

# Managers' communication skills as perceived by their subordinates

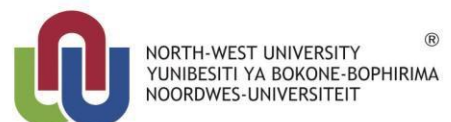
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It all starts here <sup>TM</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

Modern businesses are continuously confronted by unrelenting change which is accommodated by precipitous competition. In South Africa's volatile economic and business landscape, competent managers and their subordinates are often the difference between business success and failure. These businesses are increasingly becoming more diverse. It is the managers' task to not only harvest the potential for innovation that emerges from diversity, but also to minimise the potential strife that it may bring. Diversity can be in terms of a variety of races, genders, ages, nationalities, cultures, sexual orientations, social classes, educational levels, generations and many more factors such as business sizes, industries and sectors.

Effective task execution is dependent on an extensive number of managerial competencies, including but not limited to communication, creative problem solving, teamwork, interpersonal relations, self-management, decision-making, networking, global awareness and strategic action. Communication is one of the most important managerial competencies for effective management. Active listening is the single most important skill for effective communication. Additionally, other essential skills include feedback, message sending skills and the ability to deal with (general as well as listening and feedback phase related) interference. Managers' attainment of an effective and efficient communication process is conducive to their understanding of the various contributing aspects/skills of effective communication. Moreover, they are required to comprehend the various perceptions, perspectives, preferences and pre-dispositions of various groups of subordinates. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how subordinates from various industries, educational backgrounds and generations perceive their managers' communication skills in South Africa.

The researcher used a quantitative descriptive design to achieve the study's objectives. Further, a non-probability, convenience sample was implemented and 931 useable responses were obtained via a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire began with a short preamble which was followed by two sections. The first section gathered data regarding the subordinates' demographic information and the second section, which comprised a five-point Likert scale with only the end points labelled as *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree*, measured the subordinates' perception of their managers' various selected communication skills – which culminated in their overall communication competencies. Furthermore, the questionnaire was found to be both reliable and valid.

This dissertation is presented in the **article format** and its primary objective was reached by achieving various secondary objectives which were spread through the three articles that make up this study. The first article determined managers' message sending skills and their ability to

deal with general interference in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in the manufacturing, retail and services industries. In the second article, the effectiveness of managers' listening and feedback skills as well as their ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process as perceived by subordinates with varying educational backgrounds was determined. The third article determined managers' overall communication competencies (which comprised the five selected aspects of effective communication) as perceived by subordinates from various generations.

The findings of the first article revealed that subordinates perceived their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with general interference as slightly above average. Furthermore, subordinates from manufacturing businesses perceived their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference to be slightly better than those from retail, whereas there were no statistical differences between these industries and the services industry. The results presented in the second article showed that subordinates perceived their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process as marginally above mediocre. Additionally, managers' listening and feedback skills were perceived to be better by graduate level subordinates than by those with only a grade 12 qualification. Subordinates with a post-graduate degree also had better perceptions of these skills than those with a grade 12 qualification did, although not statistically significant. Finally, in the third article it was found that subordinates perceived their managers' overall communication competencies to be barely above average. Further, where the differences between generations were statistically significant, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers constantly had better perceptions of their managers' communication skills than Generation Yers did. Though not always statistically significant, it seemed that the two older generations consistently had better perceptions of their managers' skills and overall communication competence than the younger ones did.

The findings of the abovementioned articles led to numerous recommendations. Regarding messages sending, managers are advised to promote trust in their interactions with subordinates by using nonverbal communication; especially within the retail industry. Pertaining to their ability to deal with general interference, it is recommended that retail industry managers specifically focus on refraining from being preoccupied with other matters during their conversations with subordinates. Recommendations of this study also included that managers pay particularly close attention to subordinates' emotions by considering their non-verbal cues such as speech tempo and body language when listening to conversations; especially while communicating with grade 12 level subordinates. With regards to managers' feedback skills, it is recommended that they show interest in the outcome of the feedback process, specifically by setting mutually accepted objectives with grade 12 level subordinates prior to commencing the process. Regarding

managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process, it is recommended that managers avoid information overload by determining the core issues that need to be discussed during the feedback phase and then only focusing on them. Lastly it is recommended that managers that function in generationally diverse businesses actively seek out subordinates from younger generation during the communication process. The key to this lies in communicating with them in manners which they prefer. Thus, managers are advised to consciously engage Generation Y subordinates by integrating information and communication technologies into their interactions. This will ultimately improve managers' overall communication competencies.

This study's contribution is to make managers aware of possible difficulties they may experience during the communication process regarding the five selected aspects of effective communication. In conclusion, effective communication is the key to promoting and sustaining business success in a constantly changing business environment. If managers of all businesses where they communicate with subordinates implement the findings of this study, they will stand a better chance to achieve their managerial goals and gain a competitive business advantage.

## **LIST OF KEY TERMS**

Managerial competencies

Communication

Listening

Feedback

Message sending skills

Verbal communication

Nonverbal communication

Interference

## LIST OF DEFINITIONS

**Managerial competencies:** Managerial competency refers to the ability to make business decisions and lead subordinates within a business. According to Daft and Marcic (2014:98) competence develops from self-awareness, more specifically, being aware of one's skills. Managers are considered to be competent when they are so practiced at performing their managerial tasks exceptionally that it happens without thinking, or special effort. The three most common managerial skills include (Katz, 1974:90-102):

- i. human skills, which refers to the ability to interact and motivate;
- ii. technical skills, the aptitude to apply gained knowledge to trade; and
- iii. conceptual skills, which is the capability of understanding concepts, formulating ideas and implementing strategies.

This study concentrated on the human skills of managers, more specifically their communication competencies.

**Communication:** Communication can be defined as the procedure by which information, opinions, thoughts, ideas and plans are exchanged and comprehended by two or more individuals, typically with the intention to motivate or influence behaviour (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552). In a business context today, information is one of the most fundamental resources, especially in seeking to gain competitive insights, knowing and satisfying consumer needs and being aware of regulation changes (Thill & Bovée, 2013:46).

**Listening:** Listening refers to the act of paying attention to not only the message, but also the manner in which the message is being conveyed, such as the use of language, voice, tone and body language (Certo, 2014). There are three types of listening namely passive listening, which is the weakest form of listening, attentive listening, which requires a general interest in the message being conveyed and attentive listening, which is the most powerful level of listening (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:128).

**Feedback:** Dai *et al.* (2010:17) define feedback as the purposeful sharing of information, feelings and thoughts with the intention of enabling individuals or groups to compare actual performance with a predetermined standard, norm or expectation. Feedback can be regarded as providing information relating to the performance of the receiver with the goal to improve performance (Dobbelaer *et al.*, 2013:14). There are three principal sources of feedback which include feedback from others, feedback in a task itself, and feedback by oneself (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:385).

**Message sending skills:** The message-sending skill involves three actions (Lynn, 1976:39). The first is to scrutinise recipients to determine preliminary guidelines for message construction, most appropriate channels and most engaging delivery techniques. Secondly, selecting, organising, supporting, and clearly conveying thoughts in a verbal and nonverbal way suitable for the recipients. Lastly, using several ways to solicit feedback, express approval or disapproval, and criticise or evaluate subordinate performance. Message sending includes the use of verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal communication (Windle & Warren, 2014).

**Verbal communication:** Verbal communication is the use of sounds and language to transmit a message. It serves as a medium for voicing desires, ideas and concepts. It is vital to the processes of learning and teaching. Combined with nonverbal forms of communication, verbal communication becomes the primary tool for expression between two or more people (Hanes, 2013). Verbal communication involves speaking, writing and sign language (DuBrin, 2009:411). Signs and symbols are the foremost signals that make up verbal communication. Words act as symbols, and signs are secondary compounds of the underlying message and include elements such as tone of voice (Krauss, 2002:3).

**Nonverbal communication:** Nonverbal communication is the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless (mostly visual) cues between people. It is sometimes mistakenly referred to as body language (kinesics), but nonverbal communication encompasses much more, such as the use of voice (paralanguage), touch (haptics), distance (proxemics), and physical environments/appearance (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009:681). The overall purpose of nonverbal communication is to convey the feeling behind a message such as nodding one's head to imply emphatic acknowledgement (DuBrin, 2009:412-413).

**Interference:** Interference entails any barrier in the communication process (Ciruny, 2011). Interference, also known as noise, distracts the recipient and prevents him or her from paying complete attention to the sender's intended message. There are several barriers that may occur namely, physical interference, physiological interference, psychological interference and semantic interference (Devito, 2009).

**Generations:** Generations refer to a social location with the potential of influencing a person's consciousness in much the same manner as social class or culture (Codrington, 2008). A generation usually spans the length of roughly 20 years, signifying approximately the time from the birth of a cohort of people to the time they come of age and start having children of their own (Codrington, 2008). Generation theory is attempts to interpret human societal existence and dissimilarities within this time frame (Jansen, 1975:10). Generation theory explains that the era in which a person was born affects the development of their view of the world.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Businesses exist to identify and satisfy consumers' desires and needs with products and services (Botha & Musengi, 2012:4). Other stakeholders also expect businesses to employ corporate social responsibility in their search to make profits (Strydom, 2011:4). Business leaders seek to generate sufficient income to make a profit through the economic principle of maximum output gained from minimum input (Mullins, 2013:256). For the achievement of this endeavour, managers need to have an array of competencies.

A business's success is largely dependent on managers' knowledge and skills as it is capable of either promoting or hindering the development of a business (Verle *et al.*, 2014:924). The ability to build a competency involves self-awareness. There are four stages included in this, namely unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence and unconscious competence. Where unconscious competence refers to the point where an individual is so skilled, that he/she performs their task naturally and without additional thought or effort (Daft & Marcic, 2014:98).

There are many managerial competencies that managers need to master to execute their tasks effectively and run the business efficiently. Amongst these competencies, communication, interpersonal relations, self-management, awareness of self and others, decision-making, analytical skills, global awareness, teamwork and strategic action are regarded as essential (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:23). The competency of communicating is regarded as the most crucial for effective business management (Heyns & Luke, 2012:113).

Communication is a managerial tool used to convey information, opinions, thoughts, ideas and plans amongst various factions of a business (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552). Ineffective communication is a result of messages being misunderstood or misinterpreted. However, managers can counter this by having sufficient knowledge about communication and appropriately applying it during the communication process. According to French (2013), when managers and employees fail to communicate effectively it leads to time being wasted, eroded inputs and efforts, lower customer loyalty, unfavourable perceptions towards brands, low productivity and low profits.

This study focused on managers' communication competencies as experienced and perceived by their subordinates. Significant focal points of the study included: listening, feedback, message sending skills and interference.

The research followed the article approach in writing a dissertation. The study was conducted in three industries, namely: manufacturing, services and retail.

The following section provides a brief background into communication, followed by an overview of the three industries under discussion.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND**

Communication among humans has existed for as long as humans have. Communication is a significant element of human interactions and social conduct. Communication itself has taken many forms during the existence of the human race. We have gone from the use of symbols to widen the range and extended the lifespan of our early communication efforts to cave paintings, to petroglyphs, to pictograms, to ideograms, to the fast paced modern world of telecommunications (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:2-3). In a study of the history of communication studies, Pooley and Park (2012:85) discovered that the field was dominated by field-specific research, which mainly studies communication through a contextual lens, that a large amount of the studies were focused on countries in North America and Europe and that even though there are vast amounts of literature available, far too few of these studies address communication interactions, cross-cutting rivalries, points of intellectual and institutional overlap and patterns of mutual indifference.

## **1.3 OVERVIEW OF TARGETED INDUSTRIES**

The manufacturing industry refers to businesses which involve the manufacturing and processing of items between either excellent or middling quality. Therefore this industry indulges in the creation of new commodities or adding value to existing products (Economy Watch, 2010). The final products can serve as either finished goods for sale to customers or as intermediate goods used in other production processes (Economy Watch, 2010). The manufacturing industry combines management techniques, such as technologies, modular layouts, process reengineering, Total Quality Management and employee involvement, resulting in industry growth (Chang *et al.*, 2006:102).

The manufacturing sector continues to occupy a significant share of the South African economy, despite its relative importance declining from 19 percent in 1993 to about 17 percent in 2012 (Stats SA, 2014a; Stats SA, 2014c). The seasonally adjusted real gross domestic product at market prices for the first quarter of 2014 decreased by an annualised rate of 0.6 percent; the manufacturing industry was one of the major contributors to this decrease in economic activity was (-0.7 of a percentage point). This negative contribution was based on a negative growth of

4.4 percent, mainly due to lower production in the petroleum, chemical products, rubber and plastic products division (Stats SA, 2014a; Stats SA, 2014c).

The service industry can be defined as businesses which primarily focus on earning revenue through providing services (Business Dictionary, 2014). Satisfying customers is crucial to any business, especially to those with service industries. Therefore, service quality, relationship quality and overall service satisfaction play a critical role.

The most significant positive contributors to economic activity include finance, real estate, business services, catering, transport, storage, general government services and accommodation, which is generally categorised under the services industry. Each of these sectors contributed at least 0.2 of a percentage point to South Africa's economy (Stats SA, 2014b; Stats SA, 2014c).

All products (goods and services) that are sold to consumers by businesses are grouped under the retail industry (Investopedia, 2014). Businesses within the retail industry are challenged by rapidly changing market conditions and much higher expectations from customers within the market (Chang *et al.*, 2006:102). Retail businesses operate in a highly competitive environment, which potentially creates a need for differentiation and improvement of the retail mix and customer services (Panigyrakes, 2007:137).

Poor economic activity continuously plagued the retail industry. In the first quarter of 2013, the retail industry showed a negative (-0.6 percent) contribution to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Stats SA, 2014c; Stats SA, 2014d).

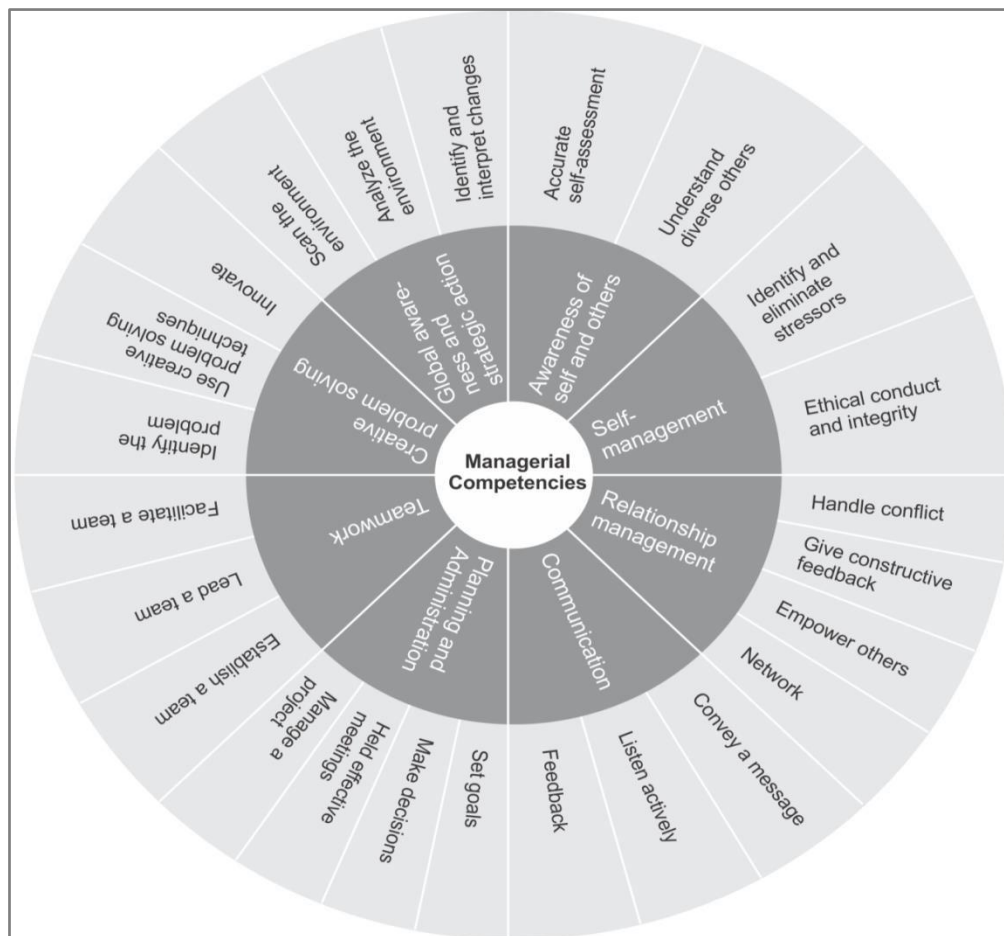
A variety of managerial competencies is needed to retain customers and ensure long-term success in any industry (Keayveney, 1995:79). Communication plays a pivotal role within the manufacturing industry as managers are becoming more preoccupied with strategic responsibilities and more removed from day-to-day operations (Worley & Doolen, 2012:231). Intangible services sold in the services industry have to be communicated appropriately to evade ambiguity from not only consumers but also employees of services businesses (Mittal, 2002:2). Communication is also important to the retail industry as the success of retail businesses can be influenced by consumer perceptions, and effective communication has been shown to be conducive to gaining businesses a competitive advantage (Adcock, 2000:7-8).

Based on the abovementioned statements, it can be concluded that managerial competencies, especially communication, are important contributors to business success within each industry. The following section provides a comprehensive literature review of the constructs of this study, followed by the problem statement.

## 1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, there is a variety of managerial skills that managers should have to effectively run a business and ultimately achieve the business's objectives and business success. Skills such as communication, teamwork, interpersonal relations, self-management, decision-making, networking, analytical skills, global awareness and strategic action, awareness of self and others, and creative problem solving are viewed to be of significant importance (Daft & Marcic, 2014:6). Figure 1.1 is a visual representation of the most crucial managerial competencies and skills. The competencies are illustrated in the smaller circle and the associated skills for the competency in the bigger circle (Dogra, 2012).

**Figure 1.1: The essential competencies of management**



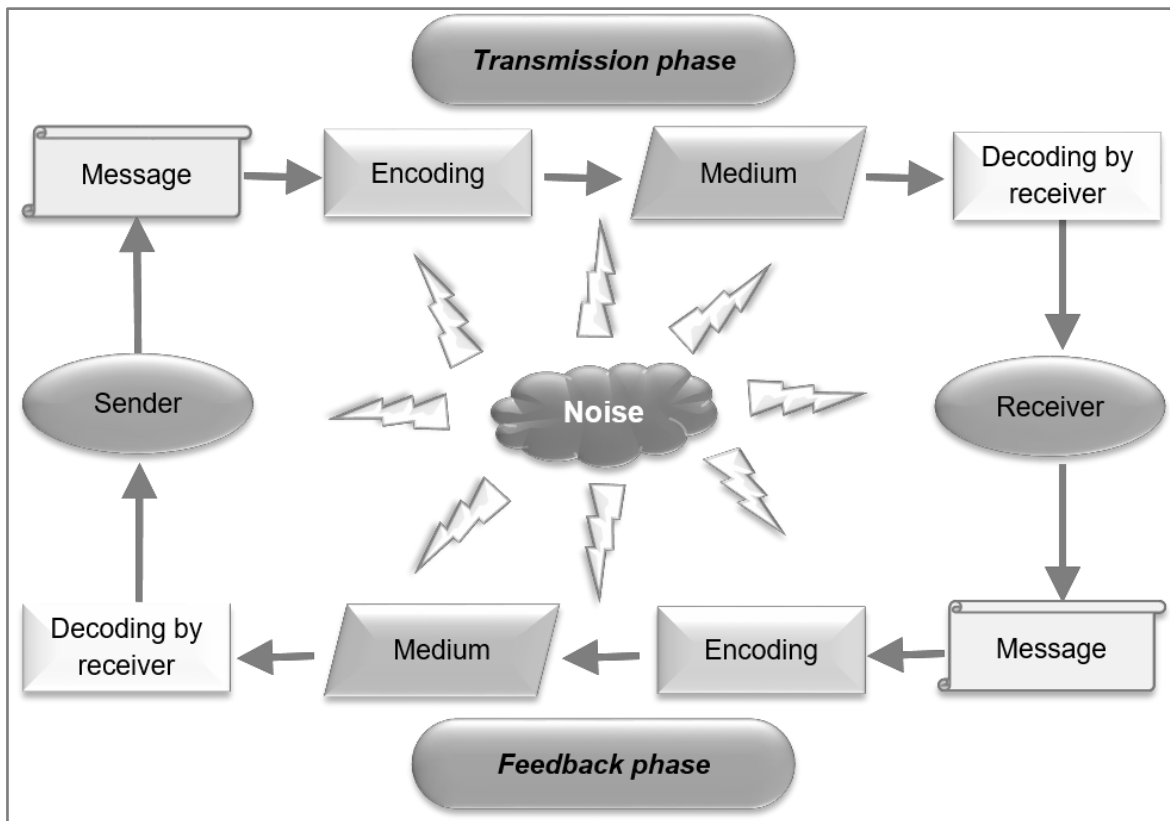
Source: Daft and Marcic (2014:13) and Dogra (2012)

There are four stages involved in building competence, namely: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence and unconscious competence. Unconscious competence refers to the point where a manager has mastered a skill to the extent that the business leader performs their tasks naturally and without thought or additional effort. When an

individual is at the beginning of the process of mastering a new skill, it is referred to as conscious competence. Conscious incompetence is when a manager is aware of their shortcomings, yet they are also aware of what measures to take to become personally competent. Lastly, the term unconscious incompetence refers to the stage where an individual is severely lacking in a skill and is oblivious to this fact (Daft & Marcic, 2014:98). For managers to reach the peak of personal effectiveness, they must seek to become unconsciously competent which refers to the combinations of knowledge, behaviour and attitudes that promote personal effectiveness (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:23).

Voinea *et al.* (2015:177) argue that the communication skill is the most essential for effective business operations. Communication is defined as the process of exchanging inner thoughts, messages and information. Communication as a skill is a major contributor to collaboration and cooperation. The purpose of communication is usually to fulfil a need, to motivate behaviour or instigate action. The majority of a manager's work and life is devoted to communication with others, either in the form of writing, reading, speaking or listening (Thill & Bovée, 2013:46). Poor communication more often than not leads to inefficient time management, eroded efforts, declined customer loyalty, hostile attitudes towards brands, low outputs and inevitably lower profits (French, 2013). Einwiller and Boenigk (2012:23) state that managers should use communication as a strategic business method used to plot, develop, execute, and evaluate coordinated, persuasive brand programmes over time with customers, prospects, subordinates and other applicable external audiences. Effective communication encourages trust and employee engagement, which leads to efficient productivity (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:8-9). According to Ruck (2011:3) businesses depend on an expansive, reliable and efficient communication process to ensure that the right information flows accordingly to the individuals and departments that require it.

There are usually two distinguishable phases present in the communication process, namely the transmission phase and the feedback phase. In the transmission phase information is shared between two or more individuals or groups. This phase can also be seen as the listening phase for managers. During the feedback phase, a mutual understanding arises through cognitive actions and listening. During both phases, a number of stages occur (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552-553). Figure 1.2 provides a visual representation of the stages in the communication process.

**Figure 1.2: The communication process**

Source: Jones and George (2013:417) and Daft and Marcic (2009:552-553).

The sender, the individual or groups that wish to share information starts the process at the transmission phase by formulating the message, and the information to be communicated. The sender then converts the message into symbols or language, a process known as encoding; messages are often encoded into words in a specific language. Encoded messages are transmitted to the receiver, the person or group for which the message is intended through a medium (Jones & George 2013:417).

There are four conditions that affect the encoded message, namely skill, attitude, knowledge and the social, cultural system. With regard to these conditions, skill refers to one's ability to communicate which includes speaking and writing, one's attitude toward the topic or receiver influences behaviour, one's knowledge restricts communication ability and finally the social, cultural system refers to social norms from beliefs that influence communication (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2007:325).

A medium is also referred to as a channel, the pathway which an encoded message is transmitted through to a receiver (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:10). A crucial event in the communication process occurs at the next stage; the receiver interprets and attempts to make sense of the message, a

process known as decoding (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:392-393). The feedback phase is commenced by the receiver (currently the sender). The receiver chooses the message and medium and then transmits it to the original sender (currently the receiver). This message could consist of validation that the first message was comprehended, or a repetition of the first message to ensure that it has been interpreted accurately, or a request for additional information (Jones & George, 2013:416-417).

Noise, also known as interference, is anything that hinders the communication process and it can occur anywhere in the communication process. This includes internal interferences such as mental blocks and negative attitudes towards the message or sender and external interferences such as literal blare caused by clattering machinery or loud music (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393). The first sender then decodes the messages and ensures that a mutual understanding has been established; if not, the process is repeated. The medium (or channel) refers to the means used to send messages and the associated formats (Clampitt, 2005). These means used to communicate can include face to face, telephone, pager, written, radio and video communication. In face to face communication, which is the method most commonly used to communicate more important matters, communication transpires through visual, auditory and olfactory formats. Managers are advised to select the medium most suitable to the particular goals pursued at that time (Conrad & Poole, 2005:25).

In the communication process, communication can occur in verbal and/or nonverbal form. Verbal communication involves speaking, writing and sign language. The overall purpose of nonverbal communication is to convey the feeling behind a message such as nodding one's head to imply emphatic acknowledgement (DuBrin, 2009:411-413).

