

**The role of senior managers at the North-West University
in internal communication and employee engagement**

PP Mmope

**Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Arts in Communications Practice at the Potchefstroom Campus of the
North-West University**

Supervisor: Mr GP van Rheede van Oudtshoorn

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Phumzile Pheladi Mmope
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Key words:

Communication; communication channels; communicator competence; communication networks; communication process; effective communication; employee engagement; internal communication; interpersonal communication; leadership; leadership communication; managerial communication; organisation; organisational communication.

Abstract:

The rationale that effective internal communication plays a crucial role in aligning employees to organisational goals, and in so doing, inculcate employee engagement and help an organisation to succeed, is remodelling internal communication management within organisations. At the core of the preceding rationale lies the fundamental realisation and acknowledgement that effective internal communication is not the function of the communication department, but in effect a basic prerequisite that must be understood, embraced and practiced by all levels of management.

Managers without effective internal communication and employee engagement cannot execute the responsibility of strategic alignment. The challenge is now to ensure that the internal communication process is approached as a properly structured and efficiently managed system, rather than a collection of fragmented messages that often cause confusion among employees and compel disengagement.

This study explores to what extent the senior managers at the North-West University understand their fundamental role in facilitating effective internal communication and employee engagement. An extensive literature study revealed that there is a correlation between effective internal communication and understanding of organisational strategy and objectives among employees. In addition, a strong correlation between effective internal communication, employee engagement, employee performance and organisational profitability has been identified in literature.

The empirical findings were obtained by means of a qualitative research method in the form of semi-structured interviews with senior and middle managers. The semi-structured interviews explored and described how the managers perceive the nature of their role in facilitating and sustaining effective internal communication and employee engagement.

In comparing the actual role of senior managers at the University in internal communication and employee engagement with the ideal state related to D'Aprix's (1996) manager's

communication model, as well as the principles of a convergence model of communication, information richness of communication channels, a leadership communication framework and the impact of highest scoring manager activities and attributes, it was concluded that this communication role is still misunderstood by senior managers and not properly structured and executed.

Consequently, internal communication is not adequately fulfilling its strategic potential as a means to establish positive relationships, diffuse information, motivate, and align employees' actions and behaviour to the set goals of the University.

It is suggested that future studies measure and determine whether the engagement levels of employees at the North-West University have increased as a result of managers fulfilling their internal communication role effectively. Another study could also assess and measure the effectiveness of internal communication channels, with the view to develop an internal communication channel guide or toolkit for managers at the North-West University. The key drivers of employee engagement and related effect on the North-West University's performance could also be explored and measured in future research studies.

Sleutelwoorde:

Bestuurskommunikasie; effektiewe kommunikasie; interne kommunikasie; interpersoonlike kommunikasie; kommunikasie; kommunikasiekanale; kommunikasienetwerke; kommunikasieproses; kommunikasievaardighede; leierskap; leierskapskommunikasie; organisasie; organisatoriese kommunikasie; werknemerbetrokkenheid.

Uittreksel:

Die rasionaal dat effektiewe kommunikasie 'n beslissende rol speel om werknemers se doelwitte in ooreenstemming met die organisasie se doelwitte te bring, en só werknemerbetrokkenheid en die onderneming se sukses te bevorder, herskryf die betekenis van interne kommunikasiebestuur in organisasies.

Die kern van dié rasionaal is die besef en erkenning dat effektiewe interne kommunikasie nie die funksie van die kommunikasiedepartement is nie, maar in werklikheid 'n basiese voorvereiste is wat op alle bestuursvlakke verstaan, aanvaar en beoefen moet word.

Bestuurders kan nie hul verantwoordelikheid, om doelwitte van werknemers in lyn te bring met dié van die organisasie, nakom sonder effektiewe interne kommunikasie en werknemerbetrokkenheid nie. Die uitdaging is om seker te maak dat die interne kommunikasieproses benader word as 'n deeglik gestruktureerde sisteem wat doeltreffend bestuur word, eerder as 'n klomp gefragmenteerde boodskappe wat dikwels verwarrend is en werknemers se onbetrokkenheid bevorder.

Hierdie studie ondersoek tot watter mate senior bestuurders aan die Noordwes-Universiteit hul fundamentele rol in die fasilitering van interne kommunikasie en werknemerbetrokkenheid verstaan. 'n Uitgebreide literatuurstudie het 'n ooreenkoms tussen effektiewe interne kommunikasie en 'n begrip van die organisasie se doelwitte onder werknemers aan die lig gebring. Literatuurstudies het ook 'n sterk ooreenkoms tussen effektiewe interne kommunikasie, werknemerbetrokkenheid, werknemerprestasie en die winsgewendheid van die organisasie uitgewys.

Die empiriese bevindings is verkry deur gebruik te maak van 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetode in die vorm van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met senior en middelbestuurders. Die semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude het die ondersoek en beskryf hoe

bestuurders die aard van hul rol in die fasilitering en handhawing van effektiewe kommunikasie en werknemerbetrokkenheid waarneem.

Deur bestuurders by die Universiteit se ware rol in interne kommunikasie en werknemerbetrokkenheid te vergelyk met die ideale rol, gegrond op D'Aprix (1996) se bestuurskommunikasiemodel, asook die beginsels van 'n konvergensiemodel vir kommunikasie, inligtingrykheid van kommunikasiekanale, 'n leierskap-kommunikasieraamwerk en die impak van die bestuursaktiwiteite en -eienskappe wat die hoogste aangeskryf word, is die slotsom dat senior bestuurders steeds hul kommunikasierol misverstaan. Die rol is steeds nie deeglik gestruktureer nie en word nie doeltreffend uitgevoer nie.

Die gevolg is dat interne kommunikasie nie die volle strategiese potensiaal vervul as 'n middel tot die vestiging van positiewe verhoudinge, verspreiding van inligting, motivering, en om werknemers se aksies en gedrag in lyn te bring met die doelwitte van die Universiteit nie.

Dit word voorgestel dat toekomstige navorsing bepaal of die vlakke van werknemerbetrokkenheid by die Noordwes-Universiteit verhoog het as gevolg van bestuurders wie hul kommunikasierol effektief uitvoer.

Nog 'n studie kan ook die effektiwiteit van interne kommunikasiekanale ondersoek, met die fokus op die ontwikkeling van 'n gids tot interne kommunikasiekanale vir bestuurders aan die Noordwes-Universiteit. Die sleutel dryfkragte in werknemerbetrokkenheid en die effek op die Noordwes-Universiteit se prestasie kan ook ondersoek word in toekomstige navorsingstudies.

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Chapter 1: Orientation and problem statement

1.1 Introduction

The business world is increasingly characterised by innovation and change. Consequently, organisations are constantly evolving and seeking a groundbreaking paradigm in management to ensure their survival in a complex, competitive, and dynamic global business environment. At the core of this pursuit for a change of paradigm in management lies the fundamental role of managers within organisations to ensure that employees are strategically aligned to organisational objectives, employees embrace organisational values and that employees are willing to exert greater discretionary effort to help the organisation succeed.

Since 2004, universities in South Africa are undergoing a process of transformation because of the national government's broader plan to transform higher education to rectify the past imbalances by using resources more effectively and creating a new landscape for institutions of higher education in South Africa (Profile, 2009/10:4). This would ensure that all South Africans receive quality and world-class education within the context of a global economy. The merger and incorporation process of universities has amplified the crucial role of effective communication on all levels. Such communication is crucial to the national, regional, and global positioning of the institutions, to build and enhance relationships with key stakeholders, address misconceptions and misunderstandings among all stakeholders, and to promote the image and reputation of the institutions. Effective communication is crucial to ensure that employees understand their contributing role towards the implementing of plans, and thereby helping to achieve organisational goals.

According to Van Ruler and De Lange (2003:145) no organisation can develop or even exist without communication. Communication describes what organisations are and do. Tourish and Hargie (1998:53) emphasise the fact that within organisations, effective internal communication between managers and staff is vital to organisational success. This is particularly true in periods of change when staff uncertainty increases and there is an increased need for greater amounts of information and communication. During periods of change, the need for rapid, open and effective communication is paramount. In times of difficulty, those organisations where careful attention is paid to communication by management have been shown to perform more successfully on a range of criteria than those where such communication is poor (Tourish & Hargie, 1998; Sliburyte, 2004; Gagnon,

Jansen & Michael, 2008). Managers without effective internal communication and employee engagement cannot execute the responsibility of strategic alignment.

More recently, Gagnon *et al.* (2008:425) explored the concept of employee alignment with strategic change - a combination of employees' strategic understanding and knowing in what ways to contribute to their organisation's strategy. The authors found a relationship between a high personal involvement in achieving strategic goals and high knowledge of the organisation's goals. This relationship, once again, draws attention to the critical role of managers as a key link in facilitating effective internal communication and developing employee engagement.

In the light of the preceding setting, this mini-dissertation investigates to what extent the senior managers at the North-West University understand their fundamental role in facilitating effective internal communication to foster an understanding among employees of organisational goals and in doing so, influence employees' level of engagement positively in order to achieve organisational goals and the desired organisational culture. The North-West University is one of 23 universities in South Africa.

In this chapter, first defined are the key concepts. Secondly, a brief explanation of the context of the study is given. Thirdly, an overview of the problem statement is outlined followed by the general and specific research questions and research objectives. Fourthly, a summary of the guiding theoretical argument in which the study is embedded, is given to orientate the reader. The chapter then gives a brief description of the research methodology that was used to answer the research questions. Lastly, this chapter gives an overview of the rest of the chapters of this study.

1.2 Definition of key concepts

1.2.1 Organisation

"Organisation" is defined as a goal-oriented, social entity with deliberately structured activity systems with an identifiable boundary (Daft, 1983:8). This definition points out that the aim of an organisation is to achieve specific goals and comprises groups of people who function within specified processes and procedures.

Argyle (1969:272) puts more emphasis on an organisation's hierarchy and communication. The author defines an organisation as large social groups where the leadership hierarchy

and role-differentiation have become formalised into fixed ranks and offices. Norms have become rules, and there are specific rules for communication and work methods.

It is therefore evident that an organisation is characterised first by groups of individuals fulfilling various roles and responsibilities, secondly by stipulated and prescribed policies, processes, rules and procedures to inform behaviour and actions, and thirdly by hierarchy or chain of command, in order to attain organisational goals. In this study, the terms “organisation” and “business” are used interchangeably with the same meaning as defined above.

1.2.2 Leadership

According to Barrett (2008:23) researchers seldom agree completely on how best to define leadership, but most would agree that leaders are individuals who guide, direct, motivate, or inspire others. Madlock (2008:64) concurs with Barrett (2008) when he points out that leadership has been defined in a number of ways, such as the ability to guide followers toward shared goals (Bryman, 1992 in Madlock), as a form of influence (Hersey, 1984 in Madlock) and as simply something a leader does (Fleishman, 1973 in Madlock).

In addition to exhibiting task-oriented behaviour as explained above, other authors have also put emphasis on relational-oriented behaviour within the concept of leadership. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1975) and Castaneda and Nahavandi (1991) in Madlock (2008:64) the conceptualisation of leadership is composed of task and relational behaviours. The authors report that employees are most satisfied when they perceive their supervisors as exhibiting both task and relational-oriented behaviours.

It can be concluded as elaborated by Barrett (2008:3) that leadership refers to the men or women, who may not necessarily be Presidents or Chief Executive Officers, who influence others, command others' attention, persuade others to follow them or pursue defined goals, control situations, improve the performance of groups and organisations and get results.

Specific to this study, the term leadership would be used to refer to individuals in leadership positions at the North-West University, such as the Vice-Chancellor, Campus Rectors and members of the Institutional and Campus Managements. In addition, this term would also be used to refer to the inherent leadership functions embedded within the position of senior managers at the North-West University, which includes Deans, Chief Directors, Directors, Heads of Departments and middle managers.

1.2.3 Communication

Within the context of organisations, communication is defined as a transactional process of exchanging messages and negotiating meaning to establish and maintain relationships (Steinberg, 1995:6). Other definitions elaborate further and stress that communication involves much more than the dissemination of information. In addition, communication may also involve symbols and it strives to create meaning (Baron & Greenberg, 1997; Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994; Fielding, 1997).

According to Gibson *et al.* (1994:17) communication is the transmission of information and understanding using common symbols. The information integrates the activities within the organisation. In addition, the information flows to, from the organisation, and within the organisation. Baron and Greenberg (1997:334) support Gibson *et al.* (1994) by defining communication as the process by which a person, group or organisation (the sender) transmits some type of information (the message) to another person, group or organisation (the receiver). A more simplified definition by Fielding (1997:4) is that communication is a transaction whereby two or more people together create meaning through the exchange of symbols. Further understanding of the concept “communication”, needs a good understanding of the major functions of communication within a group or organisation as identified by Robbins (1997).

According to Robbins (1997:124), communication serves four major functions within a group or organisation, namely, control, motivation, emotional expression, and information. The functions of communication are discussed further within the context of internal communication in chapter 2 (see section 2.4.1 of chapter 2). Senior managers often make use of communication to achieve more than one function. It is essential to point out that the four major functions of communication, as identified by Robbins (1997), are important for managers, particularly in ensuring that information which is first encoded and then transmitted through a channel to the receiver, is interpreted the same by the recipients who, in turn, will respond through a desired action and feedback.

1.2.4 Internal communication

This concept is also referred to as “employee relations”, “organisational communication”, “internal corporate communication”, “internal public relations”, or “internal liaison”, by some sources (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1997; Lubbe & Puth, 2002; Steinberg, 1995; Steyn & Puth, 2000). Internal communication is essentially communication with an organisation's

internal stakeholders, with the aim to establish and manage positive relationships. According to Steinberg (1995:154) internal communication involves one-on-one communication (between a manager and an employee), small-group communication (meetings), public communication (public speeches by a Chief Executive Officer), and mass communication (press releases, company newsletters, intranet, memorandums, and new product announcements). Internal communication is one of the most important functions within an organisation and employees are one of the organisation's key stakeholders.

"Internal communication" is often used synonymously with "organisational communication" and frequently confused with corporate communication within an organisation. It is important to note that internal communication and corporate communication functions differ as explained by Monge and Poole (2008), and Steyn and Puth (2000). These authors clearly indicate that corporate communication is communication on behalf of an organisation and organisational communication constitutes an intersection between the study of human communication and the study of human organisations. Corporate communication refers to managed communication with the aim of increasing organisational effectiveness by creating and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. The authors claim that corporate communication developed from journalism and that it is founded on an integration of communication and management sciences. Even though these two types of communication differ, a fine line separates them.

Therefore, within the context of this study the term "internal communication" will be used synonymously with "organisational communication" in relation to internal communication involving one-on-one communication between a manager and subordinates in the form of verbal, non-verbal, written, electronic communication and small-group communication in the form of meetings.

1.2.5 Managerial communication

Managerial communication is considered as an emerging discipline informed mainly by an evolution and integration of business communication, organisational communication, and management. Communication researchers, authors and textbooks are making a continuous attempt to differentiate between business communication and organisational communication (Robbins, 2003; Smeltzer, Glab & Golen, 1983; Steyn & Puth, 2000). According to Smeltzer *et al.* (1983:71) Leipzig and other authors believe that it is not possible to understand business communication and organisational communication without considering organisational behaviour, a traditional sub-discipline of management.

However, these authors also believe that the philosophies and methodologies within business communication, organisational communication, and management are converging. Steyn and Puth (2000:6) concur with the authors and are of the opinion that the focus of this concept is on the internal communication process, namely, the interpersonal communication between a manager and employees. Managerial communication follows a functional approach and regards communication as the means to an end, namely, the achievement of organisational goals (Steyn & Puth, 2000:6).

Smeltzer *et al.* (1983:71) point out that organisational behaviour has been involved with the examination of the theoretical foundations of how individuals behave within and between organisations. Organisational communication has been concerned with communication theory as applied to organisations, and secondly with the development of oral skills (through business and professional speaking). Business communication has been involved with the development of written skills for business. Traditionally, business communication was oriented toward skills and organisational communication toward the knowledge. Managerial communication, therefore, is described as an integration and orientation of the communication function, communication skills, and communication knowledge.

It is important to note that in literature, this concept is sometimes referred to as management communication. According to Steyn and Puth (2000:6), management communication is the only field of study that integrates communication and management. It incorporates from communication science everything a manager needs to know (knowledge) and to do (skills) in order to manage people as a resource more effectively (Steyn & Puth, 2000:6).

1.2.6 Interpersonal communication

Literature on communication was found focusing more on describing the nature of interpersonal communication rather than formulating clear definitions of the concept of interpersonal communication (Hartley, 1999; Heath, 2001; Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008).

Hartley (1999:20) describes interpersonal communication as, (i) communication from one individual to another; (ii) which is face-to-face; (iii) both the form and content of the communication reflect the personal characteristics of the individuals as well as their social roles and relationships; (iv) the communication is always two-way; (v) the communication does not simply involve the exchange of messages but essentially involves the creation and exchange of meaning; and (vi) the communication is an ongoing process rather than an event or series of events.

Capella (1987) supports this description of interpersonal communication in Heath (2001:106). The author explains interpersonal communication according to its essential feature, namely, influencing one another's behaviours beyond what can be attributed to "normal baselines of action". Simply put, mutual influence defines interpersonal communication. Capella (1987) argues that the idea of interpersonal communication is difficult to separate from the idea of relationship. The author adds the fact that many definitions of interpersonal communication actually are definitions of relationship.

Comparing the views of Capella in Heath (2001) with those of Bambacas and Patrickson (2008:53) who point out that interpersonal communication explains "the means" by which organisational activities, such as managing, controlling, planning and leading are delivered, it can be concluded that interpersonal communication manifests itself at the stage of feedback in the communication process. According to Bambacas and Patrickson (2008:53), the feedback loop that develops two-way communication between individuals represents interpersonal communication that may affect the substance of the message, the relationships between communicators, their credibility, and the resulting interpretation (decoding) of the message received by the individual (receiver).

The abovementioned descriptions of interpersonal communication reveal that the primary form of communication between a manager and his or her subordinates is represented predominantly in the form of interpersonal communication. In section 2.7 of chapter 2, the importance of interpersonal communication in the day-to-day interaction and exchange of information between a manager and his or her subordinates is highlighted and the forms of interpersonal communication are briefly described. It is appropriate to draw attention to the fact that the principal form of communication embedded in this study is interpersonal communication as it describes the primary form of communication between a manager and employees.

1.2.7 Employee engagement

Caldeira (2009:9) defines employee engagement according to a blended definition from the Employee Engagement Review Report (2006) published by the Conference Board, based on employee engagement findings of 12 major studies, as "a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work". In another simplified definition, Kock and Burke (2008:466) support the Conference Board's blended definition and describe employee

engagement as the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in the organisation and how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment.

To further understand the concept “employee engagement”, it is important to point out a strong correlation between employee engagement, employee performance and increased productivity as identified in literature (Kock & Burke, 2008; Shaffer, 2009). According to Shaffer (2009:16), engagement can improve performance, quality and productivity regarding things that matter to an organisation and, in so doing, employees help the organisation to succeed. According to the authors, senior management, middle management and line management play a fundamental role in employee engagement and ensuring that employees realise how they will benefit and contribute toward an organisation's success from their individual and collective actions.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of employee engagement would be based mainly on Shaffer's (2009) view of employee engagement, which entails three components, namely, (i) employees share the organisation's values and identify with its purpose (cognitive identity); (ii) employees have an emotional attachment to the company (sense of belonging); and (iii) employees are willing to go the extra mile to make the organisation a success (discretionary effort).

1.3 The context of the study

The empirical part of this study was conducted at the North-West University, which was established on 1 January 2004 because of a merger of two former institutions. The institutions that came together to create the North-West University were the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and the University of the North West. The staff and students of the Sebokeng Campus of the Vista University were also incorporated.

This merger brought together three universities that were geographically very far apart from one another - the Vaal Triangle and Mafikeng Campuses are more than 300km apart and the Potchefstroom and Mafikeng Campuses are more than 200km apart. These institutions had very different development trajectories. They served very different constituent communities, displayed different academic and research emphases from one another, and were characterised by contrasting institutional cultures and identities (Stumpf, 2008:12). The diverse, multicultural, multilingual and increased internal stakeholder profile that is geographically dispersed coupled with the transformation process of the merger, often poses

a number of challenges in fostering and sustaining effective internal communication and employee engagement.

A new management model that is unique in South African higher education was adopted by the North-West University management who felt it was best suited to its specific merger characteristics (Stumpf, 2008:12). This model comprises establishing four business units, namely, the Institutional Office and three Campuses, namely, the Mafikeng and Potchefstroom Campuses in the North West province and the Vaal Triangle Campus in the Gauteng province.

In terms of this model, the three Campuses of the University are autonomous operational entities responsible for providing teaching-learning, conducting research, and the transfer of expertise through community engagement. In doing so, they are not managerially or operationally subject to one another or to the Institutional Office, but are bound by the framework of policies and processes approved for the University. The Institutional Office is responsible for serving the institution through its three Campuses in strategic planning, institutional policy development, institutional process design, overall institutional quality, budget apportioning to the three Campuses, and overall institutional branding and positioning (Stumpf, 2008:4).

Impressions gained by the researcher during the process of interviewing with some selected subjects thought to be more knowledgeable about the merger revealed the following allegation. In 2004, the Institutional Office and three Campuses of the North-West University were characterised by an internal climate of scepticism marred by low staff morale and productivity levels, criticism of the merger, misunderstandings, false rumours and assumptions, negative word of mouth, inaccurate information from external sources, and lost opportunities for positive image and reputation building.

In the five years since the merger, the North-West University has conducted three investigations by outside, independent consultants. In 2005 and then again in 2007, a Culture and Climate Survey was conducted. In 2008, the Vice-Chancellor approached an independent consultant, Dr Rolf Stumpf, with a request to undertake an evaluation of the University's management model. Some of the findings of these three studies have an indirect bearing in this mini-dissertation.

The University has approximately 4 918 employees, of which 2 214 are temporary employees. The 2 704 permanent employees could be subdivided into academic staff,

support staff, management and service staff. The management category could be subdivided into middle management, Campus Management, senior management and Institutional Management segments. This study focused on the senior and middle management segment, bearing in mind the context set out above regarding the North-West University management model and that the three Campuses are bound by the framework of policies and processes developed by the Institutional Office and approved by the University Council. The motivation for focusing on senior and middle management is mainly because it is representative of the academic and support departments of the North-West University. In addition, this segment is instrumental in formulating and implementing operational plans as well as performance agreements that are informed by Campus plans and the University's overarching institutional plan.

In 2005 and 2007, the North-West University management commissioned a Culture and Climate survey aimed at assessing the attitudes and perceptions of a variety of stakeholder groups on a variety of issues related to the organisation, its standing and management. In comparison to the initial survey conducted in 2005, the findings of the ensuing 2007 survey revealed a noticeable and evident increase in positive perceptions and attitude among the staff. Management staff in particular improved their overall average assessment by three percent, while their subordinates showed a slight decline in overall rating (What Works Strategic, 2007:5). This positive shift could also be attributed to a gradual emphasis on aligned, integrated, coordinated, and effective internal communication at the North-West University.

In addition, in 2006 the North-West University's brand strategy, which aims to define, differentiate, and build the organisation's brand and corporate identity among internal and external stakeholders, was approved by the University Council, and implemented. The University is establishing and positioning its brand as a value-driven, diverse, innovative, and globally recognised academic institution that celebrates and encourages multiculturalism, multilingualism and multinationalism (Mmope, 2008:1). The University resolved to commence its communication and brand identity alignment efforts internally, thereby building the University's brand from within the institution. Consequently, internal communication is playing an influential and fundamental role in building brand awareness, fostering a sense of belonging to the new brand identity among internal stakeholders, creating positive attitudes through a common set of do-values, increasing productivity, and adding value to the strategic intent of the institution.

The 2007 Culture and Climate survey findings indicated that Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle staff responded noticeably more negatively overall, whereas Potchefstroom staff were much at the same level as in 2005, and the Institutional Office respondents were more positive (What Works Strategic, 2007:4). The differing perceptions and attitudes of the staff members of the four business units could be indicative of the inconsistent role played by senior managers across the four business units in sharing information about organisational goals and objectives, supporting key strategic messages and motivating staff to support the set organisational goals and objectives.

While internal communication always played an important role within the North-West University, the transition phase following the merger, the limited level of interaction and free sharing of information among employees has contributed towards feelings of uncertainty and lack of transparency with regard to management roles and responsibility that employees associate with their working environment (What Works Strategic, 2007:5).

Senior managers could play a very significant role in enhancing and sustaining effective internal communication among employees and inculcate engaged employees who help the University to achieve its strategic goals and in so doing, succeed. Most importantly, senior managers should understand the crucial role they play as primary communicators and change facilitators in the organisation. The need for senior managers to assume the role of communicative leaders and managers is also prompted by the diverse internal stakeholder profile across the four business units and the complexities presented by a diverse work environment.

This study explored the role of senior managers in terms of communication within the specific context of strategic alignment at the North-West University. It also investigated senior managers' understanding of the role they need to play to sustain effective internal communication and facilitate employee engagement.

1.4 Problem statement

Literature emphasises the fundamental premise that communication is a critical enabling factor that binds the purpose of the organisation to the people who perform specified tasks and thereby helps the organisation to achieve set goals (Hamilton-Attwell, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Kock & Burke, 2008; Sliburyte, 2004; Steinberg, 1995; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Tourish & Hargie, 1998). Effective channels of communication and communication processes, networks and systems form part of the crucial factors that keep an organisation operational.

However, in order to be effective, communication within a group needs to have the same meaning to all recipients in order to achieve the specific and intended purpose. On the other hand, employee engagement is one of the major requirements in facilitating healthy working relationships between managers and employees.

In the context of the North-West University, one of the biggest challenges in achieving and sustaining effective communication and employee engagement is the growing diversity of internal stakeholders in the Institutional Office as well as the three Campuses. The diverse internal stakeholder profile often represents differing cultures, races, religions, values, languages, backgrounds and beliefs. Senior managers need to find ways to understand the culturally diverse internal environment and communicate effectively amidst the complexities and problems that often occur in cross-cultural interactions.

The continuous organisational change in terms of the unique and decentralised management model and geographically dispersed employees of the University as a whole as well as technological developments pose another challenge in sustaining effective internal communication and employee engagement. In theory, the direct influence of the nature of the organisational structure on the flow of information, communication processes, communication systems within an organisation, and the manager's role in communication has been established (Daft, 1983; Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994; Robbins, 2003; Sliburyte, 2004).

Therefore, it becomes evident as pointed out by Eisenberg and Phillips (1990) in Sliburyte (2004:198), that managers need to understand the complexities of organisational life and they need to understand that miscommunication is inevitable and may occur at all levels and all areas of an organisation. Managers thus need to identify interventions to address factors that hamper effective internal communication. However, this has proven to be a mammoth challenge, as the authors state that most managers and organisational theorists view communication as extremely important in organisations, but difficult to address in any systematic way.

In addition, most managers lack the basic communication skills and the ability to communicate effectively because they often occupy managerial positions possessing technical expertise and very limited communicator competence. In literature, numerous communication researchers and authors support the view that managers should be educated and trained in order to understand the importance of internal communication and

to be equipped with the necessary communication skills to enable them to communicate effectively.

Since managers constitute the link that brings the organisation's units and employees together, the efficiency of the communication is dependent on how well they understand and perform it (Caldeira, 2009; D'Aprix, 1996; Johnson, 2004; Sliburyte, 2004; Thatcher, 2005).

No formal research has been conducted on the role of senior managers in internal communication and employee engagement at the North-West University. It is safe to assume that this communication role is still misunderstood by senior managers and not properly structured and therefore not fulfilling its strategic potential as a means to establish positive relationships, diffuse information, motivate and align employees' actions and behaviour to the set organisational goals.

The purpose of this study is to explore within the context of internal communication, the role of senior managers in facilitating effective communication and sustaining employee engagement at the North-West University.

1.5 Research questions

1.5.1 General research question

The general research question that arises from this study is formulated as follows: What is the role of the North-West University's senior managers in contributing to effective internal communication and employee engagement?

1.5.2 Specific research questions

This general question is divided into the following more specific research questions:

1.5.2.1 From literature, what are the current perspectives regarding internal communication, with specific reference to the role of managers as communicators?

