Journal of Contemporary Management
Volume 13

Managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference: green panacea or red herring?

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Abstract

Communication is one of the most important managerial skills for effective management, yet many managers have insufficient knowledge about the effectiveness of their message sending skills and ability to deal with interference as perceived by their subordinates.

The primary objective of this article is to elucidate the effectiveness of managers' message sending skills and their ability to deal with interference in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in the manufacturing, retail and services industries. The study focused on three constructs, namely communication, message sending skills and interference. A quantitative descriptive research design was followed. Data were collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire and 931 useable responses were obtained. A non-probability, convenience sample was chosen.

The results showed that subordinates perceived their managers' communication competencies to be slightly above average and that subordinates from manufacturing businesses perceived their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference to be slightly better than those from retail, whereas there were no statistical differences between these industries and the services industry.

The contribution is to make managers aware of possible difficulties they may experience during the communication process regarding message sending skills and aptitude to deal with interference.

Key phrases

ability to deal with interference; communication competencies; manufacturing industry; message sending skills; retail industry; services industry

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many managerial competencies needed to effectively execute managerial tasks and efficiently manage businesses, such as teamwork, interpersonal relations, self-management, decision-making, networking, analytical skills, global awareness and strategic action, awareness of self and others, and creative problem-solving (Daft & Marcic 2014:13; Dogra 2012:Internet).

However, the ability to communicate effectively is considered to be the most important competency required for sustainable business success (Heyns & Luke 2012:120). Businesses in which effective communication rules have advantages such as higher returns, more productivity and better subordinate engagement (Mishra *et al.* 2014:190-191; Yates 2006:72).

According to Kupritz and Cowell (2011:59), communication can refer to the delivery, interpretation and sharing of information. Managers who effectively send messages succeed at informing, persuading, instructing and motivating subordinates (Holm 2006:499). Effective message sending involves the incorporation of both verbal and nonverbal communication (Krauss 2002:658), often in environments that are plagued with interference (Krauss 2002:664). Examples of interference in the industries under discussion can include physical barriers such as literal background noise, physiological barriers such as discomfort, psychological barriers such as attitude, and semantic barriers such as professional jargon and regional colloquialisms (Brown 2001:27; Henrico & Visser 2012:185; Lunenburg 2011:10; Truter 2006:57).

Information cannot flow effectively if managers and subordinates lack sufficient communication skills. This can be a fatal issue as information is considered to be one of the most essential resources within the business context today, especially in gaining competitive insights, identifying and satisfying customer needs and being aware of regulation changes (Thill & Bovée 2013:46).

This study was conducted among the manufacturing, services and retail industries in businesses of varying sizes. These industries are important to South Africa's economy as they mostly employ skilled workers and make a significant contribution to the gross domestic

product of the country (Stats SA 2014:Internet), which alleviates unemployment and promotes economic growth.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Communication is one of the most important managerial competencies (Heyns & Luke 2012:121). Ineffective communication leads to time being wasted, eroded inputs and efforts, declined customer loyalty, unfavourable perceptions towards brands, low productivity and low profit margins (French 2013:Internet; Thill & Bovée 2013:46). Literature on communication within industries tends to focus on the outcome of effective communication, rather than the process (McKechinie, Grant & Bagaria 2007:117). Many managers have a commendable basic understanding of effective communication competence, yet they fail to put that knowledge into practice. This is due to the fact that communication within businesses is much more complex than generally assumed (Truter 2006:58).

Communication plays the pivotal role of informing, instructing and guiding subordinates within the manufacturing industry to counteract the situation of managers becoming more preoccupied by strategic responsibilities and more removed from day-to-day operations (Worley & Doolen 2006:242). Regarding the services industry, Sahai, Kumar and Bahuguna (2014:62) claim that inadequate message sending skills limit customer retention. Intangible services sold in this industry have to be communicated appropriately to avoid ambiguity from not only consumers, but also employees of services businesses (Mittal 2002:226).

Communication is also important to the retail industry as the success of retail businesses can be influenced by consumer perceptions, and effective communication has been known to provide businesses with a competitive edge (Adcock 2000:7-8). To conclude, effective communication is challenging for businesses of all sizes within these industries (Gregory 2015:Internet; Groyberg & Slind 2012:Internet; Holá 2012:44; Kouremetis 2013:Internet; Rauch 2015:Internet).

A manager with deficient message sending skills is unable to inform, motivate, persuade or instruct subordinates, leaving subordinates to their own, often very limited devices in an ever-changing business environment (Holm 2006:498). That considered, managers with ample message sending capabilities, but little grasp of the importance of dealing with

interference between managers and subordinates hinder team cohesion in the business (Travis 2016:Internet).