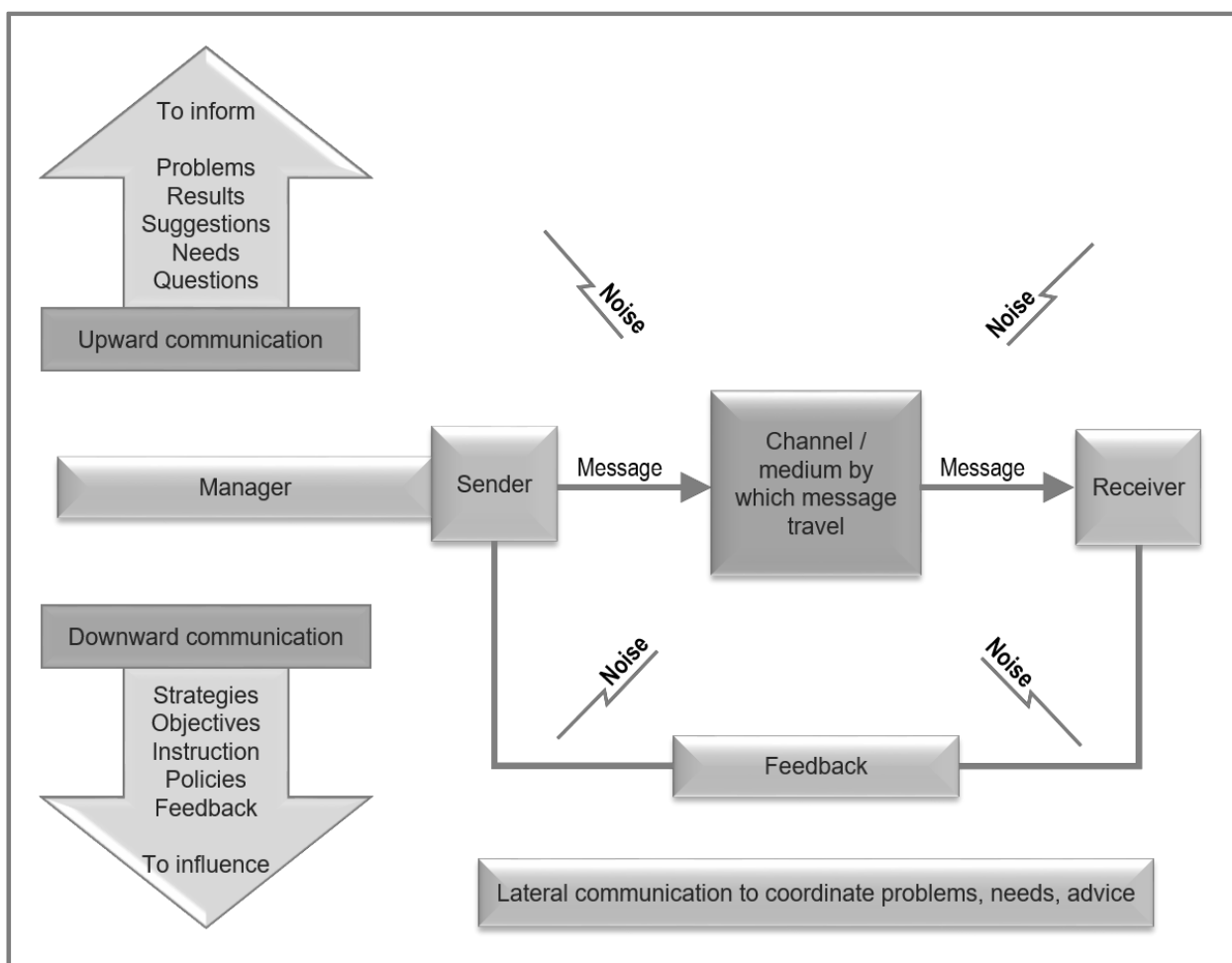
Strong verbal and nonverbal communication skills in isolation are worthless. In other words, being an exceptional verbal and/or nonverbal communicator is considered to be insufficient without the appropriate aptitude in listening and feedback skills. Active listening is essential for managerial success; it leads to increased levels of employee engagement, a better comprehension of business issues and commitment to production quality (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:14). In a business context, managers and subordinates provide feedback with the intention of confirming, adding to, overwriting or restructuring received information (Ragusa, 2011:21).

Message sending skills are often misunderstood and often considered to be a soft skill (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:15). In businesses there are individuals with different opinions, values, beliefs and needs. A managers' ability to exchange ideas with subordinates, understand their perspectives and solve problems successfully will depend significantly on how effective they can communicate with their subordinates. Windle and Warren (2014) explain that the act of message sending

involves three components known as: verbal, nonverbal, and para-verbal components. Verbal components are the content of the message being sent; this entails the choice and arrangement of words. Nonverbal components are acknowledged as the messages being sent through a person's body language. Para-verbal components refer to the way in which messages are sent, thus the tone, pacing and volume of the sender's voice (Windle & Warren, 2014).

Figure 1.3 below, illustrates how managers at different hierarchical levels implement the communication process.

**Figure 1.3: Communication process used by managers at different hierarchical levels**



Source: Jones and George (2013:417) and Slocum *et al.* (2008:440-442).

The communication process illustrated above differs from the initial communication process illustrated in Figure 1.2, as it also includes the way in which managers communicate at different levels of the hierarchy and for various purposes, which are (Slocum *et al.*, 2008:440-442):

- Upward. Upward communication flows upward from lower level managers to higher level managers and is usually used to inform higher management of problems and needs, to report results, to make suggestions and to ask questions.
- Downward. Downward communication is led by the hierarchical levels of a business; it flows from top to bottom with the purpose of influencing performance or informing subordinates through strategies, objectives, instruction, policies and feedback.
- Lateral. In a business lateral communication happens between departmental boundaries in the form of cross-departmental committees, teams and/or task forces. It also highlights the way to satisfy consumer needs through timely and accurate feedback and product information.
- Personal networks. To be able to make informed decisions, business leaders need to access a wide scope of relevant information. Thus, managers build a network of contacts to assist in information gathering, interpretation and distribution (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:350 & 356).

After managers have gained definitive comprehension of the above-mentioned theoretical constructs, it is expected of them to effectively practice them in various settings and tailor the execution of these managerial skills for diverse groups. These dynamic groups can consist of gender and racial diversities, different levels of education and especially different age segments. Cultures and generations are groups of people with resemblances and communication that are a basic necessity in groups. It is apparent that the way in which individuals use communication processes in these groups is not random, in fact, it can be very diverse and complex (Wheelan, 1994:27-29). Therefore, studying these constructs will help to gain insights into the different ways in which these diverse groups can be managed.

Generation theory is an effort at understanding human societal existence and variations in this existence (Jansen, 1975:10). A generation is an entire body of individuals that were born more or less at the same time in a span of about 20 years (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2004:10). A generation is made up of coevals who construe their circumstances by giving identical or similar meanings to their circumstances and by perceiving their world in the same way (Jansen, 1975:13). There are three fundamental conditions for a generation to exist, namely a certain time dimension, a particular historical context and a vital style (Jansen, 1975:10). In other words, the generational theory states that the era of an individual's birth significantly affects the development of their world perspective. According to Codrington (2008), people's value systems are formed in more or less the first decade of their lives by family members, friends, communities, significant events and the general era in which they are born (Codrington, 2008). The generations according to the year that they were born can be defined as the following (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2004:18):

- GI (Hero) generation (born between the 1900s and 1920s);
- The silent generation (born between the 1930s and 1940s);
- The baby boomer generation (born between the 1940s and 1960s);
- The generation X (born between the 1960s and 1980s) and
- The generation Y (born between the 1980s and 2000s).

The dates are not considered to be the be-all and end-all for generations, because people born close to the beginning or end of a generation are known as Cusper; and Cuspers have traits from both generations (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2004:69).

## **1.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Despite the magnitude of various communication methods accessible to the business and its business leaders, poor communication among and within different hierarchy levels and factions in a business are still present and significantly hinders the achievement of the business objectives (Arvidsson, 2010:340). Regarding losing money due to ineffective communication, South African businesses are in the forefront. A factor that contributes to the ineffective communication in South African businesses is the inability to manage the great number of diverse individuals within the businesses (French, 2013). Managers that have an inflated perception of their communication skills led to ineffective communication, mistakenly altered messages and misconstrued transmission (Johnson, 2013).

Experts often link blunders in business management to poor communication. Groyberg and Slind (2012) suggest that Nokia lost a great deal of their competitive advantages due to poor communication. Even the explosion at the Deepwater Horizon offshore oil rig in April of 2010 and the substantial blow to the corporate image of British Petroleum (BP) can be credited to ineffective communication, inability to share crucial information appropriately and poor message sending skills. Moerdyk (2012) goes as far as to argue that even the Marikana Massacre, where loss of life occurred can also be blamed on poor communication on the part of everybody involved, namely the mine management, the police, government and even the miners themselves.

The communication process as it occurs between managers and subordinates is often still rampant with distrust, suspicion and the concern for hidden motives (April, 1999:228). In turn, this also often amounts to psychological noise which can only be restrained by wilful cooperation in effective communication enhancement practices (Burgess & Bothma, 2007:174). Factors like gender, language or age can be a barrier to persuasive communication in the modern businesses.

However, business leaders can be trained to communicate clearly with all people in the business setting (Gass & Seiter, 2003:23).

Communication is one of the most important managerial skills, and management usually regards communication as of lesser importance (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:30; Heyns & Luke, 2012:113). Ineffective communication leads to time being wasted, eroded inputs and efforts, declined customer loyalty, unfavourable perceptions towards brands, low productivity and low profit margins (French, 2013).

Feedback and listening are the two major contributors to the skill of effective communication. If managers communicate without actively listening too, they squander potentially lucrative opportunities and managers are less likely to become aware of problems with existing processes and sources of inefficiencies unless the business exhibits an organisational culture of effective and constructive feedback. Despite their undeniable importance, listening and feedback are components of communication most underestimated and neglected (Daft & Marcic; 2009:573).

The reason for this study is to investigate managers' communication skills as perceived by their subordinates.

## **1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following objectives were formulated:

### **1.6.1 Primary Objective**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how subordinates from various industries, educational backgrounds and generations perceive their managers' communication skills in South Africa.

### **1.6.2 Secondary Objectives**

To support the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were formulated, to:

- develop a demographic profile of respondents who took part in the study;
- provide insight in the communication process used by managers;
- investigate managers listening skills in the communication process as perceived by subordinates with various educational levels;
- determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from

various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' listening skills;

- measure managers' feedback skills in the communication process as perceived by subordinates with various educational levels;
- establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' feedback skills;
- investigate managers' message sending skills in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in three different industries;
- determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills;
- determine managers' ability to deal with general interference in the communication process as observed by their subordinates;
- establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' ability to deal with general interference;
- determine managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process as observed by subordinates with various educational levels;
- determine whether there were statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process;
- measure managers' overall communication competencies during the communication process as perceived by subordinates from different generations;
- determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding their managers' various selected aspects of effective communication;
- determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding their managers' overall communication competencies;
- determine the practical significance of statistical differences;
- identify the aspect of effective communication that managers were the most proficient in; and

- describe the aspect of the effective communication where managers had the most room for improvement.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology used in this study can be discussed in two sections. Firstly, it included a literature review which entails an extensive overview of the existing literature so as to become familiarised with related works of the past. Secondly, it included an empirical study which consisted of a survey done in the three targeted industries and analysis and verification of the data via the implementation of statistical techniques.

### **1.7.1 Literature review**

Exceptional research outputs begin with the researchers familiarising themselves with previous works and existing research by conducting a literature survey and collecting secondary data (Welman & Kruger, 2001:33). In this study, secondary information related to the topics at hand were collected, and existing academic literature was utilised to add value to the current study as well as to contextualise it with preceding research done by other authors (Neuman, 2003:96).

By reviewing the existing body of knowledge, researchers can identify gaps or potential areas for future research, obtain precedence for conducting certain research in a specific way and compare their findings with the statements, findings and conclusions of other authors (Potter, 2006:156-157). The literature review discussed earlier in this chapter, and the three articles of this study aim to put concepts into perspective, and was done by consulting relevant books, subject specific journals, websites and accredited and scholarly journal articles.

It is noteworthy that some sources that were used date back as far as 1974; the reason for consulting such older sources was that contributions made by forerunners of a specific school of thought or concept are important to the comprehension of the impact of what needs to be researched.

Academic books that were enquired cover a wide range of subjects such as communication, management, psychology, human resources, generation theory, interpersonal skills and research practices and methods. Additionally, NEXUS, the database of the NRF (National Research Foundation) for completed and current registered research, was consulted before conducting this study to ensure its viability and originality. Furthermore, other databases such as Emerald, SACat, SAePublications, EbscoHost, Sabinet, Google Scholar and ProQuest were consulted for other academic resources.

## **1.7.2 Empirical survey**

The empirical survey of this study included the selection of a suitable research design and data collection method, development, and implementation of a sampling plan, development of the questionnaire and a data analysis.

### **1.7.2.1 Research design and method of collecting data**

A research design refers to the framework a study. It is used as a guide for the collection and analysis of data (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002:90). According to Burns and Bush (2014:99), there are three basic types of research designs, namely exploratory, descriptive and causal research.

Exploratory research involves discovering insights and ideas based on the objectives of the study. The design does not have pre-set procedures. Instead its nature changes as more information is gathered, making it unstructured and informal (Burns & Bush, 2014:101). Exploratory research is usually most suitable for domains that have not extensively been studied yet; the research aims to develop initial ideals along with a more specific research question (Struwig & Stead, 2007:7).

Descriptive research is focused on describing things, rather than attempting to explain causes (Sousa, 2014:225). This research design aims to provide thorough descriptions of opinions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviour, environments and markets (Bradley, 2007:515).

Causal research includes an experiment wherein some variables are altered, while keeping some constant, to prove or disprove researchers' belief that all events are caused by change (Struwig & Stead, 2007:236). Simply stated, in causal research the researcher aims to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between variables, with the belief that changing a single variable or element will lead to a change in separate variable or element (Burns & Bush, 2014:107).

Researchers consider the objectives of their study to determine which design is best suited to achieving these objectives. For the purpose of this study, the descriptive research design was selected and implemented.

With the objectives considered, and subsequently the appropriate research design chosen, the researcher has to select a corresponding data collection method. After a decision has been taken regarding the type of data needed, the researcher then needs to decide where and how the data can and should be collected (Struwig & Stead, 2007:41). Data collection refers to the process of gathering data in the form of responses using surveys, experiments, fieldwork or indirect methods (Singh, 2007:400). Data is raw information needed to achieve the purpose of a study, and it is obtained through formal scientific observation or research measurement (Stangor, 2011:4).

Furthermore, there are two distinguishable types of data collection methods, namely primary data collection and secondary data collection.

Firstly, primary data collection, which is information gathered for a specific purpose (Bradley, 2007:518), was obtained using questionnaires which were distributed by fieldworkers (Struwig & Stead, 2007:40). Secondly, secondary data collection, which is concerned with gathering data that already exists (Bradley, 2007:519), was collected to compare with the findings of the current study.

Primary data collection can be conducted using either qualitative research or quantitative research (Zikmund and Babin, 2010:132).

Qualitative research aims to describe the depth and breadth of attitudes, beliefs or opinions rather than attempting to quantify markets (Bradley, 2007:518). Qualitative research concerned with in-depth analyses, exploring the dynamic interaction of both the individual and the context, and interdisciplinary research (Struwig & Stead, 2007:243). The qualitative research methods are less concerned with numerical data collection, but rather obtaining the data in the form of words, sounds and images. The instrument used for primary data in qualitative research is based on the aim or purpose of the study, but the most commonly used primary data collection methods include interviews, focus groups, observation and unobtrusive measures (Bradley, 2007:518).

Quantitative research is a conclusive form of research which aims to describe the certain quantity features of a marketplace (Bradley, 2007:518). Quantitative data refers to numerical data and is concerned with the apportionment of numbers to the objects of study (Struwig & Stead, 2007:243). Furthermore, quantitative research is mainly used to test hypotheses. This approach uses three basic data collection methods, namely observation, questioning and experiments. Additionally, quantitative research data collection methods can be divided into personal interviews, telephone surveys, mail surveys and online questionnaires (Struwig & Stead, 2007:86-88). To achieve the purpose of this study the quantitative research method was implemented with the use of a self-administered questionnaire.

### **1.7.2.2 Development of the sample plan**

Sampling can be defined as the process of selecting sampling units from studying the population to estimate population parameters in such a way that the sample truly represents the population (Singh, 2007:89). In other words, sampling is the process of selecting a sub-group of a population to represent the entire population (Singh, 2007:408). Sampling is valuable since studying an entire population is often impractical, yet the value of the conducted research may be lost if the findings cannot assist in the comprehension of the entire population (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:33).

A study population can be described as all the possible respondents in a research project (Struwig & Stead, 2007:242). The population thus refers to a group of individuals, objects or items from among which samples are taken for measurement (Singh, 2007:88). The target population is the totality of cases that conforms to some nominated specification of a specific study (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002:983). The targeted population of this study consisted of workers with at least a grade 12 qualification within the manufacturing, retail and services industries of South Africa. From this population, the sample had to be selected. The two main sampling techniques are probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

Probability sampling involves the concept of random selection (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175). In probability sampling, every element within the study population has a known chance of selection (Struwig & Stead, 2007:112). With probability sampling, the likelihood of every unit in the population being included in the sample is known due to randomisation involved in the process (Singh, 2007:102). Simple random sample, cluster sample, stratified sample and systematic sample are typical probability sampling methods (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174).

Simple random sampling involves the researcher giving each member of the sampling frame a number followed by the researcher selecting sample units by a random method (Struwig & Stead, 2007:116). The selection is done in such a way that every unit in the population has exactly the same chance as any other unit of being chosen (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175).

In cluster sampling, the study population is divided into mutually exclusive and comprehensive subsets, and then a random sample of the subsets is selected (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:348). Cluster sampling involves entire groups or clusters being selected at random instead of choosing individual units from the population (Singh, 2007:105).

Stratified random sampling occurs when the researcher separates the study population into groups and randomly chooses sub-samples from each group (Struwig & Stead, 2007:117). Stratified random sampling involves dividing the study population into equally exclusive and comprehensive subsets, and after that a simple random sample of elements is selected independently from each subset (also referred to as strata) using random sampling or systematic sampling (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:340).

Systematic sampling occurs when researchers select the sample elements randomly from the entire list of population elements (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175). Systematic sampling involves utilising a natural ordering, selecting a random starting point and then choosing items at a pre-selected interval (Struwig & Stead, 2007:116).

Even though probability sampling is considered to be the more unbiased and more representative sampling technique, researchers more commonly use non-probability sampling (Spata, 2003:41). In non-probability sampling the chances of any member of the population being selected are unknown, and the selection of sampling units is subjective, random and with a heavy reliance on personal judgement (Struwig & Stead, 2007:111). There are four main non-probability sampling methods, namely: convenience sample, judgment sample, snowball sample and quota sample (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174; Struwig & Stead, 2007:115-116).

Convenience sampling occurs when the researcher selects respondents due to them being a convenient sample of the population (Struwig & Stead, 2007:115). In this method, the sample is chosen from a section of the population that is readily available (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174).

Judgement sampling occurs when a seasoned researcher selects the sample elements for a specific purpose, such as ensuring that all the selected members have certain characteristics (Struwig & Stead, 2007:115). Thus, this sampling method involves selection of the sample elements subjectively and intentionally (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174).

Snowball sampling occurs when a researcher chooses a sum of respondents based on characteristics that are specified by the research questions; after that the first respondents are used to identify other individuals to be respondents for the study (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174). According to Singh (2007:108), this sampling method is very useful when following an explorative research method.

Quota sampling occurs when a researcher catalogues the study population according to relevant characteristics; and then selects the predetermined portions from each group (Struwig & Stead, 2007:115). When using this sampling method, the researcher aims to make sure that the selected sample is representative of the population by selecting sample elements in a way that the proportion possessing certain characteristic is as close to identical to the proportion of the population as possible (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:328).

In this study responses were collected by using non-probability sampling and participants were chosen based on their convenience for selection. Furthermore, the sampling was non-proportional, and fieldworkers were tasked to fulfil quotas: a third of the respondents came from the three targeted industries. The sample size of the current study was 931 participants employed within the manufacturing, services and retail industry (See section 2.3.4.6 for more detail). The sampling elements were selected based on their qualification, that is, only respondents that had obtained an education level of no lower than Grade 12 completed the questionnaires.

### **1.7.2.3 Data collection form**

Data collection forms can be described as research instruments which are used to collect data such as questionnaires, topic guides or tangible items, such as a photographic camera or recording device (Bradley, 2007:516).

As stated earlier, the current study used a survey as the data collection form. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010:187) survey research involves acquiring information such as characteristics, opinions, attitudes and previous experiences from one or more groups of people. According to Malhotra (2010:209), there are eight survey research methods, namely: traditional telephone interviews, computer-assisted telephone interviews, mail interviews, mail panels, personal interviews, computer-assisted personal interviews, questionnaires, and email and internet surveys.

This study was conducted by the distribution of self-administered questionnaires, where participants answered questions without the assistance of a computer or a fieldworker.

### **1.7.2.4 Development of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire started with a preamble, which stated the rights of the respondent and provided contact details of the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, Section A collected data regarding respondents' demographic profile, and Section B measured the communication skill of managers as perceived by their subordinates. Section A of the questionnaire comprised closed ended questions to collect the demographic information of the subordinates. The closed ended questions collected information such as age, gender, race, education level, the industry where the respondent is employed, the size of the business, the department where the respondent works and whether the respondent completed a course to enhance their communication skills. Section B consisted of an unlabelled five-point Likert scale which measured how the subordinates perceive their managers' communication skills. Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with twenty eight statements. Multiple-item scales were used to measure some scale items related to a construct. Only the end points of the scales were labelled with "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" respectively. The scales were checked by experts from the Statistical Services at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus to ensure that they measure the constructs appropriately for the objective of the study. The experts then analysed the questionnaire, to ensure that it adheres to the ethical code of the University.

### **1.7.2.5 Data analysis**

The overall purpose of data analysis is to interpret the large number of data collected and to draw conclusions from that data (Tustin, 2005:102). Considering that data analysis is a specialised phase of the research process, it is advisable to use experts in the field (Struwig & Stead, 2007:150). The Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus were consulted, they analysed the data to ensure the quality, accuracy, and reliability of the interpretation made in this study.

## **1.8 CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH**

This study attempts to shed light on numerous elements of the communication process, and the recommendations will assist managers to be better communicators in interactions with their employees with different qualification levels, within various industries and descended from different generations.

## **1.9 CHAPTER CLASSIFICATION**

Each chapter (and the section listing the key definitions) of this dissertation includes its corresponding reference list. Additionally, each article chapter provides publication information for the specific article.

In **Chapter 1** the researcher introduces the reader to the study by presenting the background into this study, conducting a literature review and providing the reason for this study in the problem statement. Stemming from this is the statement of the study's purpose which included its primary and secondary objectives. Following this is a brief explanation of the study's research methodology, contribution and chapter outline.

**Chapter 2** is a discussion of the research methodology followed in this study. It starts broadly by delving into business research narrowing to the research process followed in a business context and then arriving at the process followed to conduct the current study. The process followed and discussed in this chapter includes the formulating the problem, the determination of the research design, designing the data-collection method and forms, designing the sample and collecting the data, analysing and interpreting the data and preparing the research report.

Each of the following three chapters consisted of research articles (Chapter 3 to 5). However, preceding the presentation of each article is a statement indicating the article's purpose and targeted journal. Each of the three article chapters concludes with its main findings which contribute to the overall objectives of this study.

**Chapter 3** comprises the first research article with the focus being on the manager's message sending skills and the ability to deal with general interference during the communication process as perceived by subordinates. This chapter also looks into how these perceptions differ based on the industry of the subordinates.

The second research article focused on subordinates' perception of manager's listening skills, feedback skills and their ability to deal with interference related to the listening and feedback phases of the communication process. In **Chapter 4** the researcher also looks into how subordinates with different qualifications perceive their managers' proficiency in these three elements of communication differently.

**Chapter 5** is the third and final research article with generations as a focal point. In this chapter, the researcher focused specifically on how subordinates from different generations perceived their managers' overall communication competencies, which included all the elements of communication discussed in the two preceding chapters.

**Chapter 6** summarises the findings of the study by making conclusions about the results obtained. This chapter also indicates the limitations of the study as well as provide recommendations that can be used by managers of diverse work environments.

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## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The research methodology used in this study included an extensive overview of the existing literature, a survey done in three industries and analysis and verification by means of statistical techniques. This section first delves into business research, then a general flow of the research process and finally the research process used in this study.

### 2.2 Business research

Business research is a field of practical study in which a researcher collects data and analyses it to deduce applicable managerial conclusions. At the corporate level, business research can include financial data, consumer feedback, product research and competitive analysis. Executives and managers who apply business research methods are capable of better comprehension their role as managers, the business as a whole, the position it assumes in the market wherein it competes and how to improve that position (Miranda, 2015). According to Saunders *et al.* (2009:5), a short, sensible description for business and management research is undertaking systematic research to identify things about business and management.

#### 2.2.1 Business research defined

Business research involves establishing objectives and gathering relevant information to obtain the answer to a business issue. You can conduct business research to answer a business-related question, such as: What is the target market of my product? Business research can also be used to solve a business-related problem, such as determining how to decrease the amount of excess inventory on hand. Adequate planning and information-gathering are essential to derive results for your business (Rojas, 2015).