1.5.2.2 From literature, what are the current perspectives on employee engagement?

1.5.2.3 How do senior managers at the North-West University perceive the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication?

1.5.2.4 How do senior managers at the North-West University perceive the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining employee engagement?

1.6 Research objectives

1.6.1 General objective

The general research objective for this study is to explore the role of senior managers at the North-West University in contributing to effective internal communication and employee engagement.

1.6.2 Specific objectives

With respect to the general research objective outlined above, the specific research objectives for this study are the following:

- 1.6.2.1 To ascertain from literature the current perspectives regarding the role of managers in internal communication and employee engagement.
- 1.6.2.2 To empirically explore the role of senior management at North-West University in promoting effective internal communication.
- 1.6.2.3 To empirically explore the role of senior managers at North-West University in sustaining employee engagement.
- 1.6.2.4 To draw comparisons between what is seen as the ideal role of managers in internal communication and employee engagement and what the nature of the role of managers at the North-West University actually is in internal communication and employee engagement.

1.7 Guiding theoretical argument

This mini-dissertation is based on Robbins' (2003) linear model of the communication process, Fielding's (2006) convergence model of the communication process, theoretical perspectives on communication functions, networks and information richness of communication channels within internal communication and D'Aprix's (1996) model of the communication role of managers in aligning individual effort with organisational goals.

The models of the communication process, communication networks, information richness of communication channels and role of managers in communication provide a theoretical foundation and framework for exploring the role of managers in facilitating effective internal communication at the North-West University. In theory, it can be argued that the role of managers in communicating with subordinates manifests itself primarily at an interpersonal

communication level. In addition, in theory a strong correlation between effective internal communication (with an emphasis on interpersonal communication) and high levels of engagement among employees has been found (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1997; Gagnon, Jansen & Michael, 2008; Hamilton-Attwell, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Kock & Burke, 2008; Lubbe & Puth, 2002; Shaffer, 2009; Sliburyte, 2004; Steinberg, 1995; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Tourish & Hargie, 1998).

The preliminary literature review has indicated that there was no similar study conducted at the North-West University in the past five years. In this study, the principles and perspectives regarding approaches in facilitating effective internal communication and employee engagement have been used to determine to what extent senior managers at North-West University contribute towards achieving effective internal communication and inculcating committed and productive employees who are willing to exert discretionary effort and help the University succeed.

1.8 Research methodology

A qualitative research approach was followed since this is an exploratory-descriptive type of study, with very little known or reported empirical data. This choice is strongly endorsed by Creswell (1994:21) who states that “one of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory, not much has been written about the topic or population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to informants and to build a picture based on their ideas.”

The qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to explore the senior managers' understanding of the role they need to play to achieve and sustain effective internal communication and facilitate employee engagement. Furthermore, the qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to listen to informants, gather information, go into greater depth and get more details on the concepts being analysed and be immersed in the data collected in order to build a picture related to the context of this study.

The main data-collection method in the form of semi-structured interviews with senior managers at the North-West University was employed.

A more detailed description of the research method, research design, sampling method, data collection and data analysis is provided in Chapter 4.

1.9 General overview of the study and chapter layout

Chapter 2: Literature study - the role of managers in internal communication, describes management models in South African Higher Education and the impact of evolving organisational structures on internal communication. It discusses the findings of the literature study regarding theoretical models of the communication process, functions of communication, interpersonal communication, flow of information, categorisation of internal communication and formal and informal communication channels. Furthermore, it considers the interdependence between leadership communication and managerial communication and the role of the manager as the key connection in facilitating effective internal communication with employees.

Chapter 3: Literature study - the role of managers in employee engagement, describes the findings of the literature study focusing on the emergence of employee engagement, effective employee engagement, key drivers of employee engagement, the interdependence between communication and employee engagement and challenges and concerns in sustaining employee engagement.

Chapter 4: Research methodology and design, provides a detailed description of the motivation of a qualitative research approach, the research method employed, the research design, sampling technique, data collection procedure, data analysis and shortcomings and sources of error of the research.

Chapter 5: Reporting of the data, explores and discusses the perceptions of the senior managers from the Institutional Office and the three Campuses of the North-West University from the semi-structured interviews regarding their role in facilitating effective internal communication and employee engagement.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations, concludes all the findings and recommendations on how senior managers can be able to facilitate, achieve and sustain effective internal communication and employee engagement at the North-West University.

Chapter 2: Literature study - The role of managers in internal communication

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to ascertain from literature the current perspectives regarding internal communication, with specific reference to the role of managers in facilitating effective internal communication with employees.

Literature in the field of internal communication recognises the prevailing significance of communication within an organisation. In addition, literature acknowledges that communication remains one of the basic prerequisites in strategic alignment and achieving the objectives and goals of an organisation. However, various authors (D'Aprix, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Quirke, 2008; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Van Ruler & De Lange, 2003) have already pointed out that varied factors related to organisational change, unstructured communication systems and processes, the diverse internal environment, technological development and the complexity of organisational life, pose concerns and challenges in fostering and sustaining effective internal communication within an organisation.

Until recently, literature was found focusing on theoretical perspectives of the communication process, the traditional disciplines of corporate communication, functions of internal communication, categorisation of internal communication, integrated marketing communication, communication effectiveness, barriers to effective communication and formal and informal internal communication channels (Fielding, 1997; Kitchen, 1999; Steinberg, 1995; Steyn & Puth, 2000). In the past five years, literature in internal communication and management has recognised the changing nature of organisational management models, interaction, and work. Literature also recognised the ensuing impact on internal communication that emphasises the need for effective managerial communication in order to build and sustain working relationships among employees and foster and maintain effective internal communication (Johnson, 2004; Quirke, 2008; Rosen, 2007; Sliburyte, 2004; Wagner & Harter, 2006).

As much as has been written about internal communication and its role in an organisation, extensive attention has not been given to the role of managers within internal communication as well as the approaches to managing the internal communication process in a structured method as a system rather than unstructured and uncoordinated mixed messages in an organisation. Research findings and communication practitioners have identified managers as a key medium in disseminating relevant, credible and continuous information about the

organisation's vision, mission, values, goals and strategic messages (Barrett, 2008; Caldeira, 2009; D'Aprix, 2005; Hamilton-Attwell, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Madlock, 2008; Naudé, 2009; Quirke, 2008; Shaffer, 2009; Sliburyte, 2004; Thatcher, 2005).

Similarly, a number of authors have linked organisational performance and success to the managers' ability to communicate effectively with employees. Since 2000, literature concerning internal communication has indicated an increased awareness of the need to develop and implement communication systems, structures, and processes. Literature also pointed out a tendency to include communication responsibilities to managers' key performance areas to utilise managers as the key agents in facilitating and managing committed and productive employees (Barrett, 2008; Caldeira, 2009; Hamilton-Attwell, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Madlock, 2008; Paulraj, Lado & Chen, 2008; Thatcher, 2005).

This chapter first gives a general overview of organisations, the changing business environment, and the impact of evolving organisational structures on internal communication. The management models in South African Higher Education and the nature of the North-West University's management model are also described briefly. In orientation of significant sections in the literature study, theoretical models of the communication process, functions of communication, flow of information, communication networks, interpersonal communication, categorisation of internal communication, formal and informal communication channels, effective communication in a changing environment and the communication role of managers are discussed in an attempt to answer the first specific research question. Finally, the chapter concludes with a general summary of the literature.

2.2 Organisations and the changing business environment

The constant and escalating force of change within the political, socio-economical, legislative, and technological setting poses various challenges for institutions in South Africa as well as those operating within the global business environment. Due to the growing force of change, institutions are becoming increasingly complex and the nature of management models, interaction and work is transforming. Both Hamilton-Attwell (2009) and Johnson (2004) acknowledge that organisations today, regardless of size or industry are complex, cruel places.

It is therefore evident that this varied and constant force of change has a fundamental impact on organisations and members of an organisation. Furthermore, the changing environment influencing the nature of organisations, interaction and work is reinforcing the crucial role of

communication within organisations. Organisations comprise individuals who are organised into groups that strive to obtain organisational goals. Communication and management scholars and communication practitioners assert that organisations are held together by communication and communication is the essence of organisational life (Adey & Andrew, 1990; Andrews & Baird, 1992; D'Aprix, 1996; Fielding, 2006; Paulraj, Lado & Chen, 2008; Sliburyte, 2004; Steinberg, 2005). As soon as people gather together to begin organising, they need to make plans, give input, make decisions, and resolve disputes as stated by Mosia (1999:24). Organisations depend on receiving, processing, and transmitting information to achieve their goals.

According to Bridges in D'Aprix (1996:80), today's organisation is rapidly being transformed from a structure built out of jobs into what the author calls "a field of work needing to be done". The author is of the opinion that the traditional nature of "jobs" associated with the notion of carrying out a particular task repetitively according to a specific directive is changing into "areas of responsibility and accountability" which is indicative of the changing nature of work.

Bridges in D'Aprix (1996:80) is of the opinion that jobs are artefacts of the days of factories, mass production and repetitive tasks and they reflect the bureaucratic mentality that once enabled organisations to organise work and apportion many layers of managers to oversee jobs to make sure that they were done satisfactorily. Recent literature clearly indicates that further developments resulting in adjustments to the nature of work as described by Bridges above have taken place. In the next section of this chapter, more attention is given to the impact that the evolving organisational structures have on internal communication, interactions, and the nature of work (see section 2.2.1). In the meantime, it is important to point out that the underlying communication practices within organisations are developing in order to keep abreast with the changing nature of organisations, interactions, and work.

2.2.1 The impact of evolving organisational structures on internal communication

Some literature already describes prevalent aspects pertinent to internal communication, emanating from the impact of evolving organisational structures (Sliburyte, 2004; Stumpf, 2008; Quirke, 2008).

One of the fundamental factors identified by Quirke (2008) and Sliburyte (2004) is the move in working patterns from the old, hierarchical, chain of command, vertical structure to something much flatter, more organic in character, dynamic and horizontal as well as

vertical. Sliburyte (2008:193) is of the opinion that the purpose of hierarchy is order, whereas the purpose of the new organisational form is to provide organisations that are welcoming cross-functional collaboration, and are gathering people and resources quickly to serve customer needs. However, Quirke (2008:156) asserts that the flatter structures are devolving decision making to lower levels in the organisation, creating the need for more information to ensure high-quality decisions. The foregoing discussion clearly indicates a significant change in the traditional role of managers from being information owners and gatekeepers to employees possessing more information because of the evolving organisational structures. Therefore, it is clear that the direction of the modern organisation is set to become more collaborative and flatter in design and interactions as opposed to hierarchical and solitary.

The aforementioned development of organisational structures is influencing the flow of information within organisations. A common inclination with more emphasis on open, two-way, and horizontal communication is becoming more prevalent as opposed to the traditional top down and vertical communication pattern. This view is stressed by Sliburyte (2004) and D'Aprix (2005) who argue that in hierarchies, issues of status, power, rank and prerequisites often cloud the form and content of upward communication. Because so many people aspire to higher-level positions in the organisation, there may be numerous agendas that affect and alter communication patterns. The authors assert that in particular, subordinates may be reluctant to communicate negative feedback, or to share information that reflects negatively on them and their work. Whereas, recently the modern organisational form is establishing a culture which encourages open communication channelling ideas and feedback from subordinates upwards to those in management who have the responsibility and power to promote and implement them.

Sanchez (1999) in Sliburyte (2004:190) adds the fact that change has become a constant phenomenon within organisations, therefore, managing organisational change appropriately to ensure organisational survival makes effective internal communication a critical success factor. However, Geijerstam (2000) in Sliburyte (2004:190) argues that the success in creating effective internal communication depends on generating communicative leaders, where not only the top management takes responsibility, but delegates it to senior, middle and line managers to facilitate a continuous dialogue with employees while defining critical problems, suggestions and solutions. This argument clearly indicates that the leadership and managers in an organisation play a crucial role in fostering and sustaining effective internal communication. In section 2.10 and section 2.12 of this chapter, more attention is given to

the concept of leadership communication and the role of the manager as the key connection in facilitating effective internal communication with employees.

The foregoing argument also highlights the undisputed view of Sinickas (2006) regarding the role of communication in ensuring that employees grasp both business strategy and their role in its execution. Senior management and supervisors' discussion of strategy can improve employees' understanding of it, especially if there is better access to staff meetings where the topic could be discussed (Sinickas, 2006:13). Sinickas (2006) agrees with Sanchez (1999) in Sliburyte (2004:190) and adds the fact that it is indispensable to having a two-way communication philosophy in effectively aligning employees with the business interests of the organisation. Furthermore, the author states that it is essential to listen to what co-workers say and to use this upward information in the decision making process. Quirke (2008:11) concurs with the authors and acknowledges the important role of the leadership and managers in conveying organisational objectives. However, the author refers to research conducted among employees over the last 10 years, which indicates the impact of the disconnection between the thinking of the leaders and the attitudes of those being led. Quirke (2008:11) points out that research findings provide evidence that when employees understand their overall role in the business, 91 percent will work towards that success. The number decreases to 23 percent if they do not have an understanding.

Nevertheless, the author makes the critical point that in most organisations management acknowledges the correlation between effective internal communication and an understanding of organisational strategy and objectives among employees but this still remains one of the biggest challenges in practice. The disconnect between leadership thinking and employees' tasks or actions puts even more emphasis on the need for managers to understand the strategic value-add of effective internal communication and even more importantly, their role at a micro-level in facilitating and fostering effective internal communication.

Therefore, it can be concluded from the preceding discussion that the evolving organisational structure is influencing the flow of information and functions of communication between the leadership, managers, and employees and becoming more dynamic in character. This development asserts the crucial role of effective internal communication not only as an important organisational component, but also as the lifeblood of every organisation as declared by Sliburyte (2004). For this reason, it is imperative that in today's flatter and information based organisations, effective and proper communication processes,

structures and systems are established and managed systematically to ensure that effective communication remains a 'lubricant that keeps the organisation running'.

2.2.2 Management models of universities in South African Higher Education

In an independent study aimed at evaluating the management model of the North-West University, Stumpf (2008:14) notes that there are a limited number of management models being employed in the management of the 23 universities in South African Higher Education. According to the consultant since most South African universities developed from single Campus institutions to having a number of Campuses or additional sites of delivery, most management models represented either a continuation of the single Campus Management model, or some variation of that. In essence, Stumpf (2008:15) reports the following basic management models:

- That of managing the institution as if it consisted of one Campus only, even if it had additional sites of delivery;
- That of managing an institution with a main Campus and some formally recognised satellite Campuses which may enjoy varying degrees of decision making powers;
- That of a genuine multi-Campus institution consisting of a number of Campuses but not having a formally designated main Campus, in which the institution is, however, managed in terms of a unitary management model – usually in the form of an administrative and management centre; and
- The model implemented at North-West University that can be depicted as a type of multi-Campus model within a unified system in which Campuses enjoy considerable managerial autonomy, and an Institutional Office that provides services concerning strategic planning and policy development to the Campuses.

It is therefore evident that primarily the North-West University's management structure encompasses features that can be associated with an organisation characterised by a decentralised organisational structure because of the three Campuses with operational and managerial autonomy. Conspicuously, there is also an element of centralisation because of the Institutional Office that sets strategy, policy, processes, and procedural direction to the three Campuses. This implies that the North-West University's management model comprises a combination of a certain degree of both centralisation and decentralisation attributes as opposed to a hierarchical or centralised organisational structure. It is also important to note that the three Campuses are not independent, but operate within the set policies, processes and procedures established by an Institutional Office.

2.2.3 The nature of the North-West University's management model

According to Stumpf (2008:23), the management model chosen for North-West University is based on the premise of the University being a single, integrated institution. It is made up of three separate and operationally autonomous, but not independent, Campuses together with an Institutional Office. The Institutional Office is responsible for strategic planning, policy development, allocation of resources to the Campuses, design of institutional processes, overall quality assurance, and institutional branding and positioning.

The basic elements of this model are:

- The Institutional Office represents the reflective, conceptualising and analytical component of the University on a macro or system level in which the international, national and local environment affecting the North-West University is interpreted and appropriate institutional strategies, plans and processes are developed to assist the Campuses in positioning and organising themselves for the fulfilment of their academic tasks.
- The three Campuses, while obviously also engaging in the above activities in relation to their Campuses, are the providers of academic services (teaching-learning, research, and transfer of knowledge) and are thus the operational and income generating entities of the University.
- The North-West University also initiated the development of a performance management model, which established the principle of individual accountability residing in the various managers – either at Campus level or at the level of the Institutional Office. For senior managers within the Institutional Office, this meant that they as individuals were to be held accountable for the leadership displayed within their various portfolios regarding strategic planning, policy and process development.

Because of the distinctive character of the North-West University's management model, the findings of Stumpf's (2008) evaluation reveal various problems created by the new management model. Evidently, one of the problems identified by numerous senior managers, pertinent to the context of this study, is that the new management model created 'communication uncertainties' (Stumpf, 2008:24).

The consultant reports that the 'communication problem' has two angles to it. According to Stumpf (2008:24), primarily, a strict interpretation of the application of the management model means that all communication is to be conducted from the Institutional Office through

the Campus Rector's offices and vice versa. The consultant reasons that in real life such a strict application creates insurmountable bottlenecks and becomes ridiculous such as when mere information on a particular matter is required, say by a manager in the Institutional Office from someone on one of the Campuses. In addition, many misunderstandings and perceptions of operational involvement in Campus affairs by the Institutional Office can probably be ascribed to confusion about what communication channels are to be followed. Moreover, academics in particular, were uncertain as to whether a certain issue constituted an institutional or Campus issue, which added to their communication uncertainties.

Another facet of the 'communication problem' is that many managers felt that the management model was not explained and communicated regularly within the management levels of the University as well as to the broader staff complement. This resulted in many unwarranted perceptions that could have been avoided (Stumpf, 2008:24-25).

The unique organisational structure of the North-West University and ingrained problems created by the new management model highlights the underlying key message that organisational structure change has a direct bearing on employees, their interactions and internal communication. Quirke (2008:72) asserts that regular communication is the antidote to many of these problems created by organisational structural change, but communication is the first thing to be discarded when time is tight. The author maintains that the most important lesson from successful mergers, restructurings, and acquisitions is that evolving organisations must consciously create the glue of goodwill by investing in regular communication among its people (Quirke, 2008:72). Therefore, the crucial role of effective internal communication and the central responsibility of managers in understanding, embracing and facilitating effective internal communication among employees at the North-West University, in particular, and within organisations, in general, cannot be overemphasised.

2.3 Positioning internal communication within a decentralised management model

There seems to be a substantial amount of literature supporting the premise of internal communication as a sub-discipline of the concept of corporate communication. However, literature also suggests that other sub-disciplines of corporate communication are converging and justifying a need for an integrated approach of studying and managing the discipline of corporate communication (Conrad & Poole, 2005; Tourish & Hargie, 1998; Van Ruler & De Lange, 2003). These disciplines were traditionally separated into management

communications, marketing communications, public relations or external communications and intraorganisational communication.

Communication scholars and authors justify an interdisciplinary and integrated approach to studying and managing the sub-disciplines of the concept of corporate communication. Literature, on the other hand, also indicates that there has been a significant shift in the traditional role of internal communication from a one-way, top-down communication of management decisions, policies, rules, regulations and messages to guide employee behavior and actions to a two-way, top-down and bottom-up approach that also encourages employees' input, involvement, and participation in decision making.

Tourish and Hargie (1998:56) note that the role of internal communications has been transformed over the past decade. The authors summarise the traditional role of internal communication as:

- the announcement of management decisions;
- the working of management thinking into messages which are then sufficiently distributed via communication channels; and
- ensuring consistency of information, and making messages easily comprehensible, and easy to disseminate.

Furthermore, the need to connect employees to those who have authority to make decisions has added the following objectives to internal communication as pointed out by Tourish and Hargie (1998:56):

- the stimulation of thinking, participation and ideas;
- the networking of knowing how and learning across the organisation;
- the involvement of all employees in improving processes;
- the identification of ways of providing additional value to customers; and
- the expansion of what all employees believe is possible.

In addition to a need for adopting an integrated approach and the transforming traditional role of internal communication, the technological revolution and information society is changing the role of employees from information consumers to becoming information architects. According to Van Ruler and De Lange (2003:145) one of the reasons for this is because with greater access to information, every employee is becoming more responsible for planning, leading, organising, and controlling a job function. Because of employees

having increased access to information, the authors declare that the nature of internal communication is changing.

The foregoing arguments can be summarised in presupposing that it is evident that the nature of internal communication has transformed in the last decade. This is even more so within organisations with a decentralised management model where the communication does no longer follow the chain of command from top-down, but there is also more emphasis on two-way communication because of cross-functional, multidisciplinary, and collaborative approaches to work.

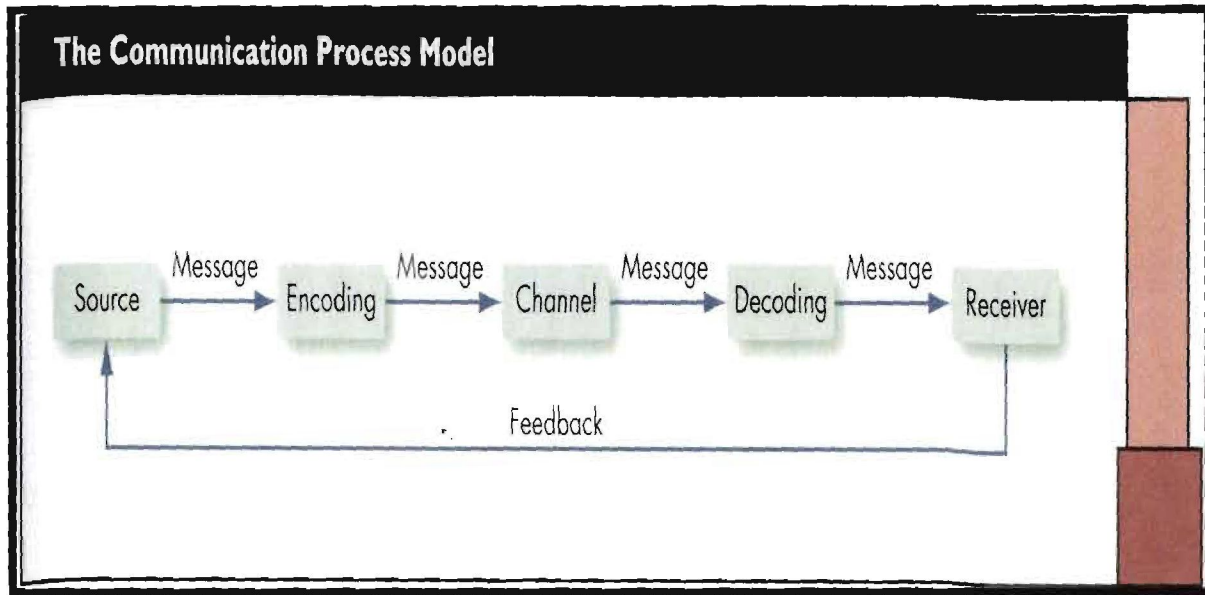
As a result of the evolving nature of internal communication, the notable increase in the existence of two-way communication channels, and the transforming role of employees as information architects, it could be argued that the communication between a manager and his or her subordinates has become more crucial than ever before. The importance of this communication lies in facilitating common understanding of organisational goals and individual contribution, increasing employees' willingness to collaborate and reducing interpersonal hostility and internal competition. It can also be declared that the nature of communication between managers and employees is shifting because of employees becoming more knowledgeable about their job functions.

2.4 A theoretical perspective of the communication process

According to Robbins (2003:284) before communication can take place, a purpose, expressed as a message to be conveyed is needed. The author explains that the message passes between a source (the sender) and a receiver. The message is encoded (converted to a symbolic form) and passed by way of some medium (channel) to the receiver, who retranslates (decodes) the message initiated by the sender. The result is the transference of meaning from one person to another (Robbins, 2003:284).

The model, illustrated in figure 2.4, is referred to as the linear model of the communication process (Fielding, 2006). This model depicts communication as a system that involves an interrelated and interdependent set of elements working together for a specific purpose. There are seven elements in the linear model as illustrated in figure 2.4, namely, (1) the communication source; (2) encoding; (3) the message; (4) the channel; (5) decoding; (6) the receiver; and (7) feedback (Fielding, 2006; Robbins, 2003).

Figure 2.4: The communication process model.



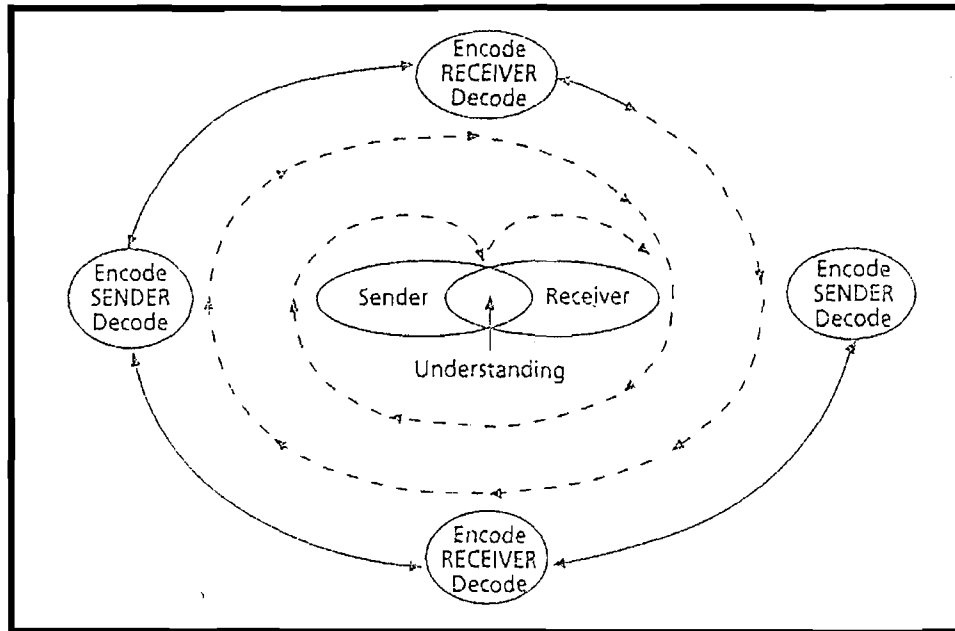
Source: Robbins (2003).

Robbins (2003:285) explains that within the communication process as illustrated in the figure above, the source initiates a message by encoding a thought. The message can be in the form of a speech, written message, a gesture, body language, for example the movements of arms and an expression on a face. The message travels through a channel selected by the source who must determine whether to use a formal or informal channel. According to Robbins (2003:285), formal channels are established by the organisation and transmit messages that are related to the professional activities of the members. Other forms of messages, such as personal or social, follow the informal channels in the organisation. The receiver is the object to whom the message is directed. However, before the message can be received, the author points out that the symbols in the message must be translated into a form that can be understood by the receiver. This step is the decoding of the message. The final link in the communication process is a feedback loop. This final link is important in the communication process as it determines whether understanding has been achieved.

To understand fully the theoretical perspective underpinning the process of communication, which links to the focus of this study, it is appropriate to also briefly describe the convergence model of communication which postulates that communication is a transaction in which meaning is created by both sender and receiver working together (Fielding, 2006:18).

According to Fielding (2006:23), the linear model emphasises the various elements in the communication process whereas the convergence model highlights the transactional and continuing nature of communication.

Figure 2.4(2): A convergence model of communication.

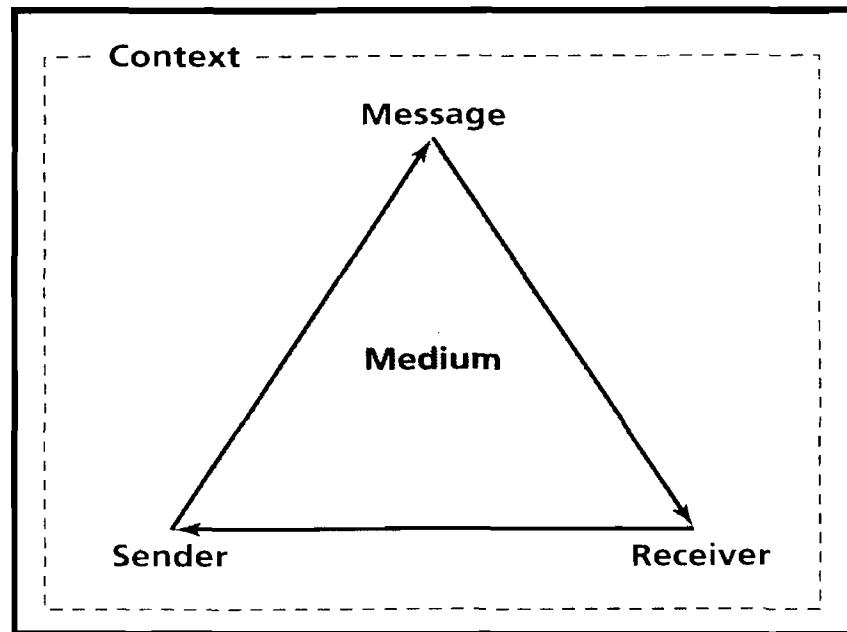


Source: Fielding (2006).