However, if the communication process is done effectively, with both quality messages sent and interferences dealt with appropriately, it can improve relationships and therefore result in better teamwork, decision-making and problem-solving skills (Robinson, Segal & Segal 2014:Internet). It is also of crucial importance that managers are aware of possible shortcomings regarding these skills in order to execute their managerial tasks successfully.

As the receiver of the messages, subordinates play a crucial role in the communication process. They interpret (decode) messages from managers (senders) to fulfil their role within the business (Colquit, Lepine & Wesson 2013:392-393).

The research question for this study was: How do subordinates perceive the effectiveness of their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference in three key industries in South Africa?

3. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Stemming from the above, the primary purpose of this article is to investigate how subordinates from three key industries of various sizes in South Africa perceive their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference in the communication process.

To achieve the purpose of this article, the following secondary objectives were set:

- Compile a demographic profile of respondents who took part in the study.
- Investigate managers' message sending skills in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in three different industries.
- Measure managers' ability to deal with interference in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in three different industries.
- Determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills.
- Establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference.

- Determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates regarding their managers' message sending skills based on the size of the business where they are employed.
- Establish whether there are statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference based on the size of the business where they are employed.
- Determine the practical significance of the statistical differences.

The following alternative hypotheses were formulated for this research:

Ha1: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from three key industries in South Africa regarding their managers' message sending skills during the communication process.

Ha2: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from three key industries in South Africa regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the communication process.

Ha3: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different-sized businesses regarding their managers' message sending skills during the communication process.

Ha4: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different-sized businesses regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the communication process.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 is a conceptual framework derived from various sources and was compiled to guide this study.