#### 2.2.2 Importance of business research

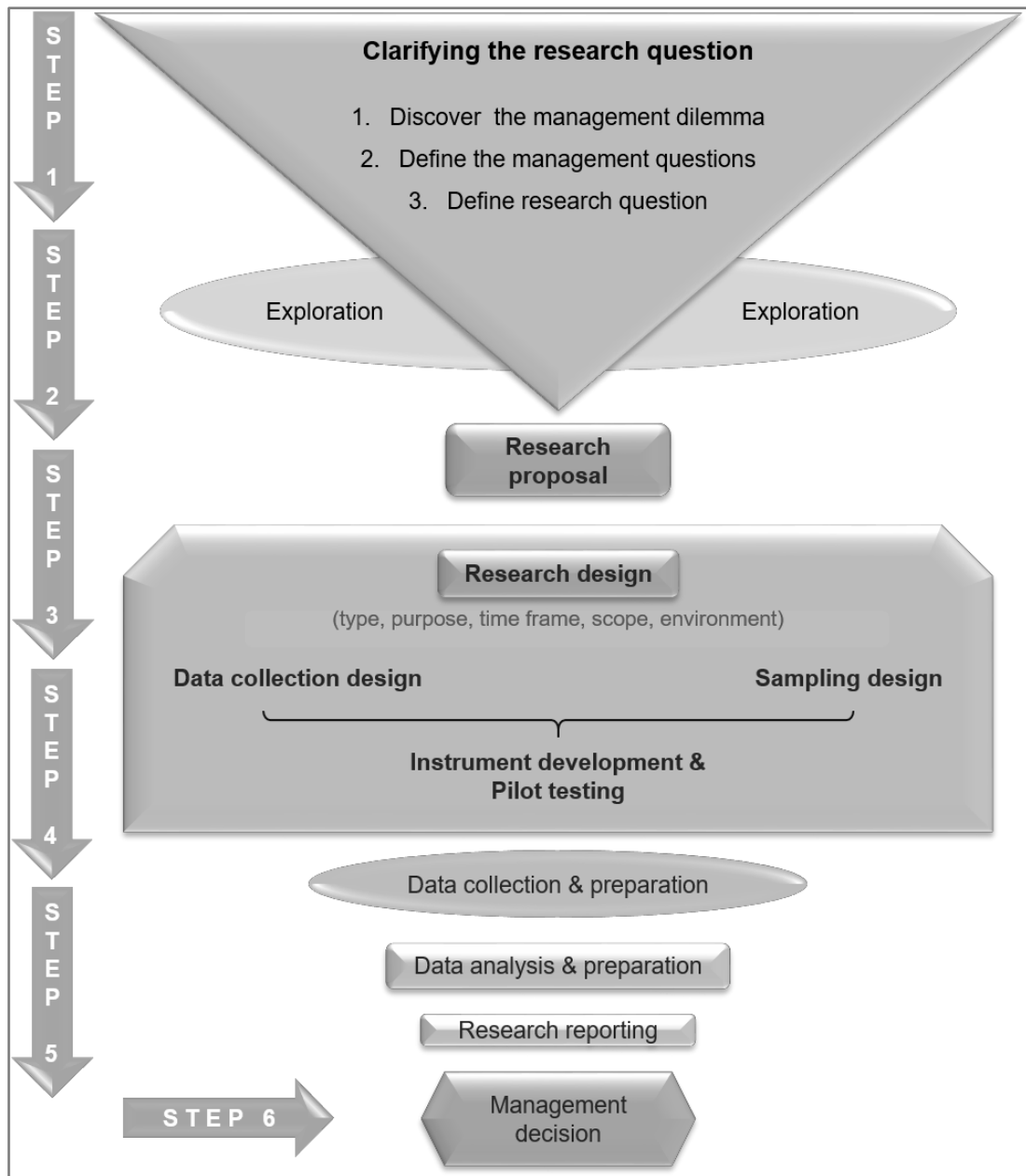
Business research, in this context, is a methodical inquest that results in guiding information for managerial decisions and applications. More precisely, business research is a process of planning, obtaining, analysing, and distributing pertinent data, information, and insights to managers in such a way that it drives the business to make relevant conclusions, take applicable actions that, in turn, maximise performance (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:4). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008:47) argue that four things combine to make business and management a distinctive focus for research. Firstly, the ways in which managers (and researchers) draw on knowledge developed by other disciplines. Secondly, the fact that managers tend to be powerful and busy

people. Therefore, they are unlikely to allow research access unless they can see personal or commercial advantages. Thirdly, the fact that managers are educated. Many now have undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and as such, often tend to be as well educated as those conducting research about them. Lastly, the requirement for the research to have some practical consequence. This means it either needs to contain the potential for taking some form of action or needs to take account of the practical consequences of the findings.

### **2.3 RESEARCH PROCESS**

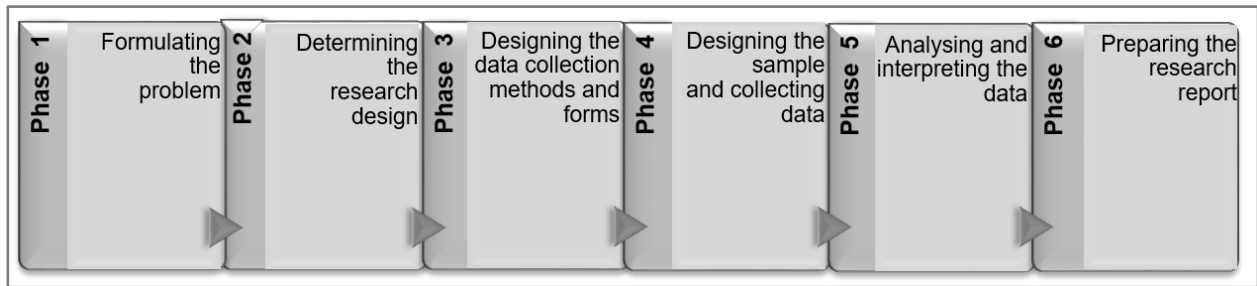
Research is regarded as a sequential process made up of clearly defined steps. With that stated, research does not necessarily require the completion of a previous step before continuing to the next one. Additionally, research is the objective and systematic identification, collection, analysis, distribution, and use of information (Malhotra, 2010:39). For a problem to merit research the stated problem is required to be unique, therefore requiring a custom research process to be followed (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2010:29). Cooper and Schindler (2003:64) claim some steps can be initiated out of sequence, some are executed simultaneously, and some may be totally omitted. Figure 2.1 depicts the business research process in 6 stages. The research process begins with the clarification of a research problem which stems from the discovery of a management dilemma. This management dilemma triggers the need for research, the researcher proposes the problem, if the study is approved the researcher determines the appropriate research design and data collection methods. The data is then collected, cleaned, prepared, analysed and interpreted. From the analysis and interpretation, the researcher draws conclusions and makes recommendations so as to aid the final stage of the process which is the management decision (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:77). When considering the research process, selection, statement, exploration and refinement of the management question or problem is the most crucial activity in the sequence (Greener, 2008:14).

Figure 2.1: The stages in the business research process



Source: Cooper and Schindler (2014:76).

For the purpose of this study, the six phase research process depicted in Figure 2.2 was used. The phases of the research process, as illustrated in Figure 2.2, are (Phase 1) Formulating the problem, (Phase 2) Determining the research design, (Phase 3) Designing the data-collection method and forms, (Phase 4) Designing the sample and collecting data, (Phase 5) Analysing and interpreting the data and, lastly, (Phase 6) Preparing the research report (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:40). The execution of these phases will be discussed in the next sections.

**Figure 2.2: The phases of the research process**

Source: Churchill and Iacobucci (2010:31) and Cooper and Schindler (2003:65).

### 2.3.1 Phase 1: Formulating the problem

Monette *et al.* (2008:9) refer to problem formulation as the beginning of the research process where one finds a researchable issue. Welman *et al.* (2005:13) suggest that reviewing existing literature can be helpful in recognising gaps, alternative points of view and original areas for investigation.

For the purpose of this study, secondary information based on the topic at hand were collected, and existing academic literature sources were consulted to add value to the study and to contextualise the study with preceding works done by other authors (Neuman, 2003:96).

The literature study puts concepts into perspective, and was done by consulting relevant books, subject specific journals, websites and accredited and scholarly journal articles. A few sources that were consulted date back as far as 1974; the reason for consulting these older sources was that contributions made by original authors of a specific school of thought or concept are important in understanding their contribution in what needs to be researched. Academic books that were enquired cover an array of subjects such as communication, management, psychology, human resources, generation theory, interpersonal skills and research practices and methods.

NEXUS, the database of the NRF for completed research as well as current research already registered, was consulted before commencing the current study to ensure its viability. For the purpose of this study, other databases such as Emerald, SACat, SAePublications, EbscoHost, Sabinet, Google Scholar and ProQuest were consulted.

The problem statement is an essential part of any study, as it states precisely what the research project aims to uncover or achieve in its undertaking (Fouché & de Vos, 2013:80). There are three reasons for a clear problem statement (Denscombe, 2002). Firstly, it communicates to readers what the intention of the study is, what the researcher intends to find out and what motivated the study. Secondly, readers can set benchmarks for the study. Lastly, it serves as a solid platform

for the researcher to conduct the study. The problem statement and research objectives of this study have been stated in the previous chapter (in Section 1.5).

The following section is Phase 2 of the research process, wherein the researcher will explore various research designs and select the one best suited for the study in question.

### **2.3.2 Phase 2: Determining the research design**

Churchill and Iacobucci (2002:90) describe a research design as a framework or plan for a study, which is used as a guide for the collection and analysis of data. The research design is the foundation that ensures that the study will be relevant to the problem and will use efficient processes if followed and implemented appropriately. According to Burns and Bush (2014:99), there are three basic groupings of research designs categorised according to the central objective of the research, namely exploratory, descriptive and causal research.

Exploratory research is usually unstructured and informal, in the sense that it does not have pre-set procedures, instead its nature changes as more information is gathered (Burns & Bush, 2014:101). Exploratory research refers to studies into field or domain that has not yet been researched or areas where available information is very limited. The researcher's objective is then to develop initial ideas along with a more focussed research question (Struwig & Stead, 2007:7). This preliminary data collection can assist in understanding the problem at hand and defining the research objective (Bradley, 2007:516).

When a descriptive research design is employed, the researcher attempts to describe something instead of trying to explaining their causes (Sousa, 2014:225). This research design is especially preferred when dealing with a large study population (Burns & Bush, 2014:103). This type of study attempts to produce a thorough and exact description of a situation such as the current market environment, consumer attitudes, beliefs and/or opinions (Bradley, 2007:515). Descriptive research is usually concerned with calculating the frequency with which something transpires or relationship between two variables (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002:91).

Causal research usually involves an experiment where some variables are changed, and others are kept constant, to prove or disprove the researcher's belief that all events are caused by change (Struwig & Stead, 2007:236). Simply stated, in causal research the researcher aims to investigate the cause-and-effect relationship between variables (Burns & Bush, 2014:107).

As mentioned earlier, the difference between the three research designs can be distinguished by considering the research objective of each. The descriptive research design was implemented to achieve the purpose of this study.

### **2.3.3 Phase 3: Designing the data collection methods and forms**

Data collection is the phase in the research process where responses are gathered using surveys, experiments, fieldwork or indirect methods to generate data (Singh, 2007:400). Data collection refers to the gathering of raw information for the purpose of a study. After the researcher has decided on the type of data needed for the purpose of the study, the researcher then needs to decide where and how the data can and should be gathered (Struwig & Stead, 2007:41). Data is information that has been obtained through formal scientific observation or research measurement (Stangor, 2011:4). Two types of data collection methods can be distinguished, namely primary data collection and secondary data collection.

Primary data is information which gets gathered for a specific purpose; it is essentially new information that did not exist in available sources before its collection (Bradley, 2007:518). Primary data is collected using questionnaires by either the researcher or fieldworkers (Struwig & Stead, 2007:40).

Secondary data readily is available raw information, in other words, it is primary data which was collected previously for the specific purpose a different study, usually collected by different researchers (Struwig & Stead, 2007:80). Secondary data collection can be divided into three broad groupings, namely, raw data already collected, summaries of numbers and written treatises. According to Bradley (2007:519) it can also be categorised as either internal or external to the business.

For the current study, primary data collection was done using questionnaires, and the results were compared to secondary data gathered from existing works applicable to the study. The ways in which the data can be collected will be discussed in next section.

#### **2.3.3.1 Data collection method**

According to Zikmund and Babin (2010:132) to achieve the research objectives, researchers can choose between two methods of primary data collection; namely: qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative research does not describe a single research method, and it aims to describe the depth and breadth of attitude, belief or opinion rather than to quantify markets (Bradley, 2007:518). Qualitative research favours in-depth analyses, examining the dynamic interaction of both the individual and the context, and interdisciplinary research (Struwig & Stead, 2007:243). The research methods of qualitative research are less concerned with collecting numerical data than with gathering data in the form of words, sounds and images. While numerical data may be

employed, qualitative data is seldom analysed using advanced statistical techniques (Struwig & Stead, 2007:243). Primary data collection for qualitative research will depend on the aim of the study, but the most commonly used primary data collection methods in qualitative research are interviews, focus groups, observation and unobtrusive measures (Bradley, 2007:518).

Quantitative research is a form of conclusive research and is designed to describe the quantity of some feature of a marketplace. That quantity may describe the market size and market share; it may do so using large representative samples and fairly structured data collection procedures such as structured questionnaires and mechanical measuring devices (Bradley, 2007:518). Quantitative data refers to numerical data and is based on neo-positivism which is concerned with the allocation of numbers to the objects of study; it, therefore, relies on the statistical analyses of data (Struwig & Stead, 2007:243). The main role of quantitative research is to test hypotheses. This approach uses three basic data collection methods, namely observation, questioning and experiments. Quantitative research as data collection method can further be divided into personal interviews, telephone surveys, mail surveys and online questionnaires (Struwig & Stead, 2007:86-88). The quantitative research method was used for the purpose of the current study.

### **2.3.3.2 Data collection form**

Data collection forms can be described as research instruments which are used to collect data such as a questionnaire, topic guide or tangible items, such as a photographic camera or recording device (Bradley, 2007:516). There are three distinguishable data collections forms, namely surveys, observations and experiments (Struwig & Stead, 2007:245).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to implement a survey as the data collection form. Burns and Bush (2014:173) highlight five advantages of using surveys: the ability to standardise responses, the ease of administration, the provision of deep (non-superficial) insights, the ease of analysis and the emergence of subgroup differences.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010:187) survey research involves acquiring information such as characteristics, opinions, attitudes and previous experiences from one or more groups of people. The goal of survey research is to learn about a large population of people by asking a sample of that population a series of questions and tabulating their responses. Malhotra (2010:209) differentiates eight survey research methods, namely: traditional telephone interviews, computer-assisted telephone interviews, mail interviews, mail panels, personal interviews, computer-assisted personal interviews, questionnaires, and email and internet surveys. Questionnaires are used to pose a series of questions in writing to willing participants, summarise

their responses with mean scores, frequencies, sophisticated statistical indexes and then draw inferences about the particular population from the responses of the sample.

According to Burns and Bush (2014:178), self-administered questionnaires are time and cost efficient, generate more accurate responses since the participant decides the pace of completion, and elicit more insightful responses, especially when dealing with sensitive topics. In this study the researcher used self-administered questionnaires, where respondents answer questions without assistance from a computer or a fieldworker, to obtain responses from participants.

### **2.3.3.3 Data collection instrument**

A research instrument is a tangible aid used to collect data, such as a photographic camera or recording device, or a document such as a questionnaire or topic guide (Bradley, 2007:516). A questionnaire is an instrument used to obtain information from respondents based on their opinions, attitudes and perspectives (Struwig & Stead, 2007:244). According to Berndt and Petzer (2007:48) respondents complete a self-administered questionnaire without the interviewer's assistance or presence. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents in this study.

### **2.3.3.4 Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire began with a preamble, which stated the rights of the respondent and provided contact details of the researcher. The questionnaire was made up of two sections, Section A collected data regarding respondents' demographic profile, and Section B measured the communication skill of managers as perceived by their subordinates. Section A of the questionnaire comprised of closed ended questions to collect the demographic information of the subordinates. The closed ended questions collected information such as age, gender, race, education level, the industry where the respondent is employed, the size of the business, the department where the respondent works and whether the respondent completed a course to enhance their communication skills. Section B was made up of an unlabelled five-point Likert scale which measured how the subordinates perceive their managers' communication skills. Respondents were required to specify their level of agreement with twenty eight statements. Multiple-item scales were used to measure some scale items related to a construct. Only the end points of the scales were labelled with "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" respectively. The scales were checked by experts from the Statistical Services at The North West University's Potchefstroom Campus to ensure that they measure the constructs appropriately for the objective of the study. The experts then analysed the questionnaire, ensuring its adherence to the University's ethical code.

### **2.3.4 Phase 4: Designing the sample and collecting data**

Sampling is defined as the process of selection of sampling units from the population to estimate population parameters in such a way that the sample truly represents the population (Singh, 2007:89). Sampling entails the process of selecting parts from the study population to examine these parts, usually for the purpose of making judgements and assumptions about the other parts of the population were not investigated in the study in question (Bradley, 2007:518). Sampling is, furthermore, the process of selecting a sub-group of a population to represent the entire population (Singh, 2007:408). A sample is, in essence, a sub-set of the people selected from the population to participate in the study (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:33).

Naturally, it is regarded impractical to examine all the members of the population during a study. Thus it is expected that the data gathered from the participating sample to aid in the comprehension of the population as a whole (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:33). A practical procedure to use when drawing a sample includes the following steps: (1) defining the population, (2) identifying the sampling frame, (3) selecting a sampling procedure, (4) determining the sample size, (5) selecting the sample elements and (6) collecting the data from the designated elements (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:354). In the following sections, the practical procedure used for the sampling in the current study is discussed.

#### **2.3.4.1 Population**

A population is a group of individuals, objects or items from among which samples are taken for measurement (Singh, 2007:88). The population includes all possible respondents in a research project, and a sample is drawn from the population of respondents (Struwig & Stead, 2007:242). The term research population refers to the total group of individuals to be studied. The group is taken from the general population; and the individuals that are selected to take part in a study share mutual characteristics (Adler & Clark, 2010:103). The target population is the totality of cases that conforms to some nominated specification (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002:983). From the population, a sample must be chosen – this is a subset of elements from a larger group. The sample is used as a basis to make judgements about the entire population; even those parts of the population that were not included in the sample (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002:981).

The targeted population of this study consisted of employees with at least a grade 12 qualification within the manufacturing, services and retail industries of South Africa.

#### **2.3.4.2 Sampling frame**

A sampling frame is defined as the frame of entities from which sampling units are selected for a survey (Singh, 2007:88). A sampling frame is a list of all the members that constitute the population and forms the basis by which respondents are selected. From the sampling frame, a sampling unit is compiled including the list of participants who will be included in the study (Struwig & Stead, 2007:245). In this study there was no sample frame; fieldworkers only had a list of employees at each business to aid them in place of a frame.

The sampling techniques that one can use will be discussed in the next section. The sampling technique needs to be known before the sample elements can be chosen. The selection of the sample elements will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

#### **2.3.4.3 Sampling procedure**

The two main sampling techniques are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is based on the concept of random selection (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175). In probability sampling every element within the study population has a known chance of selection (Struwig & Stead, 2007:112). With probability sampling, the likelihood of every unit in the population being included in the sample is known due to randomisation involved in the process (Singh, 2007:102). The probability that any given population element will be included in a probability sample is calculable, as the final sample elements are selected objectively by a specific process (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:329). For precise estimations probability sampling is ideal (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175). Probability sampling methods include simple random sample, cluster sample, stratified sample and systematic sample (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174).

Simple random sampling involves the researcher giving each member of the sampling frame a number and then selecting sample units by a random method (Struwig & Stead, 2007:116). The choosing of the respondents is done in such a manner that every unit has the same chance as any other unit in the population of being selected (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175).

Cluster sampling refers to when the researcher chooses sampling units randomly and then observes all the items in the group (Struwig & Stead, 2007:117). In cluster sampling, the study population is divided into mutually exclusive and comprehensive subsets, and then a random sample of the subsets is selected (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:348). Cluster sampling points toward entire groups or clusters being selected at random instead of choosing individual units from the population (Singh, 2007:105).

Stratified random sampling refers to a sampling method where the researcher splits the study population into groups and randomly chooses sub-samples from each group (Struwig & Stead, 2007:117). A stratified sample is a probability sample that involves a two steps process (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175). The population is divided into mutually exclusive and comprehensive subsets, and then a simple random sample of elements is chosen independently from each subset (also known as strata) using random sampling or systematic sampling (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:340). These strata can be based on various demographic elements such as gender, age group, religion or geographic regions (Singh, 2007:104).

Systematic sampling involves choosing the sample elements randomly from the entire list of population elements (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175). Systematic sampling is when the researcher uses a natural ordering or order of sampling frame, selects an arbitrary starting point and then selects items at a pre-selected interval (Struwig & Stead, 2007:116). The selection of the first element of the sample automatically determines the whole sample (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175).

Even though probability sampling is considered to the more unbiased and more representative sampling technique, non-probability sampling is more commonly used (Spata, 2003:41). The probability of any member of the population being selected is unknown in non-probability sampling; the selection of sampling units is subjective, arbitrary and there is a heavy reliance on personal judgement (Struwig & Stead, 2007:111). Non-probability sampling methods include convenience sample, judgment sample, snowball sample and quota sample (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174 & Struwig & Stead, 2007:115-116).

Convenience sampling refers to when the researcher chooses respondents due to them being a convenient sample of the population (Struwig & Stead, 2007:115). In this method, the sample is chosen from a section of the population that is readily available (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174). Convenience sampling can also sometimes be referred to as accidental sampling (Singh, 2007:107). Only specific respondents are selected at a specific time and place (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174).

Judgement sampling is used when a proficient or seasoned researcher chooses the sample elements for a specific purpose, such as making sure that all the members possess certain characteristics (Struwig & Stead, 2007:115). Thus, judgement samples are also known as purposive samples. Judgement sampling involves the researcher selecting the sample elements subjectively and intentionally (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174). Usually, the researcher will select the sample elements based on the belief that they are representative of the population (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:327).

According to Berndt and Petzer (2007:174) snowball sampling refers to when a researcher selects some respondents based on characteristics that are specified by the research questions, after that the initial respondents are used to identify other individuals of the population to participate. The initial respondents are often selected by probability samples; and the additional respondents are obtained by referral from the first respondents (Struwig & Stead, 2007:116). The snowball sample is a judgement sample that is usually used to sample special populations (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:327). Snowball, or chain sampling, is especially useful when conducting explorative research, as the researcher usually does not have sufficient lead information (Singh, 2007:108).

Quota sampling is when the researcher classifies the population by pertinent properties; it determines the desired proportion of sample from each class and quotas for each interviewer (Struwig & Stead, 2007:115). In quota samples, the researcher attempts to ensure that the sample is representative by choosing sample elements in a manner that the proportion possessing a certain characteristic is as close to identical to the proportion of the population as possible (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005:328). These elements are also known as controlled variables (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:174). Furthermore, quota sampling can be divided into two broader categories: proportional and non-proportional quota sampling. Proportional quota sampling is when the researcher proportionally assigns sampling units to correspond with the population size of the strata. In non-proportional quota sampling, the smallest possible number of sampled units are chosen in each category, regardless of the population size of the strata (Singh, 2007:108).

Due to the nature of the study, there was no sample frame readily available. Responses were obtained by using non-probability sampling, and respondents were selected on the basis of convenience. Non-proportional quotas had to be fulfilled to give the sampling process structure. A third of the respondents came from the manufacturing industry, another third from the retail industry and the final third from the services industry.

#### **2.3.4.4 The sample size**

According to Berndt and Petzer (2007:33) sample size refers to the total number of respondents the researcher wishes to examine. Furthermore important aspects that influence the size of the desired sample include: the diversity or heterogeneity of the population, the desired precision of the inferences, how narrow the range for error is, the level of confidence in the estimates and the number of subgroups within the sample (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:176).

The sample size of the current study was 931 (N = 931) subordinates employed within the manufacturing, services and retail industry.

### 2.3.4.5 The sample element

The sample unit for this study was the business itself (industry) where the subordinate is employed, and within the unit, the sampling elements were chosen based on their qualification. In other words, only respondents that had obtained an education level of no lower than Grade 12 were asked to complete the questionnaires.

### 2.3.4.6 Data collection

Twenty qualified fieldworkers were dispensed to each select respondents with sufficient qualifications within the three predetermined industries. All the fieldworkers had a BCom degree in Business Management and had completed a module in marketing research. Table 2.1 below illustrates that 931 responses were obtained in seven of the nine provinces in South Africa.

**Table 2.1: Participation by region**

Province	Number of fieldworkers	Number of completed questionnaires
Gauteng	12	544
KwaZulu Natal	1	48
North-West Province	2	98
Western Cape	1	50
Mpumalanga	2	91
Northern Cape	1	49
Free state	1	51
<b>Total:</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>931</b>

After the data was collected, the next phase is the analysis and interpretation of the data.

### 2.3.5 Phase 5: Analysing and interpreting the data

Data analysis initially begins with data preparation (Crouch & Housden, 2003:223-225). Data preparation is essential, as it assures the quality of analytical results, which is reliant on the accuracy of the raw data. The overall aim of data analysis is to interpret a large number of data collected and to draw conclusions from it (Tustin, 2005:102). Because data analysis is a specialised phase of the research process, it is advisable to use experts in the field (Struwig & Stead, 2007:150). Seasoned researchers follow a five-step system for data analysis, namely: (i) Validating and editing, (ii) Coding, (iii) Data entry, (iv) Machine cleaning of data, (v) Tabulation and statistical analysis.

### **2.3.5.1 Validating and editing**

The researcher must first determine the extent to which the questionnaires represent a valid interview. In this step, validation can be defined as the process of establishing whether the interviews had been executed appropriately. This is done to ensure that results on which recommendations are based reflect the legitimate responses of the participating respondents (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:413). Editing, on the other hand, refers making sure that the interviewer and respondent did not make any mistakes. Paper based questionnaires are usually edited twice before being submitted for data entry to check for possible mistakes that might have occurred (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:416). The researcher initially validated the questionnaire; validation was then repeated by the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus).

### **2.3.5.2 Coding**

This entails to the procedure of grouping and assigning numeric codes to the various response options to a particular question (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:417). The questionnaire used for the study was made up of close-ended questions that had been pre-code; in other words, numerical codes had been allocated to the various responses on the questionnaire itself. Questionnaires were numbered from 1 to 931.

### **2.3.5.3 Data entry**

After the researcher has validated, edited and coded the questionnaires, data entry can commence. According to McDaniel and Gates (2005:420) data entry refers to the process of altering information to a form that can be read by a computer. The data entry of this study was done by the twenty qualified fieldworks.

### **2.3.5.4 Machine cleaning of data**

After the data has been entered and stored in the computer that will be used to process them, final error checking is done. This final error checking is computerised (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:423). The process then ends with the final step, namely the tabulation and statistical analysis.

### **2.3.5.5 Tabulation and statistical analysis**

As mentioned earlier the data was obtained by questionnaires, the statistical analysis of this step was done by the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus).

### 2.3.5.6 Reliability and validity

The reliability of a measurement instrument is the degree to which the test results in consistent scores while the variable being measured stays the same (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:231). If a study is reliable it will produce consistent results when it is repeated. Additionally, a measurement's reliability indicates the instrument's internal consistency (Bradley, 2007:64). In this study Cronbach alpha coefficients were used to determine statistical reliability.

The validity of a measurement instrument refers to that which the measurement tests and how well it does so (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:231). In the current study, three aspects of validity were used; namely, face validity, construct validity and content validity.

**Face validity:** It refers to the extent to which superficially a research instrument seems to measure a specific construct (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). Because face validity is considered to be highly subjective the researcher used construct and content validity as well.

