house journals have a specific place in the overall communication strategies of companies (see 6.4.1, 8.4.1 and 9.4.1).
- Excellent South African in-house journals acknowledge the presence and use of other communication channels, specifically new media, and adapt to ensure they do not compete with any of these (see 6.4.1, 8.4.1 and 9.4.1).
- Excellent South African in-house journals are headed by professionally trained and experienced editors assisted by skilled technical professionals (either as full-time employees or as contracted professionals) (see 6.4.4, 7.4.4, 8.4.4, 9.4.4 and 10.4.4).
- Excellent South African in-house journals are, in most cases, the responsibility of the internal communication department, acknowledging that the in-house journal is an important internal public relations tool (see 6.4.4, 8.4.4 and 10.4.4). However, when it is the responsibility of another department (in most cases the marketing department), the unique role of the publication is acknowledged and the publication is managed accordingly, either by editors employed by the company or by professional consultants contracted by the company (see 6.4.4 and 7.4.4).
- Excellent South African in-house journals are occasionally used as internal marketing tools to help inform and educate employees on what they should do to benefit the company's future and growth (see 6.3.2.3 and 10.3.2.3).
- Although the editors of excellent South African in-house journals do not form part of senior management, they do have direct access to this group. These editors might also have a very unique impact on an in-house journal (see 6.4.4, 7.4.4, 8.4.4, 9.4.4 and 10.4.4).
- Senior management support their company's excellent in-house journals (see 6.3.2.1, 8.3.2.1 and 9.3.2.1).
- Excellent South African in-house journals acknowledge the environments in which they function by adapting both their content and format to best suit the internal (as well as external) environments as well as offer a symmetrical world view in the articles they publish that incorporate both these environments (see 6.3.2.2, 6.3.2.3, 8.3.2.2 and 8.3.2.3)
- Although excellent in-house journals typically have no influence on any strategic decisions made by senior management, they do support decisions by reporting on them and explaining them to employees (see 6.4.3, 7.4.3, 8.4.3, 9.4.3 and 10.4.3)
- Excellent South African in-house journals report extensively on typical general South African issues such as social development, legal issues, crime, health issues (including HIV/Aids) as well as ecological issues, since those influence the companies, their operations and employees (see 6.3.2.2, 8.3.2.2 and 9.3.2.2)
- Excellent South African in-house journals report extensively on relevant internal company issues such as branches, company news and achievements, products and services and marketing (see 7.3.2.3, 9.3.2.3 and 10.3.2.3).
- In at least some cases South African companies encourage two-way symmetrical communication. These companies achieve this through an open communication culture as well as through internal public relations tools such as in-house journals and other communication channels (eg e-mail and intranets) (see 6.3.2.4, 9.3.2.4 and 10.3.2.4).

Excellent South African in-house journals encourage and achieve two-way symmetrical communication by primarily supporting a culture conducive to such communication. More specifically, it is done by inter alia setting a news agenda that facilitates and encourages this style of interaction, by publishing letters (and feedback on these letters), by holding meaningful competitions, by reporting on employee achievements and encouraging employees to contribute to the in-house journal, thereby creating some ownership (see 6.3.2.4 and 9.3.2.4). They also employ new media to improve feedback to the publication (see 6.3.2.4). In the case where a company has adequate other communication channels between itself and employees, overt two-way communication is not a prerequisite in the in-house journal, but as an open climate informed by a symmetrical world view must still be the bedrock of the overall communication strategy, it must remain the starting point of the journal itself (see 7.3.2.4).

- Excellent South African in-house journals pro-actively discuss issues that will have an impact on the company and its employees (see 6.3.2.3, 7.3.2.3 and 10.2.3.3)
- Excellent South African in-house journals present information in professionally produced (well-written, edited, designed, reproduced and printed) publications that have set budgets and production schedules and are distributed to all employees (see 6.3.3, 7.3.3, 8.3.3, 9.3.3 and 10.3.3).
- Excellent South African in-house journal editors use various research methods (predominantly readers' surveys) to evaluate their publications. A number of editors also enter their publications in the annual corporate publication competition hosted by the SA Publication Forum, which can only lead to improvements (see 6.5, 8.5 and 10.5).

11.5 SUMMARY

In conclusion it can be said that, in a sense, it would have been ideal to compile a set of criteria that would result in excellent South African in-house journals, should editors follow them. However, with all the different variables that are present in today's corporate publishing environment, this is not possible. Creating a rigid set of criteria that is presented as the be-all for in-house journals might well defeat the aim of creating a theoretically based framework for excellent in-house journals in South Africa based on a clear philosophy. This excludes a technical "recipe" approach.

Instead, a set of guidelines based on normative theory and supported by scientific research, taking into account the uniqueness of every company, its environments, communication strategy and tools and specifically its in-house journal, was formulated.