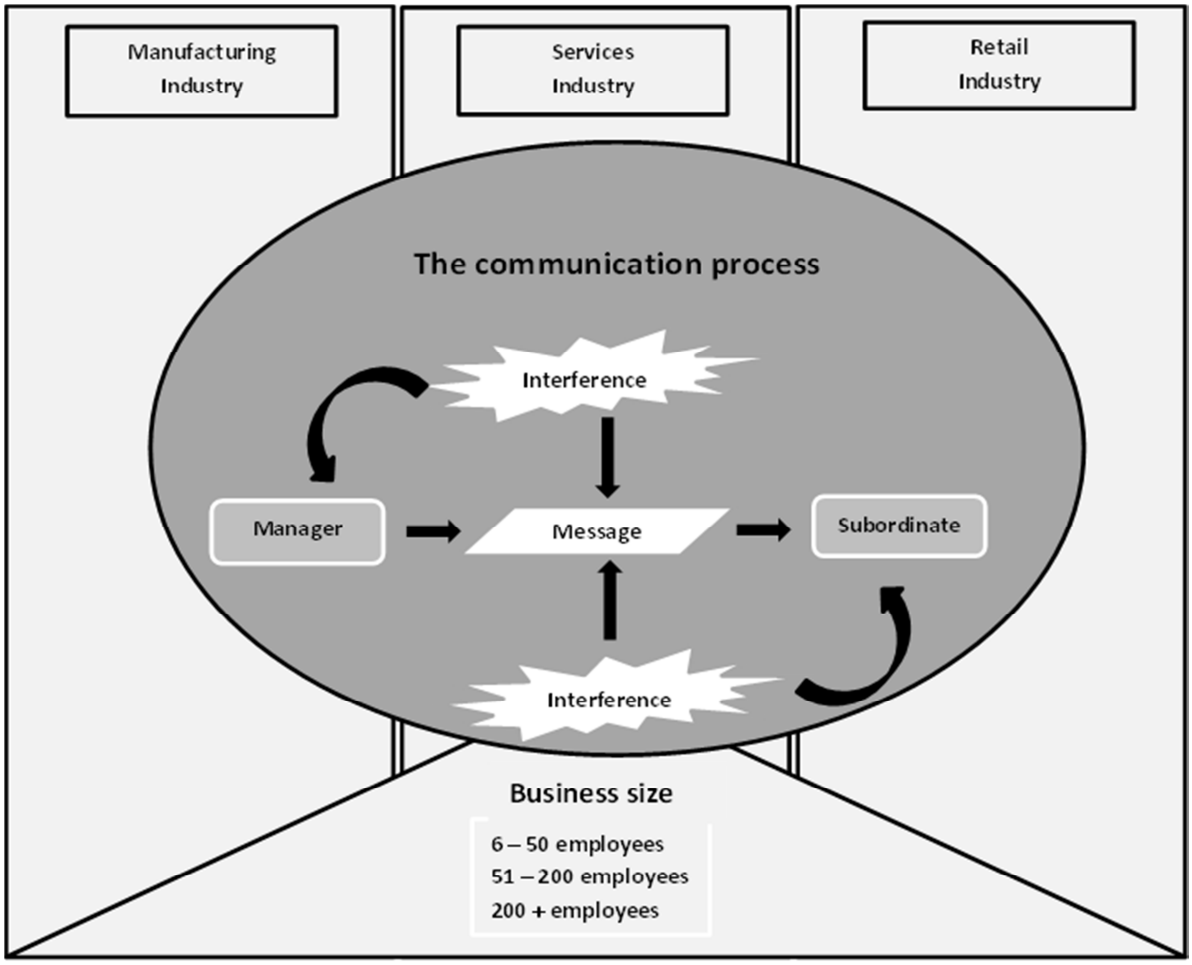

FIGURE 1: The communication process within three industries

Source: Adapted from Colquit *et al*. (2013:393); Daft & Marcic (2009:552); Jones & George (2013:417); Locker & Kaczmarek (2014:4) and Trenholm & Jensen (2013:14).

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The constructs depicted in the conceptual framework will be discussed.

5.1 The industries

The South African industries under discussion in this study are the manufacturing, the services and the retail industries.

5.1.1 The manufacturing industry

The manufacturing industry refers to businesses that involve the production and processing of items, thereby creating new commodities or adding value to existing products (Economy Watch 2010:Internet). The South African manufacturing industry occupies a significant share of the country's economy, which, despite this relative importance, has declined from 19 percent in 1993 to approximately 17 percent in 2012 (Stats SA 2014:Internet).

Manufacturing declined by 2.0% in March 2016 compared to March 2015. This deterioration was primarily due to lower production in metal-related divisions of the industry (Stats SA 2016a:Internet). Collaboration between management and subordinates is used to innovate and to remain competitive in this industry, which fosters the need for positive engagement with specific message sending and continuous mitigation of interference (Alpenberg & Scarbrough 2016:4963; Bhamu & Sangwan 2014:880,915).

5.1.2 The services industry

The services industry can be defined as businesses that primarily focus on earning revenue through providing services (Business Dictionary 2014:Internet). The most significant positive contributors to economic activity in this country include the finance, real estate, business services, catering, transport, storage, general government services and the accommodation sector, signifying the significance of the services industry in South Africa. Each of these sectors contributed at least 0.2% to the economy two years ago (Stats SA 2014:Internet).

Businesses' success within this industry is highly dependent on instructive messages toward subordinates and clear formal and informal messages regarding their corporate identity (Otubanjo & Amujo 2012:411).

5.1.3 The retail industry

All products (goods and services) that are sold to consumers by businesses are grouped under the retail industry (Investopedia 2014:Internet). The retail industry is generally challenged by rapidly changing market conditions, much higher expectations from customers and stringent competition (Chang, Hae Jung & Eun Young 2006:102; Panigyrakes & Theodoridis 2007:144). In South Africa, significant positive annual growth rates are recorded

currently for general dealers (6.0%), textile, clothing, leather goods and footwear retailers (4.9%), cosmetics, toiletries, medical goods and pharmaceuticals retailers along with food, beverages and tobacco retailers (0.3%). All this contributed to a rise of 2.8% in sales in the retail industry (Stats SA 2016b:Internet). According to Ettouzani, Yates & Mena (2012:231), internal communication breakdowns can lead to ineffective collaboration with suppliers due to the adverse effect of distrust it has on the relationship between the retailer and this external stakeholder.

5.2 Size of business

For the purpose of this research, the size of a business was determined by the number of employees (Department of Trade and Industry 1996:15; Nieuwenhuizen 2011:365-366). Within a small business (6-50 employees) context, communication serves as the core of the relationship between managers and subordinates. The nature of the information shared is a vital element for selecting the appropriate channels for message sending (Gregory 2015:Internet; Kouremetis 2013:Internet).

Communication is used to satisfy the basic need for information within medium-sized businesses (51-200 employees). Holá (2012:32,44) confirms that managers with exceptional communication skills significantly influence subordinate performance and attitude in medium-sized businesses. Large businesses (200 + employees) face a number of challenges related to communication that may stem from departments within them operating in isolation (Groyberg & Slind 2012:Internet; Rauch 2015:Internet).

To improve communication within businesses of all sizes, Newlands (2016:Internet) suggests practising it habitually, promoting fluid decision-making and preventing information overload.

5.3 Managers

As indicated in the conceptual framework, the manager starts the communication process by encoding the message and then sending it to the subordinate via appropriate communication channels, while simultaneously dealing with interference (Jones & George 2013:417).