The convergence model as illustrated in the figure above, emphasises the sender and receiver to be constantly exchanging messages until they reach an understanding. Fielding (2006:23) maintains that in this model the sender and receiver are both encoders and decoders of messages and even though they continue exchanging messages until they arrive at an understanding, the communication is still not perfect as a result of the partially overlapping shapes.

Within the context of this study, it is therefore evident from the foregoing theoretical perspective that the appropriate underlying model of the communication process, which describes communication that takes place mainly between a manager and his or her subordinates, is the convergence model of communication. Managers utilise one-on-one communication repeatedly when communicating with employees. Barrett (2008:4) adds the fact that communication from one person to another is often called the “rhetorical situation,” which is commonly depicted as a simple triangle consisting of the context, the sender, the message, and the receiver as illustrated in figure 2.4(3).

Figure 2.4(3): The rhetorical situation.

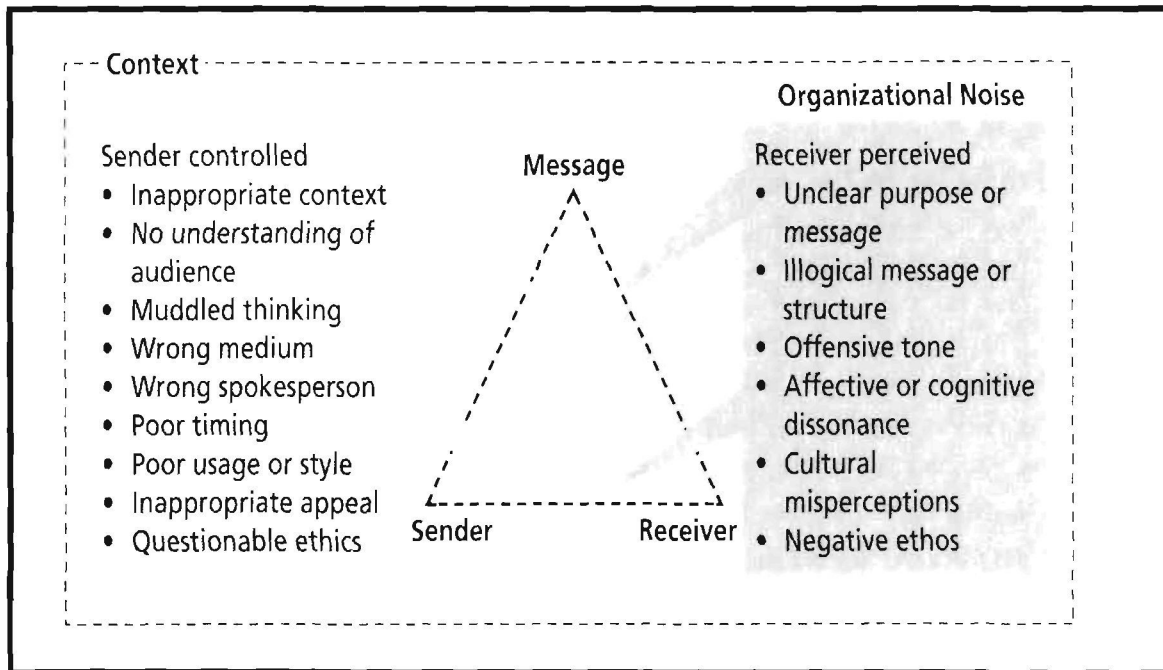


Source: Barrette (2008).

According to Barrett (2008:3), the rhetorical situation, as illustrated in the figure above, shows a very simple and ideal communication. According to this model, there would be no miscommunication or misunderstandings. The sender would understand the context and the receiver, select the right medium, and send a clear message.

In addition, Barrett (2008:3) explains that the receiver would receive and understand that message exactly as the sender intended. However, in figure 2.4(4), Barrett (2008:4) demonstrates the reality that various factors result in complications or barriers that hamper "ideal communication". This is reported by several research findings (Hamilton-Attwell, 2009; Stumpf, 2008; Van Ruler & De Lange, 2003; What Works Strategic, 2007).

Figure 2.4(4): Communication reality or the interruptions to communication.



Source: Barrett (2008).

The foregoing discussion can be summarised in concluding that communication between managers and employees entails the seven elements in the linear model of the communication process. However, the convergence model of the process of communication is the most appropriate illustration of the nature of communication that occurs between managers and subordinates in the form of interpersonal communication. Because complications often occur during the transmission of messages, managers should learn to anticipate interferences in the rhetorical situation, to understand the context and the audience, to select the right medium, and to construct clear messages that allow the meaning to reach the specific receiver as intended as pointed out by Barrett (2008:5).

This aspect which forms part of the communication responsibility of managers is the most basic and critical source of effective internal communication, yet it remains misunderstood or overlooked by many managers as discussed and substantiated further in section 2.9 and 2.12 of this chapter.

2.4.1 Functions of internal communication

In order to illustrate the fundamental role of internal communication within organisations it is important to understand the various functions of internal communication. The four major functions of communication within an organisation are to inform, control, motivate and emotional expression (Robbins, 2003:284). In this section, the focus will be on functions of internal communication in organisations as identified and described by Robbins (2003) and Steinberg (1995).

- **The information function**

The information function refers to the dissemination of information to ensure that the organisation operates efficiently, and achieves its set organisational goals and objectives. As Steinberg (1995:164) points out, all members of the organisation require a constant flow of information to achieve organisational and individual goals. In addition, the information function assists the organisation in sourcing information about the organisation itself to identify issues that can be addressed accordingly. On the other hand, information is also sourced from the environment to prepare the organisation to adapt to change (Steinberg, 1995:164). Robbins (2003:284) concurs with Steinberg (1995) and adds that communication facilitates decision making by providing information that individuals and groups need to make decisions by transmitting the data to identify and evaluate alternative choices.

- **The control function**

This function acts to control the behaviour of employees in several ways. Organisations have authority hierarchies, reporting lines, manuals, formal policies, procedures, guidelines, and processes that employees are required to follow (Robbins, 2003:284). Steinberg (1995) refers to this role as a regulatory function, however, his explanation is similar to that alluded to by Robbins regarding the control function. As a regulatory function, Steinberg (1995:164) asserts that communication controls and coordinates the activities of the organisation to ensure its successful operation. In addition, the author reasons that regulatory messages are work-oriented and aimed at informing employees about restrictions that are placed on their behaviour.

- **The motivation function**

This function fosters motivation by clarifying what is expected from employees, how well they are doing and what can be done to improve performance if it is not up to standard. The

formation of specific goals, feedback on progress toward the goals, and reinforcement of desired behaviour all stimulate motivation and require communication (Robbins, 2003:284).

Steinberg (1995:165) mentions another function, which could also be associated with the behavioural trait of the abovementioned motivation function. According to the author, communication also fulfils a persuasive function that can be used by both managers and employees to achieve a desired effect. Steinberg (1995:165) states that many successful managers realise that voluntary compliance on the part of employees often leads to more involvement than enforced compliance. Similarly, employees may use persuasion when, for instance, requesting an increase in salary.

- **The emotional expression function**

The emotional expression function often occurs within the social interaction of groups or employees and refers to the communication that takes place within the group by which members show their frustrations or feelings of satisfaction. In this context, therefore, communication provides a release for the emotional expression of feelings and for fulfilment of social needs.

In addition to the abovementioned four major functions of communication, Steinberg (1995:165) adds a fifth function of communication and points out that communication also fulfils an integrative function.

- **The integrative function**

This function is concerned largely with creating identity and uniformity in the organisation, thereby achieving organisational unity and cohesion. The greatest benefit of this function is that it saves time and wasted effort. For example, two departments who coordinate their activities to achieve a specific goal will be more successful compared to when they function separately without coordination (Steinberg, 1995:165).

2.4.2 Flow of information in the organisation

Literature recognises that communication is a continuous, dynamic and interrelated process that involves seven main elements as discussed and illustrated in section 2.4. Effective communication serves a purpose or fulfils a combination of functions (see section 2.4.1 above). Another significant facet in the communication process within an organisation is the flow of information or direction of communication.

The flow of information refers to a communication system or to the direction in which messages pass through in the organisation. Information is distributed throughout an organisation in a hierarchical structure. The hierarchical structure of an organisation is often depicted in an organisational chart. An organisational chart or organogram shows the status of different members of an organisation and the relationship among them. Within an organisation information flows formally in vertical (upward or downward) and lateral (horizontal) directions as well as informally along the grapevine (Adey & Andrew, 1990:69).

It is important to note that the different organisational structures, for example a centralised, decentralised or matrix structure will dictate and determine the pattern(s) of the flow of information within an organisation. For example, in comparison to a matrix organisational structure, a centralised organisation will portray more vertical communication whereas a matrix structure is flatter and therefore, will possess a combination of vertical, lateral, and diagonal patterns of the flow of information.

Another important aspect to take note of is that the hierarchical levels in an organisation affect the interpersonal relations of employees and control the channels of communication within the organisation. The hierarchy also controls the frequency and quality of daily interactions among people.

The discussion in this section will focus on the vertical (downward, upward), lateral and diagonal flow of information within an organisation. In addition, the communication networks will be discussed to identify and illustrate the connecting lines of communication within an organisation.

2.4.2.1 Downward communication

This communication from top to bottom goes down on various levels of the line structure from superior to subordinate and is used:

- for giving instructions;
- for providing information about the policies of the organisation;
- for providing information about the procedures of the organisation;
- for providing performance appraisals to subordinates; and
- for explaining the relationship of a specific task to the overall objectives of the organisation (Adey & Andrew, 1990:85).

Andrews and Baird (1992:62) agree with Adey and Andrew (1990) and explain that through downward communication, organisations direct the activities of employees, instruct them in proper behaviours and work methods, persuade them to adopt certain attitudes and ideas, evaluate their performance on the job, solicit upward communication, and provide entertainment.

More common types of downward communication include employee handbooks, job descriptions, work rules and work procedures or protocols, bulletin boards, letters and memoranda, external media, employment interviews, performance appraisals, disciplinary interviews, departmental meetings, committee meetings, new employee orientation programmes, mass meetings and video presentations (Andrews & Baird, 1992:66). According to Robbins (2003:285) the downward communication pattern is the most common pattern associated with communication between managers and employees because managers use it to assign goals, provide job instructions, inform employees of policies and procedures, point out problems that need attention and offer feedback about performance.

Adey and Andrew (1990:85) clearly indicate that downward communication possesses some disadvantages when they argue that it is essentially authoritative, and that too much of downward communication with little upward communication will affect employees' morale negatively. The authors also point out that if the communication is oral and the line of communication is long, the message will be filtered and distorted. In order to overcome this distortion, there must be opportunities for response from below in the form of upward communication.

Andrew and Baird (1992:69) add the following limitations of downward communication. First, the authors claim that communication is often not received. Second, downward communication occurs too frequently. Third, the authors argue that it is common for downward communication to bypass some organisational level through distortion or filtering. Fourth, downward communication may fail because it does not meet the evolving characteristics of the organisation. The authors maintain that effective downward communication is best achieved through careful and strategic combination of oral and written messages; however, downward communication does not have to be limited to oral or face-to-face contact.

2.4.2.2 Upward communication

Communication flowing from subordinates to superiors constitutes upward communication and such communication is vital to the success of an organisation (Andrews & Baird, 1992:70). The authors note that types of upward communication include letters columns, employee opinion, surveys, letters and memoranda, suggestion boxes and systems, open door policies, employee counsellors, telephone hotlines, departmental meetings, formal grievance procedures, advisory committees, quality circles and other participative problem-solving groups and public presentations. Adey and Andrew (1990:86) add the fact that non-verbal communication can also play a significant role in upward communication. Because subordinates are often reluctant or ill-equipped to communicate freely with their superiors, non-verbal messages can often be more illuminating than oral or written messages.

The main purpose of upward communication is to allow the upper levels of the hierarchical structure to know what is happening at the lower levels (Adey & Andrew, 1990:86). Robbins (2003:286) concurs with the authors when he states that upward communication is used to provide feedback to superiors, inform them of progress towards goals and relay current problems. Robbins (2003:286) adds that upward communication keeps managers aware of how employees feel about their jobs, co-workers, and the organisation in general. Managers also rely on upward communication for ideas on how things can be improved. However, Adey and Andrew (1990:86) argue that in organisations, there is usually not enough upward communication. Similar to downward communication, upward communication is not exempt from limitations and has its share of problems in organisations. Andrews and Baird (1992:75) argue that first upward communication is subject to substantial distortion. Second, some members of the organisation actively discourage upward communication. Third, upward communication can be intimidating to some employees and to management.

2.4.2.3 Lateral communication

Lateral communication describes communication between two employees on the same hierarchical level or the same status. It may take the form of work-related messages, or may provide social interaction (Steinberg, 1995:161). Robbins (2003:286) concurs with Steinberg (1995) and adds that lateral communication also includes communication among members of the same work group, members of work groups at the same level, managers at the same level or among any horizontally equivalent employees. The channels used for lateral communication are similar to those used for downward and upward communication (Steinberg, 1995:161).

According to Adey and Andrew (1990:86) lateral communication is very useful in co-ordinating and problem-solving and averts wasteful communication with a common superior who then has to communicate with each of the people on the same level but in different departments. In addition, the authors mention that lateral communication serves the further purpose of allowing peers to form good working and social relationships and thereby foster good teamwork.

The authors argue that, from a manager's viewpoint, lateral communication can be good or bad. Andrews and Baird (1992:76) contend that since strict adherence to the formal vertical structure for all communications can impede the efficient and accurate transfer of information, lateral communication can be beneficial. In such cases, the authors point out that lateral communication occurs with the knowledge and support of superiors. However, the authors are also of the opinion that lateral communication can create dysfunctional conflicts. This can happen when the formal vertical channels are breached when members go above or around their superiors to get things done, or when bosses find out that actions have been taken or decisions have been made without their knowledge. Furthermore, Adey and Andrew (1990:87) argue that another negative drawback is that people on the same hierarchical level could use lateral or horizontal communication to gang up on their common superior or superiors and form a power-block to defeat the wishes of top management.

2.4.2.4 Diagonal communication

Adey and Andrew (1990:87) refer to communication between members who are not on the same hierarchical level as diagonal communication. According to the authors, this communication is particularly common with line and staff departments and with projects when people on different levels of authority in different departments have the expertise needed for the successful outcome of a project. This may mean that those in higher positions have to liaise and work together with those in positions hierarchically lower, and sometimes those in higher positions have to submit to the expert knowledge of inferiors (Adey & Andrew, 1990:87). The authors point out that one of the problems of diagonal communication is that the immediate line superior may feel left out or may consider that his authority is being snubbed in some way. This negative aspect may result in diagonal communication being potentially explosive unless, as Adey and Andrew (1990) reason, employees are tactful and committed to the overall objectives of a project or the organisation.

2.4.3 Communication networks

In this section a summary of communication networks and an illustration of the three most common small group networks is provided, as these are relevant to the theoretical perspective of the communication process discussed in section 2.4 and also applicable to this study.

Fielding (1997:47) defines networks as the interconnecting lines of communication used to pass information from one person to another. Steinberg (1995:140) emphasises that networks represent recurring patterns of communication, or simply stated, who talks to whom in a group. Within the context of organisations, including universities, communication networks point out where information comes from (central figures) and to whom it flows in the communication process (Steinberg, 1995:40). According to Adey and Andrew (1990:57-60) the different kinds of communication networks include the single strand, the probability chain, the chain, the cluster chain, the circle, the Y structure, the wheel or star and the open channel. Robbins (2003:290) argues that lines of communication used within organisations to pass information from one person to another have a propensity to depict the chain, wheel, and all channel networks. He refers to the three networks as illustrated in figure 2.4.3 below as the three most common small-group networks.

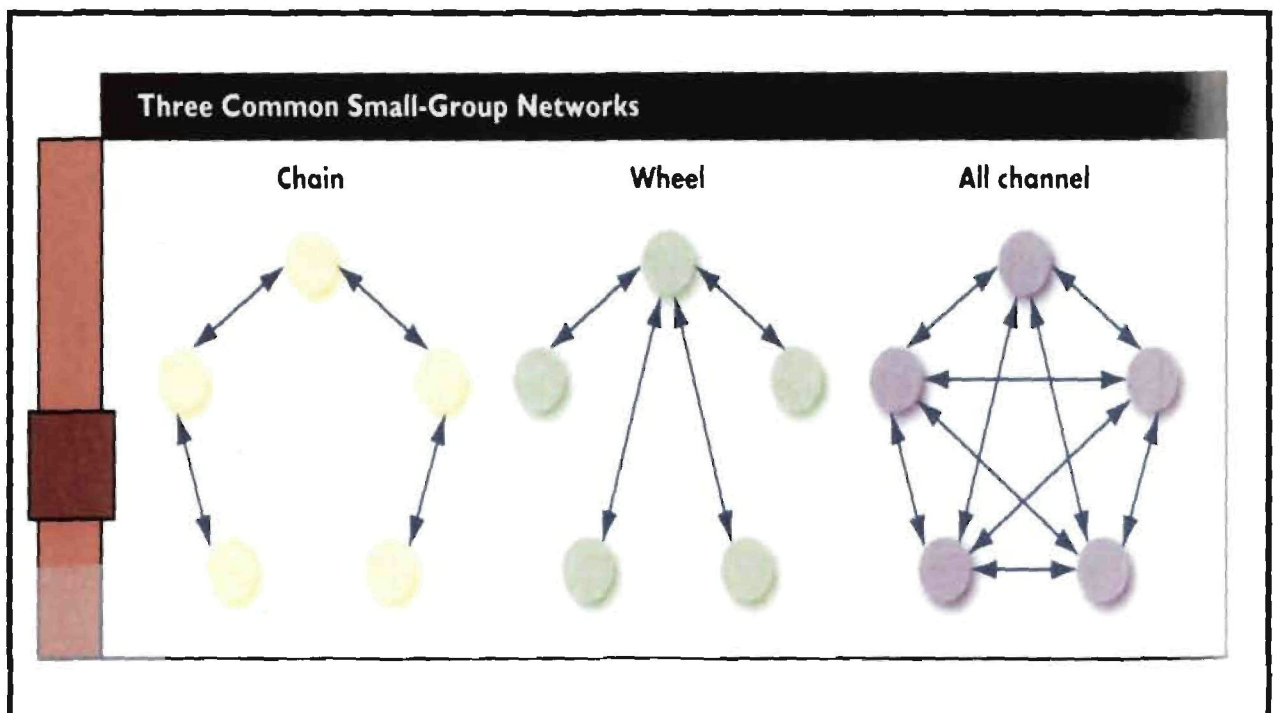


Figure 2.4.3: Three common small-group networks.

Source: Robbins (2003).

Robbins (2003:290) explains that the chain rigidly follows the formal chain of command. This network approximates the communication channels you might find in a rigid and centralised three-level organisation. The wheel relies on a central figure to act as the conduit for the entire group's communication. It stimulates the communication network you would find on a team with a strong leader. This network is prominent in organisations with a structure that possesses both centralised and decentralised attributes. The all channel network permits all group members to actively communicate with each other. The all-channel network is most often characterised in practice by self-managed teams, where all group members are free to contribute and no one person takes on a leadership role. This network can be found in organisations with decentralised characteristics or a matrix structure with cross functional and collaboration teams.

According to Steinberg (1995:40), the two main types of communication networks are centralised and decentralised networks. In centralised networks, the person who communicates with most other members is the central figure. Whereas, in decentralised networks everyone has an equal opportunity to communicate with other members in the organisation. Comparing the views of Adey and Andrew (1990) with that of Robbins (2003), it is evident that the centralised and decentralised networks possess their own advantages and disadvantages. For example, Adey and Andrew (1990:60) mention that centralised networks often cause dissatisfaction among members because they resent the control of the central figure. However, in the decentralised network, there is no dominant figure and members appreciate that everyone has an equal say. In addition, the authors point out that the best network could also be determined by whether the message is simple or complex and on whether the purpose of communication is task performance or member-satisfaction.

Theoretically, it can be concluded that there is no communication network, which can describe categorically the interpersonal communication that occurs between a manager and his or her subordinates. In some instances when a manager communicates with subordinates, the interconnecting lines of communication used to pass information from the manager to an employee and vice-versa may depict the single strand or chain networks. Whereas, in other cases when a manager addresses two or more subordinates in the form of a small-group meeting, the lines of communication may resemble the wheel, circle or open channel networks. Therefore, it is important for the manager to understand the advantages and disadvantages associated with the various communication networks in order to choose the most appropriate network for the message and purpose.

The foregoing discussion and argument focuses on formal communication networks within an organisation. It is important to point out that the grapevine is also considered a notable communication network, even though it is informal in character. The grapevine is simply described as an informal channel through which factual and non-factual information about an organisation's activities and its people flows in any direction within an organisation (Robbins, 2003; Steinberg, 1995). Steinberg (1995:162) argues that a dysfunctional aspect of the grapevine is that it fosters and spreads rumours. Because rumours lack substantiated facts, it may be damaging when circulated and possibly acted upon.

This argument is supported by Robbins (2003:290), however, he adds the fact that in spite of this, *in most organisations the grapevine is still considered by both management and employees to be the most readily accessible and reliable source of information*. Robbins (2003:290) refers to a survey that found that 75 percent of employees hear about matters first through rumours on the grapevine. The author notes that the grapevine has three characteristics, namely, (i) it is not controlled by management; (ii) it is perceived by most employees as being more believable and reliable than formal communiqués issued by top management; and (iii) it is largely used to serve the self-interests of the people within it.

The preceding argument clearly indicates that the grapevine is an important part of any group or organisation's communication network as described by Robbins (2003) and that managers should make a concerted effort to understand the grapevine. The grapevine identifies for managers the confusing issues that employees consider important and that create anxiety. It acts, therefore, as both a filter and a feedback mechanism, picking up the issues that employees consider relevant. Management cannot entirely eliminate rumours. Management can minimise the negative consequences of rumours by limiting their range and impact (Robbins, 2003:290).

2.5 Categorisation of internal communication

The various categories of internal communication are important to understand in order to be able to identify the relevant category of internal communication within which this study is embedded. Erikson (1992) in Sliburyte (2004:190-191) identifies five categories of internal communication, namely, work, news, manage, change and culture communication.

The author describes these five different concepts that can be used to separate content of information as follows:

- **Work communication:** communication necessary for each co-worker in order to pursue his or her daily work. This communication involves for example an agenda for a meeting. The majority of the oral communication concerns practical issues that continuously emerge.
- **News communication:** information about the latest issues in the organisation, which enables the employees to perform more efficiently from a long-term perspective. This dialogue usually occurs via personnel magazines, internal radio, department meetings, or other regular channels.
- **Manage communication:** this communication guides the business towards the stated goals, long-term plans and short-term measures. Such communication contains budget issues, company policies, and memos that regulate the business. Manage communication further includes manuals for production, quality regulations and working environment regulations.
- **Change communication:** an organisation often needs to separate the dialogue that concerns the regular business from the unexpected. Change communication is based on particular incidents, within the company or the world around it, which occurs beyond the normal news flow. Information about altered business goals, visions, and strategies are such examples.
- **Culture communication:** includes facts that touch the company values, its ethics, and attitudes towards people are not always obvious. These issues are more or less invisible in the internal communication. However, they appear in the Chief Executive Officer's comments for a new-business deal or an accident. For example, culture communication further involves attitudes towards leadership, equality matters, environmental questions, and company responsibilities in general.

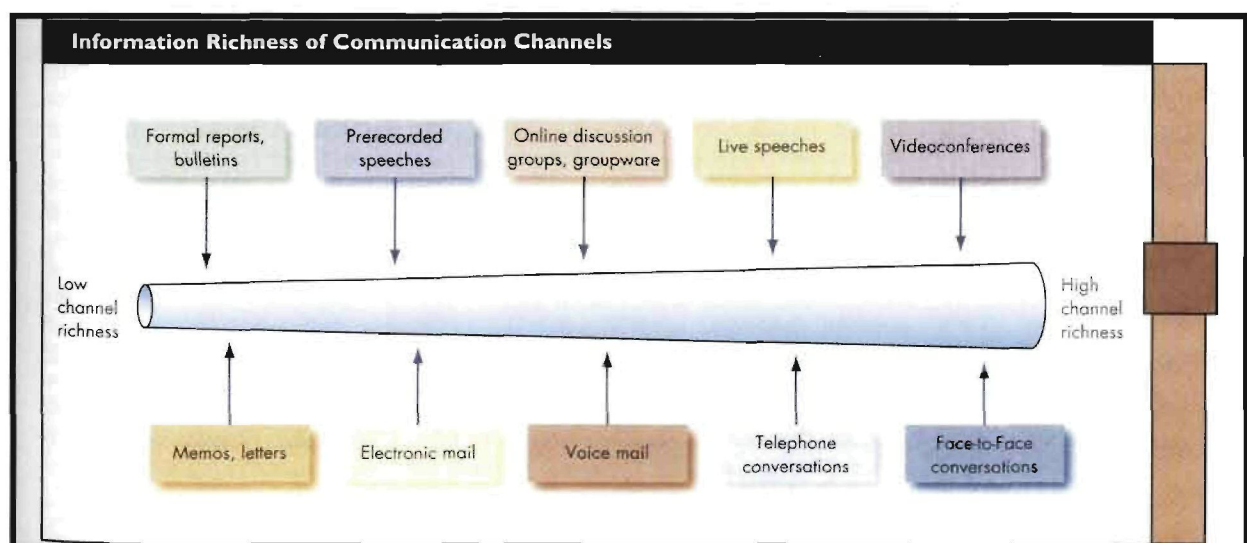
Based on Erikson's (1992) categorisation of internal communication it is evident that, within the context of this study, managers at North-West University fulfil communication responsibilities in varying quantities in four of the five categories, namely, the work, manage, change and culture categories of communication. However, this study is focussing specifically on the role of senior managers at the North-West University in fulfilling communication responsibilities, within the work and manage communication categories.

2.6 Formal and informal communication channels

Communication channels are a vital component of the communication process as they constitute a route or medium through which information or a message is conveyed. Literature indicates that there are different communication channels and the effectiveness of the different communication channels in delivering messages differs (Ewing 2007; Robbins, 2003; Sliburyte, 2004; Steinberg, 1995).

Because of research findings confirming that channels differ in their capacity to effectively convey information, Robbins (2003) has developed a model of information richness of communication channels (see figure 2.6) to explain channel selection among managers. Robbins' model of information richness of communication channels declares that some communication channels are rich in that they have the ability to, (i) handle multiple cues simultaneously; (ii) facilitate rapid feedback; and (iii) be very personal. Whereas, other communication channels are lean in that they score low on these three factors.

Figure 2.6: Information richness of communication channels.



Source: Robbins (2003).

The information richness of communication channels model illustrated above, asserts that face-to-face conversation scores highest in terms of channel richness because it provides for the maximum amount of information to be transmitted during a communication interface. This information also includes other important factors such as posture, facial expression, gestures, intonations, immediate feedback (both verbal and nonverbal), and the personal

touch of being present. Impersonal written media such as formal reports and bulletins rate lowest in richness. According to Robbins (2003:295) the choice of one channel over another depends on whether the message is routine or non-routine. The author points out that routine messages tend to be straightforward and have a minimum amount of ambiguity. On the other hand, non-routine messages are likely to be complicated and have the potential for misunderstandings.

Managers can communicate routine messages efficiently through channels that are lower in richness such as memos, letters, and electronic mail. However, they can communicate non-routine messages effectively only by selecting rich channels, for example face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations, small-group meetings, or videoconferences (Robbins, 2003:295).