This study underlined that Grunig's (cf. 1992) theory on excellence in public relations, combined with what Steyn and Puth (2000) say about a company's environment, as well as the technical criteria set by international and local literature (Ferreira & Staude, 1991; Kandler, 2000; Fanson, 1994; Abbott, 2001) and the SA Publication Forum, formed a good basis to create such a set of guidelines. By incorporating the findings from the five case studies, gaps in the theoretical basis were filled, providing a set of guidelines that can be adapted to any company and its in-house journal.

Although South African in-house journals function in a very unique environment (see 3.3), the basic concepts highlighted in this study would also be applicable to in-house journals published in other countries. In-house journal editors must take cognisance of their own unique situations and environments and include these variables when using the following guidelines:

- An in-house journal must be well managed. This can be achieved either by a manager employed by the company publishing the journal or by a professional consultant employed to manage the publication on behalf of the company.
- A company must ensure that its in-house journal has a very specific place in its overall communication strategy and that it is fully aware of what it wants to achieve with the publication.
- The editor of the in-house journal must acknowledge the presence and use of other communication channels, specifically new media, and adapt the publication in such a way as not to compete with any of these.
- In-house journals must be headed by professionally trained and experienced editors assisted by skilled technical professionals (either as full-time employees or as contracted professionals). The role of the editor must be clearly defined and he/she must produce the publication in line with the company's aims to ensure consistency in producing the journal.
- The in-house journals should ideally be the responsibility of the public relations (or specifically the internal communications) department. However, if publishing the in-house journal is the responsibility of another department (in most cases the marketing department), the unique role of the publication needs to be acknowledged and the publication needs to be managed accordingly either by editors employed by the company or by professional consultants contracted by the company.
- The in-house journal could, given the dominance of marketing and branding objectives in many companies, be (mis)used as a purely internal marketing tool, but sensitive editors who acknowledge the unique place of a public relations based internal communication function, would strive to balance marketing messages with information not aimed at this function.
- If an in-house journal editor does not form part of senior management, he/she must have direct and easy access to them.
- Senior management must support their company's in-house journal without using it as a propaganda tool.
- An in-house journal should acknowledge the environments in which it functions by adapting both its content and format to best suit the internal (as well as external) environments. It can also offer a symmetrical worldview in the content that incorporates both these environments.
- Even if an in-house journal does not have any influence on any strategic decisions made by senior management (as is the case in most companies), it needs to support these decisions by reporting on them and explaining them to employees.
- In-house journals tend to report extensively on typical general country-related issues such as social development, legal issues, crime, health issues (including HIV/Aids) as well as ecological issues, since these influence the company, its operations and employees. However, it is the prerogative of the editor to decide whether this type of

information is relevant to employees or not, and to define a strategy on reporting on external issues in the publication's editorial policy.

- Generally speaking, in-house journals need to report extensively on relevant internal company issues such as branches, company news and achievements, products and services and marketing, as this is still the main reason for publishing such a journal.
- It is advisable that companies encourage two-way symmetrical communication in their in-house journals as part of a climate where the employee is regarded as an important stakeholder in a company's success. This can be done by publishing letters (and feedback), hosting competitions, reporting on employee news and achievements and encouraging employees to contribute to the in-house journal in general. However, should a company employ new media (e.g. e-mail, intranet, television, radio and video newsletters) to improve feedback to the publication and it feels that these media offer adequate communication channels between itself and employees, two-way communication is not a requirement for an in-house journal. Ideally the spirit of the in-house journal should reflect a symmetrical world view, i.e. acknowledging that both the company and employees contribute equally to the success of the company and that both should be able to adapt to each other when necessary.
- In-house journals should pro-actively discuss socio-economic, health and political issues that will have an impact on the company and its employees.
- In-house journals should present information in professionally produced (well written, edited, designed, reproduced and printed) publications that have set budgets and production schedules and are distributed on time to all employees.
- In-house journal editors should regularly evaluate their publications by either conducting research (for example readers' surveys) or by obtaining an outside opinion on the in-house journal. This can, for example, be done by participating in the annual corporate publication competition hosted by the SA Publication Forum. Results from these surveys need to be evaluated and incorporated in the in-house journal to ensure its sustainability.

It is important to remember that these are only guidelines, and must therefore be adapted to suit every individual company and its in-house journal. However, should these guidelines be followed (especially as explained in the case studies used in this research project), companies should be able to produce excellent in-house journals that acknowledge their South African character, convey relevant information, enable internal communication flow and justify the investment companies make in terms of finances and human resources, to publish these journals.

11.6 CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF STUDY

This research project endeavoured to contribute in the following manner to internal communication (specifically as a subdiscipline of public relations, but also of journalism, marketing and corporate communication, depending on the company or organisation's particular preference):

- A holistic attempt was made to describe the management, environmental and technical criteria necessary for an excellent in-house journal, all placed within the framework of normative public relations theory.
- Excellent South African in-house journals were analysed empirically in order to ascertain what these leading journals publish.