**Construct validity:** It implies the extent to which a research instrument measures abstract characteristics that cannot be observed directly (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). It entails the degree to which an assessment (or instrument) measures a theoretical concept or trait which is assumed to exist based on observable behaviours and traits such as a personality characteristic (like intelligence) (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997:113), motivation, creativity, racial prejudice (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). Empirical methods such as principal component analysis and factor analysis assisted in identifying the underlying structure. In this study, construct validity was determined by the statistical program AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures version 20).

**Content validity:** It refers to the extent to which a measurement instrument is a representative sample of the content area (or domain) being measured. In other words, for a measurement to have high content validity, the questions or items covered need to reflect the various parts of the domain, these parts of the domain also need to be the central behaviours or skills to that domain (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). According to Linn (1989:57), content validity means the degree to which the questions imitate the theoretical content domain of the construct being measured. Content validation was used to address two issues, namely whether the instrument covered the content of interest and whether the assessment was suitable for the respondents that participated in the study (Linn, 1989:57).

### 2.3.5.7 Methods and statistical techniques

Gravetter and Wallnau (2009:5) state that there are two distinguishable groups of statistical processes, namely descriptive and inferential statistics. Even when the aim is to use inferential

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techniques, for the initial examination, the use of descriptive analysis can be worthwhile (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:522).

**Descriptive statistics:** Descriptive statistics are statistical procedures used, to sum up, arrange and simplify data. It refers to methods that take scores of raw data and abridges these in a form that is more convenient; in most cases, the data are arranged in a table or a graph which enables one to view the scores in their entirety (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009:6).

The reliability of the constructs used in the current study was tested by calculating their Cronbach alpha coefficients. According to Bagozzi (1994:18), the values of Cronbach Alpha range from 0 to 1, and a value of 0.7 indicates the desired level of reliability. Frequency distributions were also used for this study by placing the scores in a frequency distribution, which is an organised tabulation of the number of individuals located in each category on the scale of measurement (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009:37). Points of central tendency refer to the middle point where the data seems to revolve (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:265). When researchers want to measure central tendency, they use three measures, namely mean, median and mode (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:437). Mean scores were used as a measurement of central tendency in this study. Measuring variability is used to summarise the degree of dispersion. Also, variance and standard deviation were determined in this study, because they are commonly used and highly regarded measures of variance (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:31).

**Inferential statistics:** It refers to practices that let researchers make generalisations about populations after investigating samples from the selected populations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:31). These are used when a researcher aims to go further than simply to describe the sample data, to make inferences about larger populations from much smaller samples (Burns & Bush, 2014:317-318). The two basic functions of inferential statistics are to estimate a population parameter from a random sample and to test statistically based hypotheses (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:275). Due to the use of a non-probability sample, no generalisations were made in this study.

In the current study, t-tests were conducted for the purpose of determining whether statistically significant differences exist between the independent groups studied (Zikmund & Babin, 2010:565). Furthermore, Cohen's d-value was used for the purpose of determining the practical significance of the findings. To determine whether a statistically significant difference exists between the independent groups studied analysis of variance, also known as ANOVA, was used (Zikmund & Babin, 2010:573).

### 2.3.5.8 Interpretation of statistics

To interpret statistics refers to rendering results into integrated and meaningful general inferences and findings (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:34). The following section will briefly discuss statistical and practical significance.

**Cronbach alpha coefficients:** As indicated earlier a Cronbach alpha value that equates or is greater than 0.70 signifies good reliability, while a value less than 0.60 indicates poor reliability (Zikmund & Babin, 2010:334). For the purpose of the current study, the researcher used Cronbach alpha coefficients to determine the statistical reliability of constructs that consist of more than one item. Regarding single items, Cronbach alpha coefficients could not be applied. In the case of single items, content validity was used to ensure their validity.

**Construct validity:** For the determination of construct validity, exploratory factor analyses together with confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. The data is converted into a more formal set of structural and measurement models (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:466). This is done by a set of equations that define the equations linking the constructs, the construct specifying exogenous and endogenous variables and a set of matrices indicating any hypothetical covariances among constructs or variables (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:627). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are done. Similarly, the main difference between EFA and CFA is that in EFA there are no constraints on variable loading; thus cross-loading is not an issue (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:627). Alternatively, Kaiser's measure of sample adequacy (MSA) can be used to calculate the appropriateness of a factor analysis. MSA indicates the inter-correlations among variables; the index values range from 0 to 1, scoring an index value of 1 when each variable is flawlessly anticipated by the other variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001:564). Table 2.2 serves as a guideline to interpret MSA:

**Table 2.2: Kaiser's measure of sample adequacy (MSA)**

Index value	Measure
$\geq 0.80$	Meritorious
0.70	Middling
0.60	Mediocre
0.50	Miserable
$< 0.50$	Unacceptable

Source: Hair *et al.* (1998:99).

The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity relates to the significance of the study, and thereby it proves the suitability and validity of the responses obtained to address the problem of this study. For Factor

Analysis to be recommended suitable, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity must be less than 0.05. The associated Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of the current study was found in all cases to be statistically significant as the  $p = 0.0000$ , indicating that there is scope for reduction and that the Factors Analysis is valid. A principal component analysis technique was used to extract factors from the data, which best describe the underlying relationships among the variables eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 with loads of 0.30 were used for inclusion of items in the exploratory factor analysis. An Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation technique was applied.

Kaiser's measure of sample adequacy (MSA) was used to calculate the appropriateness of the factor analysis. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2001:564), MSA indicates the inter-correlations among variables; the index values range from 0 to 1, scoring an index value of 1 when each variable is flawlessly anticipated by the other variables. In the current study, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was 0.950, which indicates meritorious sample adequacy. The EFA was used to extract five factors (which represent the five constructs of this study) representing 51.79% of the data. The following sections give explanations on the extracted factors.

**Content validity:** Content validity was determined by expert judgement in which the item domain of the test was compared with a detailed description of the domain of the construct (Struwig & Stead, 2007:139). In the current study, content validity was determined via expert judgement of knowledgeable study leaders from the School of Business Management at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus.

**Statistical significance:** Significance can be defined as that which is probably true (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:279). The reason that researchers make use of statistical inferences is to generalise results gained from samples to population characteristics. When a particular difference is large enough to be unlikely to have occurred due to chance or sampling error, then the difference is statistically significant (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:454). The one-way ANOVA (analyses of variance), which is done with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21), determines whether groupings are statistically significantly different with regards to the group mean scores from one dependent variable (Struwig & Stead, 2007:162). For this study, p-values (ANOVA) were used. A p-value is a precise probability of gaining a computed test statistic that is due to chance; the greater the p-value, the greater the probability that the observed result occurred by chance (Burns & Bush, 2014:357-358). The study used a 0.05 level of significance; in other words,  $p \leq 0.05$  is considered as statistically significant. Even though statistical significance is important, it is equally important that researchers note that it does not necessarily infer that the result carries any practical importance (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:523, Ellis & Steyn, 2003:5).

**Practical significance:** Practical significance can refer to when there is a large enough difference to have an effect in practice (Cooper & Schindler, 2003:523). Practical significance is the difference between two mean scores, which is determined by Cohen's effect size or d-value (Steyn, 1999:3). In this current study, the researcher utilised Cohen's d-value throughout the study to interpret results. The equation used to calculate Cohen's d-value is expressed below (Ellis & Steyn, 2003:52):

$$d = \frac{|\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2|}{s}$$

**Equation: Cohen's d-value**

According to the equation,  $\bar{x}_1$  is the first observation with the group of observations,  $\bar{x}_2$  refers to the second observation,  $|\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2|$  is the subtraction of the two observation's mean scores and the d-values are calculated by dividing the answer of the subtraction answer by the standard deviation (s).

Table 2.3 below represents the guidelines used to interpret effect sizes calculated through Cohen's d-value:

Table 2.3 below represents the guidelines used to interpret effect sizes calculated through Cohen's d-value:

**Table 2.3: Guidelines to interpret effect sizes**

Effect size	Effect
d = 0.2	Small effect
d = 0.5	Medium effect in practice and observable with the naked eye
d ≥ 0.8	Large effect and of practical significance

Source: Cohen (1988:223).

A large effect size (equal or greater than 0.8) points to a finding that has practical significance, where a medium effect size (of 0.5) shows a finding that could be substantial, and lastly a small effect size (of 0.2) indicates that there is no difference in the mean scores and therefore there is little of no practical significance (Cohen, 1988:223).

### 2.3.6 Phase 6: Preparing the research report

In each article the researcher summarised the findings of this study pertaining that specific article, each article includes numerous conclusions about the results obtained; as well as recommendations that can be used by managers in various work environments.

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## CHAPTER 3: ARTICLE 1

### MANAGERS' MESSAGE SENDING SKILLS AND ABILITY TO DEAL WITH INTERFERENCE: GREEN PANACEA OR RED HERRING?

This chapter is the first article of the study, and it measured how South African subordinates from three key industries of various sized businesses perceived their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with general interference in the communication process. This article was submitted to the Journal of Contemporary Management (a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) accredited journal) and was **accepted for publication**, with the condition that the reviewers' suggestions were implemented. In this chapter, these recommendations have been considered and applied accordingly. It should be noted, however, that the heading numbers, table numbers, figure numbers referencing, page margins, font and font size were kept uniform to the rest of this dissertation. The author guidelines for manuscript submissions to are available at:

- [https://journals.co.za/upload/Guidelines\\_for\\_Authors/jcman\\_auth.pdf](https://journals.co.za/upload/Guidelines_for_Authors/jcman_auth.pdf)

The Journal of Contemporary Management's guidelines for authors and their editorial policy are presented as Appendix B. Lastly, this chapter concludes with the article's main findings which contribute to the study's overall objectives.

## **MANAGERS' MESSAGE SENDING SKILLS AND ABILITY TO DEAL WITH INTERFERENCE: GREEN PANACEA OR RED HERRING?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Communication is one of the most important managerial skills for effective management, yet many managers have insufficient knowledge about the effectiveness of their message sending skills and ability to deal with interference as perceived by their subordinates. The primary objective of this article is to elucidate the relationship between managers' message sending skills and their ability to deal with interference in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in the manufacturing, retail and services industries. The study focused on three constructs, namely communication, message sending skills, and interference. A quantitative descriptive research design was followed. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire, and 931 useable responses were obtained. A non-probability, convenience sample was chosen. The results showed that subordinates perceived their managers' communication competencies to be slightly above average and that subordinates from manufacturing businesses perceived their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference to be slightly better than those from retail, whereas there were no statistical differences between these industries and the services industry. The contribution is to make managers aware of possible difficulties they may experience during the communication process regarding message sending skills and aptitude to deal with interference.

### **Keywords:**

Managerial competencies, communication, message sending skills, verbal communication, nonverbal communication, interference, manufacturing industry, retail industry, services industry

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

There are many managerial competencies needed to effectively execute managerial tasks and efficiently manage businesses, such as teamwork, interpersonal relations, self-management, decision-making, networking, analytical skills, global awareness and strategic action, awareness of self and others and creative problem solving (Daft & Marcic 2014:13; Dogra, 2012). However, the ability to communicate effectively is considered to be the most important competency required for sustainable business success (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:30; Heyns & Luke, 2012:13). Businesses in which effective communication rules have advantages such as higher returns, more productivity and better subordinate engagement (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:8-9; Yates, 2006:2)

According to Kupritz and Cowell (2011:5), communication can refer to the delivery, interpretation and sharing of information. Managers that effectively send messages succeed at informing, persuading, instructing and motivating subordinates (Holm, 2006:6). Effective message sending involves the incorporation of both verbal and nonverbal communication (Krauss, 2002:3), often in environments that are plagued with interference (Krauss, 2002:9).

Examples of interference in the industries under discussion can include physical barriers like literal background noise, physiological barriers like discomfort, psychological barriers like attitude, and semantic barriers like professional jargon and regional colloquialisms (Botha & Musengi, 2012:185; Brown, 2001:27; Lunenburg, 2011:10; Truter, 2006:3).

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

This study was conducted among the manufacturing, retail and services industries in businesses of varying sizes. These industries are important to South Africa's economy as they mostly employ skilled workers and make a significant contribution to the gross domestic product of the country (Stats SA, 2014b), which alleviates unemployment and promotes economic growth.

### 3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Communication is one of the most important managerial competencies (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:30; Heyns & Luke, 2012:14). Ineffective communication leads to time being wasted, eroded inputs and efforts, declined customer loyalty, unfavourable perceptions towards brands, low productivity and low profit margins (French, 2013; Thill & Bovée, 2013:46). The

literature on communication within industries tends to focus on the outcome of effective communication, rather than the process (McKechinie *et al.*, 2007:2). Many managers have a commendable basic understanding of effective communication competence, yet they fail to put that knowledge into practice. This is because communication within businesses is much more complex than generally assumed (Truter, 2006:4).

Communication plays the pivotal role of informing, instructing and guiding subordinates within the manufacturing industry to counteract the situation that managers are becoming more preoccupied with strategic responsibilities and more removed from day-to-day operations (Worley & Doolen, 2006:15). Regarding the services industry, Sahai *et al.* (2014:11) claim that inadequate message sending skills limits customer retention. Intangible services sold in this industry have to be communicated appropriately to evade ambiguity from not only consumers but also employees of services businesses (Mittal, 2002:2). Communication is also important to the retail industry as the success of retail businesses can be influenced by consumer perceptions, and effective communication has been known to gain businesses a competitive edge (Adcock, 2000:7-8). To conclude, effective communication is challenging for businesses of all sizes within these industries (Groyberg & Slind, 2012; Gregory, 2015; Holá, 2012:12; Kouremetis, 2013; Rauch, 2015).

A manager with deficient message sending skills is unable to inform, motivate, persuade or instruct subordinates, leaving subordinates to their own, often very limited devices in an ever changing business environment (Holm, 2006:6). That considered, managers with ample message sending capabilities, but little grasp of the importance of dealing with interference between managers and subordinates hinder team cohesion in the business (Travis, 2016). However, if the communication process is done effectively, with both quality messages sent and interferences dealt with appropriately, it can improve relationships and therefore result in better teamwork, decision-making and problem-solving skills (Robinson *et al.*, 2014). It also of crucial importance that managers are aware of possible shortcomings regarding these skills to execute their managerial tasks successfully.

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

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

### 3.3 OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Stemming from the above, the primary purpose of this paper is to investigate how subordinates from three key South African industries within various sized businesses perceive their managers' message is sending skills and ability to deal with general interference in the communication process.

To achieve the purpose of this paper, the following secondary objectives were to:

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

The following alternative hypotheses were formulated for this research:

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

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

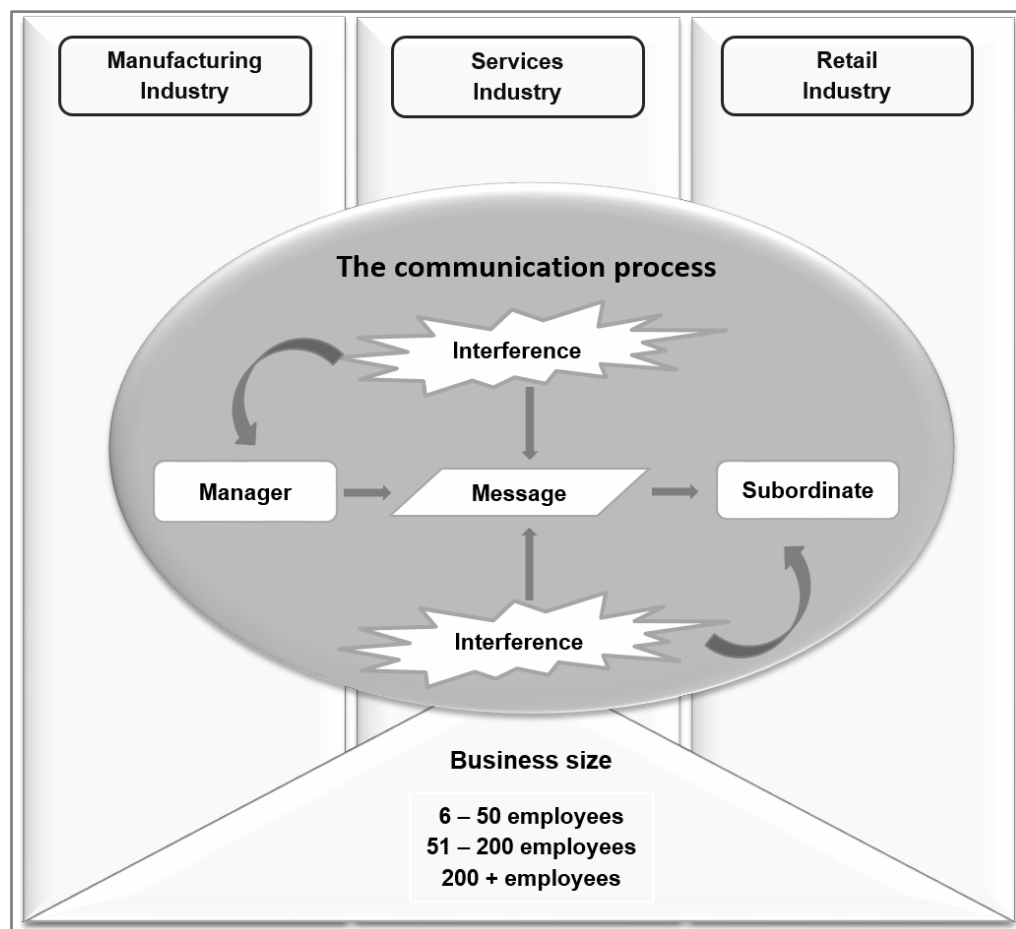
*Ha3: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different sized businesses regarding their managers' message sending skills during the communication process.*

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

### 3.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework, derived from various sources (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393; Daft & Marcic, 2009:552; Jones & George, 2013:417; Locker & Kaczmarek 2014:4; Trenholm & Jensen, 2013:14) was compiled to guide this study.

**Figure 3.1: The communication process within three industries**



Source: Adapted from Colquit *et al.* (2013:393); Daft and Marcic (2009:552); Groyberg and Slind (2012); Henrico and Visser (2012:183); Jones and George (2013:417); Locker and Kaczmarek (2014:4); Sher (2014) and Trenholm and Jensen (2013:14).

## **3.5 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The constructs depicted in the conceptual framework will be discussed.

### **3.5.1 The industries**

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

#### **3.5.1.1 The manufacturing industry**

The manufacturing industry refers to businesses which involve the production and processing of items, thereby creating new commodities or adding value to existing products (Economy Watch, 2010). The South African manufacturing industry occupies a significant share of the country's economy, which despite this relative importance has declined from 19 percent in 1993 to about 17 percent in 2012 (Stats SA, 2014a; Stats SA, 2014b). Manufacturing declined by 2.0% in March 2016 compared to March 2015. This deterioration was primarily due to lower production in metal-related divisions of the industry (Stats SA, 2016a). Collaboration between management and subordinates is used to innovate and to remain competitive in this industry, which fosters the need for positive engagement with specific message sending and continuous mitigation of interference (Alpenberg & Scarbrough, 2016:4962; Bhamu & Sangwan, 2014:4 & 39).

#### **3.5.1.2 The services industry**

The services industry can be defined as businesses which primarily focus on earning revenue through providing services (Business Dictionary, 2014). The most significant positive contributors to economic activity in this country include the finance, real estate, business services, catering, transport, storage, general government services and accommodation sector, signifying the significance of the services industry in South Africa, as each of these sectors contributed at least 0.2 % to the economy two years ago (Stats SA, 2014b). Businesses' success within this industry is highly dependent on instructive messages toward subordinates and clear formal and informal messages regarding their corporate identity (Otubanjo & Amujo, 2012:8).

#### **3.5.1.3 The retail industry**

All products (goods and services) that are sold to consumers by businesses are grouped under the retail industry (Investopedia, 2014). The retail industry is generally challenged by rapidly changing market conditions, much higher expectations from customers and stringent competition (Chang *et al.*, 2006:2; Panigyrakes & Theodoridis, 2007:7). In South Africa, significant positive annual growth rates are recorded currently for general dealers (6.0%), textile, clothing, leather

goods and footwear retailers (4.9%), cosmetics, toiletries, medical goods and pharmaceuticals retailers along with food, beverages and tobacco retailers (0.3%). All this contributed to a rise of 2.8 % sales in the retail industry (Stats SA, 2016b). According to Ettouzani *et al.* (2012:18), internal communication breakdowns can lead to ineffective collaboration with suppliers due to the adverse effect of distrust it has on the relationship between the retailer and this external stakeholder.

### **3.5.2 Business sizes**

For the purpose of this research, the size of a business was determined by the number of employees (Department of Trade and Industry, 1996:15; Strydom, 2011:365-366). In a small business (6 – 50 employees) context, communication serves as the core of the relationship between managers and subordinates. The nature of the information shared is a vital element for selecting the appropriate channels for message sending (Gregory, 2015; Kouremetis, 2013). Communication is used to satisfy the basic need for information within medium sized businesses (51-200 employees). Holá (2012:1 & 12) confirms that managers with exceptional communication skills significantly influence subordinate performance and attitude in medium sized businesses. Large businesses (200 + employees) face some challenges related to communication that may stem from departments within them operating in isolation (Groyberg and Slind, 2012; Rauch, 2015). To improve communication within businesses of all sizes Newlands (2016) suggests practicing it habitually, promoting fluid decision making and preventing information overload.

### **3.5.3 Managers**

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

#### **3.5.3.1 Managerial competencies**

A business' success is largely dependent on managers' knowledge and skills required for the specific business as that is capable of either promoting or hindering the development of a business (Verle *et al.*, 2014:924). Oosthuizen (2011:66) describes managerial competencies as sets of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that a manager needs to be successful in a variety of organisational settings and managerial jobs. Competent managers are so exceptionally practiced at performing their managerial tasks that they execute them without special effort (Daft & Marcic, 2014:98). In research done where 60 businesses were analysed communication was identified as the most crucial managerial competency (Oosthuizen, 2011:66).

### **3.5.4 The communication process**

Communication is a process where information-carrying messages are exchanged between two or more individuals. This process is generally used by managers to encourage or influence behaviour (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552; Krauss, 2002:1; Thill & Bovée, 2013:50). This study focused on managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference.

#### **3.5.4.1 Message sending skills**

Managers' message sending skills play a vital role in the communication process applied in businesses. Managers' aptitude to trade and share ideas with subordinates, comprehend their stances and solve problems successfully will significantly rely on how effectively they can transmit messages in the communication process (Windle & Warren, 2014). Managers with adequate message sending skills can alter the dissatisfactory behaviour of their subordinates (Holm, 2006:6).

Effective message sending involves the incorporation of both verbal and nonverbal communication (Trenholm & Jensen, 2013:14). Verbal communication is a pivotal skill within businesses that utilises words in many forms, including face-to-face or telephone conversations, meetings, text, e-mail and voice-mail messages, letters and memos, and reports (Locker & Kaczmarek, 2014:4; Maes et al. 1997:67). Nonverbal communication can be described as any communication that does not depend on spoken words, written passages, or any other linguistic systems to send meaningful messages (Chira, 2013; Mishra et al., 2014:13), such as eye contact, proxemics, gesture, body contact, posture, body orientation, facial expression and gaze. Without withstanding verbal communication's importance, Locker and Kaczmarek (2014:4) confirm that verbal communication is not always enough to convey messages sufficiently, consistently and effectively. Thus, managers should incorporate both types of communication.

#### **3.5.4.2 Interference**

Interference is anything that hinders the communication process, and it can occur anywhere in the process (Lunenburg, 2011:4). In a business setting interference is, for example, literal blare caused by clattering machinery (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393). According to Brown (2001:27) interference as depicted in the conceptual framework of this study, is any obstruction to the effective exchange of thoughts, ideas or commands. There are many ways for a message to get distorted, misconstrued, misunderstood or confused. Having sufficient knowledge about interference and the contributing barriers to message sending promotes effective communication (Truter, 2006:1 - 3).

### **3.5.5 Subordinates**

As depicted in Figure 3.1, subordinates are the receivers of messages. They fulfil the role of listeners in the communication process. To be effective listeners the subordinates need to withhold judgment, be attentive and refrain from formulating and rehearsing responses (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:12-13). Subordinates' communication competence is critical to productivity; they have to interpret information correctly, alter unsatisfactory behaviour when instructed to do so and report progress and defects to managers (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:392-393; Holm, 2006:6).

## **3.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

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

### **3.6.1 Research design**

Empirical research for this descriptive study was done using a survey, entailing a quantitative research method (Bradley, 2007:516; Burns & Bush, 2014:103).

### **3.6.2 Target population, sampling and data collection**

The target population for this study consisted of workers with at least a grade 12 qualification within the three industries indicated in the conceptual framework (Figure 3.1). A non-probability, convenience sampling method was followed and to give structure to the sampling process, quotas were fulfilled: a third of the respondents came from the manufacturing industry, another third from the retail industry and the final third from the services industry. The sample included a total of 966 subordinates of which 931 submitted usable questionnaires. Table 3.1 shows the participation of respondents by region.

**Table 3.1: Participation by region**

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

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

### 3.6.3 The measuring instrument

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

The questionnaire was based on indicators from various literature sources and made up of two sections. Section A comprised of closed ended questions which collected data regarding respondents and their businesses' demographic profile, while section B which consisted of a five-point Likert scale measured the communication skills of managers as perceived by their subordinates. Respondents were required to specify their level of agreement with eleven statements concerning message sending skills and ability to deal with interference. Only the end points of the scales were labelled with "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" respectively.

### 3.6.4 Data analysis and interpretation

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

- Frequency analyses were computed for all the items in the questionnaire and meant scores and standard deviations were calculated.

- The validity of the measuring instrument was inspected by firstly applying an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) since a validated questionnaire was not used. Subsequently, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to confirm the validity of the scales.
- Reliability was determined by computing Cronbach-alpha coefficients.
- Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) tests were used to test statistical significance ( $p = 0.05$ ) (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:455; Struwig & Stead, 2007:162) and Cohen's d-value was used to assess practical significance, where a large effect size (equal to or greater than 0.8) points to

a finding that has practical significance, a medium effect size (of 0.5) shows a finding that could be substantial and lastly a small effect size (of 0.2) indicates that there is a negligible difference among the mean scores (Cohen, 1988:223; Ellis & Steyn, 2003:51-52; Steyn, 1999:3).