Ewing (2007:13) is of the opinion that managers should be knowledgeable about the different communication channels and their effectiveness in order to be able to identify and utilise appropriate channels in achieving the University's and communication goals. This view is supported by Robbins (2003:295) who provides evidence that effective managers are better able to match appropriate media richness with the ambiguity involved in the communication. The author states that the model of information richness of communication channels is consistent with organisational trends and practices during the past decade. More managers that are senior have been using meetings to facilitate communication and regularly leaving the isolated sanctuary of their offices to manage by walking around. These executives are relying on richer channels of communication to transmit the more ambiguous messages they need to convey.

The most effective managers are expanding their use of information rich communication channels (Robbins, 2003:295). This viewpoint is supported by Wood (1999) in Sliburyte (2004:194) who declares face-to-face communication to be the most effective channel, as it allows for immediate interaction. The author reasons that pursuing a dialogue is not only a system for recording and exchanging practical and useful information, but it also represents a major vehicle for expressing feelings and emotions. The author also points out that there is a downside to this communication channel and that is it tends to be rather time-consuming and resource demanding. In addition, some information may be difficult to present orally, as it contains a large amount of numbers or figures.

Erikson (1992) in Sliburyte (2004:197) adds the fact that to achieve the required effectiveness, a suitable combination of different types of communication channels must be

chosen. A mixture of oral, written, and electronic channels that complement each other to give management a possibility to heighten the knowledge of the employees, and at the same time allow them to speak their mind must be utilised. For example, written communication followed by an open meeting can provide communication efficiency and effectiveness. Erickson (1992) in Sliburyte (2004:197) further adds time as an important factor when selecting communication channels. This view is supported by Quirke (2008:279) who refers to a study of Fortune 1000 workers that found that the average manager in companies studied were sending and receiving 178 documents a day through a variety of media. The study reported that 69 percent of Fortune 1000 companies do not have a communications policy to guide and support their employees' ability to make decisions about communication tools. However, Quirke (2008) adds that some organisations provide a simple guide to channels, others provide toolkits that provide greater detail on when to use which channel, its strengths, and weaknesses, and who to contact for advice.

According to Steinberg (1995:159) channels of information in an organisation can be described as direct or formal and indirect or informal channels. Formal channels are the official channels through which communication is exchanged and include face-to-face conversation, interviews, training programmes, letters, memoranda, and oral reports.

Another form of a formal communication channel is the manager or supervisor who is described by Sliburyte (2004:195) as 'the natural communication channel' concerning information about employees' work assignments. According to Wood (1999) in Sliburyte (2004:195), research on methods of communication indicates the immediate supervisor as a major source of information and that the communication from senior management was highly regarded among the employees. However, the author points out that as the organisational structure is changing in terms of decentralisation, the manager's role as communicator is altered. The author argues that this indicates a need for managers to understand the importance of internal communication since managers constitute the link that brings the organisation's units together, therefore, the efficiency of their communication is dependent on how well they understand and perform it.

A meeting is another form of a formal communication channel and Hogstrom, Bark, Bernstrup, Heise and Skoop (1999) in Sliburyte (2004:194) argue that a meeting is the most effective direct communication channel because it involves vast knowledge, experiences, ideas and thoughts that exist in a group of people, especially if the group is diverse. A disadvantage of this channel is that it is not always easy to make the employees participate

in meetings. Depending on how the meeting is named it will create a certain reaction among the co-workers (Hogstrom *et al.* in Sliburyte, 2004).

Information is also exchanged unofficially or informally during, for example, conversations among employees or through the grapevine. Such information may be work-related or may be concerned with social and personal matters (Steinberg, 1995:159).

In addition to formal and informal communication channels, communication in today's organisations is enhanced and enriched by computer-aided technologies (Robbins, 2003: 292). These include electronic mail, intranet, text messages, internet links, blogs, and videoconferencing. According to Robbins (2003:294) electronic mail has dramatically reduced the number of memos, letters, and phone calls that employees historically used to communicate among themselves and with suppliers, customers, or other outside stakeholders.

It is evident as pointed out by Robbins (2003:294) that computer-aided communications are reshaping communication in organisations. It is no longer necessary for employees to be at their workstation or desk to be available. Organisational boundaries become less relevant because of computer-aided communications. Networked computers allow employees to jump vertical levels within the organisation, work full time at home or someplace other than an organisationally operated facility, and conduct ongoing communications with people in other organisations (Robbins, 2003:294).

In spite of the convenience, efficiency and cost-effective advantages associated with computer-aided communication channels, effective two-way communication and human presence by managers is still essential to accomplish understanding, positive attitude, and behaviour among employees towards an organisation and its objectives and values.

2.7 Interpersonal communication

Within the context of this study, the importance of interpersonal communication or face-to-face communication in the day-to-day interaction and exchange of information between a manager and his or her subordinates is highlighted by communication scholars, practitioners and research findings (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Caldeira, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Robbins, 2003; Shaffer, 2009; Thatcher, 2005).

In fact, the definition of interpersonal communication provided in section 1.2.6 of chapter 1 underlines the notion that the primary communication between a manager and his or her subordinates is conducted predominantly in the form of interpersonal communication.

According to Robbins (2003:286) interpersonal communication refers to the transfer of meaning between two people through oral, written, and non-verbal communication. This section describes the forms of interpersonal communication and briefly cites some examples as identified by Robbins (2003).

- **Oral communication:** The chief means of conveying messages in interpersonal communication is oral communication. Speeches, formal one-on-one and group discussions, and the grapevine are popular forms of oral communication. The advantages of oral communication are speed and feedback. A verbal message can be conveyed and a response received in a minimal amount of time. If the receiver is unsure of the message, rapid feedback allows for early detection by the sender and, hence, allows for early correction. Robbins (2003:286) argues that the major disadvantage of oral communication surfaces whenever the message has to be passed through a number of people. The more people a message must pass through, the greater the potential of distortion. In an organisation, where decisions and other communiqués are verbally passed up and down the authority hierarchy, there are considerable opportunities for messages to become distorted (Robbins, 2003:286).
- **Written communication:** written communication include memos, letters, electronic mail, fax transmissions, organisational periodicals, notices placed on the bulletin boards, or any other device that is transmitted via written words or symbols. Robbins (2003:286) reasons that written communication is tangible and verifiable. Both the sender and receiver have a record of the communication. The message can be stored for an indefinite period. Another benefit of written communication comes from the process itself. Written communications is more likely to be well thought out, logical and clear, however, written communication is time consuming. Another disadvantage is feedback or a lack of feedback. The sending of a written communication is no assurance it has been received, and, if received, there is no guarantee the recipient will interpret it as the sender intended (Robbins, 2003:287).

- **Nonverbal communication:** according to Robbins (2003:288), every time a message is given verbally to someone, a nonverbal message is also imparted. No discussion of communication would be complete without the consideration of nonverbal communication, which includes body movements, the intonations or emphasis given to words, facial expressions, and the physical distance between the sender and receiver. The author argues that every body movement has a meaning, no movement is accidental, and messages are rarely conveyed consciously. The two most important messages that body language convey are, (i) the extent of which an individual likes another and is interested in his or her views; and (ii) the relative perceived status between a sender and receiver.

Body language adds to and often complicates verbal communication. A body position or movement does not by itself have a precise or universal meaning, but when it is linked with spoken language, it gives fuller meaning to a sender's message. Robbins (2003:287) asserts that it is important for the receiver to be alert to nonverbal aspects of communication and look for nonverbal cues as well as listen to the literal meaning of a sender's words.

Literature indicates that traditionally the internal communication function focuses on communication channels, which are discussed in section 2.6 of this chapter. According to Naudé (2009:18), research reveals that communication channels contribute only 10 percent to internal communication effectiveness.

It is therefore comprehensible that interpersonal communication, particularly in the form of verbal or face-to-face communication, contributes significantly to internal communication effectiveness, building trust and enhancing relationships between managers and subordinates. This point of view highlights that the interpersonal communication skills are a critical facet of core communication skills of managers, however, research indicates that these skills are those that are most lacking in managers (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Caldeira, 2009; Thatcher, 2005). Additionally, research indicates that a correlation exists between effective interpersonal communication skills and enhanced employee commitment to the organisation (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008).

The observation above signals a major shift from the original role of internal communication, which focuses on communication channels towards an emerging need to accentuate the critical role of interpersonal communication in enhancing internal communication effectiveness within an organisation. In addition, this also emphasises a need for managers

to possess interpersonal communication understanding and skills in order to enable them to fulfil their communication role. The role of managers in this regard will be explained more thoroughly in section 2.12 of this chapter.

2.8 Effective communication in a changing environment

According to Sliburyte (2004:198) to achieve effective internal communication, it is vital to know what kind of information is to be communicated. Knowledge of the kind of information is vital when deciding to whom the information is relevant, and what channel is suitable for such information.

Erikson (1992) in Sliburyte (2004:190) who suggests keeping the information concentrated, as focusing on issues that are essential for the receiver will simplify matters, supports this view. Sliburyte (2004:198) also states that it is vital to secure a mutual commitment where both sender and receiver are involved throughout the information exchange. In order to make internal communication effective throughout the organisation, management must articulate clear directions that support every aspect that comes with such effectiveness, and teach all employees how to take charge of such means (Sliburyte, 2008:198).

Engquis (1994) in Sliburyte (2004:191) is of the opinion that the outcome of effective communication depends on several factors, such as culture, physical work environment, communication systems, processes and regulation systems. He further claims no conversations to be alike, as different people possess separate knowledge, qualities, thus realising that the combinations of external circumstances and human qualities are eternal.

Consistent, coordinated, and coherent communication also contributes towards achieving communication effectiveness. Erikson (1992) in Sliburyte (2004:190) argues that it is not rare that two managers choose to present a message to employees in two separate ways. He claims that this will not result in effective communication, rather confusion among the employees as they discuss the conflicting messages with each other. An important aspect, therefore, is to formulate a unitary picture of what the message is, he explains, which will make it coordinated and consequent over time.

Another contributor to communication effectiveness is unambiguous non-verbal communication such as vocal intonation and body language particularly when communicating face-to-face. In addition, the information must be conveyed in a manner that strives to create a dialogue. If the receiver does not invite for the further exchange of ideas,

Erikson (1992) in Sliburyte (2004:190) argues, effective communication cannot be achieved. In addition, he points out that pursuing communication on a continuous basis is crucial when creating credibility among the employees and sustaining effective communication.

2.9 Challenges and concerns in sustaining effective internal communication

Although effective communication is regarded as the 'lifeblood of organisations', a significant number of literature describe communication as extremely important, but difficult to address in any systematic way (Johnson, 2004; Sliburyte, 2004; Van Ruler & De Lange, 2003). This poses a number of challenges and concerns in sustaining effective internal communication in institutions, including the North-West University.

One of the main reasons for complications in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication is because the complexities of organisational life make miscommunication and misunderstandings inevitable, which may occur at all levels and all areas of an organisation according to Eisenberg and Phillips (1991) in Sliburyte (2004:192).

Another reason is that since the conceptualisation and establishment of organisations, barriers to communication such as noise, differing perceptions, cultural backgrounds, languages, inconsistencies in communication, differences in status, distrust, behavioural and attitudinal factors such as apathy, resistance to change are common, prevailing and perpetual factors within organisations. Sliburyte (2004:192) argues that using face-to-face communication, being sensitive to the other people's background, using direct unambiguous language and frequent repetitions, being supportive to counteract defensiveness and being a good listener can assist managers to ameliorate barriers to effective communication.

In addition, poor communication is the cause of concern in most organisations because it is frequently cited as a source of interpersonal conflict. On the other hand, over the last 10 years a number of studies have shown as pointed out by Quirke (2008:298) a growing problem with information overload. According to the author in 2000, a survey by the Institute of Management linked email to workplace stress in general. Another study of Fortune 1000 workers found that corporate staff are inundated with so many communication tools such as email, teleconferencing, video-conferencing, postal mail and voicemail that they don't know which to use for which task. This challenge, once again, draws attention to the fact that in many organisations internal communication is managed in an unstructured and uncoordinated manner and this undermines the effectiveness of communication and strategic value it can add in enhancing organisational effectiveness.

Furthermore, the fundamental role of managers in facilitating effective internal communication is often misunderstood, overlooked or undermined by many managers and organisations. This is often caused by managers lacking the theoretical knowledge of the internal communication function and the basic communication skills needed to enable them to communicate effectively. This facet, which forms part of the research objective of this study, will be discussed further in section 2.12 of this chapter.

2.10 The concept of leadership communication

Since the focus of this study is set mainly within communication between managers and their subordinates it can be affirmed, as already pointed out, that the inherent and proper component of this study is rooted in interpersonal communication (see section 2.5) and managerial communication. For this reason, the concept of leadership communication, which encompasses managerial communication and management communication skills, is applicable and relevant to this study.

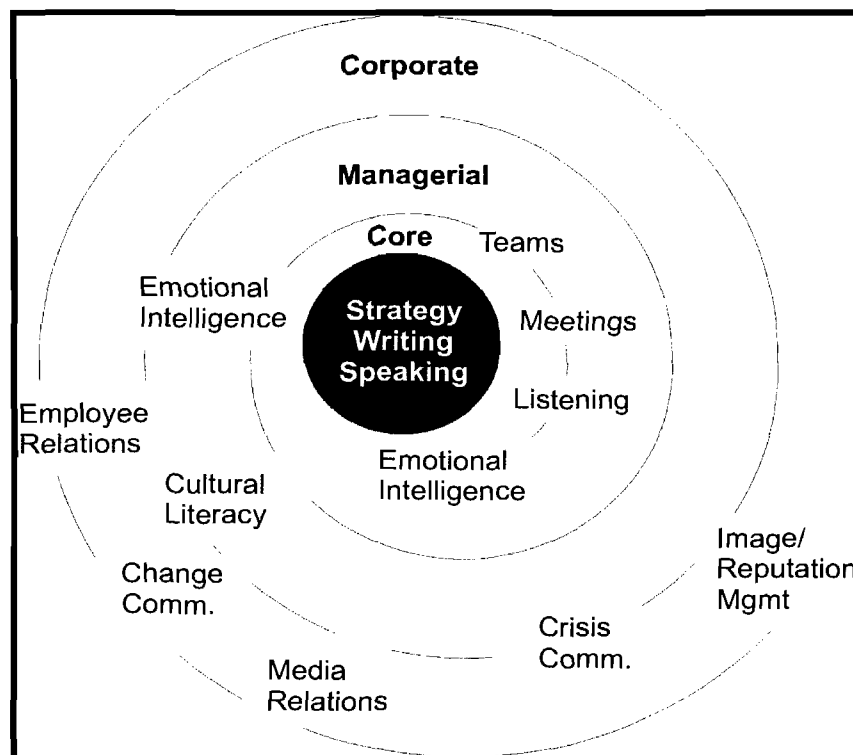
According to Barrett (2008:2), various studies of how much time managers spend on various activities show that communication occupies 70 to 90 percent of their time everyday. This amount of time managers spend communicating underscores how important strong communication skills can be for the manager (Barrett, 2008). Madlock (2008:64) concurs with Barrett (2008) when he points out that effective leadership depends on effective communication and it is through effective communication that leaders guide, direct, motivate and inspire. Good communication skills enable, foster, and create the understanding and trust necessary to encourage others to follow a leader (Madlock, 2008:64). The author adds that being able to communicate effectively, make sound decisions and get things done with and through people is what allows a manager to move into a leadership position.

2.11 The interdependence between leadership communication and managerial communication

According to Barrett (2008:5), leadership communication consists of three primary layers as illustrated in figure 2.11. The first layer entails core communication skills, which develop into the second layer comprising managerial communication skills, and then expands further to the third layer that includes the corporate communication capabilities included in the broader corporate communication setting. Barrett (2008:8) explains that as the manager's perspective and control expand, he or she will need to improve the core communication skills to become effective in the larger, more complex organisational situations.

The model emphasises the fact that all effective communications depend on the core, individual skills at the center of the spiral. In addition, the model points out that the process which leads to a manager becoming a leader and then possessing the corporate communication skills needed to interact successfully with internal and external audiences is indicative of the development and growth acquired through experience, training and mastering the core communication skills.

Figure 2.11: The leadership communication framework.



Source: Barrett (2008).

An interpretation of the leadership communication framework model within the context of this study could illustrate the dissimilar but interrelated communication roles of the various levels of managers within an organisation. In other words, an analysis of figure 2.11 could mean that the executive or senior leadership's communication role (at the corporate level) is to formulate strategic plans and to communicate key strategic messages about an organisation to ensure that the external perceptions or expectations are aligned with the strategy of the organisation. The middle management's primary communication role (at the managerial level) is focused on creating and articulating operational plans aligned with the organisation's strategy to ensure that stakeholders' perceptions or needs are addressed. The line

managers' communication role (at the core level) is to mobilise their subordinates or teams to deliver on the action plans and thereby achieve an organisation's strategic goals. It is important to point out that the three levels are interrelated and mutually supporting particularly in the fulfillment of the managerial and effective internal communication responsibilities.

The foregoing interpretation of the leadership communication framework model indicates that communication forms an important part of both managerial and leadership competencies. Furthermore, the model acknowledges that managerial communication is a basic requirement for fulfilling the central managerial responsibility of strategic alignment. However, this basic function is often misunderstood, or ignored, by many managers.

Caldeira (2009:4) asserts that very few organisations can claim that effective internal communication is "practiced by the Chief Executive Officer, driven by executive management and embraced by middle and line management". According to the communication specialist, the power of the manager in connecting employees to the role they play in achieving the organisation's strategic goals through effective communication, should be understood and supported by everyone in the organisation.

However, Caldeira (2009:3) adds the fact that the level of understanding regarding the fundamental communication role of managers within organisations differs. Some organisations have a vague sense of it, others have heard the statistics, others think it sounds sensible, other organisations are busy doing the research and very few are advocates of managerial communication (Caldeira, 2009:2).

This draws attention, once again, to the need to address the role of managers in internal communication and managing the internal communication process in a structured method. In addition, it signals a need to implement a system or a framework as part of the management of the internal communication process aimed at assisting managers to disseminate relevant, credible and continuous information about an organisation to employees in a structured, consistent and systematic manner.

2.12 The role of the manager as the key connection in facilitating effective internal communication with employees

Management and communication scholars describe the basic functions of a manager, in all types of organisations and at all levels, as to inform, plan, organise, direct, motivate, control and engage their subordinates and teams (Robbins, 2003; Sliburyte, 2004; Thatcher, 2005).

Bednar (1982:51) supports this explanation and refers to Koontz and O'Donnell's (1974) definition of the task of a manager as "the achievement of harmony of individual effort towards the accomplishment of group goals". The authors argue that each of the basic managerial functions of informing, planning, organising, motivating and controlling is an exercise in coordination designed to accomplish synchronized effort of subordinates.

The central role of coordination in "managing" is emphasised by Katz and Kahn (1978) in Bednar (1982:51) in their explication of the three principal functions of the managerial subsystem in any organisation, namely, (i) the coordination of substructures; (ii) the resolution of conflicts between hierarchical levels; and (iii) the coordination of external requirements with organisational resources and needs.

Literature considers coordination to be the very essence of "managing" and there is much evidence to suggest that coordination is achieved through communication (Bednar, 1982). This view is supported by Barnard (1938) in Bednar (1982:51) who states that the "first function of the executive in an organisation is to develop and maintain a system of communication". Appley (1963) in Bednar (1982:51) argues that "communication is the way management gets its job done." In addition, Koontz and O'Donnell (1974) in Bednar (1982:51) declare "it is no exaggeration that communication is the means by which organised activity is unified".

The abovementioned argument highlights the crucial and inherent function of communication in enabling managers to perform their tasks and fulfill their managerial responsibilities. Therefore, it can be declared as acknowledged by Singleton (2009:7), and elucidated further in section 1.2.6 of chapter 1, that employees always prefer to get important information about the institution they work for from their direct supervisor or manager, particularly if the information sharing happens in an environment where the group feels safe to ask questions, to raise concerns and to offer opinions.

Tourish and Hargie (1998:53) add the fact that the important role of managers as the key link in facilitating effective internal communication with employees is widely recognised to contribute significantly in the success of individual performance in organisations. Organisations are increasingly coming to the realisation that sound internal communications are central to their overall efficiency and effectiveness (Hamilton-Attwell, 2009; Singleton, 2009; Tourish and Hargie, 1998).

For example, Hanson (1986) in Tourish and Hargie (1998:53) found that the presence of good interpersonal relationships between managers and staff was three times more powerful in predicting organizational profitability. Tourish and Hargie (1998:53) refer to another recent study by Pettit, Goris and Vaught (1997). The study established that proper, correct and clear information is positively connected to job satisfaction and productivity. The correlation between effective internal communication, positive individual performance and organisational profitability will be discussed in the next chapter (see section 3.2.3) because literature has revealed that it forms part of outcomes of successful employee engagement.

The abovementioned discussion clearly indicates that the manager's role in line managerial communication is to inform, motivate, control and engage as stated by Thatcher (2005:2). On the other hand, employees expect feedback on performance, involvement in decisions and recognition for contributions.

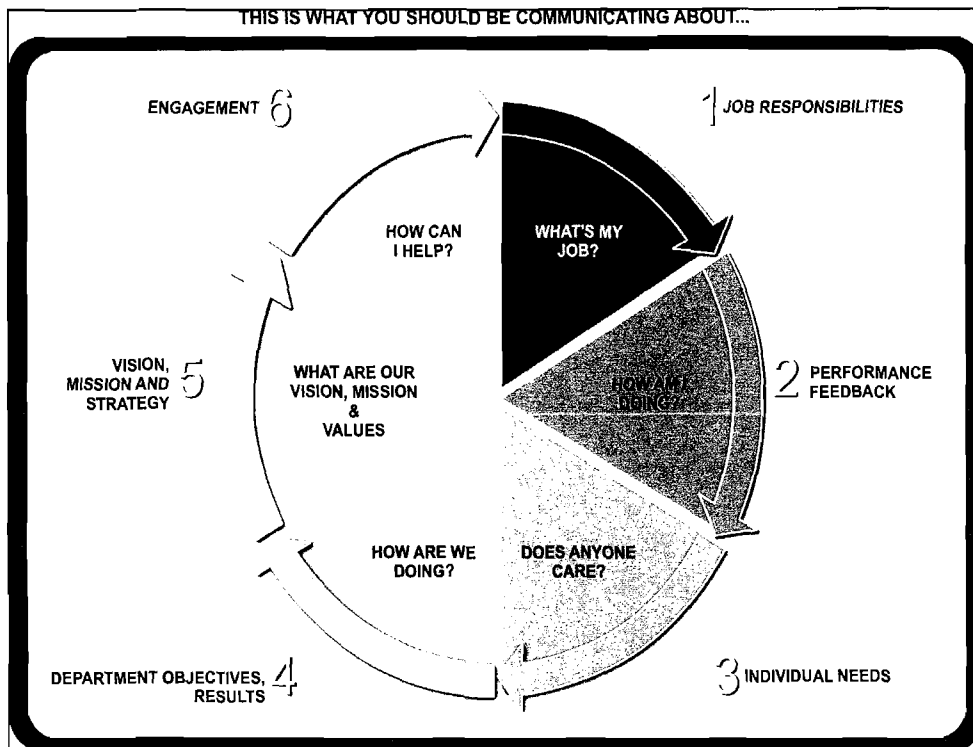
In theory, Thatcher's (2005:1) explanation of the manager's role in line manager communication can be linked to the manager's communication model developed by D'Aprix over 20 years ago. The manager's communication model, as illustrated in figure 2.12, asserts that (i) managers are the primary communicators with employees in organisations, particularly within the context of strategic alignment; (ii) interpersonal communication is the predominant form of communication which can be found in interactions between managers and subordinates; (iii) interpersonal communication skills, communication guidelines and tools and an understanding of the internal communication function and techniques are critical success factors which contribute significantly towards managers achieving and sustaining effective communication; (iv) communication between a manager and his or her subordinates is a continuous, dynamic, two-way and ongoing process.

According to D'Aprix (1996:83), essentially managers should inform employees about the following six key aspects, as illustrated in figure 2.12:

- i. job responsibilities (what's my job?);
- ii. performance feedback (how am I doing?);

- iii. individual needs (does anyone care?);
- iv. department objectives, results (how are we doing?);
- v. vision, mission, values and strategy (what are our vision, mission, values?); and
- vi. engagement (how can I help?).

Figure 2.12: The manager's communication model.



Source: D'Aprix (1996).

D'Aprix (1996:83) argues that one of the first communication tasks of any manager or supervisor is to define the work, the working relationship, and expectations of an employee, on a continuing basis. The author explains that this information entails the following:

- clear description of employee's responsibilities, roles and expectations;
- agreed upon priorities and deadlines;
- information needed to do the job;
- involvement in planning, decision-making and implementing changes; and
- establishing a link between employees' job responsibilities and organisation strategy and priorities.

The next key aspect that managers should inform employees about is performance feedback. According to D'Aprix (1996:85) employees cannot improve their performance at any task unless they have a measure of their success or failure. Additionally, the author points out that a critical role of the manager is to involve him or herself in this measurement process and to know how to correct performance positively.

This aspect, as D'Aprix (1996) explains, can include the following:

- providing feedback – positive and negative – on performance;
- discussing mutual actions for performance improvement;
- making feedback a frequent and timely activity; and
- listening effectively and coaching people so they can improve their performance.

When people know what is expected, and that they are performing at a competent level, another powerful communication need emerges which represents the third element in D'Aprix's (1996) model. This element relates to individuals' needs and managers can address it through the following:

- taking time to listen and talk honestly with employees;
- practice management by walking around;
- hold staff meetings in which people have the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns;
- solicit feedback about the manager's leadership style;
- recognise and act on people's ideas; and
- practice common day-to-day courtesies and civilities.

D'Aprix (1996:94) reasons that when employees acknowledge that the first three key elements are addressed, they begin to feel part of something larger than their own set of interests. This leads to the fourth element, namely, departmental objectives that managers can attend to through conducting the following with the aim to foster a sense of a team:

- sharing general business information on a timely basis;
- discussing departmental objectives and how they match overall organisational objectives;
- recognizing departmental accomplishments;
- discussing the need for work group performance improvement; and
- finding opportunities to assemble the group for dialogue or celebration.

According to D'Aprix (1996:95) the fifth element in the model articulates where the organisation is going in terms of its vision, mission and values. Managers who can proclaim a vision and a mission in convincing terms, are of the finest motivators in the organisation (D'Aprix, 1996:96). In practice, the question requires managers to do the following:

- gain a personal appreciation and knowledge of the organisation's vision, mission, and strategic direction;
- internalise the organisation's value system and behave accordingly;
- show personal conviction and commitment to the vision, mission, and strategy;
- relate work group experience to the vision, mission, and values, and help keep people focused; and
- be present to employees in ways that make them feel they are being led by someone who understands and cares.

The final aspect in the model is considered a response to high-quality leadership as pointed out by D'Aprix (1996:97). The author argues that this step is the beginning of commitment, of empowerment, and even of individual productivity. What is required to nurture the employee who wants to commit his or her talents is a manager who:

- provides genuine opportunities for involvement;
- empowers people to take the initiative and make decisions without second guessing them;
- supports the risk takers even when they make a mistake;
- recognises and rewards true contribution;
- encourages and supports cross-functional collaboration; and
- promotes mutual trust.

In addition to the abovementioned six key elements encompassing the manager's primary role in communicating with employees, Caldeira (2009:16) adds the fact that the underlying key principles required in this communication process are content, context, conversation, and feedback. These principles resonate with the model of the rhetorical situation (see section 2.4) which highlights the importance of the sender understanding the context, the receiver, selecting the right medium and sending a clear message during communication from one person to another.

Caldeira (2009:17-20) further suggests that managers should, (i) provide employees with clear messages in plain language, presented in a familiar and recognisable format, with the intended meaning clearly highlighted; (ii) have the context themselves in order to put the

information in context for employees; (iii) be provided with the appropriate skills to prepare information and engage in a conversation with their own people to create clear understanding; and (iv) there should be upward channels for response, together with clear guidelines for managers in prioritising areas for feedback to test understanding and as a means of continuing the conversation, and providing input to the next round of communication.