5.4. Managerial competencies

A business' success is largely dependent on managers' knowledge and skills required for the specific business, as this is capable of either promoting or hindering the development of a business (Verle, Markic, Kodric & Zoran 2014:11).

Oosthuizen (2011:66) describes managerial competencies as sets of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that a manager needs in order to be successful in a variety of organisational settings and managerial jobs. Competent managers are so exceptionally practised at performing their managerial tasks that they execute them without special effort (Daft & Marcic 2014:98). In research done where 60 businesses were analysed, communication was identified as the most crucial managerial competency (Oosthuizen 2011:66).

5.5 The communication process

Communication is a process where information-carrying messages are exchanged between two or more individuals. This process is generally used by managers to encourage or influence behaviour (Daft & Marcic 2009:552; Krauss 2002:655; Thill & Bovée 2013:50). This study focused on managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference.

5.5.1 Message sending skills

Managers' message sending skills play a vital role in the communication process applied in businesses. Managers' aptitude to trade and share ideas with subordinates, comprehend their stances and solve problems successfully will significantly rely on how effectively they are able to transmit messages in the communication process (Windle & Warren 2014:Internet). Managers with adequate message sending skills are able to alter dissatisfactory behaviour of their subordinates (Holm 2006:499).

Effective message sending involves the incorporation of both verbal and nonverbal communication (Trenholm & Jensen 2013:14). Verbal communication is a pivotal skill within businesses that utilises words in many forms, including face-to-face or telephone conversations, meetings, text, e-mail and voice-mail messages, letters and memos, and reports (Locker & Kaczmarek 2014:4). Nonverbal communication can be described as any

kind of communication that does not depend on spoken words, written passages or any other linguistic systems to send meaningful messages (Chira 2013:Internet; Mishra *et al.* 2014:195), such as eye contact, proxemics, gesture, body contact, posture, body orientation, facial expression and gaze.

Without withstanding verbal communication's importance, Locker and Kaczmarek (2014:4) confirm that verbal communication is not always enough to convey messages sufficiently, consistently and effectively. Thus, managers should incorporate both types of communication to convey messages.

5.5.2 Interference

Interference is anything that hinders the communication process and it can occur anywhere in the process (Lunenburg 2011:4). In a business setting, interference is for example literal blare caused by clattering machinery (Colquit *et al*. 2013:393). According to Brown (2001:27), interference as depicted in the conceptual framework of this study is any obstruction to the effective exchange of thoughts, ideas or commands.

There are many ways for a message to get distorted, misconstrued, misunderstood or confused. Having sufficient knowledge about interference and the contributing barriers to message sending promotes effective communication (Truter 2006:55-58).

5.6 Subordinates

As depicted in Figure 1, subordinates are the receivers of messages. They fulfil the role of listeners in the communication process. To be effective listeners, the subordinates need to withhold judgement, be attentive and refrain from formulating and rehearsing responses (Dixon & O'Hara 2010:12-13).

Subordinates' communication competence is critical to productivity; they have to interpret information correctly, alter unsatisfactory behaviour when instructed to do so and report progress and defects to managers (Colquit *et al*. 2013:392-393; Holm 2006:499).

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study included an extensive overview of the existing literature to contextualise and add value to the study (Neuman 2003:96).

6.1 Research design

Empirical research for this explorative study was done by means of a survey, entailing a quantitative research method and a descriptive research design (Bradley 2007:516; Burns & Bush 2014:103).

6.2 Target population, sampling and data collection

The target population for this study consisted of workers with at least a grade 12 qualification within the three industries indicated in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). A non-probability, convenience sampling method was followed and to give structure to the sampling process, quotas were fulfilled: a third of the respondents came from the manufacturing industry, another third from the retail industry and the final third from the services industry.

The sample included a total of 966 subordinates of whom 931 submitted usable questionnaires.

Table 1 shows the participation of respondents by region.

Twenty trained fieldworkers were used to distribute the self-administered questionnaires and collect them afterwards. The fieldworkers were BCom honours students in the field of Business Management who had completed an undergraduate module in marketing research.

6.3 The measuring instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain information from subordinates based on their opinions and perceptions regarding their managers' communication competence (Struwig & Stead 2007:244). An introduction stated the rights of the respondent, provided contact details of the researchers and explained the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was based on indicators from various literature sources and made up of two sections.

Section A comprised of closed-ended questions that collected data regarding respondents and their businesses' demographic profile, while section B, which consisted of a five-point Likert scale, measured the communication skills of managers as perceived by their subordinates.

Respondents were required to specify their level of agreement with eleven statements concerning message sending skills and ability to deal with interference. Only the end points of the scales were labelled with 'strongly disagree' and 'strongly agree', respectively.