### **3.7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Firstly, the psychometric properties of the measuring instrument are discussed, followed by the results of the empirical study which will be presented in co-ordination with the objectives of the study.

#### **3.7.1 Psychometric properties of the measuring instrument**

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

##### **3.7.1.1 Construct validity**

To determine valid constructs, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first performed. Bartlett's test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy were used to test whether the data were suitable for factor analysis. The KMO statistic generally varies between 0 and 1; KMO should be 0.50 or higher for a satisfactory factor analysis. In the current study, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.950. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated. The associated Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for the current study was found to be statistically significant in all cases.

A principal component analysis technique was used to extract factors from the data, which best describes the underlying relationships among the variables. Eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 with loads of 0.30 were used for inclusion of items in the exploratory factor analysis. An Oblimin with the

Kaiser Normalisation technique was applied. Five factors, representing 51.79% of the variance explained in the data, were extracted. For the purpose of this article, only two of the five factors will be discussed.

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

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

Consequently, the instrument was found to be construct valid.

### **3.7.1.2 Content validity**

Content validity refers to the extent to which a measuring instrument is representative of the content area (or domain) being measured. In other words, for a measurement to have high content validity, the questions or items need to reflect the various parts of the domain, and these parts of the domain also need to reflect the central behaviours or skills associated with that domain (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). In the current study, content validity was confirmed by the expert judgement of knowledgeable study leaders and supervisors from the School of Business Management at The North West University's Potchefstroom Campus. Consequently, the instrument was found to be content valid.

### **3.7.1.3 Reliability**

The researcher used Cronbach alpha coefficients to determine the statistical reliability of the constructs. According to Zikmund and Babin (2013:249), a Cronbach's alpha value between 0.80 and 0.96 indicates very good reliability, a value between 0.70 and 0.80 indicates good reliability, and a value between 0.60 and 0.70 indicates fair reliability. Scales with a Cronbach's alpha value below 0.60 indicate poor reliability.

Table 3.2 depicts the reliability testing conducted in this study.

**Table 3.2: Cronbach's alpha values for the two factors used in this study**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>
Message sending skills (4 scale items)	0.684
Ability to deal with interference (7 scale items)	0.808

It is evident from Table 3.2 that both factors can be accepted as reliable, as they are above the required value of 0.60. A Cronbach alpha value of 0.684 for the construct Message sending skills is acceptable as the current study is related to social sciences with psychological constructs based on attitudes, opinions and perceptions (Field, 2005:668). All of the factors are consequently deemed reliable.

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

### **3.7.2 Results of the empirical study**

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

#### **3.7.2.1 Demographic profile of the respondents**

A limited demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 3.3

From Table 3.3 it is evident that there were nearly equal numbers of male and female respondents and their average age was 33 years. The majority (475) worked in small businesses, followed by about a third working in medium-sized businesses. Only 145 worked in large businesses. Most of them were employed in the retail and services industries, followed closely by the manufacturing industry.

**Table 3.3: Demographic profile (N=931)**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	464	49.8
Female	467	50.2
<b>Business size and number of permanent employees in business</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
6 – 50 (small business)	475	51.02
51 – 200 (medium-sized business)	311	33.4
200 and more (large business)	145	15.6
<b>Industry</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Manufacturing	291	31.3
Retail	334	35.8
Services	304	32.7
Error	2	0.2

\*Average age of respondents: 33.

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

Table 3.4 depicts the mean scores and standard deviations of the items measuring managers' message sending skills on a 5-point Likert scale.

**Table 3.4: Managers' message sending skills (N = 931)**

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

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

behaviour is negative and counter-productive due to its tendency to lead to mistrust (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:8-9).

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

Table 3.5 portrays the means and standard deviations of the items measuring managers' ability to deal with interference on a 5-point Likert scale.

The overall mean score for this total factor was 3.533 with an SD of 1.112. It can be concluded that the respondents generally agreed with scale items contained in this measurement set and therefore had positive perceptions regarding managers' ability to deal with interference. With regards to managers' ability to deal with interference, their subordinates tended to agree most with the statement: "My manager does not make negative judgements about others while talking to me". A manager refraining from making negative statements behind subordinates' backs leads to a trusting work relationship, which encourages subordinates to solicit managerial feedback. This implies that the manager does not allow negative thoughts about others to interfere with the transfer of messages to subordinates. Subordinates also feel comfortable to communicate defects they may have caused or experienced during their work activities. (Jones & George 2013:418-419).

**Table 3.5: Managers' ability to deal with interference (N = 931)**

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

The statement respondents agreed the least with was "My manager stops what he is busy with when I talk to him". When this happens, it counteracts the productivity gained from the positive

relationship established. Subordinates may feel rushed to conclude the interaction, in this case, potentially leaving out vital information.

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

### 3.7.5 Comparisons, statistical and practical significance and hypotheses testing

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

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

ANOVA was used to determine whether statistical differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) existed in the perception of subordinates working in the three different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills and their ability to deal with interference. The findings are summarised in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6: Differences between subordinate's perceptions in the three industries**

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

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

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was found that subordinates from manufacturing and retail businesses (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.006 /  $p = 0.006$  and Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.007 /  $p = 0.007$ ) had statistically differing perceptions, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses (mean = 3.804) perceived their managers' message sending skills to be slightly better than subordinates from retail businesses (mean = 3.605) did. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.2$ ) suggests

negligible practical significance. The services industry did not differ statistically or practically from the other two industries regarding message sending skills. Other researchers have found that the frequency at which manufacturing managers communicate with subordinates is higher than in retail, due to the complex nature of the manufacturing industry (Chang *et al.*, 2006:2). Naturally, the manner in which managers from different industries send messages ought to be different. When considering the key role communication plays in each of these industries, manufacturing managers mostly use it to mitigate their distance from ground level operations, whereas retail managers aim to influence consumer perception rather than focusing on internal communication (Adcock, 2000:7-8; Worley & Doolen, 2006:15; Yates, 2006:2).

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

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was found that subordinates from manufacturing and retail businesses (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.032 /  $p = 0.032$  and Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.035 /  $p = 0.035$ ) had statistically differing perceptions, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses (mean = 3.640) perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference slightly better than subordinates from retail businesses subordinates (mean = 3.482) did. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.2$ ) suggests little practical significance. The services industry did not differ statistically or practically significantly from the other two industries regarding the ability to deal with interference. Where problems are encountered within the communication process, managers from retail and services industries ought to put more emphasis on dealing with interference they cause. Small changes to one's approach to communication in the business context, especially when dealing with subordinates, can have a significant and positive effect on the general wellbeing of the business (Truter, 2006:3).

### **3.7.5.2 Statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different sized businesses regarding the two factors**

ANOVA was used to determine whether statistical differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) existed in the perception of subordinates working in businesses of three different sizes regarding their managers' message sending skills and their ability to deal with interference. The findings are summarised in Table 3.7.

**Table 3.7: Differences between subordinate's perceptions in the three business sizes**

Construct	Number of permanent employees	n	Mean	Std Dev	p-value
Message sending skills	6-50	475	3.644	0.756	0.164
	51-200	311	3.703	0.795	
	200+	145	3.773	0.851	
Ability to deal with interference	6-50	475	3.554	0.787	0.588
	51-200	311	3.520	0.781	
	200+	145	3.598	0.651	

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

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

Regarding ability to deal with interference, there was also no statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.588$ ) regarding how subordinates from different sized businesses (6-50 employees  $m = 3.554$ ,  $SD = 0.787$ ; 51-200 employees  $m = 3.520$ ,  $SD = 0.781$ ; 200+ employees  $m = 3.598$ ,  $SD = 0.651$ ) perceived their managers' ability. Contrary to these findings Groyberg and Slind (2012) argue that larger businesses fail to transform ideas into products, struggle to arrange face-to-face communications with management, do not appealingly address consumer concerns and share information inadequately. Sher (2014) declares that businesses with fewer employees communicate more organically. The communication process is much more fluid, problems are solved quicker, ideas are turned into outputs more often, and interference is dealt with consistently. Thus they concluded that the larger the business is, the more complex the communication is and the higher the likelihood of the process breaking down.

### 3.7.5.3 Hypotheses testing

#### 3.7.5.3.1 Hypothesis 1

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

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

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

#### 3.7.5.3.2 Hypothesis 2

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

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

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

#### 3.7.5.3.3 Hypothesis 3

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

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

Consequently, *Ha3* is rejected.

#### 3.7.5.3.4 Hypothesis 4

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

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

Consequently, *Ha4* is rejected.

### 3.8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The communication process as depicted in Figure 3.1 occurs in the manufacturing, services and retail industries within small, medium and large businesses. Furthermore, the conceptual framework provides an overview of the communication process used by managers. The manager starts the process by encoding the information he/she wishes to convey into a message, and the message is then transmitted to the receiver using a medium. The subordinates decode the message according to their interpretation (Jones & George, 2013:416-417). Interference can occur anywhere in the communication process and obstruct the communication process (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393). The relevance of effective communication as a managerial skill is clearly highlighted in the problem statement and literature review.

Conclusions regarding the results of the empirical study were presented in coordination with the objectives. Demographic findings revealed that nearly equal numbers of male and female respondents with an average age of 33 years worked in the three industries in businesses of different sizes. Regarding message sending skills subordinates from all three industries had a positive perception of their managers' ability in this competency. Further, the above respondents regarded their managers' ability to deal with interference to be marginally above average. Regarding the statistical differences between variables it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding message sending skills and ability to deal with interference, where subordinates from manufacturing businesses perceived these competencies to be slightly better than those from retail businesses. Subordinates from the services industry did not differ statistically from those of the other two industries. Further, these differences had negligible practical significance. Concerning subordinates from different sized businesses, there were no statistically significant

differences regarding their perception of their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with interference.

From the results, the following recommendations can be made. Although the message sending skills were perceived to be above average for all three industries the ability to deal with interference was perceived to be a little less. Consequently, managers need to be made aware that improvement in their ability to deal with interference should be focused on. Especially in conversational situations managers should not be preoccupied with other matters, permit distractions or allow a poor relationship with the subordinate to detract them from effective listening.

General recommendations gathered from the literature embrace a wider range of aspects concerning communication. Thill and Bovée (2013:50) argue that seeing communication as a process assists managers in creating steps that can be taken to improve their success as communicators. Effective communication ultimately leads to collaborative problem solving (Robinson *et al.*, 2010:8). Managers of the industries should not only be conscious of their own limitations in communication but make required adjustments which would significantly improve their ability to execute their managerial task effectively and efficiently (Lunenburg, 2011:10; Truter, 2006:3). To address issues such as information-overload, misunderstandings, and interruptions, Kupritz and Cowell (2011:4) advocate a rise in the business need for identification of effective communication channels. It is generally recommended that managers use communication as a strategic business tactic to plan, develop, implement, and measure brand programs over time with customers, prospects, subordinates and other applicable external audiences (Einwiller & Boenigk, 2012:23).

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## SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM ARTICLE 1 CONTRIBUTING TO THE OVERALL OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

For the purpose of linking this article to the overall objectives of the study, the Chapter 3's main findings are presented below and are numbered in coordination with the article number.

**Main finding 1.1:** There were approximately equal numbers of male and female subordinates and their average age was 33 years. The majority of who worked in small businesses. Most of them were employed in the retail and services industries, followed closely by the manufacturing industry.

**Main finding 1.2:** In the communication process presented in this article's conceptual (Figure 3.1) the manager begins the process by encoding the information he/she wants to convey into a message, and this message is then transmitted to the receiver using a medium. The subordinates are then tasked to decode the message according to their interpretation. This process includes interferences that can disturb it at any point (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393; Jones & George, 2013:416-417).

**Main finding 1.3:** Subordinates had relatively positive perceptions about their managers' message sending skills and just marginally above average for their ability to deal with general interference.

**Main finding 1.4:** There was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from the three different industries under discussion.

**Main finding 1.5:** Manufacturing industry subordinates had more positive perceptions of their managers' message sending skills than those from the retail industry did. The perceptions of subordinates from the services industry did not differ statistically or practically from the other two industries about their managers' message sending skills.

**Main finding 1.6:** The manufacturing industry subordinates also had better perceptions of their managers' ability to deal with general interference than those from the retail industry did. The perceptions of subordinates from the services industry did not differ statistically or practically from the other two industries with regards to their managers' their ability to deal with general interference either.

**Main finding 1.7:** All of the statistical differences that were found had negligible practical significance.

## **CHAPTER 4: ARTICLE 2**

### **MANAGERS' LISTENING SKILLS, FEEDBACK SKILLS AND ABILITY TO DEAL WITH INTERFERENCE: A SUBORDINATE PERSPECTIVE**

Chapter 4 comprised the second article which investigated how subordinates from various educational backgrounds perceive their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process. This article will be submitted for publication to *Acta Commercii* which is a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) accredited journal. The editorial policy and guidelines for the submissions of manuscripts can be found at:

- <http://www.actacommercii.co.za/index.php/acta/pages/view/original>

It is noteworthy that while the article's abstract was presented according to these guidelines, the heading numbers, table numbers, figure numbers, referencing, page margins, font and font size promoted uniformity and according conformed to the rest of this dissertation. The chapter ends with a discussion of the main findings which contribute to the overall objectives of this study.

## **MANAGERS' LISTENING SKILLS, FEEDBACK SKILLS AND ABILITY TO DEAL WITH INTERFERENCE: A SUBORDINATE PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Orientation:** Active listening is the single most important contributor to effective communication by managers; however, this is the skill they seem to struggle with the most. Other important skills for effective communication include feedback and the ability to deal with interference.

**Research purpose:** This study's primary objective was to determine the effectiveness of managers' listening and feedback skills and their ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process as perceived by subordinates with varying educational backgrounds.

**Motivation for the study:** Improvement of managers' communication with their subordinates.

**Research design, approach and method:** The research followed a quantitative descriptive design. A self-administered questionnaire was compiled, a non-probability, convenience sample was chosen, and 931 useable responses were acquired.

**Main findings:** The results showed that subordinates perceived their managers' communication competencies to be marginally above average. Managers' listening and feedback skills were perceived to be better by graduate-level subordinates than by those with only a grade 12 qualification. Subordinates with a post-graduate degree also had better perceptions of these skills than those with a grade 12 qualification, although not statistically significant.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Managers need to be aware that their communication competencies are crucial to their business' success. Additionally, their subordinates' perception of the effectiveness of their communication varies according to varying educational levels. Thus, managers are advised to consciously make greater efforts in their communication with subordinates with lower qualifications.

**Contribution/value-add:** In conclusion, this article will make managers more knowledgeable about potential challenges they may encounter during the communication process regarding listening skills, feedback skills and propensity to deal with interference.

**Keywords:**

Managerial competencies, communication, listening skills, feedback skills, ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases, educational levels

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Modern businesses are faced with an onslaught of constant change, and steep competition wherein managers and subordinates are the primary sources of competitive advantage that are predominantly achieved by ways of communication (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2004:594; Longenecker, 2010:39). Other crucial managerial competencies include teamwork, interpersonal relations, self-management, decision-making, networking, analytical skills, global awareness and strategic action, awareness of self and others, and creative problem-solving (Daft & Marcic 2014:13; Dogra, 2012). According to Voinea *et al.* (2015:177), effective communication is one of the most important competencies required for sustainable business success.

Communication is the social action that involves the transfer and exchange of information, opinions, plans and ideas among individuals and/or groups to motivate action, influence, behaviour and entices responses (Henrico & Visser, 2012:183; Kupritz & Cowell, 2011:58). Businesses that exhibit effective communication have higher levels of productivity, increased returns and better employee engagement (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:190-191; Yates, 2006:2). Ineffective communication among managers and subordinates significantly hampers a business's ability to achieve its objectives (Arvidsson, 2010:350). An effective communication process involves active and empathetic listening and providing and receiving feedback (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552).

In general, effective listening involves paying close attention to both the message and the manner in which it is conveyed, and it is crucial for managerial success (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196). Feedback, in general, is essentially evidence that enables persons or groups to compare actual performance with a specified standard or expectation that inspires improvement, growth, and development (De Janasz *et al.*, 2009:392).

The comprehensive communication process is plagued by interference, that is, semantic barriers such as professional jargon and regional colloquialisms; physical barriers such as literal background noise; psychological barriers such as attitude; and physiological barriers such as discomfort (Brown, 2001:27; Krauss, 2002:654; Lunenburg, 2011:10; Truter, 2006:57). Managers' sufficient knowledge about interference, dealing with it and the contributing barriers to listening and feedback enable them to promote effective communication within businesses (Truter, 2006:55-58).

## 4.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Due to the way that businesses function, there are many important managerial competencies; however, Voinea *et al.* (2015:177) argue that communication is the most essential. In an ever-

changing business environment with subsiding corporate loyalty, managers with exceptional communication skills such as listening, feedback and ability to deal with interference during these two stages are pivotal to the sharing of information, altering of behaviour and promoting subordinate commitment to a business (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2004:594). Knowledge of the opinions of subordinates concerning this process is important because problems like ineffective communication practices, mistakenly altered messages, and misconstrued transmission can be linked to managers with overly positive opinions of their communication skills (Johnson, 2013).

Differences in levels of education and training can be linked to different employee perceptions regarding the communication process between themselves and their managers (Gondlekar & Kamat, 2016:193,195; Hailu *et al.*, 2016). Subordinates with higher education levels can be associated with higher levels of satisfaction with the communication capabilities of their managers (Erdil & Tanova, 2015:187) who, when considering these differences in educational levels, will be able to function more effectively as communicators (Tschannen & Lee, 2012).

Listening plays a crucial role in the communication process and can significantly enhance interpersonal relationships in a business. When managers listen actively, subordinates tend to feel more supported, engaged and committed to them and the business (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196; Trees, 2000:259). Managers who can listen while paying attention to the needs, problems and suggestions of subordinates are better able to achieve business objectives and utilise lucrative opportunities by easily gaining information regarding defects (Canary *et al.*, 2008:111, Daft & Marcic; 2009:573).

Feedback during the communication process is equally important for the most advantageous performance of a business that is reliant on not only managers and subordinates giving and receiving feedback, but also its integration into their tasks (De Janasz *et al.*, 2009:384). Unless managers promote an organisational culture of effective, constructive and collaborative feedback, they will be unable to alter dwindling subordinate performance positively (De Janasz *et al.*, 2009:392; Jones & George 2013:418-419; Longenecker, 2010:34). Despite its importance, most managers and subordinates are reluctant to provide or request feedback (De Janasz *et al.*, 2009:393).

Successful listening and feedback exercises are accompanied by the effective handling of interference. A deficient ability to deal with interference during these processes hinders team cohesion and clarity of instructions among managers and subordinates (Schreiner, 2014; Travis, 2016).

The research question for this study was: How do subordinates with varying educational backgrounds perceive the effectiveness of their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during listening and feedback?

### **4.3 OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES**

Stemming from the above, the primary purpose of this paper is to investigate how subordinates from various educational backgrounds perceive their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases in the communication process.

To achieve the purpose of this paper, the objectives were to:

- compile a demographic profile of respondents who took part in the study;
- investigate managers' listening skills in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates;
- explore managers' feedback skills in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates;
- investigate managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback stages of the communication process as perceived by their subordinates;
- determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' listening skills;
- establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' feedback skills;
- determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases; and
- determine the practical significance of the differences.

The following alternative hypotheses were formulated for this research:

*Ha1: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' listening skills during the communication process.*

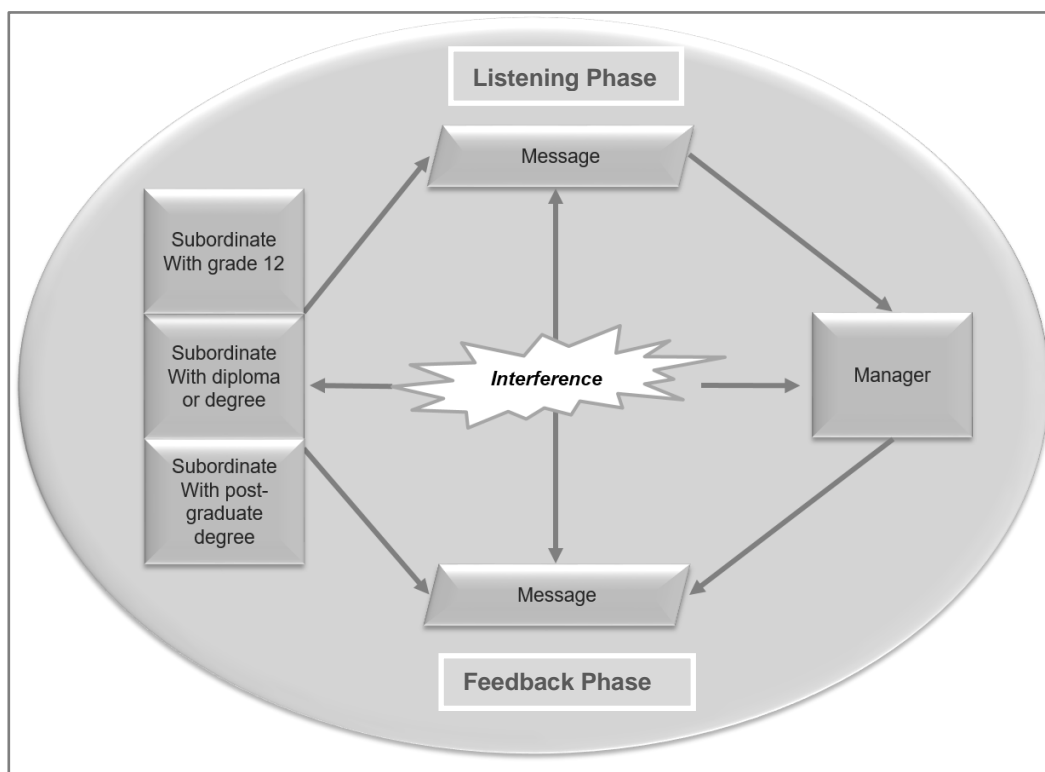
*Ha2: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' feedback skills during the communication process.*

*Ha3: There is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback stages of the communication process.*

#### 4.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework, derived from various sources (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393; Daft & Marcic, 2009:552; Erdil and Tanova, 2015:187; Henrico & Visser, 2012:183; Jones & George, 2013:417; Locker & Kaczmarek 2014:4; Trenholm & Jensen, 2013:14; Tschannen and Lee, 2012) was compiled to guide this study.

**Figure 4.1: The communication process between subordinates with various qualifications and their managers**



Source: Adapted from Colquit *et al.* (2013:393); Daft and Marcic (2009:552); Erdil and Tanova (2015:187); Henrico and Visser (2012:183); Jones and George (2013:417); Locker and Kaczmarek (2014:4); Trenholm and Jensen (2013:14) and Tschannen and Lee (2012).

## 4.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The various concepts in the conceptual framework will be discussed.

### 4.5.1 Subordinates

For the purpose of the current study, subordinates from three main industries were divided into three groups based on their highest educational achievement. As indicated in the conceptual framework, subordinates play an important role in the communication process between themselves and managers. They start the communication process by encoding the message and then sending it to the managers via appropriate communication channels, with possible interference occurring anywhere in this process (Jones & George, 2013:417). Subordinates' communication competencies are critical to productivity; they have to encode information-carrying messages correctly, alter unsatisfactory behaviour when given feedback and report progress and defects to managers (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:392-393; Holm, 2006:498).

#### 4.5.1.1 Education and training

Well-educated and sufficiently trained employees are conducive to the success of a business (Al-Adwani, 2014:137). According to Daoanis (2012:48), education and training in communication are included among the most important skills a subordinate should have in a business. Differences in level of education and training can be linked to different employee perceptions of aspects of communication. Gondlekar and Kamat (2016:193,195) found that employees with post-graduate degrees had reached significantly higher levels of personal growth and development within businesses than those with only a matric qualification. Employees with higher levels of education were also found to have higher perceived levels of respect and satisfaction within the business as well as regarding the effectiveness of their managers' communication competencies (Erdil & Tanova, 2015:187; Hailu *et al.*, 2016). It can be concluded that managers who consider the educational levels of subordinates can promote effective communication (Tschannen & Lee, 2012).

### 4.5.2 Managers

Managers play an important part in the success of a business as they influence business performance (Lubatkin *et al.*, 2006:668). As depicted in Figure 4.1, managers are the receivers of the messages during the first communication phase, where they fulfil the role of listeners. To be effective listeners, the managers need to withhold judgement, be attentive and refrain from formulating and rehearsing responses (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:12-13). During the feedback phase of the communication process, the roles of managers and subordinates are reversed.

#### 4.5.2.1 Managerial competencies

Oosthuizen (2011:66) describes managerial competencies as sets of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that a manager needs to be successful in a variety of organisational settings and managerial jobs. Effective communication is imperative in businesses because it affects how managers and subordinates execute their tasks, as well as the quality of their execution (Henrico & Visser, 2012:185-186).

#### 4.5.3 The communication process

As depicted in the conceptual framework (Figure 4.1), the communication process consists of two distinguishable phases. These phases are usually named the transmission phase and the feedback phase (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552). During the transmission phase, information is shared between two or more individuals or groups. For the purpose of this study, the transmission phase is referred to as the listening phase, since the subordinate encodes messages and the manager listens during this phase. In the feedback phase, a mutual understanding arises through cognitive actions and active listening (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552-553). This phase can also be used to confirm comprehension, instruct and motivate subordinates and/or request more information. These messages are sent and received via a medium (also referred to as a channel), which is the pathway by which an encoded message is transmitted to a receiver (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:10).

##### 4.5.3.1 Listening

Listening can be referred to as the act of consciously paying attention to not only the message but also the manner in which the message is being conveyed, such as the use of language, voice, tone and body language of the speaker (Certo, 2014; Pelham, 2006:180). Effective managers are active listeners who are engaged and invested in the outcome of the interaction (De Janasz *et al.*, 2009:128). To be truly effective listeners, managers are advised to be supportive and genuinely concerned about the feelings of their subordinates during the communication process through empathetic listening (Henrico & Visser, 2012:185).