In order to be able to fulfill the fundamental communication role as outlined above, literature and research findings recognise the need for managers to possess good communication skills to enable, foster and create the understanding necessary to encourage subordinates to follow them Barrett (2006:390). In a study conducted by Madlock (2008:62) the concept of communicator competence was conceptualised to encompass the elements of knowledge, motivation, listening, negotiating, emotional intelligence and cultural literacy. The researcher also points out that even though there are vast amounts of research focused on competent communication, there appears to be limited amount of research examining the influence of supervisors' communicator competence on employee outcomes.

Madlock (2008:64) refers to one such study by Berman and Hellweg (1989), whose findings indicated that the perceived communicator competence of a supervisor, was related to their subordinate's satisfaction with that supervisor. Another example he referred to was a study by Myers and Kassing (1998). The authors examined the relationship between subordinate perceptions of their supervisor's communication skills, and the subordinate's level of organisational identification. Myers and Kassing's findings indicated that supervisor communication competence was a significant predictor of subordinate organisational identification.

This gives emphasis to the key message that managers must be equipped with good communication skills. This is the basic requirement to enable them to execute their communication role as managers. In the absence of communication skills, an understanding of the importance of internal communication, and their role in facilitating effective internal communication, managers cannot fulfill their primary managerial responsibility - to inform, plan, organise, direct, motivate, control and engage their subordinates and teams.

The foregoing discussion dismisses the illusion that often undermines the fundamental communication role of managers that this role is trivial and inconsequential compared to other responsibilities of managers. This aspect is pointed out by D'Aprix (1996:99), who argues that the communication role of managers will never be addressed sufficiently in

organisations as long as it is perceived as an add-on to all the other things managers do when everything else is done.

The author stresses that there is a need to understand managerial communication as 'a means to an end, a way to enable the work process rather than as an activity that managers perform if they have the time and it matches their style'. The real solution is to make it an accountable part of every manager's job (D'Aprix, 1996:99). Caldeira (2009:26) concurs with D'Aprix (1996) and adds that this accountability should be enforced. For example, it could be included in the manager's job descriptions and performance management system.

In addition, Quirke (2008:309) asserts that tools, which allow freedom while ensuring accountability could be created to enable managers to fulfill their communication responsibility and thereby connect them with employees. These tools could include, for example, shared communication standards and clear measures, regular tracking and measurement, manager's communication toolkit and linking communication competencies to appraisals and rewards.

It becomes evident that the communication role of managers is significant and an answer to successfully aligning employees' actions to organisational goals, facilitating meaningful conversations with employees and contributing towards productive, motivated, engaged and effective teams.

2.13 Conclusion

The crucial role of effective internal communication in ensuring that employees understand the objectives and goals of an organisation, is acknowledged in literature. However, organisational change, unstructured communication systems and processes, the diverse internal environment, technological development and the complexity of organisational life are transforming the traditional role of internal communication.

There is a shift towards accentuating the critical role of interpersonal communication between managers and subordinates in enhancing internal communication effectiveness within an organisation. Many authors emphasise the correlation between effective internal communication and an understanding of organisational strategy and objectives among employees. In addition, research indicates that a correlation exists between effective interpersonal communication and enhanced employee commitment to the organisation.

Managers need to take cognisance of the important role they play in internal communication as illustrated by D'Aprix's (1996) model of the manager's communication role. Furthermore, Caldeira (2009:26-29) identified four principles for managers to apply in facilitating effective communication, namely, (i) provide employees with clear messages in plain language, presented in a familiar and recognisable format, with the intended meaning clearly highlighted; (ii) have the context themselves in order to put the information in context for employees; (iii) acquire the appropriate skills to prepare information and engage in a conversation with employees to create clear understanding; and (iv) provide upward channels for response, to test understanding and as a means of continuing the conversation and providing input to the next round of communication.

If D'Aprix's (1996) model is understood, embraced and executed by managers in organisations and informed by the four principles for facilitating effective internal communication between managers and subordinates as identified by Caldeira (2009), managers would fulfill their role as the key connection in facilitating effective internal communication and thereby enhance organisational effectiveness.

There is evidence in literature indicating a need to approach the internal communication process as a system to be properly structured and efficiently managed rather than a collection of fragmented messages which often cause confusion among employees.

In the following chapter, the role of managers in employee engagement will be explored, with specific focus on the enabling role of effective managerial communication in fostering and facilitating employee engagement.

Chapter 3: Literature study - The role of managers in employee engagement

3.1 Introduction

The concept of employee engagement is becoming more prevalent in organisations that endeavor to adapt to innovation and change in order to survive in a dynamic, complex and competitive business environment. This relatively new concept was found to be an essential managerial intervention to ensure a connection between the organisation and employees. It also ensures that employees are emotionally and mentally committed to the organisation, and that they exert extra effort to help the organisation succeed.

In the past five years, literature and broadly conceived research findings regarding the concept of employee engagement, emphasised that the ability to engage employees - to make them want to work with an organisation - is going to be one of the great organisational challenges of the following 10 years (Johnson, 2004; Morgan, 2004; Parsley, 2006; Rothman, 2009; Smythe, 2008).

In 2009, literature, research findings, and various sources relating to employee engagement, have indicated an increased development and implementation of employee engagement strategies within organisations. These strategies are aimed at fostering, managing and sustaining committed and productive employees. In addition, literature asserts the value of employee engagement and indicates that engaged employees are more profitable, more customer-focused and more likely to withstand temptations to leave, but rather help their organisation to succeed (Caldeira, 2009; Hamilton-Attwell, 2009; Lee, 2009; Matshitse, 2009; Naudé, 2009; Rothman, 2009; Shaffer, 2009).

Primarily, organisations utilise people to implement their plans, therefore, the managerial responsibility of strategic alignment is crucial to ensure the attainment of organisational goals. For this reason, it is critical that organisations are able to motivate and inspire managers to utilise employees and their skills more productively and thereby cultivate engaged employees. It is important to point out that this cannot be achieved without effective communication between managers and employees. Therefore, effective communication plays a crucial role in fostering and sustaining employee engagement. In section 3.4 and 3.4.1 of this chapter, more attention is given to the interdependence between communication and employee engagement and the role of communication in employee engagement.

The purpose of this chapter is to ascertain from literature the current perspectives regarding the role of managers in fostering employee engagement. First, this chapter provides a general overview of the emergence of the concept of employee engagement in organisations, key drivers of employee engagement, as well as the effects of employee engagement on the individual and the organisation. The interdependence between communication and employee engagement and the role of communication in employee engagement, will be discussed in an attempt to answer the second specific research question. Finally, the chapter concludes with challenges and concerns in sustaining employee engagement and a summary of the literature.

3.2 The emergence of employee engagement in organisations

In general, employee engagement is regarded as a fairly new but widely recognised concept, and is specifically regarded as an emerging trend within the field of human resources practice or human capital development. Employee engagement concedes that the emotional well-being of employees is as important as skills, experience and competence in sustaining good work performance (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Nicholson, 2009; Shaffer, 2009).

This concept is aimed at employees and entails levers or drivers that influence employees' behavior positively, enhance work performance and contribute significantly to employee alignment to organisational goals. In so doing, employee engagement contributes positively towards improving employees' sense of purpose, sense of responsibility, and their sense of achievement, which in turn can result in employees going beyond what is expected of them to help the organisation succeed.

An increasing number of organisations are exploring the concept of employee engagement to ensure that employees reach the state of being emotionally and intellectually connected to their organisation, and thereby generate behaviour that will help fulfill an organisation's goals and improve results.

According to Nicholson (2009:2) times are changing, and employee engagement has taken on a completely new meaning. Employees need to believe in what they are doing to be productive, and they have to understand and appreciate why they are needed in order for them to do it right. This requires a level of commitment beyond simple training. The message has to be conveyed in a way that can be felt (Nicholson, 2009:2).

Hamilton-Attwell (2009:1) supports Nicholson's view and emphasises that employees live in an insecure, demanding world with little use for loyalty; yet they feel entitled to involvement in business decisions and access to information. In the past, employees were expected to leave their emotions behind when they entered the workplace. However, Cartwright & Holmes (2006:201) point out that an attitude based on denial and idealism is today recognised to be inconsistent with the template of an emotionally fit and healthy society. In addition, Cartwright and Holmes (2006:201) specify that work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor, in short, for a fulfilled life rather than living a boring routine from Monday to Friday. This indicates a high need for meaningful work content and self expression through work.

Thus, it can be presumed from the above discussion that the concept of employee engagement has been in existence for a number of years; however, building and sustaining a culture of engagement within organisations is a relatively new managerial philosophy prompted, generally, by the growing diversity of internal stakeholders and the complex and evolving business environment. According to Johnson (2004:129), when one considers the complexity of the modern organisation and the difficulty in getting messages understood by an even more diverse workforce, then effective communication and engagement is paramount.

3.2.1 The concept of employee engagement

Literature provides inconsistent descriptions and approaches to the concept of employee engagement (Caldeira, 2009; Guest, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Lee, 2009; Matshitse, 2009; Morgan, 2004; Naudé, 2009; Rothman, 2009; Shaffer, 2009). This is indicative of the fact that even though the concept of employee engagement is widely recognised, extensive attention has not been given to the underpinning theoretical perspectives of the concept of employee engagement. In addition, this could be suggestive of a need to explore the concept of employee engagement from an interdisciplinary research comprising the psychological, behavioural, communication and sociocultural sciences disciplines. For this reason, the concept of employee engagement will be described within the specific context of this study based on recent research findings.

According to Rothman (2009:3) the concept of engagement is part of a more general emerging trend towards a positive psychology that focuses on human strengths and optimal functioning. This concept manifests itself in different disciplines such as psychology, organisational behaviour, communication and human resources practice (Caldeira, 2009;

Guest, 2009; Johnson, 2004; Lee, 2009; Naudé, 2009; Rothman, 2009; Shaffer, 2009). Guest (2009:10) contends that there are three approaches to the concept of employee engagement, namely:

- engagement as a set of motivating resources – such as support, recognition, feedback, learning opportunities and usage of skill;
- engagement as a psychological state where employees feel a vested interest in the organisation's success and perform to a high standard that may exceed the stated requirements of the job. This leads to personal satisfaction and a sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from work and being part of an organisation; and
- engagement as independent from job resources and personal satisfaction, but as “a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being” (Maslach, Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova in Guest, 2009:13).

The abovementioned description clearly indicates that in the “engagement” state individuals make use of and express themselves physically, intellectually and emotionally during work performance. The intensity of this state is likely to vary over time depending on a range of personal or situational reasons.

In order to better understand the concept of employee engagement, Guest (2009:22) suggests that the physical, intellectual, and emotional facets under the construct of “engagement” should be separated into the following two main categories:

- emotional and cognitive: feeling engaged and loyal to the organisation.
- behavioural outcomes of feeling engaged: advocacy and extra-effort.

Naudé (2009:6) supports Guest's (2009) view when she states that the outcome of employee engagement is committed employees, on two levels, namely:

- rational: commitment of the mind – factual, intellectual reasoning keeping employees in an organisation or particular job.
- emotional: commitment of the heart – formed when employees believe in, value and enjoy their daily work or teams or managers or organisation.

According to Naudé (2009:7), both levels of commitment affect organisational performance. The author points out that rational commitment is a driver for retention and emotional commitment is a driver for discretionary effort, where employees are willing to go the extra mile for the organisation. Comparing the views of Guest (2009) and Naudé (2009), it is evident that the concept of employee engagement manifests itself primarily at the rational

(mental) and emotional levels. Essentially, the drivers of rational commitment include the manager, the team and organisation. The positive status of these attributes leads to an intent to stay, which in turn determines the retention rate. Emotional commitment, on the other hand, is driven by the connection of the job to the organisation's vision, the team, manager and organisation. These attributes lead to discretionary effort which, in turn, drives performance. In the next section, attention is drawn to the varied factors that create engaged employees on an emotional and mental levels within an organisation.

3.2.2 Key drivers of employee engagement

There are various aspects, often referred to in literature as “drivers” or “levers” which contribute towards fostering, achieving and sustaining engaged employees within an organisation. Research findings concede that these factors vary depending on an organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives, the profile of internal stakeholders and the general engagement level(s) of employees in an organisation (Caldeira, 2009; Cillie-Schmidt, 2009; Morgan, 2004; Naudé, 2009).

In an employee engagement review published by the Conference Board in 2006, Caldeira (2009:9) states that the Conference Board identified the following eight key drivers of employee engagement:

- (i) trust and integrity – how well managers communicate and “walk the talk”;
- (ii) nature of the job – is it mentally stimulating day-to-day?;
- (iii) line of sight between employee performance and organisation performance;
- (iv) career growth opportunities;
- (v) pride about the organisation - how much self-esteem does the employee feel by being associated with the company?;
- (vi) co-workers or team members significantly influence one's level of engagement;
- (vii) employee development - is the organisation making an effort to develop the employee's skills?; and
- (viii) relationship with one's manager - does the employee value his or her relations with his or her manager?

Morgan (2004:12) refers to another study conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council in 2004 that identified the top 25 most effective levers of engagement. Out of the identified top 25 levers of engagement illustrated in table 3.2.2, the levers associated with manager characteristics were considered the most significant levers of engagement compared to levers linked to organisational culture and performance and day-to-day work characteristics.

This declaration is also supported by the Conference Board's findings. According to Caldeira (2009:10), all the major studies reviewed by the Conference Board agreed that the direct relationship with one's manager is the strongest of all drivers of engagement.

Table 3.2.2: The top 25 most effective levers of engagement.

	LEVER	IMPACT	CATE-GORY
1.	Connection Between Work and Organizational Strategy	32.8	D
2.	Importance of job to Organizations Success	30.3	D
3.	Understanding of How to Complete Work Projects	29.8	D
4.	Internal Communication	29.2	O
5.	Demonstrates Strong Commitment to Diversity	28.5	M
6.	Demonstrates Honesty and Integrity	27.9	m
7.	Reputation of Integrity	27.6	O
8.	Adapts to Changing Circumstances	27.6	M
9.	Clearly Articulates Organizational Goals	27.6	M
10.	Possesses Job Skills	27.2	M
11.	Sets Realistic Performance Expectations	27.1	M
12.	Puts the Right People in the Right roles at the Right Time	26.9	M
13.	Helps Find Solutions to Problems	26.8	M
14.	Breaks Down Projects into Manageable Components	26.7	M
15.	Accepts Responsibility for Successes and Failures	26.6	M
16.	Encourages and Manages Innovation	26.5	M
17.	Accurately Evaluates Employee Potential	26.3	M
18.	Respects Employees as Individuals	26.1	M
19.	Demonstrates Passion to Succeed	26.0	M
20.	Cares about Employees	26.0	M
21.	Has a Good Reputation Within the Organization	26.0	M
22.	Innovation	26.0	O
23.	Is Open to New Ideas	25.9	M
24.	Defends Direct Reports	25.8	M
25.	Analytical Thinking	25.7	M

O = Organizational Culture and Performance Trait
D = Day-to-Day Work Characteristic
M = Manager Characteristics

Source: Corporate Leadership Council 2004 Employee Engagement Survey (Morgan, 2004)

In essence, table 3.2.2 points out that in comparison to organisational culture and performance traits, as well as day-to-day work characteristics, manager characteristics feature prominently, contribute significantly in the top 25 levers of engagement and are critical for increasing engagement levels. This is in spite of a connection between employees' job and organisational strategy, and employees' understanding of how important their job is to organisational success being the two most important levers among the 25 highest-impact drivers of engagement.

Within the manager characteristics, which contribute towards the 19 levers of engagement as mentioned in table 3.2.2, predominantly strong commitment to diversity, honesty and integrity, adaptation to change, good communication and adequate job skills are critical.

The preceding discussion accentuates the view of Caldeira (2009:12) that most managers see their job as managing. However, the author argues that there is a need to make managers understand that through effective communication and engagement, they will have more engaged and effective teams that will deliver and thereby, help managers to accomplish their key managerial and performance objectives. The communication role of managers in contributing towards employee engagement will be discussed further in section 3.4.2 of this chapter.

3.2.3 The effect of employee engagement on the individual and the organisation

In an engagement survey conducted in 2004 by the Corporate Leadership Council of more than 50 000 employees at 59 global organisations, the study concluded, among other findings, as follows (Morgan, 2004:2):

- employees who are engaged and committed perform 20 percent better and are 87 percent less likely to leave the organisation – indicating the significance of engagement to organisational performance;
- dramatic differences between organisations suggest that engagement levels are determined more by company strategies and policies;
- an analysis of both rational and emotional forms of engagement reveals that emotional engagement is four times more valuable than rational engagement in driving employee effort;
- among the top 25 drivers of employee engagement identified by the Corporate Leadership Council, the most important driver is a connection between an employee's job and organisational strategy.

These findings draw attention to the existing correlated relationship between emotionally and mentally engaged employees, knowledge of organisational strategy, and organisational performance. This relationship is supported by Cillie-Schmidt (2009:3), who points out that the effect of employee engagement on employees is that, (i) they stay (they have an intense desire to be a part of the organisation); (ii) they say (they advocate for the organisation by referring potential employees and customers, are positive with co-workers and are constructive in their criticism); and (iii) they strive (they exert extra effort and engage in behaviours that contribute to the organisation's success).

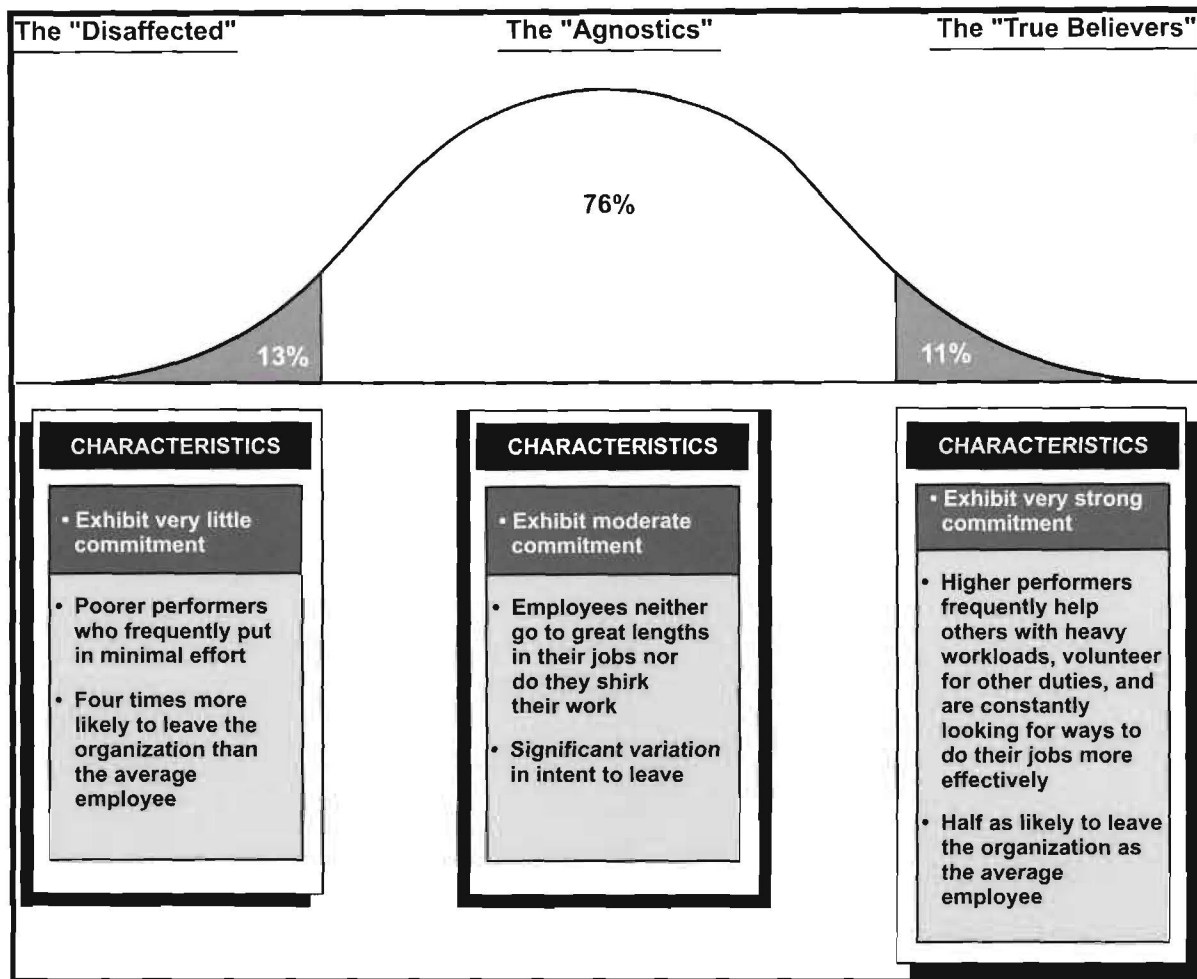
Naudé (2009:4) adds the fact that in a high engagement climate employees increase their commitment towards the organisation. Organisations with highly engaged employees have employees who are passionate and excited about their work; report increased quality and productivity; have more efficient and effective teams and have increased retention rates and lower employee turnover (Naudé, 2009:4). According to Naudé (2009:5) productivity is up to 57 percent higher in a high engagement climate, while staff turnover drops by up to 87 percent.

Nevertheless, literature reveals that even though there is documented evidence of the positive effect of employee engagement on the individual and the organisation, on average, 13 percent of employees are actively disengaged, 11 percent are engaged and 76 percent are non-engaged in organisations. The Corporate Leadership Council in Morgan (2004:11) survey refers to the 11 percent of engaged employees as the “True Believers” who demonstrate very strong commitment. The 13 percent who are actively opposed to someone or something in their organisations are referred to as the “Disaffected” and 76 percent of employees, the “Agnostics”, are only modestly committed, as illustrated in figure 3.2.3.

The diagram, illustrated in figure 3.2.3, clearly indicates that the Agnostics represent the state of the majority of employees within organisations and they present a real opportunity to create a conducive environment for rational and emotional connection to the organisation.

Therefore, in general, it can be argued that organisations could invest more time and effort in identifying and implanting employee engagement strategies to shift the Agnostics towards becoming the True Believers, while at the same time, ensuring that the True Believers are recognised and given incentives to remain committed, very strongly, to the organisation.

Figure 3.2.3: The state of workforce engagement.



Source: Corporate Leadership Council 2004 Employee Engagement Survey (Morgan, 2004).

3.3 Building and sustaining a culture of engagement

In order for an organisation to strive towards achieving effective employee engagement, it is important to first measure and determine the engagement levels of employees. Then, judging from the overall percentage of employees who fall within the "Disaffected", "Agnostics" and "True believers" categories as illustrated in the figure above, an organisation could develop tailor-made strategies or interventions to address challenges within the "Disaffected" and "Agnostics" categories with an objective to shift these employees towards the "True believers" category.

It is safe to reason that a positive shift towards more engaged employees could be achieved, provided that an organisation can identify and communicate non-negotiable leadership and

managerial behaviours that contribute in building and sustaining an engagement culture. For example, a non-negotiable behavior by managers could be that managers must fulfill their communication responsibility as illustrated by D'Aprix's (1996) manager's communication model and discussed in section 2.12 of chapter 2, and inform employees about the following five key aspects, (i) job responsibilities; (ii) performance feedback; (iii) individual needs; (iv) departmental objectives and results; and (v) vision, mission, values and strategy.

A combination of the appropriate leadership and managerial non-negotiable behaviors, together with the relevant tools to measure engagement levels and the development of suitable and effective engagement interventions, forms the foundation of building an engagement culture and achieving effective employee engagement within an organisation.

Even so, once a culture of engagement is established within an organisation, a question arises as to whether a persistent state of engagement is achievable given the dynamic environment within which organisations operate and the constant change(s) often brought about by the given dynamic and competitive business environment. It is logical to concede that an organisation can make a concerted effort to ensure a sustained culture of engagement, however, even engaged employees could feel demoralised and disengaged at some point.

Therefore, it is necessary for organisations to also invest in recovery strategies to ensure that when engaged employees suddenly regress, and as a result become disengaged, a diagnoses and appropriate intervention could be made to help the employees return to a state of mind characterised by dedication, commitment, vigor and positive behavior. The strategies or interventions adopted to achieve a higher percentage of engaged employees or employees who demonstrate very strong commitment to an organisation, may differ and focus on various drivers of engagement.

Smythe (2008:20), who conducted research into the meaning and value of employee engagement among 59 organisations worldwide, challenged these organisations to find the single most influential cause of more engaged employees. The study concluded that the primary driver resulting in engaged leaders and employees is the ability of leaders at every level to engage their subordinates in "everyday decision making and bigger-ticket change".

According to Smythe (2008:20), an organisation can cultivate more engaged employees by focusing on the following three key aspects:

- i. decision making: the primary cause or driver of engaged employees is power sharing. This concept is the core of employee engagement. In essence, to engage people effectively, leaders or managers must adjust their style from that of a god to that of a guide of other people's creativity.
- ii. problem-solving and identifying opportunities: the highest levels of performance come from engaging people in painful decisions as well as growth opportunities even though some managers think it is too risky to engage too many people when difficult decisions have to be made.
- iii. communication: engagement is a terrific opportunity for communicators to help leaders distinguish between old-style "tell" communication and employee engagement. It means becoming the architects of the engagement interventions that add value to the business.

It can be concluded from the preceding discussion that creating a culture of engagement is the foundation for facilitating effective employee engagement and it can only be built through two-way communication. The first step towards nurturing a culture of engagement within an organisation is to determine the key drivers of engagement, engagement levels of employees, and then develop engagement interventions to strive towards fostering more engaged employees compared to non-engaged and disengaged employees. The role of the leadership and manager in facilitating engagement is paramount and it cannot be achieved in the absence of effective internal communication.

3.4 The interdependence between communication and employee engagement

In chapter 2, it was established that communication is a critical enabling factor that binds the purpose of the organisation to the people who perform specified tasks and thereby helps the organisation to achieve set goals. In addition, effective channels of communication and communication processes form part of the crucial factors that keep an organisation operational. However, in order to be effective, communication within a group needs to have the same meaning to all recipients so that it can achieve the specific and intended purpose.

In theory a strong correlation and interdependence between effective communication and employee engagement exists (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1997; Kock & Burke 2008; Lubbe & Puth 2002; Shaffer, 2009; Steinberg 1995; Steyn & Puth, 2000). The authors explain this correlation firstly by emphasising the importance of fostering effective communication, which then becomes a means to enable, build, manage and sustain engaged employees. Effective communication contributes significantly towards employees' understanding of organisational

objectives and their contribution in this regard. This leads to enhanced employee performance, increased productivity, and achievement of organisational goals.

In an employee engagement study of more than 40 in-depth case studies and a global survey of 1000 corporate communication and human resources practitioners conducted by Melcrum Publishing in 2005, more than one-half of respondents revealed improvements in employee retention and customer satisfaction as a result of engagement efforts. More than one-third reported improvements in productivity and higher levels of discretionary behavior since beginning to focus on engagement (IOMA, 2005:1). In addition, the research found engagement efforts falling into four main categories, namely, (i) improving the overall quality of the company's leadership; (ii) creating opportunities for on-the-job learning and development; (iii) empowering employees with regard to decision making; and (iv) improving the people management skills of immediate supervisors.

It is therefore apparent as stated by Parsley (2006:11) that employee engagement is a major driver for organisational performance and effective communication is a significant driver of employee engagement. The two concepts have a reciprocal function and effect. This signifies the underlying nature of the interdependence between communication and employee engagement.

3.4.1 The role of communication in employee engagement

In practice, the concept of employee engagement is generally positioned within human resources practice. Johnson (2004:1) argues that employee engagement is something that cannot succeed if being managed by human resources alone. According to the author, human resources possess the skills and tools to assist, but line managers need to know how to engage their employees.

This argument, once again, stresses that the primary connection in employee engagement, similar to effective internal communication, is between the line manager and his or her subordinates. This connection begins with effective communication. Then develops into engagement that is driven through a continuous process of learning, motivation, feedback, performance measurement and improvement. To engage employees, line managers need to understand the concept of engagement, be able to diagnose engagement levels, build an engagement culture and model it themselves. In addition, managers have to treat people in a way they perceive themselves – as individuals with unique needs of their own (Johnson, 2004:1).