TABLE 1: Participation by region

Province	Number of fieldworkers	Number of usable questionnaires
Gauteng	12	544
KwaZulu-Natal	1	48
North West	2	98
Western Cape	1	50
Mpumalanga	2	91
Northern Cape	1	49
Free State	1	51
Total:	**20**	**931**

Source: Calculated from survey results

6.4 Data analysis and interpretation

For the purpose of capturing and analysing the data, the Strategic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS version 20) were used. All statistical tests were done at a 5% level of significance.

The following analyses were performed:

- Frequency analyses were computed for all the items in the questionnaire and mean scores and standard deviations were calculated.
- Validity of the measuring instrument was inspected by firstly applying an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) since a validated questionnaire was not used. Subsequently, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to confirm the validity of the scales.
- Reliability was determined by computing Cronbach alpha coefficients.
- Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) tests were used to test statistical significance ($p = 0.05$) (McDaniel & Gates 2013:455; Struwig & Stead 2007:162). Cohen's d-value was used to assess practical significance, where a large effect size (equal to or greater than 0.8) points to a finding that has practical significance. A medium effect size (of 0.5) shows a finding that could be substantial and lastly a small effect size (of 0.2) indicates that there is a negligible difference among the mean scores (Cohen 1988:223; Ellis & Steyn 2003:51-52; Steyn 1999:3).

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistics were done and tested by a statistician of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus. Firstly, the psychometric properties of the measuring instrument are discussed, followed by the results of the empirical study, which will be presented in co-ordination with the objectives of the study.

7.1 Psychometric properties of the measuring instrument

Since no suitable validated questionnaire could be found, the compiled questionnaire was inspected for construct and content validity as well as for reliability.

7.1.1 Construct validity

In order to determine valid constructs, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first performed. Bartlett's test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy were used to test whether the data were suitable for factor analysis. The

KMO statistic generally varies between 0 and 1; KMO should be 0.50 or higher for a satisfactory factor analysis. In the current study, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.950. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated. The associated Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for the current study was found to be statistically significant in all cases.

A principal component analysis technique was used to extract factors from the data, which best describes the underlying relationships among the variables. Eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 with loads of 0.30 were used for inclusion of items in the exploratory factor analysis. An Oblimin with the Kaiser Normalisation technique was applied. Five factors, representing 51.79% of the variance explained in the data, were extracted. For the purpose of this article, only two of the five factors will be discussed.

The above analysis was followed by a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The Chi-square minimum discrepancy (CMIN) divided by degrees of freedom (DF) function was used to calculate the goodness of fit in AMOS. The goodness of fit is acceptable if CMIN/DF is between 2 and 5 (Arbuckle 2003:77-85). In this study, goodness of fit was acceptable (CMIN/DF = 2.929). Additionally, a model is regarded as acceptable and valid in a CFA if:

- The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.93 or greater (Byrne 2001:79-88); in this study, the CFI was 0.929.
- The root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) is appropriate. Ideally, the RMSEA should be less than 0.05 (Steiger 1990:177); in this study, the RMSEA was 0.046.

Consequently, the instrument was found to be construct valid.

7.1.2 Content validity

Content validity refers to the extent to which a measuring instrument is representative of the content area (or domain) being measured. In other words, for a measurement to have high content validity, the questions or items need to reflect the various parts of the domain and

these parts of the domain also need to reflect the central behaviours or skills associated with that domain (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:92).

In the current study, content validity was confirmed by expert judgement of knowledgeable study leaders and supervisors from the School of Business Management at The North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus. Consequently, the instrument was found to be content valid.

7.1.3 Reliability

The researchers used Cronbach alpha coefficients to determine the statistical reliability of the constructs. According to Zikmund and Babin (2015:280), a Cronbach's alpha value between 0.80 and 0.96 indicates very good reliability, a value between 0.70 and 0.80 indicates good reliability, and a value between 0.60 and 0.70 indicates fair reliability. Scales with a Cronbach's alpha value below 0.60 indicate poor reliability.

Table 2 depicts the reliability testing conducted in this study.

TABLE 2: Cronbach's alpha values for the two factors used in this study

Factors	Cronbach's alpha
Message sending skills (4 scale items)	**0.684**
Interference (7 scale items)	**0.808**

Source: Calculated from survey results.

It is evident from Table 2 that both factors can be accepted as reliable, as they are above the required value of 0.60. A Cronbach alpha value of 0.684 for the construct message sending skills is acceptable as the current study is related to the social sciences with psychological constructs based on attitudes, opinions and perceptions (Field 2013:668). All of the factors are consequently deemed reliable.