As indicated in the problem statement, listening is a crucial element of the communication process. Listening skills are significantly more important than speaking for managerial success, business performance and effective communication (Flynn *et al.*, 2008:148, Fracaro, 2001:3). Burley-Allen (2005:2) states that a significant portion (40%) of the communication process is made up of listening, yet despite this frequency, communicators may not actually grasp the impact that effective and ineffective listening have on interpersonal interactions (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008:67). Managers who are effective listeners connect with subordinates and, in turn, may result

in those managers being perceived as leaders to be followed by choice (Canary *et al.*, 2008:111). Subordinates also perceive managers who actively and attentively listen as being more competent communicators, which increases the likelihood of achieving interpersonal objectives. Managers gain insights into complex problems and solutions and are better able to provide valuable feedback (Canary *et al.*, 2008:111; Trees, 2000:259) when they listen attentively. Managers who are ineffective listeners are more likely to make mistakes, are generally less proficient at their managerial tasks and obstruct the flow of information (Pelham, 2006:180). Insufficient listening skills may cause managers to squander potentially lucrative opportunities (French, 2013; Johnson, 2013).

According to Hartley and Bruckman (2002:20), managers can improve their listening skills by applying two steps; firstly, developing the aptitude to identify and deal with obstacles that prevent optimal listening; and secondly, cultivating and using behaviours that assist listening. Hoppe (2007:11-12) suggests a six-step model to assist managers to improve their active listening specifically, which are paying attention, withholding judgement, reflecting, clarifying, summarising and sharing. As the initial senders in the communication process, subordinates can smile, lean forward, maintain eye contact and arch their necks forward to increase the probability of their managers listening to them actively (Buck, 2004:25).

#### **4.5.3.2 Feedback**

Feedback can be regarded as providing information relating to the performance of the receiver with the goal to improve performance (Dai *et al.*, 2010:213; Dobbelaer *et al.*, 2013:99). During the feedback phase of the communication process, the message could also consist of a validation that the first message was comprehended, or a reiteration of the first message to ensure an accurate interpretation, or a request for additional information (Jones & George, 2013:416-417). Managers and subordinates provide and seek feedback with the intention of confirming, adding to, overwriting or restructuring received information (Ragusa, 2011:21). Feedback enables subordinates to determine whether they have been successful in transmitting their message. Naturally, it also assists managers to evaluate peers and subordinates according to predetermined, pre-set standards, expectations and norms (Daft & Marcic; 2009:573).

The importance of feedback was discussed in the problem statement. Feedback is mentally reassuring and usually leads to improved performance and growth (De Janasz *et al.*, 2009:392; Kobeleva & Strongman, 2011:98). Modern managers are usually preoccupied with their strategic responsibilities, effectively removing them from the ground-level, day-to-day operations of the businesses. This causes a rift between managers and subordinates and makes it more challenging to provide and receive effective feedback. This gap can only be bridged by fostering

an effective feedback culture within a business (Jones & George 2013:418-419). Managers can only positively alter dwindling subordinate performance with effective feedback (Longenecker, 2010:34). However, regardless of its importance, feedback is often neglected, and managers and subordinates find providing and requesting feedback to be inherently challenging (Daft & Marcic; 2009:573). This could be due to the feedback provider's fear of the receiver's reaction, fear of insufficient tangible support of the feedback and/or fear of a potential rise in tension in the interpersonal relationship (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:18).

A prerequisite of effective feedback within the business context is established standards (Longenecker, 2010:38). To provide effective feedback, managers are advised to be specific, provide the feedback face-to-face, be sensitive and offer solutions when providing negative feedback (Wertheim, 2005). Daoanis (2012:49) recommends clear objectives and proper documentation as effective feedback practices that can serve as tangible support for the feedback and increase subordinate commitment and performance. Krasman (2011:24) found that having unambiguous goals and appropriate standards in place also increase the likelihood of feedback-seeking among managers and subordinates. Consistently seeking feedback demonstrates a subordinate's willingness to learn and leads to improved self-awareness. However, excessive feedback requests can lead to perceptions of incompetence and could indicate a lack of initiative (Van Rensburg & Prideaux, 2006:566).

#### **4.5.3.3 Interference**

According to Brown (2001:27), interference is any obstruction to the effective exchange of thoughts, ideas or commands. Interference can, therefore, refer to anything that hinders the communication process, and it can occur during any phase of the communication process (Lunenburg, 2011:4). A common example of interference within a business context is literal blare caused by clattering machinery during production (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393). There are many ways for a message to get misinterpreted, distorted, misunderstood or confused during the listening and feedback phase. The barriers that stand out the most during the listening phase of the communication process are jumping to conclusions, hearing what one wants to hear, formulating and rehearsing responses, being inattentive (that is, thinking about other matters), judging the sender, having a closed mind, feeling anxious or self-conscious and excessive interrupting (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:12-13). During the feedback phase, fearing tension, receiver reaction and lack of concrete substantiation can be sources of barriers (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:18).

Having sufficient knowledge about interference and the contributing barriers to listening and feedback enables managers to deal with it better and promotes effective communication (Truter, 2006:1-3). It can be concluded that the most effective way of dealing with interference is by being

knowledgeable about it and actively trying to minimise its impact on the communication process (Erven, 2012; Pfeiffer, 1998).

## **4.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

An in-depth study of the existing literature was undertaken to contextualise the study (Neuman, 2003:96).

### **4.6.1 Research design**

A survey was employed to conduct this quantitative, descriptive and exploratory study (Bradley, 2007:516; Burns & Bush, 2014:103; Struwig & Stead, 2007:243).

### **4.6.2 Target population, sampling and data collection**

The target population consisted of employees with at least a grade 12 qualification from three major South African industries. There was no sample frame in this study (Singh, 2007:88), and therefore fieldworkers used a list of employees at each business as a frame, which served as a substitute for a frame. A non-probability, convenience sampling method was followed, and to provide structure to the sampling process, fieldworkers were instructed to fulfil quotas where a third of the respondents came from the manufacturing industry, another third from the retail industry and the final third from the services industry. The sample included a total of 966 workers of whom 931 submitted usable questionnaires. Twenty trained fieldworkers were used to distribute the self-administered questionnaires and collect them afterwards. The fieldworkers were BCom Honours students in the field of Business Management who had completed an undergraduate module in Marketing Research. The following number of usable questionnaires were retrieved from the various provinces, and the numbers of fieldworkers employed are indicated in brackets: Gauteng, 544 (12); KwaZulu-Natal, 48 (1); North West Province, 98 (2); Western Cape, 50 (1); Mpumalanga, 91 (2); Northern Cape, 49 (1); Free State, 51 (1).

### **4.6.3 The measuring instrument**

Subordinates' opinions and perceptions concerning their managers' communication competencies were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire (Struwig & Stead, 2007:244). This questionnaire commenced with an introduction that stated the rights of the respondent, provided contact details of the researchers and indicated the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was based on indicators from some literature sources and consisted of two sections. Data regarding respondents' demographic profile were gathered in Section A, which consisted of closed-ended questions, while Section B, which comprised a five-point Likert scale,

measuring three communication skills, namely listening, feedback and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of managers as perceived by their subordinates. All five response categories were not named; only the end points of the scales were labelled as *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*, respectively.

#### 4.6.4 Data analysis and interpretation

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS version 20) were used in this study to capture and analyse the data. A 5% level of significance was used as a criterion for all statistical tests. The following analyses were performed:

- Frequency analyses were performed for all the items in the questionnaire and mean scores and standard deviations were computed.
- The validity of the measuring instrument was examined by firstly applying an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) since a validated questionnaire was not used. Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to confirm the validity of the constructs.
- Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to determine reliability.
- Statistical significance ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) was determined using analyses of variance (ANOVA) (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:455; Struwig & Stead, 2007:162) and Cohen's d-value was used to assess practical significance. The following criteria were used to interpret practical significance:  $d=0.2$  – small effect (negligible);  $d=0.5$  – medium effect (substantial); and  $d=0.8$  – large effect (definitive) (Ellis & Steyn, 2003:51-52; Steyn, 1999:3).

### 4.7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the primary data collection are discussed in this section. Firstly, a discussion of the psychometric characteristics of the measuring instrument is given. The remainder of the section will present the sample profile based on the demographic information gathered, followed by the results concerning the three constructs used in the empirical study, in correspondence with the objectives.

#### 4.7.1 Psychometric properties of the measuring instrument

The researchers could not find a suitably validated questionnaire; subsequently, the compiled questionnaire was tested for construct and content validity as well as for reliability. This article forms part of a bigger study in which more aspects of communication were investigated. The

measuring instrument for the comprehensive study was validated, and the findings are provided below.

#### **4.7.1.1 Construct validity**

Firstly, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was executed to determine valid constructs. Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy were used to test whether the data were suitable for factor analysis. The KMO statistic generally varies between 0 and 1; KMO should be 0.50 or higher for a satisfactory factor analysis. In this study, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.950. Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated. The associated Bartlett's test of sphericity for the current study was found to be statistically significant in all cases.

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

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

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

Consequently, the instrument was found to be construct valid.

#### **4.7.1.2 Content validity**

According to Delport and Roestenburg (2011:173), content validity is concerned with the extent to which a measuring instrument covers the whole content domain. The items in each scale of

the measuring instrument must consequently be representative of the conceptual definition under discussion and must measure the concept that the researcher intends to measure.

In this study, content validity was verified by knowledgeable study leaders and supervisors from the School of Business Management at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus, who all found the instrument to be content valid.

#### 4.7.1.3 Reliability

The researcher computed the Cronbach alpha coefficients to establish the statistical reliability of the constructs. Zikmund and Babin (2015:280) state that a Cronbach's alpha value between 0.60 and 0.70 indicates fair reliability, a value between 0.70 and 0.80 indicates good reliability and a value between 0.80 and 0.96 indicates excellent reliability. Scales with a Cronbach's alpha value below 0.60 indicate poor reliability.

Table 4.1 depicts the reliability testing conducted in this study.

**Table 4.1: Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs used in the study**

Measurement sets	Cronbach's alpha
Listening (8 scale items)	0.844
Feedback (6 scale items)	0.788
Ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases (4 scale items)	0.706

It is evident from Table 4.1 that all the constructs have good reliability.

#### 4.7.2 Results of the empirical study

The results will be presented in line with the objectives. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented first, followed by specific findings regarding managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases.

##### 4.7.2.1 Sample profile

Nearly an equal number of males and females took part in this study, the majority of whom had a grade 12 qualification (50.2%), followed by approximately one third who had obtained a diploma or degree. Lastly, only 123 of the subordinates had obtained a post-graduate degree. Only 337 (36.2%) of the respondents had completed a course to improve their own communication skills. The average age of the respondents was 33 years old.

#### 4.7.2.2 Managers' listening skills as perceived by their subordinates

Table 4.2 depicts the mean scores and standard deviations of the items measuring managers' perceived listening skills on a five-point Likert scale.

**Table 4.2: Managers' listening skills (N = 931)**

Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
My manager is can sense how I feel without me having to tell him how I am feeling.	3.356	1.146
My manager reads my non-verbal messages when I am in a conversation with him.	3.434	1.047
My manager reflects my emotions to let me know that he understands how I am feeling.	3.402	1.091
My manager calms me down when I become angry by reflecting my emotions.	3.591	1.130
My manager restates my words to make sure that he understands me correctly.	3.602	1.086
My manager makes sure he understands what I am saying in a conflict situation.	3.766	0.980
My manager does not justify his actions when I complain about something he has done wrong.	3.563	1.079
My manager does not get angry or defensive when I correct him.	3.535	1.102
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.531</b>	<b>1.083</b>

Regarding their managers' listening skills, subordinates agreed most with the statement: "My manager makes sure he understands what I am saying in a conflict situation". According to Cohen (2014:139), people generally listen poorly during situations of conflict. Managers who can listen effectively under these conditions promote the solving of problems and the resolving of the conflict. However, subordinates had a less positive perception about their managers' aptitude to read their emotions during conversations. Employee engagement, commitment to production quality as well as an understanding of business issues decline when managers fail to read subordinates' emotions during the listening phase of the communication process (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196). The overall relatively positive mean score for managers' listening skills as perceived by their subordinates was 3.531 (SD = 1.083).

#### 4.7.2.3 Managers' feedback skills as perceived by their subordinates

Table 4.3 depicts the means scores and standard deviations regarding managers' feedback skills on a five-point Likert scale.

**Table 4.3: Managers' feedback skills (N = 931)**

Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
My manager does not judge me by my past faults.	3.591	1.137
My manager does not have trouble handling conflict.	3.791	1.033
My manager leans towards me rather than away from me when talking.	3.570	1.002
My manager asks me for more information when someone has complained about me.	3.667	1.119
My manager encourages two-way interaction with me by inviting a response.	3.630	1.017
My manager probes for deeper information by asking questions during a conversation with me.	3.759	0.982
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.668</b>	<b>1.048</b>

The statement: "My manager does not have trouble handling conflict" had the highest mean score of 3.79 (SD = 1.033). Managers who appropriately handle conflict during the feedback phase of the communication process take steps towards improving their overall communication competencies and can identify and consolidate sources of deficiencies and make the necessary amendments to reward systems (Jiang *et al.*, 2014:101). Nonverbal feedback, such as leaning forward, is deemed to be very credible and can increase the likelihood of active listening among subordinates during the feedback phase (Buck, 2004:25; Trenholm & Jensen, 2013:50). However, in this study, the gesture of leaning forward so as to show interest had a lower score of 3.57 (SD = 1.002). Managers can improve their feedback skills by addressing this behaviour specifically. The overall mean score for the respondents' perceptions of how well managers provide feedback was 3.668 (SD = 1.048), pointing out that respondents perceived managers' overall feedback skills to be slightly above average.

#### **4.7.2.4 Managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases as perceived by their subordinates**

Table 4.4 provides insight into the mean and standard deviation scores of the items measuring managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases.

**Table 4.4: Managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases (N = 931)**

Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
My manager concentrates on making sure I hear all the information he conveys to me.	3.822	1.004
My manager makes sure I do not have an overload of information when giving an instruction.	3.589	1.049
My manager does not use technical language (jargon) that I do not understand.	3.881	1.085
My manager does not allow a poor relationship with a person to detract him from effective listening.	3.591	1.089
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.720</b>	<b>1.057</b>

The overall mean score for managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases was a positive 3.720 (SD = 1.057). It can be concluded that subordinates generally agreed with the items within this construct. "My manager does not use technical language (jargon) that I do not understand" was the statement subordinates agreed with most. When managers avoid the unnecessary use of technical jargon, it improves relationships between managers and their subordinates, enhances the effectiveness of the communication process and increases productivity (Patoko & Yazdanifard, 2014:570). On the opposite side of the spectrum, subordinates agreed equally less with the statements: "My manager makes sure I do not have an overload of information when giving an instruction", which might lead to a loss of the intended purpose of the communication (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552), and "My manager does not allow a poor relationship with a person to detract him from effective listening", which may result in subordinates being more hesitant to report problems they may have experienced in the execution of their duties (Jones & George 2013:418-419).

#### **4.7.3 Comparisons, statistical and practical significance**

The following section compares the perceptions of subordinates with three different educational levels regarding managers' listening skills, feedback skills and their ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases.

##### **Statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates with various levels of education regarding three aspects of communication**

ANOVA was used to determine statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), and Cohen's d-values ( $d \geq 0.5$ ) were used to determine practically significant differences between the perception of subordinates regarding their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and their ability to deal

with interference during the abovementioned communication processes based on their highest level of education. The findings are summarised in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Comparison of subordinate perceptions based on their highest qualification**

Construct	Highest qualification	n	Mean	Std dev	p-value	d-value
Listening	Grade 12	467	3.410	0.790	0.000	0.2
	Diploma or degree	319	3.622	0.722		
	Post-graduate degree	123	3.588	0.662		
Feedback	Grade 12	467	3.602	0.728	0.048	0.2
	Diploma or degree	319	3.726	0.726		
	Post-graduate degree	123	3.701	0.720		
Ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases	Grade 12	467	3.665	0.791	0.042	0.2
	Diploma or degree	319	3.792	0.716		
	Post-graduate degree	123	3.785	0.641		

Regarding listening skills, there was a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.000$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates with varying educational levels (Grade 12 mean = 3.410, SD = 0.790; Diploma or degree mean = 3.622, SD = 0.722; Post-graduate degree mean = 3.588, SD = 0.662) in terms of how they perceived this skill.

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was found that subordinates with grade 12 and those with a diploma or degree (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.000 /  $p = 0.000$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.000 /  $p = 0.000$ ) had statistically differing perceptions. Respondents with a diploma or degree (mean = 3.622) perceived their managers' listening skills to be slightly better than those with grade 12 (mean = 3.410) did. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.2$ ) suggests little practical significance.

With regard to managers' feedback skills, there was a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.049$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates with varying educational levels (Grade 12 mean = 3.602, SD = 0.728, Diploma or degree mean = 3.726, SD = 0.726; Post-graduate degree mean = 3.701, SD = 0.720) during the communication process.

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was found that subordinates with grade 12 and those with a diploma or degree (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.048 /  $p = 0.048$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.049 /  $p = 0.049$ ) had statistically differing perceptions. Subordinates with a diploma or degree (mean = 3.726) had a slightly better perception of their managers' feedback skills than respondents with grade 12 (mean = 3.602) did. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.2$ ) suggests negligible practical significance.

Regarding ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases, there was a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.042$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates from different educational levels (Grade 12 mean = 3.665, SD = 0.791; Diploma or degree mean = 3.792, SD = 0.716; Post-graduate degree mean = 3.785, SD = 0.641) regarding how subordinates perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases during the communication process.

However, the Tukey HSD and Games-Howell *post hoc* tests yielded no specific group differences, and Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.2$ ) suggested negligible practical significance.

Similarly, Tschannen and Lee (2012) and Erdil and Tanova (2015:187) found that higher levels of education were associated with better perceptions of communication skills. The findings of this study, however, are specific to the three aspects of effective communication under discussion. Furthermore, regarding listening and feedback, the statistically significant differences were only between subordinates with grade 12 and those with a diploma or degree, whereas from the mean scores it can be concluded that the perceptions of subordinates with post-graduate degrees slightly declined. In this study, the increased educational level, from first degree to a post-graduate degree did not seem to improve the respondents' perception of their managers' listening or feedback skills or ability to deal with interference. The researcher believes that the relatively small number of respondents (123) involved may have contributed to this finding. It should be noted, however, that the mean scores for the perceptions of subordinates with post-graduate degrees were higher than those of subordinates with only a grade 12 qualification.

#### **4.7.4 Hypotheses testing**

##### **4.7.4.1 Hypothesis 1**

Regarding hypothesis 1, stating that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' listening skills during the communication process, the following was found:

- There was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' listening skills during the communication process.
- In *post hoc* tests, it was found that employees with a grade 12 qualification and those with a diploma or degree had statistically significant different perceptions, where subordinates with a diploma or degree perceived their managers' listening skills to be slightly better than those with only a matric qualification. The perceptions of respondents with a post-graduate degree did not differ statistically significantly from those with the other two levels of education.

Consequently, *Ha1* is accepted regarding statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates with grade 12 and those with a graduate qualification concerning managers' listening skills.

#### **4.7.4.2 Hypothesis 2**

Regarding hypothesis 2, stating that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' feedback skills during the communication process, the following was found:

- There was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' feedback skills during the communication process.
- In *post hoc* tests, it was found that employees with a grade 12 qualification and those with a diploma or degree had statistically significant different perceptions, where subordinates with a diploma or degree perceived their managers' feedback skills to be slightly better than those with only a graduate qualification did. The perceptions of respondents with a post-graduate degree did not differ statistically significantly from those with the other two levels of education regarding managers' feedback skills.

Consequently, *Ha2* is accepted regarding statistically significant differences between the perceptions of grade 12 and graduate-level subordinates concerning managers' feedback skills.

#### **4.7.4.3 Hypothesis 3**

Regarding hypothesis 3, stating that there is a statistically significant difference on how subordinates with different education levels perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process, the following were found:

- There was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process.
- However, in the *post hoc* tests, no statistically significant differences could be identified between perceptions of subordinates regarding managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback stages of communication.

Consequently, *Ha3* is accepted regarding the existence of statistically significant differences between the perceptions of grade 12, graduate-level and post-graduate-level subordinates concerning managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases, without having been able to determine the educational levels wherein these differences occur.

#### **4.8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations are firstly made from the results of the current study, followed by general recommendations from literature sources. The results showed that managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases was perceived by subordinates to be most effective of the three communication skills, followed closely by their feedback skills and then listening skills.

Managers can still improve on their ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases by refraining from information overload when giving instruction and by not allowing poor relationships with subordinates to diminish their effective listening.

Managers are also advised to add credibility to their message by paying more attention to exhibiting nonverbal cues, such as leaning forward during the feedback phase of the communication process. Showing interest by leaning forward might also entice active listening by subordinates.

Even though subordinates had relatively positive perceptions about their managers' listening capabilities, it proved to be the skill with the most room for improvement. The specific problem seemed to be managers' ability to sense how subordinates feel without having to be told how they feel. When managers effectively read their subordinates' emotions during the communication process, it will enhance employee engagement and commitment.

Furthermore, managers need to be aware that their communication is perceived differently by subordinates with varying educational backgrounds. Managers should consciously make greater

efforts in their communication with subordinates with lower educational levels. To accomplish truly effective communication, particularly in the three aspects discussed in this paper, they ought to alter their behaviour appropriately.

Generally, seeing the entire communication as a process with distinct phases and elements assists managers to take the required steps towards becoming more effective communicators (Thill & Bovée, 2013:50). According to various authors, listening is the most crucial skill to improve for overall effective communication (Griffen, 2014:362, Flynn *et al.*, 2008:148, Fracaro, 2001:3). Regarding effective listening, some of the important behaviours that managers should practise during the listening phase of the communication process include withholding judgement, pondering on the initial message and clarifying vagueness (Hartley & Bruckman, 2002:20; Hoppe 2007:11-12). Regarding effective feedback skills, it is recommended that managers have clear, unambiguous and acceptable pre-set standards and objectives that foster a commendable feedback culture among themselves and subordinates (Daoanis 2012:49; Krasman, 2011:24; Longenecker, 2010:38). Kupritz and Cowell (2011:4) suggest addressing the issue of information overload when dealing with interference during the listening and feedback phases by selecting an appropriate communication medium. In conclusion, the best way that managers can effectively deal with interference is by having knowledge about it (Erven, 2012; Pfeiffer, 1998).

#### **4.9 CONCLUSIONS**

This study was concerned with the importance of three aspects of effective communication between managers and subordinates, namely listening and feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases. The focus was specifically on the difference of perceptions of subordinates with varying educational qualifications. Figure 4.1 depicts the communication process as it concerns this study.

The following conclusions pertain to the empirical findings of this study and are presented in coordination with the objectives. Demographically, there were nearly equal numbers of male and female respondents with an average age of 33 years, the majority of whom had a grade 12 qualification, followed by approximately one third who had obtained a diploma or degree and only 123 of the subordinates had obtained a post-graduate degree.

Subordinates at all the educational levels had relatively positive perceptions regarding their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference. Despite the importance of managers' listening skills, they were perceived to be the skills that managers are least effective in. Regarding the statistical differences between variables, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates with different

educational backgrounds regarding all three aspects of communication discussed in this study. Subordinates with a diploma or degree perceived their managers' listening skills to be marginally better than those with grade 12 did. They also had a slightly better perception of their managers' feedback skills than respondents with grade 12 had. Concerning managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases, it was found that subordinates with different educational levels had varying perceptions. However, no statistically significant differences were found between the perceptions of subordinates with different educational levels. Finally, judging by the mean scores, it seems that subordinates with a degree or diploma had a better perception of all the communication skills discussed in this study than those with matric, while post-graduates fell in between. Furthermore, these differences had negligible practical significance.

In conclusion, effective communication is the key to promoting and sustaining business success in a constantly changing business environment. If managers of all businesses in a specific situation have to communicate with subordinates implement the findings of this study, there is a greater likelihood that they will achieve their managerial goals and gain a competitive business advantage.

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## SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM ARTICLE 2 CONTRIBUTING TO THE OVERALL OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

Chapter 4's main findings are presented below and are numbered in coordination with the article number. This is done for the purpose of linking them to the overall objectives of the study.

**Main finding 2.1:** The majority of the subordinates that took part in this study had a grade 12 qualification, followed by about a third who had completed a diploma or degree and only 123 of the respondents had obtained a post-graduate degree.

**Main finding 2.2:** In the conceptual framework of this article (Figure 4.1), the communication process is divided into two distinct phases. In the second article, transmission phase is referred to as the listening phase since the subordinate encodes messages and the manager listens. In the feedback phase, a mutual understanding arises through cognitive actions and active listening (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552-553).

**Main finding 2.3:** Subordinates at all the educational levels had marginally above average perceptions regarding their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases.

**Main finding 2.4:** The article also found that there were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates with varied educational backgrounds regarding all three aspects of communication discussed.

**Main finding 2.5:** Subordinates with a graduate level education perceived their managers' listening skills to be slightly better than those with grade 12 did.

**Main finding 2.6:** They also had a slightly better perception of their managers' feedback skills than respondents with grade 12 had.

**Main finding 2.7:** It should be noted that there were also differences between the perceptions of subordinates with regards to managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases, but the *post hoc* tests did not indicate where the differences were.

**Main finding 2.8:** With post-graduate subordinates having middling ranked perceptions of their managers' aptitude in all three aspects of communication, it seems that the effectiveness of managers' communication competencies did not increase along with the increased level of their subordinates' education.

**Main finding 2.9:** All the statistical differences had negligible practical significance.

## **CHAPTER 5: ARTICLE 3**

### **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGERS' COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES: A GENERATION-BASED SUBORDINATE PERSPECTIVE**

In chapter 5 the third article is presented. This article determined how subordinates from various generations perceived the effectiveness of their managers' overall communication competencies during the communication process. This article will be submitted to the Southern African Business Review (a Department of Higher Education and Training or DHET-accredited journal) for publication. The guidelines for contributors are available at:

- <http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Colleges/Economic-and-Management-Sciences/Journals/Southern-African-Business-Review/Guidelines-for-contributors>

The chapter's heading numbers, table numbers, figure numbers, referencing, page margins, font and font size also conformed to the rest of this dissertation. Chapter 5 culminates with main findings in coordination with the overall objectives of this study.