The fact that engagement essentially occurs between line manager and subordinates, accentuates that the most critical form of communication to enable engagement is interpersonal communication, as pointed out already in chapter 2. In general, the other forms of internal communication also play a role in contributing towards building a culture of engagement. However, face-to-face communication between the manager and subordinates creates an opportunity for the manager to utilise communication in order to fulfill the four major functions of communication, namely, control, motivation, emotional expression and dissemination of information.

Employees are regarded as an organisation's greatest asset (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002; Lubbe & Puth, 2002). Yet, employees do not often feel that way, therefore engagement is critical. Effective communication and sound relationships with employees are therefore of significant importance to ensure that employees are involved, committed, focused, passionate as well as enthusiastic about the organisation and strive to contribute to its success.

Essentially, effective two-way communication is a means towards fostering a culture of engagement and nurturing engaged employees. Employee engagement manifests itself on an emotional and behavioral level, therefore, it is crucial for organisations to first cultivate engagement as a management philosophy, and then establish processes to support engagement efforts and ensure that managers are equipped with the right set of skills to communicate effectively and thereby engage employees optimally.

Furthermore, line managers should put the following measures as identified by Hamilton-Attwell (2009:16) into action in order to build a culture of engagement, (i) create a climate of open and effective communication; (ii) help employees understand their role in organisational success; (iii) build trust; (iv) involve employees in decision making; (v) empower employees to solve problems themselves; (vi) follow through on promises and commitments; (vii) role model commitment to the company's goals.

In addition to the above, Rothman (2009:35) also cites the following actions which contribute towards building a culture of engagement; (viii) building (personal and organisational) resources to deal with demands; (ix) implementing career development; and (x) encouraging supportive, trusting, and rewarding relationships with co-workers. Moreover, organisations should support effective managerial communication and include communication as one of the competencies that line managers are appraised on.

Organisations should also offer training for managers who need to improve their communication skills and hold managers accountable for poor communication with their employees. This argument is supported by D'Aprix (2005:4) who maintains that organisations must establish the necessary management accountability in the form of positive incentives. This way managers are rewarded for communicating effectively or suffer negative consequences for choosing to ignore that part of their role. According to the author, accountability is the key to effective communication down the line, which is an essential part for building and sustaining an open and positive engagement culture (D'Aprix, 2005:4).

Parsley (2006:11) adds the fact that in order to successfully implement the above, education, development and the appropriate infrastructure for communication is essential. The author reasons that every manager in an organisation must understand how effective communication drives performance. Then every manager must recognise the difference between natural and organisational communication and commit to developing the required skills. The organisation must also invest in the development and maintenance of appropriate channels of communication.

The aforementioned discussion maintains that with the right foundation in place to equip managers with the necessary skills to communicate effectively with regard to the six key elements incorporated in D'Aprix's (1996) model of the manager's communication role, the culture of engagement within an organisation can thus begin to flourish. Consequently, through communicating effectively and fostering more engaged employees who release discretionary effort, managers will fulfill their fundamental managerial responsibility of strategic alignment, achieving organisational goals, and ensuring that they retain dedicated employees who help their organisation succeed.

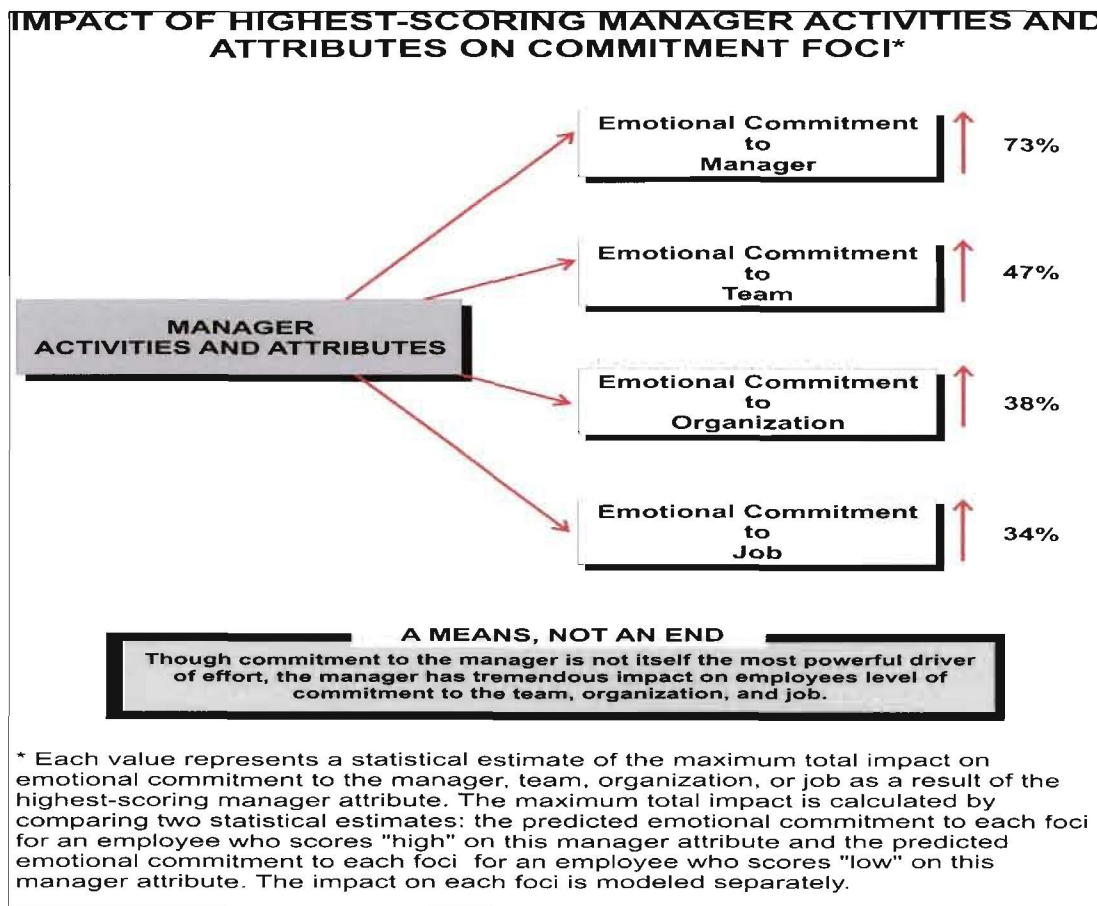
3.4.2 The role of the manager as the key connection in facilitating employee engagement

Managers are critical to effective communication and engagement in an organisation. In the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) employee engagement study in Morgan (2004:11), it was found that while employees' commitment to their manager is crucial to engagement and represents the highest score, the manager actually plays a more important role as enabler of employee commitment to other, more valuable, forms of commitment such as emotional commitment to the manager, team, organisation and the job.

In figure 3.4.2 it is clear that even though commitment to the manager is not itself the most powerful driver of effort, the manager has tremendous impact on employees' level of

commitment to the team, organisation and the job. However, the reality in many organisations is that there are many individuals in key managerial positions who lack the basic and required communication and people management skills to enable successful engagement. This is because of a similar reason cited in section 2.12 in chapter 2 as elucidated by Johnson (2004:20). The author explains that the reason for a shortage of people skills among managers goes back to the turn of the century. Anyone and everyone were hired, often for very specific skills. As they progressed they were given people management responsibilities but not any training or personal development to empower them to communicate effectively (Johnson, 2004:20).

Figure 3.4.2: Impact of highest scoring manager activities and attributes.



Source: Corporate Leadership Council 2004 Employee Engagement Survey (Morgan, 2004).

Parsley (2006:11) supports Johnson's viewpoint and states that most managers focus on 'hard' measures, delivering the required outcomes on time, on budget, and on target and consider communication, however, as 'soft' stuff even though the reality is that it is the hardest driver of organisational performance that managers have at their disposal. Johnson

(2004:20) adds the fact that people are complicated, they have emotions, they get sick, they have hopes and fears, and they might even cry or burnout. Most managers and MBA graduates think laptops, spreadsheets and market-share are easier to deal with than complex people are (Johnson, 2004:20).

Consequently, Johnson argues that in hiring technical specialists in managerial positions, organisations have lost the ability to manage people. In addition, with that loss, the ability to inspire, instill respect and the other 'soft' skills (Johnson, 2004:20). According to Johnson (2004:20), organisations should invest a great deal of time, effort and money in making managers and leaders out of technical specialists.

The preceding argument, once again, emphasises the fact that managers play a crucial role in facilitating effective interpersonal communication. D'Aprix (2005:5) argues that despite the increase in remote working and the adoption of e-mail, instant messaging, voicemail, texting, blogging, video messaging and other technologically advanced mediums, face-to-face communication remains the most effective channel for managerial communication. In addition, the author maintains that the interaction inherent in face-to-face meetings is key to engaging employees on an emotional level and creating a sense of belonging. This is confirmed by Wagner and Harter (2006:197) when they acknowledge that great managers are an organisation's glue, because they create and hold together employees who power high-performing organisations.

The authors also point out that a strong correlation exists between the engagement levels of a manager with the attitudes of his or her subordinates. In addition, Wagner and Harter (2006:198) highlight the valid claim that executive management should first inculcate engaged managers in order to motivate the entire population in an organisation.

3.5 Challenges and concerns in sustaining employee engagement

Although literature clearly indicates that engaged employees can help an organisation to achieve its mission, implement its strategy and drive organisational results, many organisations are not exploring the proven benefits afforded by engaged and motivated employees.

This poses a number of challenges and concerns in creating a culture of engagement in many institutions, including the North-West University, that would enable managers to tap

into employees' discretionary effort as a result of their mental and emotional connection to the institutions.

A fundamental challenge in fostering and sustaining employee engagement in many organisations is that communication is not properly structured, executed and managed. In addition, internal communication is regarded as the responsibility of the Communication Department and thus not actively performed by managers. Without the proper and well-organised foundation to facilitate effective communication, it is almost impossible to achieve employee engagement.

Communication is a critical enabling factor for creating a culture of engagement within an organisation. Therefore, it is imperative firstly to achieve effective internal communication, in which all levels of managers participate actively in their communication role, in order to be able to foster engaged employees.

Another challenge could be attributed to a significant key driver of employee engagement, namely, trust. In many organisations, the credibility of leadership and managers poses a threat to upholding a culture of engagement. In organisations where poor communication, lack of transparency and doubt prevails, the levels of trust, belief and support of management by employees deteriorate.

Open and honest communication, particularly face-to-face communication, between managers and employees contributes significantly towards building trust and strengthening relations between employees, management and the organisation. In the absence of open, transparent, and honest communication, trust in the leadership is undermined and therefore poses a threat to fostering employee engagement.

The reputation of an organisation is another aspect that is a cause for concern in sustaining employee engagement. It can be argued that the power of engagement lies in mobilising employees towards a common sense of purpose. On the other hand, it also lies in creating credibility in the organisation from external stakeholders. In the event that an organisation's reputation is tarnished, this could lead to direct and negative consequences in ensuring that employees remain emotionally and mentally committed to the organisation.

The transforming nature of organisations and its impact on the nature of work and management style also plays a critical role in nurturing or neglecting employee engagement. In today's flatter organisations, employees want to contribute, to have an opportunity to

influence, to be heard and to be part of the decision making process. Managers who are still inclined towards the old, traditional and hierarchical managerial style may become a deterrent in building a climate conducive to employee engagement within organisations.

In organisations that are forced to do more with less, managers often find themselves overwhelmed with goals, targets and deadlines and this leaves little room for them to dedicated time and efforts in facilitating and sustaining effective internal communication. This poses a challenge to one of the most critical key drivers of employee engagement - the day-to-day support to employees from their immediate manager or supervisor. If communication is included in the manager's performance agreements, then managers will be able to begin to pay equal attention to communication as they do to other key performance areas. In addition, a further fundamental challenge is that technology development has introduced more, efficient, cost-effective channels of communication including email, intranets, blogs and texting. However, this has increased the level of noise within organisations and reduced the level of conversation between managers and employees.

Effective internal communication which leads to employee engagement is achieved primarily through face-to-face communication. Therefore, the crucial role of a continuous dialogue between managers and employees within an organisation to sustain employee engagement cannot be overemphasised.

3.6 Conclusion

In theory, a strong correlation exists between effective communication and employee engagement. The communication role of managers, which facilitates engagement within an organisation, remains a critical aspect which needs to be clarified and addressed as a communication profession.

Johnson (2004:1) puts it bluntly that "engagement isn't simply a 'nice' thing to do. It isn't soft, touchy-feely stuff at all. There is a considerable body of evidence that points out the fact that engaged employees are more productive and far more likely to help the organisation become a success."

It is necessary to assess work engagement levels regularly in a reliable and valid method. Once this is achieved, resources should be put in place to develop engagement strategies and interventions. It is also imperative to train leaders and managers to identify employee

engagement levels and to develop communication skills in order to inculcate an engagement culture within an organisation.

Employee engagement is an ongoing and developing approach to making a workplace the best it can be for employees, who will, in turn, invest their own passion, innovation and dedication to making the organisation the best among competitors. For this reason, organisations will continue to acknowledge the important contribution of engagement and seek ways to enhance the levels of engagement among employees in order to achieve organisational goals.

Because of the majority of employees not being engaged in many organisations, there is a tremendous opportunity to unleash more discretionary effort from employees when they understand how their individual work contributes to an organisation's overall strategy. It is important for managers to acknowledge and understand the crucial role of effective communication in building trust and conducive working relationships with employees in order to release their discretionary effort. Furthermore, effective communication lays a foundation for inculcating and enabling a culture of engagement within an organisation. Through effective communication and nurturing more engaged employees, managers can begin to understand that employees want more than incentives. That ultimately, employees want to make a meaningful contribution, to grow, improve their lives and reach their full potential in an organisation that cares.

In the following chapter, the research methodology and the research design that was used to explore and describe the perceptions of senior managers at the North-West University regarding their role in internal communication and employee engagement, will be provided.

Chapter 4: Research methodology and design

4.1 Introduction

Literature asserts that the nature of this study is set within the field of social research that is described by Neumann (1997:5) as “a process that uses a scientific approach for producing new knowledge and to gain a richer understanding about the social world”.

Essentially, social research entails the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The two research approaches differ in that quantitative research entails numerical data, statistics, and measurement of objective specifics. Whereas, qualitative research is characterised by nonnumerical data, interpretation, and analysis of what people do and say. Therefore, it is accurate to concede that the nature of this study is qualitative research as the researcher seeks to explore, analyse, and interpret senior and middle managers' understanding of the role they need to play to facilitate effective internal communication and employee engagement at the North-West University.

Social research can serve many purposes, however, four of the most common and useful purposes are exploratory, descriptive, explanatory and/or predictive (Babbie, 2008; Du Plooy, 2002). According to Babbie (2008:97), much of social research is conducted to explore or start to familiarise a researcher with a topic. In addition, many qualitative studies' primary aim is to describe situations and events, and to explain things. The researcher observes and describes what was observed. In some instances, the research might then lead to deeper explanation or descriptions of observations (Babbie, 2008:99). For this reason, it can be declared that the nature of this study is exploratory-descriptive as the researcher seeks to understand and describe the perceptions of senior and middle managers at North-West University regarding their role in internal communication and employee engagement.

This chapter provides a more comprehensive explanation of the research method and the research design followed in this study, as it was briefly mentioned in chapter 1. The next section explains the motivation for adopting a qualitative research approach in the form of a case study of the North-West University. The finer details of the sampling technique, data collection procedure, data analysis, and factors affecting the validity of this study will also be explained in this chapter.

4.2 Qualitative research: motivation for case study approach

The North-West University, which comprises an Institutional Office and three Campuses, was selected as a case study for the purpose of this study. According to Neuman (1997:331), a qualitative researcher may use a case study approach through gathering information on one or a few cases, going into greater depth, and getting more details on the case being examined. The author points out that a case study researcher faces an overwhelming amount of data and is immersed in it. Immersion gives the researcher an intimate familiarity with lives, actions, and words of people in the context of the complete case as a whole (Neuman, 1997:331).

Consequently, this qualitative research in the form of a case study allowed the researcher to listen to the respondents, gather information, go into greater depth and get more details on the concepts being analysed and be absorbed in the data collected in order to build a picture related to the context of this study. The North-West University provided the researcher with observations and familiarity concerning the perceptions of senior managers at the four business units of the University regarding their role in terms of effective internal communication and employee engagement within the specific context of strategic alignment with organisational goals.

4.3 Research method

4.3.1 The units of analysis

According to Du Plooy (2002:53), units of analysis involve the smallest elements investigated. In this study, the units of analysis comprised individuals classified within the category of senior managers, including middle managers, at the North-West University.

A closer examination of these units of analysis revealed that this category is made up of a combination of Institutional and Campus Management members, academic departmental managers, such as Deans, Directors of schools and support departmental managers, such as Heads of departments, Chief Directors, Directors and middle managers. Some of the Directors fulfil dual managerial roles and responsibilities because their primary function is that of a Director; however, within their departments or sections there are no managers and as a result, they also fulfil middle managerial responsibilities.

To elucidate further, some Directors of academic departments or schools acknowledged that due to a lack of the next hierarchical level of managers, they also fulfilled middle managerial functions in addition to being Directors of schools. This senior management category entails the executive, senior and middle managers from the support and academic departments of the four business units of the University. The executive and line managers are exempt from this category because this study focused on the senior and middle management segment as explained earlier in section 1.3 of chapter 1. The motivation for focusing on the senior and middle management is mainly because it is representative of the academic and support departments of the North-West University. In addition, this segment is instrumental in formulating and implementing operational plans and performance agreements that are informed by Campus plans and the University's overarching institutional plan. In the next section (see section 4.3.2), more detail regarding the target population and population parameters from which the sample for this study is selected is provided.

4.3.2 Target population

The total population or senior management complement at North-West University where the study is conducted, consists of 200 managers. The sample population was selected from the total population partially in proportion to the total number of senior and middle managers per business unit as illustrated in table 4.3.2. For example, the Institutional Office has the third highest number of senior and middle managers totalling 29, Mafikeng Campus, has the second highest number of senior managers at 32, Potchefstroom Campus has the highest number of senior managers totalling 87, and Vaal Triangle Campus possesses the least number of senior managers at 16.

In table 4.3.2, it is indicated that the sample size for the Institutional Office, Mafikeng, Potchefstroom, and Vaal Triangle Campuses is 17 percent, 13 percent, 10 percent and 25 percent respectively. Overall, the sample size represents 13 percent of the target population excluding the members of the Institutional and Campus Managements. The percentages differ to some extent per business unit because the number of senior and middle managers vary across the four business units. This is mainly because of the differing number of students on the three Campuses and the dissimilar role of the Institutional Office compared to the three Campuses.

The Institutional and Campus Management categories were exempt from the sample population because they represent the executive management level that is responsible for formulating high-level strategic plans in the form of the Campus plans and the University's

institutional plan. Whereas, senior and middle managers are responsible for developing, communicating and implementing operational plans informed by the high-level strategic plans and facilitating employee engagement across the four business units. The sampling method is provided next to explain the procedure for selecting the sample from the target population illustrated in table 4.3.2.

Table 4.3.2: Target population.

Business Unit	Institutional Management	Campus Management	Dean	Director or Head of department (support)	Director or Head of department (academic)	Middle manager	Population excluding IM* and CM*	Sample size	Percentage of sample
Institutional Office	9	0	0	18	0	11	29	5	17 %
Mafikeng Campus	1	8	5	4	18	5	32	4	13 %
Potchefstroom Campus	1	9	8	12	55	12	87	9	10 %
Vaal Triangle Campus	1	7	2	3	7	4	16	4	25 %
TOTAL	12	24	15	37	80	32	164	22	13 %

IM* – Institutional Management; CM* – Campus Management

Source: Adapted from Institutional Office's Human Capital Development statistics (2009).

4.3.3 Sampling method

According to Du Plooy (2002: 105) sampling involves following a rigorous procedure when selecting units of analysis from a larger population. In addition to defining the population parameters, namely senior and middle managers, and considering the varying numbers of the target population per business unit, this study followed largely a nonprobability sampling method. This means as explained by Du Plooy (2002:106) that the researcher predicts or controls the choice of units of analysis.

There are various types of nonprobability sampling methods, namely, convenience, purposive, volunteer and snowball samples (Du Plooy, 2002:114). The purposive known-group sampling technique was followed because it allowed the researcher to use own

judgement in selecting information-rich subjects. The researcher achieved this mainly by utilising previous knowledge of the respondents and the objective of the study in order to select respondents that would be co-operative, conversational and informative. In addition, the availability of the respondents was taken into consideration when selecting the sample. This sampling method is almost always used in qualitative research and allows the researcher to select the units to be observed on the basis of the researcher's judgement about which ones will be the most informative or useful (Babbie, 2008; Bailey, 1982; McMillan, 2000; Neuman, 1997).

A combined list of members of the Institutional and Campuses' managements, Heads of academic and support departments and middle managers was solicited from the University's Human Capital Development department. A total of 22 senior and middle managers were initially selected from the target population by the researcher for the purpose of conducting interviews. The main selection criteria for the participants were to be on senior and middle management levels. The sample size consisted of five participants from the Institutional Office, namely, three Directors and two middle managers. The Mafikeng Campus consisted of four participants, namely, one Dean, one Director of an academic school, a Director of a support department, and one middle manager. At the Potchefstroom Campus, nine subjects were interviewed. They comprised seven Directors of academic departments and two middle managers from support departments. At the Vaal Triangle Campus four participants were interviewed, namely, two Directors of academic schools and two Directors of support departments.

The respondents interviewed represented some of the most important departments and disciplines at the University. The selected departments included Corporate Communication, Human Resources, Finance and Facilities, Management Information, Student Affairs, Career Centre, Potchefstroom Business School as well as academic Schools of Social Sciences, Behavioural Sciences, Curriculum Bases Studies, Creative Writing, Accounting Sciences and Pharmacy (see appendix A for complete list of participants and representative departments).

Following the selection of the participants, the researcher scheduled appointments to interview the 22 selected participants in person in their respective business units and venue of preference. They all agreed to participate in the research and most of the interviews took place in the participants' offices, while few were conducted in a conference room. Neuman (1997:202) adds the fact that qualitative research is characterised by much smaller samples

than quantitative research, because the main focus is on the quality of the information obtained by the researcher, who actively takes part in the research process.

According to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005:49), the sample is large enough when the researcher is satisfied that the data are rich enough and cover enough of the dimensions they are interested in. The authors argue that in qualitative analysis, it is difficult to predict accurately what the sample size will be. Therefore, the number of participants is less important and the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming, thus redundancy is the primary criterion (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005:49).

The researcher took cognisance of the redundancy criterion and it was applied to this study. The researcher's focus was not so much on the sample size as opposed to interviewing a number of respondents until the point of redundancy or saturation was reached when no new information was coming from the respondents interviewed. The initial selected sample size per business unit proved to be sufficient when the researcher was satisfied after the interviews that the information was rich enough and covered all the themes and topics of this study.

4.4 Research design

According to Du Plooy (2002:83), the objective of a qualitative research design is to explore areas where limited or no prior information exists and/or to describe behaviours, themes, trends, attitudes, needs, or relations that are applicable to the units analysed. The author also points out that qualitative research designs are more flexible than quantitative research designs as the researcher may, for example, start with the objective of describing a particular phenomenon or event, but through the observation or questioning process, change the objective to a combination of a description and an interpretation (explanation). In chapter 1 (see section 1.4) it was already pointed out that formal research has not been conducted on the role of senior managers at the North-West University in internal communication and employee engagement. Therefore, the objective of this qualitative research design was to explore and describe the perceptions of senior managers at the University with regard to the role they play in facilitating effective internal communication and employee engagement.

Du Plooy (2002:83) explains that the method of reasoning in qualitative research design is usually inductive. This means, based on specific assumptions, the researcher would ask questions and end with descriptions, summaries, and interpretations of the responses received. In addition, the author points out that since observations, questions and deductions

are guided by assumptions, these have to be well established in the literature to avoid the risk of approaching observations based on subjective or faulty reasoning. For this reason, theoretical assumptions were identified and drawn from the literature study regarding the role of managers in internal communication (see chapter 2) and the role of managers in employee engagement (see chapter 3). These theoretical assumptions informed the identification of the two main topics utilised in the research design, namely effective internal communication and employee engagement. In addition, the theoretical assumptions identified from the literature study informed the formulation of the open-ended questions used during the semi-structured interviews.

The following two tables give an outline of the interview schedule with questions for the first topic focusing on effective internal communication and the second topic regarding employee engagement. This interview schedule was used during the semi-structured interviews with the 22 senior and middle managers across the four business units of the University (see appendix B for the complete interview schedule with the interview questions used during the interviews). The interview schedule is elaborated further in the next section (see section 4.4.1) as it forms part of the data collection procedure.

Table 4.4 Semi-structured interview schedule for first topic - effective internal communication.

First topic The role of managers in facilitating effective internal communication (within the specific context of strategic alignment at the NWU) 1. What does internal communication really mean to you as a manager? 2. How important is effective internal communication in your role as a manager? 3. How do you achieve effective internal communication? 4. Describe the channels / methods of communication that you use in communicating with your staff? 5. How do you go about sharing information about the following: - job responsibilities; - performance feedback; - individual needs; - department objectives and motivating staff to support organisational goals; and - vision, mission, values, strategy and supporting key strategic messages? 6. How do you feel about your role as a manager in facilitating internal communication?
--

7. How do you feel about your communication skills as a manager?
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Source: Based on literature study findings.

Table 4.4(2) Semi-structured interview schedule for second topic - employee engagement.

Second topic

The role of managers in facilitating employee engagement

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do you perceive your role as a manager in employee engagement?2. Describe your feelings towards the North-West University?3. Describe how your employees feel about the University?4. <i>How do you ensure that your employees share the institution's values and identify with its purpose / strategic objectives?</i>5. How would you describe the emotional attachment of your staff to the University?6. Describe how you would encourage a sense of belonging to the University among your staff?7. How would you describe the willingness of your staff to go the extra mile in their tasks?8. How would you describe your staff's commitment to you as a manager?9. Describe how your staff feels about their work?10. What do you think is the role of internal communication in employee engagement? |
|---|

Source: Based on literature study findings.

4.4.1 Data collection procedure

The primary data collection method used was semi-structured interviews with each of the 22 participants individually because this method allowed the researcher to gauge the selected participants' perceptions, feelings, attitudes, ideas regarding their understanding and role in facilitating internal communication and employee engagement. The semi-structured interview approach was employed. This process started with open-ended questions and progressed to more specific probes about the participants understanding of their role in effective internal communication and employee engagement. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet setting, convenient to the participants.

The aim of exploring the senior managers' perceptions was to draw comparisons between what the perception of the ideal role of senior and middle managers in effective internal communication and employee engagement is, and what the nature of the actual role of managers at the North-West University in internal communication and employee engagement is.

An interview schedule containing a set of open-ended questions grouped under the two main topics relating to the overall goal of the study, namely internal communication and employee engagement, was used during the interviews. According to Du Plooy (2002:177), the interview schedule for a partially structured interview contains a list of topics, however, the interviewer is free to deviate and ask follow-up or probing questions based on the respondent's replies. This type of interview provides the interviewer with latitude to move in unanticipated directions (Du Plooy, 2002:177).

The responses of the senior and middle managers were recorded and documented separately in the form of a transcript. The tape recorder used during the interviews allowed the researcher an opportunity to listen actively, establish greater eye contact, and probe the respondents further where appropriate.

The following seven stages in the interviewing process as explained by Kvale (1996) in Babbie (2008:338) were followed:

- **Thematising:** clarifying the purpose of the interviews and the concepts to be explored;
- **Designing:** laying out the process through which the researcher will accomplish the purpose of their study;
- **Interviewing:** doing the actual interviews;
- **Transcribing:** creating a written text of the interviews;
- **Analysing:** determining the meaning of gathered materials in relation to the purpose of the study;
- **Verifying:** checking the reliability and validity of the materials; and
- **Reporting:** telling others what the researcher has learned.

In this study the first stage, thematising, was conducted in the form of drawing theoretical assumptions from the literature study in chapter 2 and chapter 3 regarding the role of managers in internal communication and employee engagement. The second stage, namely designing, included identifying the target population, the sampling method and selecting a

sample for this study. These aspects have already been discussed above. The designing stage also included the formulation of questions for the interview schedule (see section 4.4.1). The data capturing, transcribing, analysing, interpreting, and recommendation stages will be discussed further in section 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.5, and chapter 5 and 6.