Regarding the psychometric properties of the measuring instrument, it can be concluded that the validity as well as reliability were satisfactory.

7.2 Results of the empirical study

The results will be presented in coordination with the objectives. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented first, followed by specific findings regarding managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference.

7.2.1 Demographic profile of the respondents

A limited demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Demographic profile (N=931)

Gender	**n**	**Percentage**
Male	464	49.8
Female	467	50.2
Business size and number of permanent employees in business	**n**	Percentage
6-50 (small business)	475	51.0
51-200 (medium-sized business)	311	33.4
200 and more (large business)	145	15.6
Industry	**n**	Percentage
Manufacturing	291	31.3
Retail	334	35.8
Services	304	32.7
Error	2	0.2

*Average age of respondents: 33

Source: Calculated from survey results

From Table 3, it is evident that there were nearly equal numbers of male and female respondents and their average age was 33 years. The majority (475) worked in small businesses, followed by approximately one third working in medium-sized businesses. Only 145 worked in large businesses. Most of them were employed in the retail and services industries, followed closely by the manufacturing industry.

7.3 Managers' message sending skills in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates

Table 4 depicts the mean scores and standard deviations of the items measuring managers' message sending skills on a five-point Likert scale.

TABLE 4: Managers' message sending skills (N = 931)

Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
My manager avoids looking over my shoulder during a conversation.	3.604	1.129
My manager is specific in telling me how I can improve my work.	3.746	1.053
My manager makes eye contact while communicating with me.	3.957	1.012
My manager states in his own words the interpretation of my message to prevent misinterpretation.	3.598	1.085
Overall	**3.726**	**1.070**

Source: Calculated from survey results

Pertaining to managers' message sending skills, respondents agreed most with the statement: "The manager makes eye contact while communicating with me". The overall mean score for managers' message sending skills was 3.726 (SD= 1.070). A lower score was obtained regarding managers refraining from looking over the respondents' shoulders

during a conversation. This behaviour is negative and counter-productive due to its tendency to lead to mistrust (Mishra *et al*. 2014:190-191).

7.4 Managers' ability to deal with interference in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates

Table 5 portrays the means and standard deviations of the items measuring managers' ability to deal with interference on a five-point Likert scale.

TABLE 5: Managers' ability to deal with interference (N = 931)

Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
My manager does not make negative judgements about others while talking to me.	3.701	1.108
My manager uses "I" statements rather than "you" statements in communication with me.	3.465	1.082
My manager does not let his emotions affect the way he communicates with me.	3.563	1.059
My manager is not preoccupied with other matters when I am sharing my concerns with him.	3.501	1.122
My manager avoids distractions when talking to me.	3.506	1.092
My manager does not interrupt me while I am speaking.	3.510	1.167
My manager stops what he is busy with when I talk to him.	3.486	1.152
Overall	**3.533**	**1.112**

Source: Calculated from survey results

The overall mean score for this total factor was 3.533 with a SD of 1.112. It can be concluded that the respondents generally agreed with scale items contained in this measurement set and therefore had positive perceptions regarding managers' ability to deal

with interference. With regard to managers' ability to deal with interference, their subordinates tended to agree most with the statement: "My manager does not make negative judgements about others while talking to me".

A manager refraining from making negative statements behind subordinates' backs leads to a trusting work relationship, which encourages subordinates to solicit managerial feedback. This implies that the manager does not allow negative thoughts about others to interfere with the transfer of messages to subordinates. Subordinates also feel comfortable to communicate defects they may have caused or experienced during their work activities (Jones & George 2013:418-419).

The statement respondents agreed the least with was "My manager stops what he is busy with when I talk to him". When this happens, it counteracts the productivity gained from the positive relationship established. Subordinates may feel rushed to conclude the interaction in this case, potentially leaving out vital information.

In summary, the overall score for message sending skills is higher than that of ability to deal with interference, implying that these managers experience a slight difficulty in dealing with interference.

7.5 Comparisons, statistical and practical significance

In this section, the researchers compares the three types of industries and the different business sizes regarding managers' message sending skills and their ability to deal with interference.

7.5.1 Statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding the two factors

ANOVA was used to determine whether statistical differences ($p \leq 0.05$) existed in the perception of subordinates working in the three different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills and their ability to deal with interference.

The findings are summarised in Table 6.

Regarding message sending skills, there was a statistically significant difference (p = 0.008) between the three different industries (Manufacturing m = 3.804, SD= 0.742; Retail m = 3.606, SD= 0.846; Services m = 3.676, SD = 0.780) regarding how subordinates perceived these skills during the communication process.