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## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGERS' COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES: A GENERATION-BASED SUBORDINATE PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Communication is the single most important managerial competency for business success. Understanding the various and sometimes conflicting communication styles of subordinates of different generations is conducive to efficient management and efficacious businesses. In this study, the primary objective was to determine the effectiveness of managers' communication competence as perceived by subordinates from various generations. A quantitative descriptive design was used. Furthermore, a non-probability, convenience sample was implemented, and 931 useable responses were obtained via a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire began with a short introduction followed by two sections where the first section gathered data regarding the subordinates' demographic profile and the second section measured the subordinates' perception of their managers' overall communication competencies. Furthermore, the questionnaire was found to be both reliable and valid. The results showed that subordinates perceived their managers' communication competencies to be slightly above average. Where the differences between generations were statistically significant, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers constantly had better perceptions of their managers' communication skills than Generation Yers did. Though not always statistically significant, it seemed that the two older generations consistently had better perceptions of their managers' skills and overall communication competence than the younger one did.

### Keywords:

Managerial competencies, communication process, communication competencies, generations

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa's fast-paced, ever-changing business landscape managers are not only confronted by the challenge of managing diverse human resources but also harvesting the innovation emerging from this diversity within subordinates (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:106). These subordinates can vary regarding generations, races, genders, nationalities, cultures and many more factors. Competencies such as communication, teamwork, interpersonal relations, self-management, decision-making, networking, analytical skills, global awareness and strategic action, awareness of self and others and creative problem solving are crucial for managerial success; and in turn business success (Daft & Marcic 2014:13; Dogra, 2012). The sustainable success of modern businesses is also highly reliant on managers' effective communication with their subordinates (Heyns & Luke, 2012:113; Voinea *et al.*, 2015:177).

According to Rue and Byars (2009:46) communication refers to the act of exchanging information; adding that managers spend about two thirds of their time communicating. Effective managers optimise their communication competencies and use it to acquire vital information, motivate subordinates and satisfy the demands of other stakeholders (Henrico & Visser, 2012:183; Rue & Byars, 2009:46). In this study overall effective communication involves empathic and active listening (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196), consistent and collaborative feedback (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552), informative and persuasive message sending (Krauss, 2002:654), ability to deal with general interference, and with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process (Lunenburg, 2011:10; Truter, 2006:55-58).

A generation is a cohort or group of persons born during a defined span of about 20 consecutive years that share traits that are common enough to be considered a trend among the individuals of that generation (Codrington, 2008). These generations can be broadly identified as the GI (Hero) generation (born between the 1900 and 1929); the Silent generation (born between the 1930 and 1949); the Baby boomer generation (born between the 1950 and 1969); Generation X (born between the 1970 and 1989) and Generation Y (born between the 1990 and 2005) (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2004:18). According to Glass (2007:98), modern businesses are significantly more generationally diverse than ever before. The generations that participated in this study even spanned from the Silent generation to Generation Y. Because the Silent generation makes up such a disproportionately small part of the working population (Stats SA, 2016) and their low response rate, this study focused only on Baby boomers, Generation Xers and Generation Yers when comparing the perceptions of the subordinates. Each of the generations under discussion has been influenced by the events of their formative years. These events cause them to have very different perceptions, opinions, and attitudes. Generational differences can result in interference during the communication process due to conflicting

communication preferences (Glass, 2007:101; Noffsinger, 2013). It, therefore, falls upon the manager to firstly understand these differences and secondly to adjust their communication practices accordingly (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011:308).

## 5.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The highly competitive and capricious nature of businesses does not afford managers the luxury of being complacent with the development of their managerial competencies. Managers' communication competencies are considered to be the most pertinent for the execution of their managerial tasks (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:30; Heyns & Luke; 2012:113). Effective communication is the central managerial competency for the successful execution of the primary managerial tasks, namely: planning, organising, leading, motivating and controlling (Oosthuizen, 2016:24). Managers that practice effective communication within businesses are informed and can instruct and motivate their subordinates (Holm, 2006:6; Kupritz & Cowell, 2011:58). Ineffective communication practices such as grossly flawed message sending habits, incorrect channel sections, and ineffective listening can be overcome by having knowledge about the subordinates' perceptions about managers' overall communication competencies (Johnson, 2013).

As mentioned in the introduction above, overall communication involves five aspects namely: listening skills, feedback skills, message sending skills, the ability to deal with general interference and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process. Managers can utilize active listening to inspire feelings of being supported, engaged and committed among their subordinates (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196; Trees, 2000:259). Active listening also enables managers to gain knowledge on as well as seize upon potentially lucrative opportunities (Canary *et al.*, 2008:111). According to De Janasz *et al.* (2012:389), most managers and subordinates are hesitant to request and/or provide feedback. However, sustainable business performance is subject to the conversion of feedback into task execution (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:385). A manager with deficient message sending skills cannot appropriately inform, motivate, instruct and persuade subordinates (Holm, 2006:6), effectively leaving them to their own limited devices. Even if managers exhibit the skills above, yet fail to deal with interference during the communication process effectively will result in the hindrance of team cohesion and clarity of instructions among them and their subordinates (Schreiner, 2014; Travis, 2016).

Each generation has characteristics that influence their work ethic, interpersonal relationships and their attitude toward authority figures (Glass, 2007:98). Cohorts of different generations often have differing communication preferences, with older generations preferring more traditional

mediums and younger generations preferring modern, technology based mediums (Rentz, 2015:152; Venter, 2017). These preference differences cause a generational communication gap (that is, interference/noise) which leads to conflict and misunderstandings (Venter, 2017). The accelerated entrance of Generation Yers into business was a cause for concern as managers were uncertain whether predicted predispositions, communication skills, and preferences would have a significant impact on their work performance (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010:225). Noffsinger (2013) states that knowledge about subordinates' generation descent and the impact it has on their values, attitudes, and communication preferences are crucial to aid in influencing them. According to Kapoor and Solomon (2011:308), businesses are faced with the problems that arise with generationally diverse workforces. Therefore, should managers seek to be effective in the persuasions, motivation, and instruction of their workforce; they would have to make adjustments to their approach towards the communication process.

The research question for this study was: How do subordinates from different generations perceive the effectiveness of their managers' overall communication competencies?

### **5.3 OBJECTIVES**

Stemming from the above, the primary objective of this research was to investigate how subordinates from various generations perceive the effectiveness of their managers' overall communication competencies during the communication process.

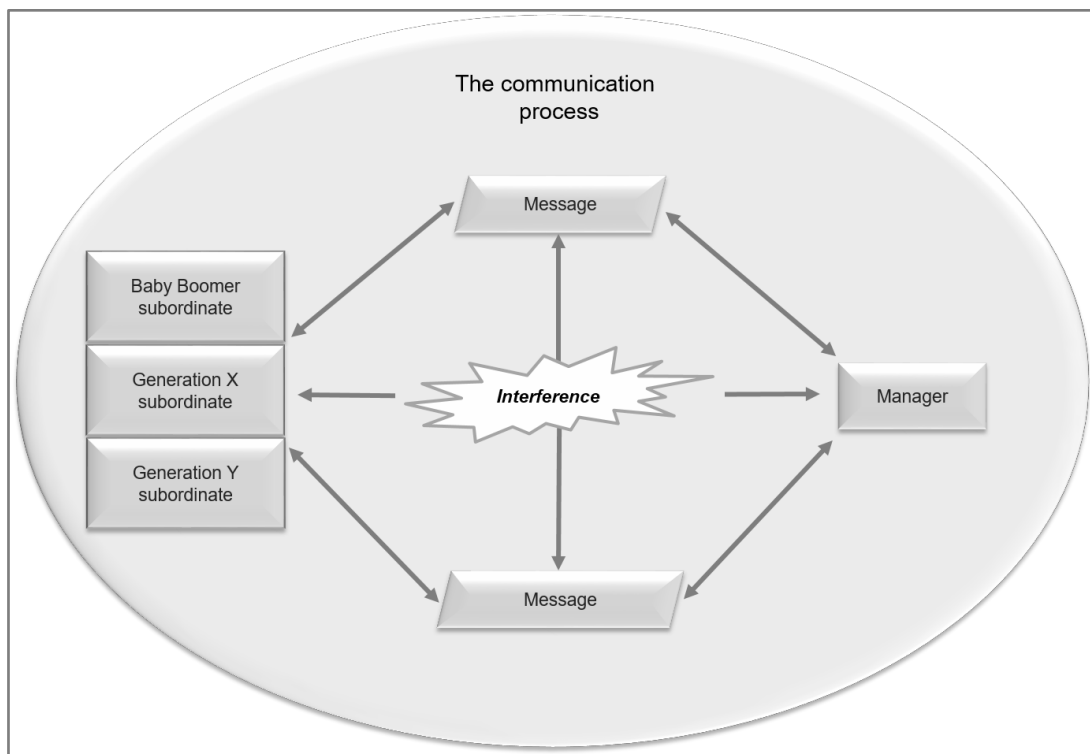
To achieve the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were to:

- compile a demographic profile of respondents who took part in the study;
- explore various selected aspects of managers' communication in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates;
- investigate managers' overall communication competencies during the communication process as perceived by their subordinates;
- establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding the various selected aspects of their managers' communication competencies; and
- determine whether statistical and practical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding their managers' overall communication competencies.

## 5.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework of the communication process, derived from various sources (see Figure 5.1 below) was compiled to guide this study.

**Figure 5.1: Communication process between managers and subordinates descendent from differing generations**



Source: Adapted from Colquit *et al.* (2013:393); Daft and Marcic (2009:552); Henrico and Visser (2012:183); Jones and George (2013:417); Locker and Kaczmarek (2014:4); Nicholas (2009:50) and Trenholm and Jensen (2013:14).

## 5.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The various concepts in the conceptual framework will be discussed below.

### 5.5.1 Subordinates

Subordinates play a crucial role in business and within the communication process. Their communication competencies are conducive to accurately comprehending their roles and instructions given, implementing received feedback on their behaviour and performance and encoding and transferring informative messages through appropriate communication channels (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:392-393; Holm, 2006:498; Jones & George, 2013:417).

### 5.5.1.1 Generations

A generation can be defined as is all of the individuals that were born and lived at about the same time (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2004:10). Generations are social locations which potentially influence subordinates' consciousness in a similar manner as other social demographics such as culture and social class (Codrington, 2008). This influence stems from individuals having certain attitudes, expectations and values based on their life experiences during their formative years (Codrington, 2008; Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2005:3).

According to Glass (2007:98), a multigenerational business environment can potentially cause workplace conflict due to diverging work ethic, differing expectations, innate attitudes, contrasting perspectives and dissimilar motivators. Managing these differences through effectively communicating with the generations under discussion is crucial for the retention and motivation of these subordinates (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:107; Kapoor & Solomon, 2011:308). Subordinates' various generations significantly influence how they communicate, and managers need to be aware of these differences to effectively manage and communicate with the differing cohorts (Glass, 2007:101; Noffsinger, 2013).

In a South African context, the Baby Boomers generation refers to the cohort of subordinates born between the years 1950 and 1969 (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2005:19) and they are usually team-orientated with impeccable work ethic (Callahan, 2010). They tend to be loyal towards their employer and respect authority. Baby Boomers also prefer direct, face-to-face verbal communication over technology based communications (Noffsinger, 2013).

As modern generational cohorts are usually about twenty years apart, South African Generation X subordinates were born between 1970 and 1989 (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2005:19) and are self-sufficient and outcome-driven (Callahan, 2010). Effective communication with them will include results-based feedback and limited direct supervision (Codrington, 2008). This generations is often more loyal to their team than to their employer, and expect managers to prove their authority. They also prefer direct, concise and outcome based communication over drawn-out small talk (Noffsinger, 2013).

Subordinates born between the years 1990 to 2005 in South Africa are Generation Yers (Codrington & Grant-Marshall, 2005:19), also known as Millennials. These subordinates are highly tech-savvy and tend to have more grandiose expectations of their employer than older generations (Callahan, 2010). Even though they seem to be arrogant and lacking work ethic (Codrington, 2008), they have redeeming qualities such as ambitions to impact their entire business, positive perceptions of frequent communication with management, affinity for

innovative technology incorporation and productive interaction within teams (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010:225). These subordinates are loyal to the members of their network and are generally dismissive of the notion of absolute authority. As digital natives, they are comfortable with computer based communication, and they prefer short, collaborative and visual communication over longwinded and elaborate interactions (Noffsinger, 2013).

It is crucial to note that generational theory is sociological and not psychological, and as such should not be used in an attempt to predict individual subordinates' behaviour. However, comprehension of generational theory can be valuable when considered along with other personality traits and variables such as gender, culture, race and religion (Codrington, 2008).

## **5.5.2 Managers**

Managers fulfil a crucial role in the success of a business as they are directly responsible for business decisions, performance and direction (Kiley, 2016:5; Lubatkin *et al.*, 2006:668). Within the communication process depicted in Figure 5.1, they are required to listen effectively by withholding judgment, being attentive and refraining from constructing rehearsed responses (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:12-13). Additionally, they compose and transmit information-carrying messages in the form of motivation, instruction and feedback to their subordinates (Dai *et al.*, 2010:213; Windle & Warren, 2014), while simultaneously dealing with interference (Lunenburg, 2011:4).

### **5.5.2.1 Managerial competencies**

According to Oosthuizen (2016:30), managerial competencies refer to a set of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour needed by managers to be successful in an assortment of organisational settings and managerial positions. These competencies are pivotal to business success as an abundance of competencies in management promotes business development, whereas a lack thereof hinders it (Verle *et al.*, 2014:924). A competent manager is one that is so proficient at performing their managerial tasks that they perform them without applying special effort (Daft & Marcic, 2014:98). Of all the managerial competencies that managers need to master, communication is arguably the most important one (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:30; Heyns & Luke, 2012:13; Oosthuizen, 2011:66). Effective overall communication influences both managers' and their subordinates' ability to fulfil their roles within the business as well as the standard of their task execution (Henrico & Visser, 2012:185-186; Oosthuizen, 2016:24).

### 5.5.3 The communication process

This process involves the transferring of information between senders and receivers (Henrico & Visser, 2012:183), who in this case, as depicted in the conceptual framework, are interchangeably managers and subordinates. This information exchange takes place in turbulent environments which are rampant with disturbances and interferences (Krauss, 2002:1). Managers usually utilise this process to change, encourage and influence behaviour and subordinates use it negotiate terms, report to managers and give and receive feedback (Pietrzykowski & Skorupski, 2015:332; Thill & Bovée, 2013:50).

#### 5.5.3.1 Overall communication competencies

The tasks of management cannot successfully be performed without exceptional overall effective communication between managers and subordinates (Oosthuizen, 2016:24). Managers with exceptional communication competencies are apt to achieve projected outcomes, with motivated subordinates in a synergistic and productive work environment (Arvidsson, 2010:350; Hellriegel *et al.*, 2012:32). As mentioned in the introduction section of this article, overall effective communication is made up of five elements namely: listening, feedback, message sending skills, ability to deal with general interference and with interference regarding the listening and feedback phases of the communication process. Each of these elements will briefly be discussed below.

#### 5.5.3.2 Listening

Listening can be defined as the deed of intentionally concentrating on both the message received as the way in which the message is delivered, that is, being attentive to both verbal and nonverbal signals (Certo, 2014; Pelham, 2006:180). Managers who are active listeners are devoted to the outcome of the interpersonal interaction, which leads to effective management (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:128). Even though listening makes up a large portion of the communication process, communicators tend to underestimate its importance (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008:67; Burley-Allen, 2005:2). For managers, being an apt listener is significantly more conducive to effective communication, task execution and business success than being a good speaker (Flynn *et al.*, 2008:148, Fracaro, 2001:3).

Managers that exhibit effective listening are more likely to be followed by subordinates out of their own accord (Canary *et al.*, 2008:111). Effective listening affords managers insights into complex problems and their solutions (Canary *et al.*, 2008:111; Trees, 2000:259). Attentive and active listening reduces mistakes made by managers; enables smooth information flow and identifies potentially lucrative opportunities (French, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Pelham, 2006:180).

### 5.5.3.3 Feedback

Feedback can be defined as the act of offering performance related information to receivers with the aim of improving current and future performance (Dai *et al.*, 2010:213; Dobbelaer *et al.*, 2013:99). However, during the communication process, feedback can also be a confirmation of comprehension of the initially received message (Jones & George, 2013:416-417; Ragusa, 2011:21). Managers also utilize feedback to measure and evaluate the performance of peers and subordinates against pre-established expectations, standards and norms (Daft & Marcic; 2009:573).

Effective feedback leads to growth, peak performance and improved productivity (De Janasz *et al.*, 2012:385; Kobeleva & Strongman, 2011:98). Businesses with collaborative feedback cultures and systems mitigate the distance between strategic-minded managers and operations-level subordinates which lead to healthier interpersonal relationships (Jones & George, 2013:418-419). Additionally, effective feedback is managers' best chance at changing unsatisfactory behaviour, attitudes and performance (Longenecker, 2010:34). However, even when the significance of feedback is known, managers and subordinates often regard it to be viscerally challenging to provide and request feedback (Daft & Marcic; 2009:573).

### 5.5.3.4 Message sending skills

Managers' message sending skills refers to their aptitude to convey information to subordinates via appropriate communication channels. Managers' ability to exchange and share information relies heavily on their message sending skills (Windle & Warren, 2014). Effective message sending skills involve informing, persuading, instructing and motivating subordinates so as to inspire productive actions, attitudes and behaviours (Holm, 2006:6). Managers can achieve this by utilising both verbal and nonverbal communication (Trenholm & Jensen, 2013:14).

According to Locker and Kaczmarek (2014:4), effective verbal communication involves the use of words in many forms, including face-to-face or telephonic discussions, voice-mail messages, letters, e-mail and reports. Chira (2013) states that messages delivered without the use of spoken or written words are nonverbal communication; this includes gestures, posture, eye contact, physical contact and facial expressions. Effective message sending cannot solely rely on verbal communications, as receivers (that is, subordinates) of nonverbal messages tend to perceive them as more credible (Locker & Kaczmarek; 2014:4).

### **5.5.3.5 General interference**

Interference can be described as any disturbance of the communication process; this includes hindrances during the encoding and decoding of messages which distort the intended meaning of messages (Lunenburg, 2011:4). General interference obstructs the effective exchange of thoughts, ideas, and instructions between managers and subordinates (Brown, 2001:27). Acquiring comprehensive knowledge about interference improves managers' ability to deal with barriers to message sending and promotes effective communication (Truter, 2006:1 - 3).

### **5.5.3.6 Interference regarding the listening and feedback phase**

Interference can take place anywhere – at the manager or at the subordinate, during any phase of the communication process (Brown, 2001:27; Lunenburg, 2011:4). A common instance of interference within a manufacturing business context is literal blare caused by clattering machinery, even though it can easily be dealt with (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393). There are many more complex ways in which messages can be misinterpreted, distorted, misunderstood or confused during the listening and feedback phase.

Prevalent barriers during the listening phase of the communication process include prematurely concluding interactions, mentally concluding the conversation, hearing what one wants to hear, mentally forming and practicing responses, being inattentive (that is thinking about other matters), feeling anxious or self-conscious and excessive interruptions (Dixon & O'Hara, 2010:12-13). In conclusion, the most effective manner to deal with interference involves actively reducing its effects and being knowledgeable about it and contributing barriers to a fluid listening and feedback phase of the communication process (Erven, 2012; Pfeiffer, 1998).

## **5.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The researcher consulted existing secondary data during the execution of this study; this was used to compile a comprehensive literature review, conceptualise the study and add value to it by comparing it to the findings of this study (Neuman, 2003:96).

### **5.6.1 Research design**

The empirical research implemented in this descriptive, explorative and quantitative study was done by the distribution of a survey (Bradley, 2007:516; Burns & Bush, 2014:103; Struwig & Stead, 2007:243).

### 5.6.2 Target population, sampling and data collection

This study's target population was made up of subordinates employed within the three major South African industries with at least a grade 12 qualification. The Silent generation still formed part of the workforce at the time of this study, however since they form such a small portion of the study population, the researcher focused only on Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Generation Yers (Glass, 2007:98; Stats SA, 2016) when comparing the perceptions of the generations. With the absence of a sampling frame, fieldworkers used a list of employees at each business instead (Singh, 2007:88). The sampling process was a non-probability, convenience sampling procedure with quotas (Berndt & Petzer, 2007:175). Quotas required a third of the respondents to come from each of the targeted industries (Struwig & Stead, 2007:115). This sample amounted to 966 participants from which 931 usable questionnaires were obtained. The twenty fieldworkers used in this study had completed an undergraduate module in Marketing Research and were BCom Honours students in the field of Business Management. Twelve of these field workers collected 544 usable questionnaires in Gauteng, two fieldworkers obtained 98 in the North West Province, another two fieldworkers gathered 91 surveys from subordinates employed in Mpumalanga, and the remaining four fieldworkers respectively obtained 48 usable questionnaires in KwaZulu-Natal; 50 in the Western Cape; 49 in the Northern Cape and 51 in the Free State.

### 5.6.3 The measuring instrument

In this study, a self-administered questionnaire was the measuring instrument used to gauge subordinates' perceptions of their managers' overall communication competency (Struwig & Stead, 2007:244). This questionnaire began with a preamble which stated the rights of the respondent, gave the contact details of the researcher and provided the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was based on indicators from some literature sources and consisted of two sections. Section A collected data about subordinates' demographic properties with closed-ended questions whereas Section B was made up of a five-point Likert scale and it measured respondents' perception of managers' overall communication competency. Only the end points of the scales were respectively named as *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*; all of the response categories were unlabelled.

### 5.6.4 Data analysis and interpretation

This study used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS version 20) to capture and analyse the primary data. The significance

level was set at 5% as the criterion for all statistical tests. The statistical objectives were achieved by performing the following analyses:

- Frequency analyses were performed for all the items in the questionnaire and mean scores and standard deviations were computed.
- The validity of the measuring instrument was examined by firstly applying an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) since a validated questionnaire was not used. Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to confirm the validity of the constructs.
- Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to determine reliability.
- Statistical significance ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) was determined using analyses of variance (ANOVA) (McDaniel & Gates, 2005:455; Struwig & Stead, 2007:162) and Cohen's d-value was used to assess practical significance. The following criteria were used to interpret practical significance:  $d = 0.2$  – small effect (negligible);  $d = 0.5$  – medium effect (substantial); and  $d = 0.8$  – large effect (definitive) (Ellis & Steyn, 2003:51-52; Steyn, 1999:3).

## **5.7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Firstly, the psychometric properties of the measuring instrument are discussed, followed by the results of the empirical study which will be presented in co-ordination with the objectives of the study.

### **5.7.1 Psychometric properties of the measuring instrument**

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

#### **5.7.1.1 Construct validity**

To determine valid constructs, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first performed. Bartlett's test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy were used to test whether the data were suitable for factor analysis. The KMO statistic generally varies between 0 and 1; KMO should be 0.50 or higher for a satisfactory factor analysis. In the current study, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.950. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated. The associated Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for the current study was found to be statistically significant in all cases.

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

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

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

Consequently, the instrument was found to be construct valid.

#### **5.7.1.2 Content validity**

According to Delport and Roestenburg (2011:173), content validity is concerned with the extent to which a measuring instrument covers the whole content domain under investigation. The items in each scale of the measuring instrument must consequently be representative of the conceptual definition under discussion and should measure the concept which the researcher intends to measure. Content validity consequently refers to the extent to which a measuring instrument is representative of the content area (or domain) being measured. In other words, for a measurement to have high content validity, the questions or items need to reflect the various parts of the domain, and these parts of the domain also need to reflect the central behaviours or skills associated with that domain (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:92). In this study, content validity was confirmed by the expert judgement of knowledgeable study leaders from the School of Business Management at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus. Consequently, the instrument was found to be content valid.

### 5.7.1.3 Reliability

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010:231), the reliability of a measurement instrument is the degree to which the test results in consistent scores while the variable being measured stays the same. The researcher used Cronbach alpha coefficients to determine the statistical reliability of the constructs. According to Zikmund and Babin (2013:249), a Cronbach alpha value between 0.80 and 0.96 indicates very good reliability, a value between 0.70 and 0.80 indicates good reliability, and a value between 0.60 and 0.70 indicates fair reliability. Scales with a Cronbach's alpha value below 0.60 indicate poor reliability.

Table 5.1 depicts the reliability testing conducted in this study.

**Table 5.1: Cronbach alpha values for the constructs used in this study**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Cronbach alpha</b>
Listening (8 scale items)	0.844
Feedback (6 scale items)	0.788
Message sending skills (4 scale items)	0.684
Ability to deal with interference (7 scale items)	0.808
Ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases (4 scale items)	0.706
<b>Overall communication competence (29 scale items)</b>	<b>0.928</b>

It is evident from Table 5.1 that all the above factors can be accepted as reliable, as they are above the required value of 0.60. Notably, a Cronbach alpha value of 0.684 for the Message sending skills to construct is acceptable as this study is related to social sciences with psychological constructs based on attitudes, opinions and perceptions (Field, 2005:668). All of the factors are consequently deemed reliable.

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

### 5.7.2 Results of the empirical study

The results will be presented in coordination with the objectives. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented first, followed by specific findings regarding managers' aptitude in the selected aspects of effective communication and their overall communication competencies.

### 5.7.2.1 Demographic profile of the respondents

A limited demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Demographic profile (N=931)**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	464	49.1
Female	467	50.9
<b>Generation</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Generation Y	207	22.2
Generation X	580	62.3
Baby Boomers	129	13.9
Silent generation	15	1.6
<b>Race</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Black	346	37.2
Brown	118	12.7
Asian	31	3.3
White	427	45.8
Other	9	1
<b>Highest educational qualification</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Grade 12	467	51.0
Diploma or Degree	319	33.5
Post-graduate Degree	123	13.0
Error	22	2.3
<b>Department or functional area</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Customer relations	118	12.7
Finance	128	13.7
Human resources	45	4.8
Information technology	33	3.5
Operations/production	257	27.6
Administration	107	11.5
Sales/marketing	155	16.6
Other	88	9.6

\*Average age of respondents: 33.

Nearly equal numbers of male and female respondents with an average age of 33 years old took part in this study. A large number of these, namely 580 (62.3%) belonged to Generation X,

followed by 207 who belonged to Generation Y and only 129 were Baby Boomers, the rest of the respondents (15) belonged to the Silent generation – which is not a focal point of this study. The majority of the subordinates that participated had a Grade 12 qualification, and most of the respondents were employed in the operations/production departments of their respective businesses.