4.4.2 Data capturing and data editing

Prior to commencing each interview, the researcher informed each participant that the interview would be recorded, kept confidential and used for the sole purpose of the study. The researcher requested the participants' permission to use a tape recorder. None of the participants objected to the fact that the interviews were being recorded. According to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005:66), tape recorded interviews provide a level of detail and accuracy not obtainable from memory or by taking notes.

The data was mainly generated through the interviews. The interviews were limited to 1 hour, the average duration was 45 minutes, and in one instance, the duration was 1.5 hours. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, so the qualitative data then consisted of verbatim typed transcripts for further analysis. The researcher's position within the University enabled the researcher to establish a rapport and trust with the participants and engage the interviewees in an open and descriptive conversation.

4.4.3 Data analysis

Data analysis proceeded through a qualitative data analysis method using the open-coding method. According to Babbie (2008:124) qualitative analysis refers to the nonnumerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships. Neuman (1997:426) concurs and adds that qualitative data analysis means a search for patterns in data. Once a pattern is identified, it is interpreted in terms of its meaning. Babbie (2008:124) explains that open-coding refers to the initial classification and labelling of concepts in qualitative data analysis. In open coding, the codes are suggested by the researchers' examination and questioning of the data.

The researcher's first step involved being immersed in the transcripts of the 22 interviews with the aim to discover and identify patterns related to this study's research topic by following the open-coding analysis. The analysis included organising and reorganising the data by themes and topics, and open-coding the text so that patterns could be identified. Once the concepts relating to the objectives of this research were identified, then the

researcher developed inductive categories, revised the categories, compared the data to literature, revised the categories and interpreted the data. Subsequently, the overall findings of the study were discussed in chapter 5, and conclusions and recommendations drawn in chapter 6.

4.5 Shortcomings and sources of error

The fact that the researcher was familiar to some of the respondents might have contributed positively towards establishing a rapport and trust. However, one could argue that this aspect could have also had a negative influence in that it might have compromised the objectivity of the participants' responses during the interviews.

The researcher used a single-methodology in the research design and data collection procedure, which may cause bias in the findings of this study. It may be argued that utilising other research methodologies may assist to reveal or develop a comprehensive picture of the trend being studied, which might otherwise be unavailable if only one method is used. In addition, the combination of data collection methods may also increase the validity of the research results.

Another aspect related to the above is that the sampling method used in this study might have resulted in drawing a sample that is much more knowledgeable about the environment and topics of this study. Consequently, it may be argued that the research findings, broadly conceived, may not necessarily be a true reflection of the entire target population of this study. One way to counteract the possibility that the findings were biased is to apply replication with different units of analysis from the same target population.

Although the researcher reached a point of saturation or redundancy when interviewing the respondents from each business unit, it may be argued that the sample size was small. Thus, due to the small sample size, the results from this study cannot be considered representative of the overall population and the research should be viewed as exploratory.

An additional aspect to make mention of is the fact that the researcher was actively involved in the environment where this study was conducted, therefore, the researcher has a better understanding of the context of this study that might have created opportunities for the researcher's personal insight to influence the responses of senior and middle management.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, it was established that the nature of this study is set within the field of social research. In addition, it was determined that this study is based on a qualitative research design as the research objectives seek to explore and describe the role of senior managers at North-West University in facilitating effective internal communication and employee engagement.

In chapter 2 and chapter 3, the theoretical assumptions were identified and drawn. These informed the formulation of questions for the interview schedule. The interview schedule was used when conducting semi-structured interviews with the respondents selected using a purposive known-group sampling method.

In the next chapter (chapter 5), the research findings and perceptions from the interviews with senior managers from the Institutional Office and the three Campuses of the North-West University regarding their role in facilitating effective internal communication and employee engagement will be explored, described and discussed.

Chapter 5: Report of the data

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a description of the results with regard to the general and specific research objectives of the study is provided. This chapter explores and describes the views of senior managers across the four business units of the North-West University by first relating the respondents' perceptions regarding their role in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication. Then the chapter progresses to describe the respondents' perceptions regarding the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining employee engagement. A deductive reasoning approach is followed by first providing a general overview of the respondents' perceptions regarding the concepts of "effective internal communication" and "employee engagement" followed by more specific aspects linked to the two concepts. The chapter is concluded with a general summary of the results obtained through the semi-structured interviews with the senior managers.

5.2 Senior managers' perceptions regarding the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication

5.2.1 Importance of effective internal communication

All the respondents acknowledged and agreed that effective internal communication is a critical, basic prerequisite in strategic alignment and achieving the objectives and goals of the University. All the respondents reiterated common phrases such as:

"communication is very, very important"; "everything is about communication"; "communication is the glue that holds everything together"; "if communication does not exist, I cannot manage my department" and "without communication, work becomes stagnant".

A respondent from the Mafikeng Campus described the importance of effective internal communication as a "livewire", adding that it keeps her department and team members alive and functioning. Another respondent from the Potchefstroom Campus stated that:

"communication is a way I engage with my staff in order to work together with them towards our objectives and strive towards the university's vision".

Eighteen of the respondents remarked that in most instances when there are problems, misunderstandings, conflict, uncertainties or internal tensions within a department, the root cause could be attributed to a lack of communication or poor communication. Almost every respondent felt that not all managers at the University realised the importance of effective internal communication in engaging employees and fulfilling strategic objectives and goals. These respondents felt that the reason for this differed from individuals who occupied managerial positions without possessing the basic communication knowledge and skills or individuals who were bad communicators by their nature or background to individuals who did not regard communication to be as important as other managerial functions such as planning, organising, leading and controlling. Twelve of the respondents remarked that one of the biggest challenges that threaten effective internal communication is misinterpretation of messages by employees. The respondents mentioned that to ensure that their subordinates interpret a message in the same and intended manner, is a constant challenge.

A further result pertinent to the importance of internal communication is that all the respondents acknowledged and understood that interpersonal communication, particularly face-to-face and written communication, is the predominant form of communication between a manager and his or her subordinates. However, all the respondents did not refer to non-verbal communication in this regard.

Generally, the importance of effective internal communication to senior managers in their role of aligning employees to the strategic objectives of the University, and ensuring that employees understand their individual and collective contribution to the University's strategic intent, was acknowledged by all the respondents. However, it was evident from almost all the respondents that the level of understanding of the importance of effective internal communication within the specific context of strategic alignment at the University and support of this important role was perceived to differ considerably among the senior managers.

5.2.2 Internal communication process and the flow of information

All the respondents' responses illustrated an understanding of the seven elements in the communication process as discussed in section 2.4 of chapter 2, namely, (i) the communication source; (ii) encoding; (iii) the message; (iv) the medium; (v) decoding; (vi) the receiver; and (vii) feedback. However, only twelve of the respondents elucidated further and expressed views related to the communication process based on the convergence model, discussed in section 2.4 of chapter 2, which emphasised the sender and receiver to be

constantly exchanging messages until they reach an understanding. The respondents mentioned that within the specific context of this study, it was critical that managers used face-to-face communication and meetings for a dialogue, discussion and feedback with employees. A further four respondents from the preceding fourteen pointed out that it was important that managers should convey concerns raised or unresolved issues back to “decision makers” or “executive management”. One of these four respondents from the Institutional Office commented that:

“it is very important to have two-way communication and not just give information through to staff. Disseminating information, receiving feedback and listening carefully to what the staff in my department say is my responsibility and an important part of the communication process”.

Another important finding relating to the internal communication process is that seven of the twelve preceding respondents singled out the fact that managers should recognise the significance of giving the appropriate context, identifying the suitable recipients and delivering the relevant message. The respondents reported that it was vital that “decision makers” or “executive management” convey information in an unambiguous and user-friendly manner to enable senior managers to interpret the information properly and then filter it down to employees. In addition, all the respondents stressed the need for an efficient and spontaneous flow of relevant information from executive management regarding policies, University’s strategic goals, key strategic messages, important decisions and daily actions.

Some of the respondents acknowledged that it was a challenge to solicit and gather feedback from their subordinates regarding aspects of importance relating to strategic alignment due to time constraints and a lack of structured communication processes. The respondents felt that senior managers who participate in management meetings are afforded an opportunity to give feedback regarding issues of strategic alignment; however, they experienced a gap between the management meetings and the rest of employees from the departments of the four business units.

When asked about the flow of information within the University relating to the context of this study, all the respondents professed that information was flowing on a continuous basis vertically, from top down and bottom up, and horizontally among the employees. None of the respondents talked about lateral communication between employees on the same level or diagonal communication between employees who are not on the same hierarchical level.

5.2.3 Key drivers of effective internal communication

Each respondent thought that different factors drive effective internal communication. These factors were found to fall mainly in three categories, namely, (i) trust and relationships; (ii) clear, relevant and continuous information; and (iii) two-way communication.

The five respondents from the Institutional Office and one respondent from the Vaal Triangle Campus thought that effective internal communication is first underpinned by trusting relationships. The respondents mentioned that it was important to first establish trust and build trusting relationships with their subordinates in order for communication to be effective. One respondent from the Institutional Office remarked that since the merger, the internal stakeholders profile was becoming more diverse and this made building trusting relationships with subordinates a challenge due to the differing cultures, races, languages, religions and backgrounds.

All the respondents from the Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses and three respondents from the Institutional Office felt that, as managers, they first need to receive clear and relevant information in the right context from the executive management level in order to enable them to filter the information down to employees continuously. The respondents stressed that in order to be effective, communication or the information must be conveyed on a regular and continuous basis. In addition, one of the three respondents from the Institutional Office felt that guidelines regarding what senior managers should communicate to employees within the specific context of strategic alignment should be developed and included in a senior manager's job description. This would ensure common understanding and execution of the Campuses' and University's strategic objectives among senior managers, and facilitate effective communication of key strategic messages, such as the values of the University, and strategic priorities. On the other hand, one respondent from the Institutional Office, two respondents from Potchefstroom Campus and one respondent from Vaal Triangle Campus professed that some senior managers withheld important information from their subordinates and did not make a concerted effort to filter the information down. Additionally, the respondents felt that some senior managers communicated one way, from top down, and did not encourage feedback from their staff.

The latter result links to the third category, namely, two-way communication. Five respondents from the Institutional Office, three respondents from Mafikeng Campus, nine respondents from Potchefstroom Campus and three respondents from Vaal Triangle Campus supported the view that two-way communication, particularly feedback from

subordinates, contributes significantly in achieving effective internal communication between senior managers and employees. The respondents mentioned that feedback from employees regarding conveyed information was very important as it facilitates mutual understanding and continuous communication.

On the other hand, two managers from the Potchefstroom Campus remarked that it was difficult for them to maintain effective and constant communication because of time constraints. The senior managers said sometimes they were “busy and forget to communicate” or away from the office and travelling on official business and therefore could not communicate as often as they would prefer.

5.2.4 Internal communication channels

When asked to share their views concerning channels or methods of communication they utilise in communicating with their staff, not a single respondent did not deem face-to-face communication a significant and dominant channel of communication. All the respondents agreed that face-to-face communication builds trust, and creates engagement with staff. Twenty of the respondents mentioned that they have an “open door policy” and added that their face-to-face communication included “walking the passages”, “visiting subordinates in their offices” or practicing “management by walking around” for formal and informal discussions.

All the respondents also utilised scheduled meetings as part of their face-to-face communication. The respondents recognised that formal meetings were helpful in confirming and clarifying understanding, and what action was expected from staff. All the respondents cited the telephone, and one respondent from the Institutional Office mentioned that he also uses mobile phone texting to communicate with his staff.

It was interesting to note the divergent views of all the respondents regarding written communication. Three respondents from the Institutional Office, three from Mafikeng Campus, two from Vaal Triangle and seven from Potchefstroom mentioned that they used email more compared to other forms of electronic or written communication such as memorandums, formal letters or reports. One respondent from the Institutional Office, one from Mafikeng, two from Potchefstroom and another two from Vaal Triangle Campuses believed that emails and other forms of written communication were detrimental to effective communication between managers and staff. One respondent from Potchefstroom Campus commented that “electronic communication is a disengagement tool”. Another respondent

from Mafikeng Campus mentioned that “I don’t write memos. I use very little written communication. I never use email to solicit input from staff regarding decisions.” However, it was evident that the majority of the respondents preferred emails.

An additional result pertinent to the above was that five respondents - one from the Institutional Office, three from Potchefstroom and one from Vaal Triangle - also make use of formal reports and minutes of meetings to disseminate information to staff. The respondents explained that the minutes pertained to management meetings such as the Senior Management meeting, Campus Management meeting or Institutional Management meeting, or reports of official matters pertaining to the University, such as the Ministerial Task Team report or the Culture and Climate survey.

It was interesting to observe from the respondents’ explanations that the choice of face-to-face communication over other channels was informed by reasons such as convenience, timeliness, effectiveness, immediate response from staff as opposed to utilising an informed approach such as distinguishing between routine and non-routine messages to select the suitable communication channel.

5.2.5 The role of senior managers in facilitating strategic alignment

Chapter 2 drew attention to the notion that the basic functions of a manager is to inform, plan, organise, direct, motivate, control and engage subordinates and their teams (Thatcher, 2005; Robbins, 2003; Slisbury, 2004). The authors assert that each of the basic managerial functions is an exercise in coordination designed to accomplish synchronised effort of subordinates. Literature provides sufficient evidence to suggest that coordination is achieved through communication. In order to find out the role of senior managers at the North-West University in facilitating strategic alignment of employees’ efforts towards the accomplishment of the University’s goals, the model of the manager’s communication role developed by D’Aprix (1996), was used to explore the views of the respondents. The senior manager’s responses will be described according to the six key aspects incorporated in D’Aprix’s (1996) model, as illustrated and discussed in section 2.12 in chapter 2, excluding the last aspect of engagement.

5.2.5.1 Job responsibilities

It was interesting to note the vast inconsistencies among the respondents and across the four business units of the University regarding the process used to inform subordinates

about their responsibilities, expectations and priorities. The five respondents from the Institutional Office mentioned that they utilise the University's official job description template to discuss and clarify the responsibilities, roles and expectations of their subordinates. In addition, the five respondents said they used their immediate supervisor's task agreement to identify departmental and employees' priorities. The respondents utilised formal one-on-one meetings for discussions, however, the frequency of the discussions differed among the five respondents.

An interesting and different view was reported by three of the four respondents from Mafikeng Campus. Three respondents remarked that they were aware of the official job description template, but they have not used it, and have not had discussions with their subordinates regarding their job responsibilities. One of the three respondents commented as follows:

"I have not had job responsibilities or task agreement discussions with my staff. I have not made up my mind to have one-on-one meetings with each of my subordinates. I have spoken to them in broad terms regarding my expectations of them".

When probed further to find out the reasons for not conducting this discussion, the respondent said "it is difficult to answer". In addition, the three respondents did not have task agreements with their subordinates. Only one of the four respondents confirmed that she has signed job descriptions and task agreements following discussions with her subordinates.

This view differed completely with the majority of responses from the seven respondents from the Potchefstroom Campus who remarked that they conducted job description and performance agreement discussions with their subordinates twice a year – at the beginning of the year, and towards the end of the year. The respondents said they continued this discussion informally during the course of the year. The other two respondents from Potchefstroom Campus commented that due to time constraints and because they manage "highly intelligent academics" they did not have formal job descriptions and performance agreements but conducted professional discussions regarding priorities and targets.

Three of the four Vaal Triangle respondents confirmed that they used the University's official job description template to conduct job responsibilities discussions with staff and they also discussed performance agreements. Once again, similar to the views expressed by most managers who conducted the job description and performance agreement discussions, the

frequency of these discussions was found to be inconsistent and at the discretion of each manager.

5.2.5.2 Performance feedback

All the respondents, including the 16 respondents who conducted formal job description and performance agreement discussions with their subordinates, seemed to realise the importance of frequent and continuous feedback about employees' performance. All the respondents said they shared feedback informally and continuously during the course of the year.

Some of the respondents reported that they made performance feedback part of the formal performance appraisal discussion at the end of the year. One more interesting finding was that all the respondents emphasised that through the informal performance feedback discussions, they also identified problems, challenges and needs of their employees, and thereafter devised interventions where necessary.

5.2.5.3 Individual needs

All the respondents seemed to make time to talk to their employees in order to establish their needs and help address existing problems. Some of the respondents went to the extent to state that it was important to take an interest in their subordinate's personal lives, because they regarded the well-being of their personal lives to be an important attribute in ensuring their well-being at work.

Few of the managers mentioned that the individual needs of the older generation differed vastly from employees representing the younger generation in their departments. One respondent commented that younger employees have small children and have to multi-task more responsibilities, and therefore they were prone to incur more personal problems which may affect their work. Most managers stressed that they addressed employees' professional needs through training, career development and conference attendance.

5.2.5.4 Department objectives:

In essence, eleven respondents from academic departments across the three Campuses held the similar view that their subordinates had a clear understanding of their respective departmental objectives and how they link to the overall strategic objectives of the

University. The main reason for this was that the respondents felt that the academic departments represented the core business of the University, that is, teaching-learning, research and community engagement, and this aspect formed the essence of the University's institutional plan and Campus plans.

The respondents mentioned that they conducted formal departmental strategic planning sessions that created an ideal opportunity to discuss department objectives and ensure that team members were informed about the objectives of their respective departments. One of the respondents on the Mafikeng Campus developed a pocket-sized brochure for staff members with a graphic illustration of the link between the department's objectives, the Mafikeng Campus plan and the overarching University's institutional plan.

In contrast, respondents from support departments felt that it was a challenge to establish a clear relation of departmental objectives to specific strategic objectives of the University because of various reasons. The respondents reasoned that even though their departments do make a meaningful contribution to the "bigger picture", they were often confronted with criticism and problems because of fragmented internal processes or alignment of processes or implementation of new processes, guidelines and procedures.

A respondent from the Institutional Office, which fulfils a support function, said her department is often criticised by other managers who refuse to adapt to their revised terminology, structures and processes. Another respondent from a crucial Mafikeng Campus support department shared the same sentiment and explained that because the department does not have a good name, team members always feel "criticised" and "unappreciated". A respondent from a Vaal Triangle Campus support department agreed with this view but cited a different reason. The respondent said due to inadequate resources and staff members to carry out the tasks of the department, the employees felt inundated, and that they were not making a significant contribution to the institution's strategic objectives.

5.2.5.5 Vision, mission, values and strategic objectives

All the respondents reported that their departmental plans were informed by the vision, mission, values and strategic objectives of the University's overarching institutional plan and/or Campus plans. All the respondents were aware of the University's four do-values, namely, integrity, commitment, accountability and respect. However, there were divergent views from the respondents regarding their managerial responsibility to advocate the

University's do-values among their employees in order to ensure that their employees embrace and live the values.

Thirteen of the respondents felt that it was sufficient to state the do-values in their departmental strategic plans. Five respondents used their own discretion and initiative to create awareness among their staff members of the do-values. Three respondents reported that they informed their staff about the do-values during their formal job description discussion. One respondent mentioned that the four do-values are a standard discussion point on the agenda of her departmental meetings where she engages staff and facilitates discussions about the University's do-values.

5.2.6 Internal communication within the decentralised management model of the North-West University

The decentralised management model of the University raised a few noteworthy views from some of the respondents from the academic departments on the Mafikeng and Potchefstroom Campuses.

An interesting view articulated by three respondents, one from Potchefstroom and two from Mafikeng's academic departments, related to the flow of information regarding strategic objectives, decisions, policies and other important management information within the University. The respondents felt that at times they experienced a top down communication approach and very little bottom up communication. The respondents explained that even though there was a Campus Management structure that was supposed to feed information to and from the Institutional Management structure, they did not feel that they were involved in management discussions and decisions, because they were not part of the Campus Management structure. As a result, the respondents felt that often they lacked the important context to management decisions and this made it difficult for them to convey this information in the right or relevant context to their staff.

An additional view linked to the above was that as a result of the respondents' lack of participation in decision making, coupled with the lack of understanding of the context in which decisions were made, they reported that they experienced difficulty in buying into some decisions taken by the Institutional Management.

In addition, one respondent from an academic department on the Potchefstroom Campus remarked that in comparison to support departments in the Institutional Office and on the

three Campuses, the academic departments lacked the much needed managerial level of middle managers in their departmental management structures. The respondent explained that in the support departments there were various levels of managers including Chief Director, Director, Head of department, Senior Manager and Manager. Whereas, in the academic departments there were two levels of managers, namely, Deans and School Directors and no management structure or positions below the "School Director".

The respondent felt that this posed a challenge in communication because of the senior, middle and lower managerial responsibilities that a School Director needed to fulfill. According to this respondent, prior to the merger academic departments had managers, however, these positions were discontinued in the merged institution and replaced by subject heads with no managerial responsibilities. The respondent commented that this reflected some unfairness in the model and once again, a lack of consultation and engagement with academics in the development of this management model.

The perceived lack of clarity and uniformity in the levels of senior, middle and lower managers in both the academic and support departments resulted in uncertainties regarding the communication role of the various managerial levels.

A further view expressed by one respondent from the Institutional Office, three from the Potchefstroom and one from Vaal Triangle Campuses, pertinent to the preceding result, was that one of the challenges facing the University in facilitating internal communication understanding and effectiveness among managers was to explain the decentralised management model structure, and managerial roles and responsibilities in a simple and clear language to ensure common understanding. One respondent from Potchefstroom remarked that prior to achieving clarity and common understanding about the University's new and unique management model, it would be difficult to address internal communication from a systematic, structural and procedural approach. The respondent summed up this viewpoint as follows:

"It is a question of which comes first. I believe that you can have the best communication model or system, but if the organisational structure is misunderstood or perceived to be problematic, then even the best communication model will fail. The organisational structure is the foundation on which a communication model is put into practice".

5.2.7 Communicator competence and communication accountability

Although it became evident in all the respondents' responses that they agree that their managerial responsibilities included fulfilling a communication role, the respondents had mixed feelings regarding their communication skills. Most of the respondents regarded their communication skills to be acceptably satisfactory. These respondents described their communicator competence as follows:

"very good in general"; "it has improved over the years"; "not that bad"; "I feel comfortable to communicate".

An interesting discovery was that all the respondents acknowledged that their communication skills could improve, citing the following among other reasons:

"managers need to sharpen up their communication skills"; "my communication skills are lacking in certain respects" and "there is always room for improvement".

An added and interesting observation from one respondent from the Institutional Office was that senior managers needed to be equipped with the necessary skills to communicate in cross-cultural interactions, especially because of the diverse internal stakeholder profile of the University resulting from the merger. The respondent pointed out that initially she experienced difficulty in communicating with staff or colleagues from different cultural backgrounds, but this has improved. She also said there is a need to equip senior managers with skills to overcome barriers to effective internal communication with a diverse staff composition.

When asked whether they would participate in a communication skills development training programme for managers if it were made available, it was interesting to observe that the response was divided across the ages of the respondents. The older senior managers, most of them approaching the retirement age of 65, said they would not be keen to undergo communication skills development training. Whereas, the respondents who seemed relatively younger affirmed that they would definitely participate in a communication skills development training programme.

It could be declared that the senior managers' perceptions of their communication competency was largely subjective as the University does not hold the managers

accountable for internal communication effectiveness and there is also no scientific measuring method or instrument employed by the University to determine the communication effectiveness of the senior managers within the specific context of strategic alignment among employees.

5.3 Senior managers' perceptions regarding the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining employee engagement

5.3.1 General overview of employee engagement

When asked to describe how they perceived their role in employee engagement only six respondents, three from the Institutional Office, two from the Potchefstroom and one from Vaal Triangle Campuses, had an applicable idea of the meaning of the concept "employee engagement". The other 16 respondents requested an explanation of the concept first before they were able to respond.

Once they grasped the meaning of the concept, within the context of this study, all the respondents concurred that they should play a role in facilitating and fostering engaged employees. One of the respondents commented that "managers must set a conducive environment to foster engaged employees". However, not all the respondents believed that they were currently fulfilling a facilitation role in fostering and achieving employee engagement. The respondents cited various drivers of employee engagement such as providing basic needs to enable employees to do their work, career development opportunities, involving staff in decision making, "playing open cards" with subordinates, keeping employees informed, being accessible and visible, caring for the employees, and "walking the talk".

With respect to their perceived state of the engagement levels of staff, all the respondents from the Potchefstroom Campus reported that all or a majority of subordinates in their respective departments were "definitely engaged". A different view was expressed by the four respondents from Mafikeng. Two of the Mafikeng respondents said a notable number of staff was engaged and the other two said only half of their staff members seemed to be engaged. One of these respondents cited the following reason:

"The Mafikeng culture is different. There seems to be a culture of entitlement among most of the employees and therefore it is a challenge to engage employees. A few employees have reached the engagement state; however, I do not think most employees have reached that point."

5.3.2 Senior managers' commitment to the North-West University

A very important factor that emanated from the respondents was that in spite of their divergent views and feelings about various factors pertinent to this study, they all asserted that they felt positive about the University, identified with its purpose and were committed to the institution.

Three of the respondents, one from the Institutional Office, one from Vaal Triangle and one from Mafikeng Campus were relatively new at the University, but reported a strong connection and enormous respect for the University. Two comments relating to the above view are highlighted to give an indication of the respondents' professed commitment to the University:

"I share a long history with the university. I received all my degrees here. I met my husband here. All my children graduated at this university. I have a lot of emotional attachment to the university and I am very committed to it." – **Potchefstroom Campus respondent.**

"I am still new at the university. I come from a culture where I was taught to have enormous respect for the institution I work for, to cherish the institutions as something to be nurtured and protected for our children. For that reason, I am passionate about the North-West University and I think of myself as a committed NWU employee." – **Vaal Triangle Campus respondent.**

5.3.3 Employees' commitment to the North-West University

In general, all the five Institutional Office respondents and the nine Potchefstroom Campus respondents reported that they believed that all their subordinates were "proud" and "fully committed" to the University. But, a conflicting view emanated from the four Mafikeng and four Vaal Triangle Campus' respondents who stated that there were mixed feelings of commitment among their staff members.

The Institutional Office and Potchefstroom Campus' respondents articulated the following views which they believed contributed towards their employees' commitment to the University:

"The staff members have a great sense of ownership and contribution towards the university's strategic objectives";

"The staff members value the institution and give it their best, they are over-performers";

“The staff members are proud to be associated with the university because it is regarded as a best governed university in South Africa”;

“The staff members feel they can make a meaningful contribution, they make a difference and that is part of what is making the university better”.

In addition, fourteen respondents from the Institutional Office and Potchefstroom Campus believed that their staff has a willingness to go the extra mile in their tasks. One respondent from Potchefstroom said that her staff members go the extra mile more than she does as their manager. The other respondents reported that their staff has no problem working overtime when requested, adding that they always work long hours and over weekends. The respondents believed that because they set a good example as managers, their subordinates followed the example they set, they were ambitious and also wanted to give the University their best.

The Mafikeng Campus respondents said some employees were committed to the University, whereas others “detest” the merger and that factor eroded their level of confidence and commitment to the institution. One of the four Mafikeng Campus respondents explained that the pessimistic feelings of employees who were not as committed could be attributed more to a “human” factor as opposed to other reasons. The respondent commented that it is a fact that human beings react differently to change and some staff members welcomed the merger whereas others did not like the change.

The Vaal Triangle Campus respondents were also of the view that a notable portion of their staff members was committed to the University and a few “disgruntled” employees were not as committed. Only one of the four respondents reported that there was one staff member who seemed not to be committed compared to the rest of the staff members.

5.3.4 Employees’ commitment to manager

An evident pattern closely linked to the aforementioned responses transpired once again under this theme. In general, all the five Institutional Office respondents and the nine Potchefstroom Campus respondents reported that they believed their subordinates were committed to them. But, a differing view emanated from the four Mafikeng and four Vaal Triangle Campuses’ respondents who stated that there were mixed feelings of their staff’s commitment to them as managers.

The fourteen respondents from the Institutional Office and Potchefstroom Campus believed that their staff were committed based on their observations of subordinates' positive reactions to the respondents' requests and the feedback from staff.

On the other hand the eight respondents from Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle Campuses said some subordinates showed signs of commitment towards them, whereas other staff members, in comparison, were not as committed. The respondents agreed that those employees who did not seem to be engaged were the same employees who were not committed to them as managers. One respondent from Mafikeng Campus remarked that she believed it was impossible to have all the staff members to be committed, adding, other people were unhappy by their nature and would never be satisfied.