TABLE 6: Differences between subordinate's perceptions in the three industries

Construct	Industry	n	Mean	Std dev	p-value	d-value
Message sending skills	Manufacturing	207	3.804	0.742	0.008	0.2
	Retail	580	3.606	0.846		
	Services	129	3.676	0.780		
Ability to deal with interference	Manufacturing	207	3.640	0.673	0.032	0.2
	Retail	580	3.482	0.859		
	Services	129	3.526	0.752		

Source: Calculated from survey results

In further conducting Post Hoc Tests, it was found that subordinates from manufacturing and retail businesses (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.006 / p = 0.006 and Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.007 / p = 0.007) had statistically differing perceptions, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses (mean = 3.804) perceived their managers' message sending skills to be slightly better than subordinates from retail businesses (mean = 3.605) did.

However, Cohen's effect size (d = 0.2) suggests negligible practical significance. The services industry did not differ statistically or practically from the other two industries regarding message sending skills. Other researchers have found that the frequency at which manufacturing managers communicate with subordinates is higher than in retail, due to the complex nature of the manufacturing industry (Chang *et al*. 2006:102).

Naturally, the manner in which managers from different industries send messages ought to be different. When considering the key role that communication plays in each of these industries, manufacturing managers mostly use it to mitigate their distance from ground-level operations, whereas retail managers aim to influence consumer perception rather than focusing on internal communication (Adcock 2000:7-8; Worley & Doolen 2006:242; Yates 2006:72).

Regarding ability to deal with interference, there was a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.033$) between the three different industries (Manufacturing $m = 3.640$, $SD= 0.673$; Retail $m = 3.482$, $SD= 0.859$; Services $m = 3.526$, $SD = 0.752$) regarding how subordinates perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference during the communication process.

In further conducting Post Hoc Tests, it was found that subordinates from manufacturing and retail businesses (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.032 / $p = 0.032$ and Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.035 / $p = 0.035$) had statistically differing perceptions, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses (mean = 3.640) perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference slightly better than subordinates from retail businesses subordinates (mean = 3.482) did.

However, Cohen's effect size ($d = 0.2$) suggests little practical significance. The services industry did not differ statistically or practically significantly from the other two industries regarding ability to deal with interference. Where problems are encountered within the communication process, managers from retail and services industries ought to put more emphasis on dealing with the interference they cause. Small changes to one's approach to communication within the business context, especially when dealing with subordinates, can have a significant and positive effect on the general wellbeing of the business (Truter 2006:57).

7.5.2 Statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different sized businesses regarding the two factors

ANOVA was used to determine whether statistical differences ($p \leq 0.05$) existed in the perception of subordinates working in businesses of three different sizes regarding their managers' message sending skills and their ability to deal with interference.

The findings are summarised in Table 7.

Regarding message sending skills, there was no statistically significant difference (p = 0.164) regarding how subordinates from different-sized businesses (6-50 employees m= 3.644, SD =0.756; 51-200 employees m = 3.703, SD = 0.795; 200+ employees m = 3.773, SD= 0.851) perceived their managers' skills.

Regarding ability to deal with interference, there was also no statistically significant difference (p = 0.588) regarding how subordinates from different-sized businesses (6-50 employees m = 3.554, SD = 0.787; 51-200 employees m = 3.520, SD = 0.781; 200+ employees m = 3.598, SD = 0.651) perceived their managers' ability.

TABLE 7: Differences between subordinate's perceptions in the three business sizes

Construct	Business size and number of permanent employees in business	n	Mean	Std dev	p-value
Message sending skills	6-50 (small business)	475	3.644	0.756	0.164
	51-200 (medium-sized business)	311	3.703	0.795	
	200+ (large business)	145	3.773	0.851	
Ability to deal with interference	6-50 (small business)	475	3.554	0.787	0.588
	51-200 (medium-sized business)	311	3.520	0.781	
	200+(large business)	145	3.598	0.651	

*Cohen's d-values are` not reported since there were no statistical differences found

Source: Calculated from survey results

Contrary to these findings, Groyberg and Slind (2012:Internet) argue that larger businesses fail to transform ideas into products, struggle to arrange face-to-face communications with management, do not appealingly address consumer concerns and share information inadequately.

Sher (2014:Internet) declares that businesses with fewer employees communicate more organically. The communication process is much more fluid, problems are solved quicker, ideas are turned into outputs more often and interference is dealt with consistently. Therefore, they concluded that the larger the business, the more complex the communication will be and the greater the likelihood of the process breaking down.