- As this holds up a clear picture of excellence, communication professionals should be able to use the results of this study as a benchmark for South African in-house journals.
- The study provides empirically researched data that South African companies can use when establishing or making decisions on the future of their publications.
- The role an in-house journal can or should play in a modern-day company, regardless of the use of other communication channels such as internet and e-mail, has been determined.
- Academics can use this study as a guideline to teach students what the demands of producing an excellent in-house journal in the modern-day context could entail.
- It provides a starting point for continued research and reflection in this important, yet neglected field. In particular it challenges the notion that a sterile marketing paradigm (in conjunction with a technical approach) provides an adequate framework for internal communication.

APPENDIX A

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Publication | |
| Issue | |
| Date | |

Newsletters

Content

| | <i>Cover</i> | <i>Inside</i> |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Vision/mission | | |
| Policy/procedure | | |
| Strategic planning | | |
| Staff/management changes/ appointments | | |
| Employee contributions/ achievements | | |
| Package changes | | |
| Technology in use | | |
| Skills | | |
| New initiatives | | |
| Sensitive queries | | |
| Products/ services | | |
| Branches/subsidiaries | | |
| Customer information/service | | |
| Productivity improvement | | |
| Editorial | | |
| Letters | | |
| Competition | | |
| Company projects | | |
| Message from CEO | | |
| Company news/ achievements | | |
| Humour | | |
| Employee profile | | |
| Communication | | |
| Marketing | | |
| Safety | | |

Technical

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----|----|--------|
| Fact boxes | | | Number |
| Pictures | | | Number |
| Graphics | | | Number |
| Headline style | | | |
| Main colour on cover | | | |
| Subheads | | | Number |
| Introductory paragraph | | | Number |
| Colours used | | | |
| Size and grid | | | |
| Teasers | | | Number |
| Contents | Yes | No | |
| Invites readers | Yes | No | |
| Pull quotes | Yes | No | |

External environment

| | <i>Cover</i> | <i>Inside</i> |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Social issues | | |
| Arts and culture | | |
| Education and training | | |
| Health | | |
| General | | |
| HIV/Aids/STDs | | |
| Diseases | | |
| Occupational | | |
| Crime | | |
| Social development | | |
| Sport and recreation | | |
| Politics | | |
| Economy | | |
| Markets | | |
| Industry sectors | | |
| Ecology | | |
| Technology | | |
| Legal | | |

APPENDIX B

Editorial questionnaire Elvira Wood KOMS971 10228497

Company: _____ **Publication:** _____
Editor: _____ **Date of interview:** _____

1. Please give some background with regard to your publication – when was it first published? Why? What changes have been implemented over the years?
2. What is the vision and mission of the company?
3. Do you have a vision and mission for your in-house journal? How do these link with that of the company?
4. How would you describe the company's culture – for example – how easy is it for employees to communicate with management?
5. What would you say are the communication needs of employees, and of management?
6. How would you describe your audience/public?
7. How many employees does your company have?
8. Would you say that your publication contributes to/is involved in the overall strategic planning of the company?
9. Are you – as editor – part of top management, or else, do you have direct access to top management?
10. Does top management support your publication?
11. Do you think your publication encourages/achieves two-way communication with employees? How would you describe the participation of employees in the publishing process of the in-house journal?
12. Which department has the responsibility of publishing the in-house journal?
13. What staff work on your publication – what type of training/experience do they have? Do you think they represent South Africa's citizens fairly?
14. Is your publication produced in-house or do you make use of a publishing consultant?
 - a. If so – why?
 - b. Who do you employ?
 - c. What do they do – and what do you do?
15. What are the typical issues that you cover in your publication? Why these issues?
16. What amount and type of planning goes into every issue?
17. How and why did you decide on the title of your publication?
18. Why does your journal look the way it does – e.g. format, layout etc?
19. What is your print run?
20. How do you distribute your publication?
21. Do you have a detailed budget?
22. Do you have a detailed production schedule? Do you manage to keep to it?
23. What paper do you use?
24. Please name the typefaces that you use.
25. How regularly is your in-house journal published? Why this interval?
26. How do you see the future of your in-house journal?
27. According to you – what is your audience's opinion of the in-house journal?
28. Apart from the employee newsletter – in what other ways do management communicate with employees?

APPENDIX C

Abacus – Absa Bank

| 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 31 January | 15 August | 15 February | 15 April | 30 June |
| 15 April | 15 September | 15 May | 31 May | 15 July |
| 31 May | 31 October | 31 July | 15 October | 15 August |
| 31 July | 15 November | 15 December | 15 December | 15 October |

Harmonise – Harmony Gold Mining Company

| 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|------|---------|---------|-----------|------------------|
| | October | May | April | January |
| | | October | September | August/September |

Hello the Future – MTN

| 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|----------|-------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| January | January | January | January | February |
| February | September | April | June | April |
| October | November/December | May | August | September |

Pick 'n Patter – Pick 'n Pay

| 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|----------|-------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| January | January | January | January | February |
| May | September | April | June | April |
| November | November/December | May | August | September |

Sandaba – Sanlam

| 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|------|----------|---------|----------|--------|
| | February | June | April | March |
| | April | August | July | July |
| | May | October | November | August |

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