5.3.5 Employees' mental and emotional commitment to department

In general, all the respondents who were convinced that their subordinates portrayed signs of commitment to the University and towards their managers, also believed that these subordinates revealed signs of rational commitment towards their department and tasks. One of the respondents from the Institutional Office explained that this was evident from the initiative and innovative ideas from staff, adding that all subordinates looked forward to coming to work.

On the other hand, those respondents who believed that some of their staff members were not as committed also believed that the same staff members lacked evident attributes associated with rational commitment.

An interesting view linked to this theme was that all respondents, including those who believed their subordinates were rationally committed to their department and tasks, felt that their subordinates were also emotionally committed to their respective departments. One of the respondents from Vaal Triangle remarked that mental and emotional commitment were not the same and she believed her staff was more committed mentally compared to emotionally. The respondent said sometimes staff do not feel appreciated enough and other institutional challenges create fear, doubt and uncertainties which undermine the emotional commitment of staff.

When probed further as to whether they feel a sense of responsibility to enhance emotional commitment to their departments among the subordinates, differing views emanated from the respondents. Some respondents felt they could contribute towards enhancing emotional

and mental commitment of their staff, other respondents blatantly said they do not feel a sense of responsibility towards the disengaged staff members, while others remained convinced that some people would never be emotionally and mentally committed, in spite of interventions, because they were unhappy by their nature.

The few respondents who felt that they could contribute towards enhancing emotional and mental commitment of staff cited various enhancement fundamentals such as an open and trusting relationship with subordinates, open communication, proactive problem-solving, rewards, awards and incentives, career growth, and personal development opportunities and networking opportunities.

5.3.6 Role of internal communication in employee engagement

When asked to describe the role of internal communication in employee engagement all the respondents acknowledged that internal communication plays a critical enabling and facilitating role in achieving and sustaining employee engagement. All the respondents agreed that without internal communication, there would be no employee engagement, adding that the accomplishment of employee engagement depends on effective internal communication.

Essentially, the respondents accentuated that a correlation and interdependence exists between effective internal communication and employee engagement. One respondent described the connection between internal communication and employee engagement succinctly when she stated that:

“Internal communication plays a very important role. It creates positive energy among staff which then leads to engaged employees who are informed and strive to make a difference” – Vaal Triangle Campus respondent.

5.4 Conclusion

In essence, all the senior managers interviewed in this study believed that senior managers play a vital role in connecting employees, through effective internal communication, to their responsibility in achieving the University's strategic goals. However, the respondents also believed that this significant communication role of senior managers is currently misunderstood, not supported by all managers and is implemented inconsistently across the four business units of the University.

It also became evident that the internal communication process and flow of information is not managed in a structured and systematic manner within the University. The University's unique and decentralised management model was not clearly understood and this contributed towards some perceived disconnection regarding the flow of information between Institutional and Campus Management structures. This resulted in some of the managers on the Campuses lacking the relevant context to important management information they needed to convey to subordinates. In addition, communication channels were also utilised randomly and not rationally by most managers. This did not contribute positively to internal communication effectiveness between managers and subordinates.

With regard to senior managers' communication competence and communication accountability, most respondents regarded their communication competence as satisfactory. However, some respondents admitted that they needed training to equip them with communication skills to communicate effectively, particularly with a diverse internal staff complement. It was also apparent that senior managers are not held accountable for the communication function and as a result communication did not feature prominently among the senior managers' key performance areas.

The senior managers also believed that they play an important role in facilitating employee engagement, through effective communication, even though the concept was unfamiliar to most of the managers interviewed. Not all the respondents believed that they were fulfilling a facilitating role in fostering and achieving employee engagement.

An important result evident from the views of all the senior managers regarding employee engagement is that they believed that a correlation exists between committed managers and committed subordinates. In addition, the senior managers believed that this correlation was underpinned, among other elements, by a positive working relationship between the manager and his or her employees, and open communication.

Fundamentally, the senior managers recognised that the managers' communication role is the key medium in aligning employees to the University's strategic objectives and a critical enabling factor in achieving employee engagement. In the next chapter the report of the research data of this study is concluded in order to answer the four research questions formulated in chapter 1.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the outcome of the empirical study was provided and described. In this chapter, conclusions will be drawn from the findings of the literature study in chapter 2 and chapter 3 and the report of the research data. In the last section, recommendations will be made to achieve and sustain effective internal communication between senior managers and employees at the North-West University and thereby, facilitate employee engagement. The shortcomings and suggestions for further research will also be provided. A synopsis of the study is outlined in the next section.

6.2 Synopsis of the study

In chapter 1, the problem statement was discussed. Research objectives and the guiding theoretical argument were outlined. The research method to be followed was briefly discussed. The study was guided by the following general research question: What is the role of the North-West University's senior managers in contributing to effective internal communication and employee engagement?

This general question was divided into the following four specific research questions:

- From literature, what are the current perspectives regarding managerial communication, with specific reference to the role of managers as communicators?
- From literature, what are the current perspectives on employee engagement?
- How do senior managers at the North-West University perceive the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication?
- How do senior managers at the North-West University perceive the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining employee engagement?

Chapter 2 focused on the theoretical perspectives regarding the role of managers in internal communication. Literature research was provided on the following; effective internal communication and the models of the communication process, convergence communication, the rhetorical situation, communication reality or the interruptions to communication, three common small-group networks, information richness of communication channels, a leadership communication framework, and the manager's communication role as described by D'Aprix's (1996).

Chapter 3 focused on the theoretical perspectives regarding the role of managers in employee engagement. Literature research on the concept of employee engagement, key drivers of employee engagement, the effect of employee engagement on the individual and the organisation, building and sustaining a culture of engagement and models of the state of workforce engagement and the top 25 levers of engagement were discussed.

In chapter 4, the research method and research design followed in this study were explained. The finer details of the sampling technique, data collection procedure, data analysis, and factors affecting the validity of this study were also provided.

The fifth chapter covered the reporting of the research data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the 22 respondents. In conclusion, a summary of the results was discussed.

6.3 Conclusions

In the light of the specific research objectives of this study, findings of the literature, and report of the empirical study, the following final conclusions are drawn in the form of statements. First, the research question – how do senior managers perceive the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication? - and secondly, the research question – how do senior managers perceive the nature of their role in achieving and sustaining employee engagement? - are discussed.

6.3.1 The nature of the role of senior managers in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication

6.3.1.1 Effective internal communication

- Effective internal communication is significant, particularly during the current period of organisational change, because of the merger of the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and the University of North-West, the incorporation of staff and students of the former Sebokeng Campus of the Vista University and subsequent establishment of the North-West University.
- Effective internal communication remains one of the basic prerequisites for senior managers in ensuring that employees understand both the University's strategy and their role in its execution. It is a means for the senior managers to fulfil their managerial function of strategic alignment.

- The success of achieving and sustaining effective internal communication at the University depends, in part, on generating communicative managers at all levels - managers who facilitate two-way communication that is instrumental in ensuring shared understanding and defining critical problems, suggestions and solutions together with employees of the University's four business units.
- Interpersonal communication, particularly in the form of verbal or face-to-face communication, is highly regarded and practiced by senior managers. Interpersonal communication constitutes the most predominant form of communication found in interactions between senior managers and subordinates. This form of communication was considered to contribute significantly to internal communication effectiveness, building trust, enhancing relationships between managers and subordinates.
- Internal communication, within the context of this study, is managed in an unstructured and uncoordinated manner across the four business units of the University. This undermines the effectiveness of internal communication and strategic value it could add in aligning all employees to the University's goals and thereby, contributing towards developing engaged employees and enhancing employee's performance as well as institutional effectiveness. This accentuates the need for proper structures, systems, and processes to be developed and implemented to facilitate effective internal communication management.

6.3.1.2 Flow of information and communication channels

- Senior managers are a key medium in disseminating relevant, credible, and continuous information about the University's vision, mission, values, goals, and strategic messages.
- It is vital for senior managers to first receive accurate and relevant information in the right context and to interpret it correctly, as this constitutes the foundation when senior managers determine whom the information is relevant for, and what channel of communication is suitable for such information.
- All senior managers use face-to-face communication, among other communication channels, which scores highest in terms of communication effectiveness determined by Robbins' (2003) model of information richness of communication channels. The research data supports the pronouncement that upward communication from employees to managers happens verbally. For this reason, senior managers articulated a call for the creation of formal communication channels for upward communication, greatly across the four business units. Therefore, a need for formal

communication channels for upward communication from employees to managers and “decision makers” across the Institutional Office and the three Campuses, was found.

- There is a justifiable need, among the senior managers, to be knowledgeable about the various internal communication channels and the associated effectiveness of the different communication channels in order to be able to determine and utilise appropriate channels for messages and facilitate effective internal communication and employee engagement.

6.3.1.3 Role of senior managers

- Senior managers perceive communication as part of their day-to-day job.
- The role of senior managers in facilitating and sustaining effective internal communication is critical.
- The communication role of senior managers is meaningful and an answer to successfully align employees’ actions to institutional goals, to facilitate meaningful conversations with employees, and contribute towards productive, motivated, engaged employees and effective departments.
- Senior managers are the primary communicators with employees, particularly within the context of strategic alignment - ensuring that employees’ efforts are aligned to the University’s objectives and goals.
- The level of senior managers’ understanding of the role they play in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication with employees differs significantly across the four business units of the University. This was found to be a major contributing factor to the senior managers’ differing approaches in fulfilling their communication role.
- The senior managers’ primary role in communicating with employees is not properly managed. Consequently, this central role, as elucidated by D’Aprix’s (1996) model of the communication role of the manager, is executed in an unsystematic, uncoordinated, unstructured, and disorganised manner among senior managers across the University’s four business units. This could be a compelling contributing factor to misunderstandings, rampant rumours, fear, doubt, uncertainties, scepticism, and disengaged employees.
- Senior managers are a major source of information for employees. Additionally, information from the University’s Institutional Management, Campus Management and other governance structures of the institution such as Council, Senate and the

Institutional Forum is highly regarded. Senior managers need the relevant information in the right context, conveyed through the right medium from the University's governance and management structures, in order to fulfil their communication role and help foster informed employees.

6.3.1.4 Communication competence and accountability

- Senior managers must be equipped with good communication skills. Essentially, senior managers must possess good interpersonal communication skills.
- Interpersonal communication skills, and an understanding of the internal communication function and techniques, are considered critical success factors that contribute significantly towards managers achieving and sustaining effective communication.
- It can be declared that the apparent contradiction in commitment of subordinates on the Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses compared to the Mafikeng Campuses, are suggestive of the varying degree of communication competence of senior managers on the three Campuses. This highlights the relationship between subordinates' perceptions of their manager's communication skills, and the subordinates' level of identification with the purpose of the University.

6.3.1.5 Decentralised management model

- The University's unique and decentralised organisational structure has a direct impact on internal communication and employees' interactions. The decentralised management model presents notable complications, complexities, and challenges that make miscommunication and misunderstandings inevitable.
- The management model has not been explained or communicated properly within the management levels of the University, nor to the employees of the four business units. Therefore, the management model is not properly understood as it was also confirmed by the findings of Stumpf's (2008) evaluation of the North-West University's management model.
- In the implementation of tasks, horizontal interactions among the three Campuses, and vertical interactions from the Institutional Office with the three Campuses, were inevitable. However, 'communication uncertainties', as identified by Stumpf's (2008) findings, were still prevalent in all the business units and to a greater extent on the three Campuses. This stressed the lack of a shared understanding regarding the

roles and responsibilities of the four business units in the execution of the University's strategic objectives.

6.3.2 The nature of the role of senior managers in achieving and sustaining employee engagement

6.3.2.1 Employee engagement

- Employee engagement is still an unfamiliar concept at the University. Therefore, this concept is not fully comprehended among senior managers; nevertheless, the outcomes of the concept are regarded as significant to the University.
- There is a need to create a culture of engagement at the University and a common understanding among managers of the concept of employee engagement.
- The perceived level of engagement of employees across the business units differs. Employees at the Institutional Office, and Potchefstroom Campus employees, were perceived to be more engaged compared to Vaal Triangle and Mafikeng Campuses' employees.
- A strong connection and commitment to the University was found among the senior managers. This commitment was higher in senior managers from the Institutional Office and Potchefstroom Campus compared to Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle Campuses. The managers' commitment to the institution, in general, is regarded as a great contributing factor to the perceived commitment of employees in their tasks, but not necessarily an indicator of a correlation between the senior managers' and their respective subordinates' engagement levels.
- Rational commitment is perceived to be more prevalent among engaged employees compared to emotional commitment.

6.3.2.2 Effective internal communication and employee engagement

- Effective internal communication is a critical enabling and facilitating lever in developing employee engagement.
- The achievement of engaged employees depends predominantly on effective internal communication. Therefore, it can be declared that a correlation and interdependence exists between the status of internal communication and engagement levels of employees at the University.

- The perceived inconsistent engagement levels of employees across the four business units, and commitment to their respective line managers, is indicative of the differing interpersonal communication skills of the senior managers.

6.4 Recommendations

6.4.1 Recommendation 1: proper internal communication system, infrastructure, processes and resources

In the history of the North-West University, the strategic value of the role of senior managers in facilitating, achieving and sustaining effective internal communication with employees, has not been featured on the agendas of Institutional Management and Campus Managements, or regarded as a top priority.

The Corporate Affairs and Relations department in the Institutional office is responsible for developing, overseeing, and coordinating strategies, policies, processes, guidelines, implementing plans, and monitoring the corporate communication function (including internal communication) across the University. This department, in collaboration with the Marketing and Communication departments of the Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses, should first persuade Institutional Management and Campus Managements that a focus on delegating the communication role to all managers, and building effective internal communication, should be a top priority. Additionally, management should be convinced to understand that effective internal communication management necessitates time, budget and human resources.

Once the support and buy-in of management is solicited in making effective internal communication a priority, a task team with the relevant internal communication practitioners from the four business units, should be convened to discuss and develop a proposal in the form of a plan. This should happen to establish, implement and manage the internal communication system scientifically across the four business units of the University in a structured, cohesive and coordinated manner.

The task team should identify and involve other key internal stakeholders, such as Human Resources and the Language Directorate, because they have a direct and/or indirect bearing on the successful implementation of the proposed plan. This proposal should also entail a request for funding and appropriate resources to address the above.

The proposal should be tabled at the Campus Management meetings of the three Campuses to seek the Campus Managements' endorsement. Subsequently, the proposal should also be tabled at Institutional Management for approval.

The aforementioned recommendation would be a first step towards addressing the need to devise and implement proper internal communication structures, systems and processes across the University. Once addressed, this would be a first step to ensure that managers receive accurate, relevant information in the right context, and are able to filter it down to their employees and help to achieve the University's goals.

The following aspects should also be addressed and form part of the plan aimed at managing the internal communication system in a coordinated and cohesive approach:

- The development of a manager's communication toolkit to assist managers to understand internal communication, to help managers execute their communication role, and to explain the available communication tools.
- The development of a simple guide to communication channels that provides detail on when to use which channel, strengths and weaknesses of the different channels, and contact information for each business unit for advice. This guide should be based on Robbins' (2003) model for information richness of communication channels.
- The development of a communication policy to clarify the function of managerial communication as opposed to corporate communication, electronic communication and other sub-disciplines of corporate communication that exist within the University. This would also assist in enforcing the delegation of communication to managers.

The development and monitoring of a relevant plan, policies, processes, procedures, and guidelines related to the establishment of a proper internal communication system, should be driven by Corporate Affairs and Relation in collaboration with the three Campuses.

The implementation of these policies, processes, procedures and guidelines, should be driven by the communication department of each business unit in order to make each business unit accountable for achieving and sustaining effective internal communication between managers and employees.

6.4.2 Recommendation 2: content, context, conversation and feedback

It is vital that all managers take on the role of communicating the vision, mission, values, objectives, strategic messages and important information relating to the University's strategic priorities and core business.

The Corporate Affairs and Relations Department in the Institutional Office in partnership with the Campuses' Marketing and Communication departments, should identify current communication channels, and conduct an assessment of the communication channels and other methods utilised by managers to convey information to employees.

The communication channels can be assessed on aspects such as timeliness, accuracy, usefulness, effectiveness, perceived trust and preference, cost effectiveness and richness. In addition, the assessment should also identify information needs of both managers and employees and also identify existing gaps.

An evident existing gap that emanated from the empirical study, was a lack of a formal and official communication vehicle for senior managers from management. As part of the recommendations of the findings of the aforementioned assessment of communication channels, a monthly manager update and discussion points for managers and their staff should be developed and disseminated.

The Corporate Affairs and Relations department and the Campuses' communication practitioners should set up weekly forums or meetings to discuss and formulate a unitary picture of what needs to be communicated. This information should be written and conveyed in the monthly manager update in a manner that strives to create dialogue. Additionally, the information should be coordinated and consequent.

As part of ensuring that staff members are informed about the vision, mission, values, objectives, strategic messages and important information relating to the University's strategic priorities and core business, formal upward communication channels must be developed and implemented. These upward communication channels should be linked in a carefully structured approach to the suggested monthly manager update to solicit constructive feedback from employees in order to channel feedback to the relevant decision makers or management structures.

In addition to the monthly manager update, discussion and facilitation guides should be developed for managers to ease dialogue, discussion and debate between managers and employees regarding identified issues of strategic importance such as the University's do-values, decentralised management model, diversity, and academic programme alignment. In addition, the discussions should be aimed at engaging employees to identify and define critical problems, suggestions and solutions.

6.4.3 Recommendation 3: education, development, accountability and measurement

Presently, there is no system in place at the University to ensure that all managers embrace, practice and fulfill their communication role in a controlled manner that can be measured to determine communication effectiveness. Therefore, it is proposed that communication should be one of the core managerial competencies that managers are appraised on at the University. The Organisational Learning and Development section of the Human Resources department in the Institutional Office should be requested to collaborate with the Corporate Affairs and Relations department to identify and define non-negotiable communication competencies for managers and develop instruments to measure manager's communication performance as part of the University's annual performance appraisal system.

In addition, the identified and defined communication responsibilities of the managers should be included as part of the managers' job description and key performance areas. This would ensure that all managers know what is expected from them regarding internal communication with their subordinates and additionally, that they are held accountable for fulfilling their communication role.

The Organisational Learning and Development section in collaboration with the Corporate Affairs and Relations department should develop a communication framework for the various levels of managers to clarify communication roles and responsibilities. This framework could be based on Barrett's (2008) leadership communication framework that defines the communication role and responsibilities of executive management, senior managers, middle managers and line managers.

Once developed, this framework should be integrated into the University's official job description template developed by the Organisational Learning and Development section. This would ensure that the communication role of managers is clearly articulated and included as part of the manager's key performance areas.

Furthermore, developing managers' communication skills should become a priority at the University. The Human Resources department together with the Corporate Affairs and Relations department should determine the communication needs of managers. Once identified, a communication training programme in the form of communication workshops, practical communication training and coaching, should be developed to enhance managers' ability to communicate in an effective and confident manner. With the limited resources of the Organisational Learning and Development section, and the Corporate Affairs and Relations department, this element could be outsourced to an external accredited and reputable communication skills training company.

The communication role of managers must be an accountable part of every manager's job. This accountability should be enforced by means of integrating the manager's communication role in job descriptions, key performance areas and performance appraisal. Moreover, a managers' communication toolkit should be created to ensure communication accountability. This toolkit should include tools such as shared communication standards, clear measures and regular tracking and measurement.

A two-pronged approach should be devised to address the above through an imperative induction communication training programme with specific modules for newly appointed managers. The other managers, already employed at the University, could be first assessed to determine the level of their communication aptitude and then invited to take part in a suitable module of the University's communication training programme.

6.4.4 Recommendation 4: internal communication campaign

Since the inception of the North-West University, a dedicated and concerted effort has not been made to enhance employees' awareness of the general advantages of the unique management model and merger. Internal communication should play a role in managing organisational change, because of the merger and subsequent transformation and integration process.

The University needs all lines of management to act as communicators and change facilitators to facilitate a shared understanding of the concepts of the merger, the University's unique decentralised management model, the diverse internal environment and inconsistencies in the managerial levels within academic and support departments. Effective communication from all lines of management is also invaluable in resolving obstacles arising from unstructured communication systems, processes, prevalent misunderstanding among

employees and limited internal communication resources at the Institutional Office and three Campuses.

A dedicated internal communication or advocacy campaign to explain the management model and solicit buy-in from senior managers and all employees, should be conceptualised and implemented by the Corporate Affairs and Relations department together with its Campuses' counterparts, Vice-Chancellor's office and the three Campus Rectors' office. This measure has already been identified by the Institutional Management at the annual strategic planning session held in August 2009.

This study confirmed and reiterated the compelling and insistent need to embark on an internal communication campaign. The internal communication campaign should preferably be addressed prior to implementing an internal communication plan to address the internal communication system, structure and processes.

The Institutional Management and Campus Management should also utilise the campaign to convey a unified message of management's commitment and undertaking to invest in regular communication with employees as an answer to address communication problems within the Institutional Office and the Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses.

6.4.5 Recommendation 5: building a culture of employee engagement

Effective internal communication is a critical contributing and enabling factor for fostering engaged employees. For this reason, the Corporate Affairs and Relations department should first focus on enhancing internal communication effectiveness as recommended above. Once notable progress and outcomes have been achieved, the department can then shift its focus to building a culture of employee engagement at the University.

As a first step, the Corporate Affairs and Relations department should initiate a discussion to explain the benefits of engaged employees in driving employee performance and organisational efficiency to the Human Resources department with the view to solicit their support in prioritising employee engagement.

Once this is achieved, a proposal to investigate and identify key drivers of employee engagement at the University should be developed, discussed with the relevant key stakeholders and then tabled at the Institutional Management for approval.

This would lead towards the development and implementation of an employee engagement plan. This plan should be closely linked or integrated with the relevant aspects of the recommended internal communication plan. This would ensure that the managers, who are already practicing their internal communication role, begin to embrace and execute the employee engagement plan and thereby develop engaged employees.

Since the concept of employee engagement is still unfamiliar at the University, the implementation of an engagement plan should be phased in. This should provide an opportunity to first focus on implementing the plan within the support departments of the University and measure the outcomes of the employee engagement efforts.

Once the benefits of employee engagement are identified and evident, then it would be a logical progression to phase in the implementation of employee engagement efforts within the academic departments of the University. This plan, similar to the internal communication plan, would be implemented through the involvement and participation of all managers in the Institutional Office and the three Campuses.

6.5 General conclusion

This study serves as an instrument to explore and describe the role of senior managers at the North West University in achieving and sustaining effective internal communication and employee engagement.

In comparison, differences exist between what is seen to be the ideal role of managers in internal communication and employee engagement, and what the nature of the role of managers at the North-West University actually is in internal communication and employee engagement.

As there was no similar study conducted at the North-West University since it was established in 2004, this study presents an opportunity to conduct further research within the higher education sector with the view to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding managerial communication and employee engagement.

6.6 Shortcomings and recommendations for future research

6.6.1 Shortcomings of this study

The perceptions of Institutional Management, Campus Management and lower management did not form part of this study; therefore, this could be considered a shortcoming of this study bearing in mind that their opinions might have differed.

Although the research sample was valid, the sampling technique might have allowed the researcher to interview subjects who are more knowledgeable about aspects pertinent to this study. Thus, the senior managers' perceptions may not necessarily be a comprehensive, representative and valid depiction of the nature of the role of senior managers in effective internal communication and employee engagement.

No quantitative research supported the qualitative findings, therefore, this could be considered another shortcoming to the study. A quantitative study could have been useful in validating or refuting the qualitative findings and could have identified trends and patterns pertinent to the context of this study.

6.6.2 Recommendations for future research

A follow-up study could be conducted to measure the effect of the recommendations that were made in this study. It would be interesting to measure and determine whether the engagement levels of employees have increased because of managers communicating adequately with their subordinates.

Another study related closely to a recommendation made in this study could assess and measure the effectiveness of internal communication channels, with the view to develop an internal communication channel guide or toolkit for managers.

Another suggestion for future research is to determine the key drivers of employee engagement and quantitatively measure the related effect of the specific drivers on the University's performance and the resulting return on investment in employee engagement efforts.

This study did not involve other universities, yet it transpired from the literature study that the management of the internal communication process remains a challenge. For this reason, a study across the higher education sector, particularly among other Universities with a multi-Campus character similar to the North-West University, could be conducted to determine a need for the develop of a framework or model for managing the internal communication process and managerial communication as a system in a structured, coordinated and cohesive method that can be measured to determine internal communication effectiveness.

Finally, in the future, an interdisciplinary study comprising the psychological, behavioural, communication, and sociocultural sciences could be conducted to further develop theoretical grounding of the concept of employee engagement.

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Appendix A _ List of interviewees

The role of senior managers at the North-West University in internal communication and employee engagement

List of interviewees

<u>Institutional Office</u>	
Mrs A S de Waal	Manager – Management Information
Mrs B Smit	Manager – Career Centre
Me C F de Wit	Director – Human Resources Operations
Mr L J Jacobs	Director – Corporate Communications
Prof M M Verhoef	Director – Language Directorate
<u>Potchefstroom Campus</u>	
Mr A A le Roux	Manager – Logistics
Mr R G Roberts	Snr Accountant – Financial Administration: Revenue
Prof S S Visser	Director – School of Accounting Sciences
Prof T E du Plessis	Director – Potchefstroom Business School
Prof H G W du Plessis	Director – ATKV School for Creative Writing
Mr P J van der Merwe	Director – School of Music
Prof B W Richter	Director – School of Curriculum – based studies
Prof H H Vorster	Director – Centre of Excellence for Nutrition
Prof D W Oliver	Director – School of Pharmacy
<u>Mafikeng Campus</u>	
Mrs E K Travis	Head – Committee Secretariat
Prof M Maselesele	Dean – Faculty of Agriculture, Science and Technology
Mr E L Mostert	Director – Finance and Facilities
Prof L I Qalinge	Director – School of Social Sciences
<u>Vaal Triangle Campus</u>	
Mr F Pedro	Director – Information and Support
Prof C van Eeden	Director – School of Behavioural Sciences
Mr J N Simango	Director – Student Affairs
Prof T C Rabali	Director – School of Basic Sciences

The role of senior managers at the North-West University in internal communication and employee engagement

Interview schedule

Name:

Campus / Institutional Office:

Position:

Date:

First topic

The role of managers in facilitating effective internal communication (within the specific context of strategic alignment at the NWU)

1. What does internal communication really mean to you as a manager?
2. How important is effective internal communication in your role as a manager?
3. How do you achieve effective internal communication?
4. Describe the channels / methods of communication that you use in communicating with your staff?
5. How do you go about sharing information about the following:
 - job responsibilities (what's my job?);
 - performance feedback (how am I doing?);
 - individual needs (does anyone care?);
 - department objectives and motivating staff to support organisational goals (how are we doing?);
 - vision, mission, values, strategy and supporting key strategic messages (what are our vision, mission and values?);
6. How do you feel about your role as a manager in facilitating internal communication?
7. How do you feel about your communication skills as a manager?

Second topic

The role of managers in facilitating employee engagement

8. How do you perceive your role as a manager in employee engagement?
9. Describe your feelings towards the North-West University?
10. Describe how your employees feel about the University?
11. How do you ensure that your employees share the institution's values and identify with its purpose / strategic objectives?
12. How would you describe the emotional attachment of your staff to the University
13. Describe how you would encourage a sense of belonging to the University among your staff?
14. How would you describe the willingness of your staff to go the extra mile in their tasks?
15. How would you describe your staff's commitment to you as a manager?
16. Describe how your staff feels about their work?
 - Please explain how their rational (commitment of mind) compares to their emotional (commitment of the heart) commitment.
17. What do you think is the role of internal communication in employee engagement?

Appendix C _ Letter from language practitioner

Maretha Botes

Freelance journalist and language practitioner

marethab@gmail.com

Mobile 083 401 7492

13 Brahms Street
Vanderbijlpark
1911

18 November 2009

To whom it may concern

Confirmation: editing the mini-dissertation of Ms Phumzile P Mmope

I hereby wish to confirm that I edited the mini-dissertation, The role of senior managers at the North-West University in internal communication and employee engagement, by Ms PP Mmope.

My services included editing the document and translating the abstract.

Yours sincerely

Maretha Botes

Freelance journalist and language practitioner