7.6 Hypotheses testing

7.6.1 Hypothesis 1

With regard to hypothesis 1, stating that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills during the communication process, the following was found:

- There is a statistically significant difference on how subordinates from different industries perceived their managers' message sending skills during the communication process.
- In *post hoc* tests, it was found that employees from manufacturing and retail businesses had statistically significant different perceptions, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses perceived their managers' message sending skills to be slightly better than subordinates from retail businesses subordinates did. The services industry did not differ statistically significantly from the other two industries regarding message sending skills of their managers.

Consequently, *Ha1* is partially accepted regarding statistically significant differences between manufacturing and retail industries.

7.6.2 Hypothesis 2

With regard to hypothesis 2, stating that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the communication process, the following was found:

- There was a statistically significant difference on how subordinates from different industries perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference during the communication process.
- In *post hoc tests*, it was found that employees from manufacturing and retail businesses had statistically significant different perceptions, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference to be slightly better than subordinates from retail businesses subordinates did.

  The services industry did not differ statistically significantly from the other two industries regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference.

Consequently, *Ha2* is partially accepted regarding statistically significant differences between manufacturing and retail industries.

7.6.3 Hypothesis 3

With regard to hypothesis 3, stating that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different-sized businesses regarding their managers' message sending skills during the communication process, the following was found:

- There was no statistically significant difference on how subordinates from different-sized businesses perceived their managers' message sending skills.

Consequently, *Ha3* is rejected.

7.6.4 Hypothesis 4

With regard to hypothesis 4, stating that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different-sized businesses regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the communication process, the following was found:

- There was no statistically significant difference on how subordinates from different-sized businesses perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference.

Consequently, *Ha4* is rejected.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results, the following recommendations can be made. Although the message sending skills were perceived to be above average for all three industries, the ability to deal with interference was perceived to be a little less.

Consequently, managers need to be made aware that improvement in their ability to deal with interference should be focused on specifically. Especially in conversational situations, managers should not be preoccupied with other matters, permit distractions or allow a poor relationship with the subordinate to detract them from effective listening.

Managers were perceived to make good eye contact during the communication process. This behaviour is encouraged among managers as it improves engagement from both parties during conversations. Continuing to refrain from making negative remarks about others is also recommended. This behaviour is conducive to overall effectiveness as employees will report defects spontaneously and seek managers' counsel habitually.

General recommendations gathered from the literature embrace a wider range of aspects concerning communication. Thill and Bovée (2013:50) argue that seeing communication as a process assists managers in creating steps that can be taken to improve their success as communicators. Effective communication ultimately leads to collaborative problem-solving (Robinson, Gorman, Slimmer & Yudkowsky 2010:214).

Managers of these industries should not only be conscious of their own limitations in communication, but make required adjustments which would significantly improve their ability to execute their managerial task effectively and efficiently (Lunenburg 2011:10; Truter 2006:58).

To address issues such as information overload, misunderstandings and interruptions, Kupritz and Cowell (2011:58) advocate a rise in the business' need for the identification of effective communication channels. It is generally recommended that managers use communication as a strategic business tactic to plan, develop, implement and measure brand programmes over time with customers, prospects, subordinates and other applicable external audiences (Einwiller & Boenigk 2012:357).

9. CONCLUSIONS

The communication process as depicted in Figure 1 occurs in the manufacturing, services and retail industries within small, medium and large businesses. Furthermore, the conceptual framework provides an overview of the communication process used by managers.

The manager starts the process by encoding the information he/she wishes to convey into a message and the message is then transmitted to the receiver by means of a medium. The subordinates decode the message according to their interpretation (Jones & George 2013:416-417). Interference can occur anywhere in the communication process and obstruct this process (Colquit *et al*. 2013:393). The relevance of effective communication as a managerial skill is clearly highlighted in the problem statement and literature review.

Conclusions regarding the results of the empirical study were presented in coordination with the objectives. Demographic findings revealed that nearly equal numbers of male and female respondents with an average age of 33 years worked in the three industries in businesses of different sizes. Regarding message sending skills, subordinates from all three industries had a positive perception of their managers' ability in this competency. Furthermore, the above respondents regarded their managers' ability to deal with interference to be marginally above average.

Pertaining to the statistical differences between variables, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding message sending skills and ability to deal with interference, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses perceived these competencies to be slightly better than those from retail businesses. Subordinates from the services industry did not differ statistically from those of the other two industries. Furthermore, these differences had negligible practical significance. Concerning subordinates from different-sized businesses, there were no statistically significant differences regarding their perception of their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference.

Finally, the topic of communication has been thoroughly studied in the past; however this article reaffirms the relevance and significance of the two constructs under discussion. Furthermore, the article adds to the existing body of knowledge and could be valuable to

managers who that want to improve their message sending skills and ability to deal with interference.

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