### 5.7.3 Managers' overall communication competence as perceived by their subordinates

Table 5.3 depicts the mean scores and standard deviations of the items measuring managers' overall communication competence which included their listening-, feedback- and message sending skills, as well as their ability to deal with interference in general and interference during listening and feedback, on a 5-point Likert scale.

**Table 5.3: Managers' overall communication competence (N = 931)**

Scale items	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>Managers' listening skills</b>		
My manager can sense how I feel without me having to tell him how I am feeling.	3.356	1.146
My manager reads my non-verbal messages when I am in a conversation with him.	3.434	1.047
My manager reflects my emotions to let me know that he understands how I am feeling.	3.402	1.091
My manager calms me down when I become angry by reflecting my emotions.	3.591	1.130
My manager restates my words to make sure that he understands me correctly.	3.602	1.086
My manager makes sure he understands what I am saying in a conflict situation.	3.766	0.980
My manager does not justify his actions when I complain about something he has done wrong.	3.563	1.079
My manager does not get angry or defensive when I correct him.	3.535	1.102

Continued Table 5.3:

<b>Managers' feedback skills</b>		
My manager does not judge me by my past faults.	3.591	1.137
My manager does not have trouble handling conflict.	3.791	1.033
My manager leans towards me rather than away from me when talking.	3.570	1.002
My manager asks me for more information when someone has complained about me.	3.667	1.119
My manager encourages two-way interaction with me by inviting a response.	3.630	1.017
My manager probes for deeper information by asking questions during a conversation with me.	3.759	0.982
<b>Managers' message sending skills</b>		
My manager avoids looking over my shoulder during a conversation.	3.604	1.129
My manager is specific in telling me how I can improve my work.	3.746	1.053
My manager makes eye contact while communicating with me.	3.957	1.012
My manager states in his own words the interpretation of my message to prevent misinterpretation	3.598	1.085
<b>Managers' ability to deal with general interference</b>		
My manager does not make negative judgements about others while talking to me.	3.701	1.108
My manager uses "I" statements rather than "you" statements in communication with me.	3.465	1.082
My manager does not let his emotions affect the way he communicates with me.	3.563	1.059
My manager is not preoccupied with other matters when I am sharing my concerns with him.	3.501	1.122
My manager avoids distractions when talking to me.	3.506	1.092
My manager does not interrupt me while I am speaking.	3.510	1.167
My manager stops what he is busy with when I talk to him.	3.486	1.152
<b>Managers' ability to deal with interference regarding the listening and feedback phases</b>		
My manager concentrates on making sure I hear all the information he conveys to me	3.822	1.004
My manager makes sure I do not have an overload of information when giving an instruction	3.589	1.049
My manager does not use technical language (jargon) that I do not understand.	3.881	1.085
My manager does not allow a poor relationship with a person to detract him from effective listening.	3.591	1.089
<b>Overall communication competence</b>	<b>3.613</b>	<b>1.077</b>

From Table 5.3 it can be deduced that, regarding overall communication competence, the respondents revealed that managers were not able to sense how subordinates felt without having been told how they were feeling (mean = 3.356; SD = 1.146) when listening. In general, subordinates had the least positive perception about their managers' aptitude to read their emotions during conversations. Employee engagement, commitment to production quality as well as an understanding of business issues declines when managers fail to read subordinates' emotions during the listening phase of the communication process (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196). The statement with which respondents agreed most was: "My manager makes eye contact while communicating with me" (mean = 3.957; SD = 1.012). Maintaining good eye contact during conversations is an exceptional tool to make managers' messages more persuasive and subordinates feel understood (Harbinger, 2015). It also shows interest in the outcome of the interaction and that the manager is actively listening when the subordinate becomes the sender during the communication process (Goman, 2011; Schulz, 2012).

#### 5.7.4 Comparisons, statistical and practical significance

The following section compares the perception of subordinates from different generations regarding managers' listening skills, message sending skills, feedback skills, ability to deal with general interference, ability to deal with interference regarding the listening and feedback phases and overall communication competence.

ANOVA was used to determine whether statistical differences ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) existed between groups and Cohen's d-values ( $d \geq 0.5$ ) were used to determine whether practical significance existed in the perception of subordinates regarding their managers' communication competencies based on their generation. The findings are summarised in Table 5.4 below.

**Table 5.4: Comparison of subordinate perceptions based on their generation**

Construct	Generation	n	Mean	Std Dev	p-value	Gen Y vs Baby B	Gen Y vs Gen X
						d	d
*Listening	Generation Y	207	3.393	0.784	0.021	0.3	-
	Generation X	580	3.528	0.740			
	Baby Boomers	129	3.613	0.785			
Feedback	Generation Y	207	3.597	0.733	0.348	-	-
	Generation X	580	3.667	0.723			
	Baby Boomers	129	3.705	0.746			

Continued: Table 5.4

Construct	Generation	n	Mean	Std Dev	p-value	Gen Y vs Baby B	Gen Y vs Gen X
						d	d
Message sending skills	Generation Y	207	3.644	0.756	0.342	-	-
	Generation X	580	3.703	0.795			
	Baby Boomers	129	3.773	0.851			
**Ability to deal with general interference	Generation Y	207	3.411	0.827	0.003	0.3	0.2
	Generation X	580	3.575	0.748			
	Baby Boomers	129	3.689	0.696			
***Ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases	Generation Y	207	3.565	0.818	0.001	0.4	0.2
	Generation X	580	3.757	0.716			
	Baby Boomers	129	3.859	0.750			
****Overall Communication	Generation Y	207	3.522	0.675	0.010	0.3	0.3
	Generation X	580	3.646	0.624			
	Baby Boomers	129	3.728	0.677			

\*The statistically significant difference was only between Generation Y and Baby Boomers

\*\*The statistically significant differences were between Generation Y and Baby Boomers as well as between Generation Y and Generation X

\*\*\*The statistically significant differences were between Generation Y and Baby Boomers as well as between Generation Y and Generation X

\*\*\*\*The statistically significant differences were between Generation Y and Baby Boomers as well as between Generation Y and Generation X

Regarding listening skills, there was a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.021$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations (Generation Y mean = 3.393, SD = 0.784; Generation X mean = 3.528, SD = 0.740; Baby Boomers mean = 3.613, SD = 0.785).

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was found that Generation Y and Baby Boomer subordinates (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.025 /  $p = 0.025$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.034 /  $p = 0.034$ ) had statistically differing perceptions. Baby Boomers (mean = 3.613) perceived their managers' listening skills to be slightly better than Generation Y's (mean = 3.393) did. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.3$ ) suggests negligible practical significance.

With regard to managers' feedback skills, there was no statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.348$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations (Generation Y mean

= 3.597, SD = 0.733; Generation X mean = 3.667, SD = 0.723; Baby Boomers mean = 3.705, SD = 0.746).

Pertaining to managers' message sending skills, there was also no statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.342$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations (Generation Y mean = 3.644, SD = 0.756; Generation X mean = 3.703, SD = 0.795; Baby Boomers mean = 3.773, SD = 0.851).

Concerning managers' ability to deal with general interference, there was a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.003$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations (Generation Y mean = 3.411, SD = 0.827; Generation X mean = 3.575, SD = 0.748, Baby Boomers mean = 3.689, SD = 0.696).

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was found that all the generations under discussion had statistically differing perceptions. From the results, it would seem that the older generations had better perceptions of their managers' ability to deal with general interference than Generation Y subordinates had. Baby Boomers and Generation Y's had statistically differing perceptions (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.003 /  $p = 0.003$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.003 /  $p = 0.003$ ), where Baby Boomers perceived (mean = 3.689) their managers' ability to deal with general interference slightly higher than Generation Y subordinates (mean = 3.411) had. Generation X and Generation Y respondents also had statistically varying perceptions (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.022 /  $p = 0.022$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.034 /  $p = 0.034$ ), where Generation X subordinates also (mean = 3.575) perceived their managers' ability to deal with general interference slightly higher than Generation Y subordinates (mean = 3.411) had. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.3$  &  $d = 0.2$  respectively) suggests negligible practical significance.

With regard to managers' ability to deal with interference pertaining to the listening and feedback phases, there was a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.001$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations (Generation Y mean = 3.565, SD = 0.818; Generation X mean = 3.757, SD = 0.716; Baby Boomers mean = 3.859, SD = 0.750).

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was apparent that both of the older generations had better perceptions of their managers' ability than Generation Y subordinates did. Baby Boomers and Generation Y's had statistically differing perceptions (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.001 /  $p = 0.001$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.008 /  $p = 0.008$ ), where Baby Boomers (mean = 3.859) perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases slightly higher than Generation Y's subordinates (mean = 3.565) had. Generation X and Generation Y respondents also had statistically varying perceptions (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.004 /  $p = 0.004$  &

Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.002 /  $p = 0.002$ ), where Generation X subordinates (mean = 3.757) also perceived their managers' ability to deal with interference pertaining to the listening and feedback phases slightly higher than Generation Y subordinates (mean = 3.565) had. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.4$  &  $d = 0.2$  respectively) suggests negligible practical significance.

Regarding managers' overall communication competence, there was a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.010$ ) between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations (Generation Y mean = 3.522, SD = 0.675; Generation X mean = 3.646, SD = 0.624; Baby Boomers mean = 3.728, SD = 0.677).

In further conducting *post hoc* tests, it was found that all the generations under discussion had statistically differing perceptions. Both the older generations seemed to have better perceptions of their managers' overall communication competence than Generation Y subordinates had. Baby Boomers and Generation Y's had statistically differing perceptions (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.012 /  $p = 0.012$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.019 /  $p = 0.019$ ), where Baby Boomers (mean = 3.728) perceived their managers' overall communication competence to be slightly better than Generation Y subordinates (mean = 3.522) had.

Generation X and Generation Y respondents also had statistically varying perceptions (Tukey HSD at Sig. = 0.045 /  $p = 0.045$  & Games-Howell at Sig. = 0.054 /  $p = 0.054$ ), where Generation X subordinates also (mean = 3.646) perceived their managers' overall communication competence to be slightly better than Generation Y subordinates (mean = 3.522) had. However, Cohen's effect size ( $d = 0.3$  respectively) suggests negligible practical significance.

Finally, it should be noted that even though Baby Boomers and Generation X subordinates did not have statistically significant differences in their perception of their managers' aptitude in the various aspects of as well as overall communication skills, Baby Boomer subordinates consistently had slightly better perceptions of these competencies than Generation X subordinates had, although this variance was not statistically nor practically significant. Literature reveals that subordinates' varying perceptions of the effectiveness of their managers' communication competencies are influenced by their various preferences (Nicholas, 2009:50).

## 5.8 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are made according to the interpretation of the results, followed by broader recommendations obtained from literature sources. When tallying the mean scores of each aspect of communication, the total group of subordinates perceived managers' message sending skills to be the most commendable when compared to the other four aspects, whereas listening seemed to be the skill/aspect with the most space and need for improvement, followed closely by

managers' ability to deal with general interference. Managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases as well as their feedback skills were ranked second and third best respectively. The above summary of the results gives rise to the following recommendations.

Although managers' message sending skills were rated the highest, it was only slightly above average, and they can improve on it by eliminating misinterpretations during conversations. The most commendable aspect was that managers maintain constant eye contact during conversations, and it is recommended that they continue with this practice as it leads to an interpersonal interaction characterised by the trust which provides an elevated level of credibility to the delivered messages.

Even though the following aspect was ranked second best by subordinates, managers can still improve on their ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases by refraining from information-overload when giving instructions and by not allowing poor relationships with subordinates to diminish their effective listening.

Regarding feedback skills which were ranked third best, managers are advised to add credibility to their message by paying more attention to exhibiting nonverbal cues, such as leaning forward when talking to subordinates. Showing interest by leaning forward might also entice active listening by subordinates.

Managers' ability to deal with general interference was ranked fourth by their subordinates, and the statement that seemed to trouble them most was concerned with the fact that managers mainly send messages from their own perspective. Managers should rather consider the subordinates' point of view during the communication process.

The key to improving their listening skills, which was ranked lowest, lies with managers that should be especially attentive of their subordinates' emotions and reflecting these feelings as a sign of comprehension thereof. Furthermore, it is recommended that managers express their comprehension of what their subordinates have to say during conflict situations.

In addition, managers need to be aware that their communication is perceived differently by subordinates that are descendent from differing generations. The results showed that the two older generations had the most positive perceptions about their managers' communication competencies. The demographic profile revealed that the majority of the subordinates (787 or 84.5%) were from the two younger generations (Generation X and Y – born between 1970 and 2005). Therefore managers should consciously and actively seek out the younger generations during interactions and communicate with them in the manner that they prefer. If managers aim

to communicate with generationally diverse workforces effectively, they ought to acquaint themselves with their differing characteristics, communication styles and preferences.

From the literature, it can be gathered that managers perceiving communication as a process made up of distinctive phases, parts and aspects/elements of communication can expect to become more effective communicators. It aids to isolate aspects that need improvement while comprehending the effect of improving a single element leading to improvements in the overall communication process and competency (Thill & Bovée, 2013:50). Listening is widely regarded as the most important aspect of the communication process (Griffen, 2014:362; Flynn *et al.*, 2008:148; Fracaro, 2001:3). While managers' listening ability was ranked lowest in this study, they should specifically focus on improving these skills by withholding judgement during the communication process, eliminating misinterpretations by clarifying the intended meaning of messages and appropriately decoding received messages (Hartley & Bruckman, 2002:20; Hoppe 2007:11-12).

Finally, it is recommended that managers position themselves as a team member, rather than an authority figure to increase the efficacy of their communication with their Generation X subordinates (Noffsinger, 2013). Furthermore, the integration of information and communication technologies might be helpful in engaging Generation Y subordinates during the communication process, which in turn might improve their ability to execute their tasks within the business and maximise their productivity (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010:235).

## **5.9 CONCLUSIONS**

The communication process between managers and subordinates from three different generations as depicted in Figure 5.1 was investigated. With the listening and feedback (transmission) phases undefined in this conceptual frame, the communication process is initiated by either the manager or the subordinate.

With regards to subordinates' perceptions regarding their managers' performance in various selected aspects of effective communication, the respondents of all three generations under discussion perceived their managers' aptitude to be marginally above average. In all of the selected aspects of communication where there were statistically significant differences, including overall communication competence, it was found that Generation Y subordinates had the least favourable perceptions regarding their managers' skills. Furthermore, Baby Boomers had the most favourable perceptions regarding their managers' overall communication competence, followed by Generation X. All of these statistical differences had negligible practical significance.

Even with regards to those aspects that showed no statically significant differences, it was found that Baby Boomers consistently had better perceptions of their managers' communication skills than Generation Y subordinates and that Generation X subordinates' perception ranked in between, being more positive than Generation Y but less positive than Baby Boomers. Thus, it could be concluded that managers exhibited better communication competence when communicating with subordinates descending from older generations than those from younger generations. This could indicate that managers either had better interpersonal relationships with the older subordinates or that they had similar communication preferences.

Lastly, overall effective communication is vital to sustaining and promoting business success in a generationally diverse environment. Managers stand a greater chance of establishing an effective communication process when they have sufficient knowledge about the differences in the expectations and preferences of the various generations under their employment.

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## SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM ARTICLE 3 CONTRIBUTING TO THE OVERALL OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

The third article's main findings are numbered according to the number of the article and are presented below. The candidate has listed these main findings to link them with the study's overall objectives.

**Main finding 3.1:** Most of the subordinates were descendent from Generation X, followed by descendants from Generation Y and the fewest were Baby Boomers. The majority of the respondents worked in the production departments of their respective businesses.

**Main finding 3.2:** The communication process as depicted in Figure 5.1 occurs between Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y subordinates and their managers. In this case, the process is initiated by either the manager or the subordinate (Jones & George, 2013:416-417).

**Main finding 3.3:** Subordinates from all three generations had relatively positive perceptions regarding their managers' overall communication competencies. They also perceived all five of their managers' selected aspects of effective communication to be moderately above average.

**Main finding 3.4:** Concerning the statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from various generations, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences between their perceptions of managers' feedback and message sending skills.

**Main finding 3.5:** There were statistically significant differences found between the perceptions of Generation Y and Baby Boomer subordinates regarding their managers' listening skills.

**Main finding 3.6:** Subordinates descendant from Generation Y had statistically different perceptions about managers' ability to deal with general interference as well as interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process from those that were descendent from Generation X and Baby Boomers.

**Main finding 3.7:** In all the cases (including overall communication competencies, where there were statistically significant differences and where there were no differences) it was found that Generation Y subordinates had the least favourable perceptions regarding their managers' capabilities. It was also found that Baby Boomers had the most favourable perceptions, followed by Generation X subordinates.

**Main finding 3.8:** There were statistically significant differences found between the perceptions of subordinates from various generations regarding their managers' overall communication competencies.

**Main finding 3.9:** Respondents descendent from Generation Y had statistically different perceptions about their managers' overall communication competencies from those that were descendent from Generation X and Baby Boomers.

**Main finding 3.10:** Managers seemed to have exhibited better communication competencies during interactions with subordinates descending from older generations than those that were descendent from younger generations.

**Main finding 3.11:** All of the statistical differences found had negligible practical significance.

**Main finding 3.12:** Managers exceptionally excelled at message sending.

**Main finding 3.13:** The aspect of effective communication that had the most room for improvement was found to be managers' listening skills.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the study was concluded by stating the conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of this study based on its literature and empirical findings. The chapter begins with an overview which states the content and where applicable intent and findings of each of the preceding chapters. Following this, the researcher presents a discussion of the secondary objectives with their relation to the conclusions and recommendations. This is followed by a summary which indicates the link between the secondary objectives, main findings and sections in the questionnaire. Chapter 6 is then completed by discussing the study's limitations and the subsequent recommendations for future research.

### **6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

This study focused on determining the perceptions of subordinates' from various industries, educational backgrounds, and generations regarding their managers' communication competencies. This was done by measuring the subordinates' perceptions of their managers' effectiveness in various selected aspects/skills during the communication process.

Data containing these subordinates' perceptions were collected with self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaire was distributed to the study's target population which consisted of employees within the South African manufacturing, services, and retail industries with at least a grade 12 qualification. The fieldworkers used the list of employees at each business within their respective industries in place of a sampling frame. These fieldworkers managed to obtain 931 usable questionnaires by using non-probability convenience sampling. Chapter 2 details the entire research methodology used during the execution of this study. Each of the three following chapters was separate articles wherein a condensed research methodology, and all the relevant results were discussed. All of the results were analysed and interpreted with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS version 20) and were presented in the three research articles of this study (See section 3.7; 4.7 and 5.7).

The study's first article aimed to investigate how subordinates from the three industries under discussion perceived their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with general interference during the communication process and was presented as Chapter 3. Additionally, the article intended to determine if there was a statistical difference between the perceptions of

the subordinates based on the industry wherein they are employed. The frequency of message sending along with the complexity of these messages is different for each of these industries, calling for differences in the handling of interference from managers operating within them (Chang *et al.*, 2006:2). This article also sought to determine whether there were statistical variances in subordinates' perceptions based on the size of the business wherein they were employed. The purpose and nature of the communication process between subordinates and managers are inherently different in larger business versus smaller business (Groyberg & Slind, 2012; Sher, 2014).

In this chapter, it was found that subordinates from all of the industries had positive perceptions regarding their managers' message sending skills and slightly above average perceptions regarding their managers' ability to deal with general interference. With regard to the statistical differences in subordinates' perceptions of their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with general interference, it was found that there were statistically significant differences based on their industry and none based on the size of the business. Particularly, subordinates from the manufacturing industry had better perceptions of their managers' message sending skills and ability to deal with general interference than those from the retail industry. There were no statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from the manufacturing and services industry nor the retail and services industry.

Chapter 4, the second article of this study, focused on determining how subordinates from various educational backgrounds perceived their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process. Further, it also aimed to ascertain whether there were statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates with varying educational levels. Subordinates' levels of education can be linked to their perceptions of their managers' communication competencies (Erdil & Tanova, 2015:187; Tschannen & Lee, 2012).

The results presented in this article showed that subordinates at all three educational levels (that is, grade 12, diploma or degree and post-graduate) had marginally positive perceptions of their managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference. Furthermore, even though listening can be considered as the most crucial skill for an effective communication process (Griffen, 2014:362; Flynn *et al.*, 2008:148; Fracaro, 2001:3), it is also the aspect of communication that managers had the most room for improvement. Concerning the existence of statistical variances, it was found that subordinates with grade 12 and those with a diploma or a degree had statistically differing perceptions. Specifically, subordinates with a diploma or a degree perceived their managers' effectiveness in all three selected aspects of communication to be better than those with grade 12 qualification did.

In the third and final article (Chapter 5) the preceding five selected aspects of effective communication were combined, and the managers' overall communication competencies were measured according to their subordinates' perceptions thereof. Only the three main generations that are currently employed, namely Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y, are focal to this study. The focus of this article was on subordinates' various generational cohorts; therefore its purpose was to measure these subordinates' perceptions of their managers' overall communication competencies during the communication process. Furthermore, the article aimed to establish whether there were statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from various generations regarding the selected aspects of as well as the overall communication competencies of their managers. Differences in the communication preferences of differing generations can lead to differences in their perceptions of the effectiveness of their managers' communication (Nicholas, 2009:50).

The results revealed that the subordinates from all three generations under discussion perceived their managers' overall communication competencies to be slightly above average. Moreover, this chapter determined that there were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of generationally diverse subordinates regarding their managers' overall communication competencies. Particularly, the article showed that subordinates descendent from Generation Y had statistically different perceptions regarding their managers' overall communication competencies from those that were descendent from Generation X as well as Baby Boomers. Both Baby Boomers and Generation X subordinates respectively had more favourable perceptions of their managers' overall communication competencies when compared to the perceptions of their Generation Y counterparts.

### **6.3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The primary objective of the study was to investigate how subordinates from various industries, educational backgrounds, and generations perceived their managers' communication skills in South Africa. The following sections are a discussion of the literature and empirical findings for each of this study's secondary objectives (stated in section 1.6.2). The following sections also provide the conclusions drawn as well as the related recommendations (where applicable).

#### **6.3.1 Secondary objective 1**

##### **Develop a demographic profile of respondents who took part in the study.**

The demographic information was spread and explained in the three articles that make up this study. The information was distributed according to the objectives of each of the separate articles.

The following is a comprehensive demographic profile of the subordinates that took part in this study.

There were approximately equal numbers of male and female subordinates, and their average age was 33 years old. The majority of them worked in small businesses, followed by about a third working in medium-sized businesses and the fewest subordinates were employed in the large business. Most of them were employed in the retail and services industries, followed closely by the manufacturing industry (**Main finding 1.1 on p. 76**). The bulk of the subordinates that took part in this study had a grade 12 qualification, followed by about a third who had completed a diploma or degree and only 123 of the respondents had obtained a post-graduate degree. Finally, more than a third of subordinates (only 337 or 36.2%) had completed a course to improve their own communication competencies, the rest had not (**Main finding 2.1 on p. 107**). Most of these subordinates were white, followed closely by black employees and were descendent from Generation X, followed by descendants from Generation Y and the fewest were Baby Boomers. The majority of the respondents worked in the production departments of their respective businesses (**Main finding 3.1 on p. 140**).

### **6.3.2 Secondary objective 2**

#### **Provide insight in the communication process used by managers.**

The literature review conducted for this study revealed effective communication processes that managers follow. Various sources were used to compile the conceptual frameworks for the three articles of this study. Each of these frameworks acts as visual representations of the processes used by managers, depending on the focus and purpose of the interaction.

When the focus is on message sending skills, managers begin the process by encoding the information they want to convey into a message and this message is then transmitted to subordinates using a medium. The subordinates are then tasked to decode the message according to their interpretation thereof (**Main finding 1.2 on p. 76**) (Jones & George, 2013:416-417). The process can also be divided into two distinct phases. These phases are usually named the transmission phase and the feedback phase. In the second article, transmission phase is referred to as the listening phase since the subordinate encodes messages and the manager listens. In the feedback phase, a mutual understanding arises through cognitive actions and active listening (Daft & Marcic, 2009:552-553) (**Main finding 2.2 on p. 107**).

It can be **concluded** that in spontaneous interactions, as the communication process usually occurs, the phases are undefined and the process is interchangeably initiated by either the

manager or the subordinate (**Main finding 3.2 on p. 140**). Interference can hinder this process anywhere by obstructing the people, the medium or the message itself (Colquit *et al.*, 2013:393).

### 6.3.3 Secondary objective 3

#### **Investigate managers' listening skills in the communication process as perceived by subordinates with various educational levels.**

Subordinates at all the educational levels had barely above average perceptions regarding their managers' listening skills (**Main finding 2.3 on p. 107**). From the results, it could be **concluded** that managers particularly had trouble reading their subordinates' emotions during the listening phase. Thus, it is **recommended** that managers pay especially close attention to these emotions by considering non-verbal cues such as speech tempo and body language in conversations.

### 6.3.4 Secondary objective 4

#### **Determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' listening skills.**

There were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates with varied educational backgrounds regarding their managers' listening skills (**Main finding 2.4 on p. 107**). Specifically, subordinates with a graduate level education perceived their managers' listening skills to be slightly better than those with grade 12 did (**Main finding 2.5 on p. 107**).

Even though post-graduate subordinates' perceptions were not statistically different from the other two educational levels, the results revealed that they also had better perceptions of their managers' listening skills. It can be **concluded** that managers had difficulty listening to the subordinates that only had a grade 12 qualification. **Recommended** strategies from the literature review include to refrain from being judgemental, contemplating messages' original intent and clarifying vagueness (Hartley & Bruckman, 2002:20; Hoppe 2007:11-12). Managers should apply these strategies to improve their listening skills when communicating with subordinates with a grade 12 qualification.

### 6.3.5 Secondary objective 5

#### **Measure managers' feedback skills in the communication process as perceived by subordinates with various educational levels.**

Subordinates at all the educational levels also had marginally above average perceptions regarding their managers' feedback skills (**Main finding 2.3 p. 107**). It can be **concluded** from the results that managers could improve upon this skill by expressing interest in the outcome of the interaction with non-verbal communications. Thus, it is **recommended** that managers lean

forward to show interest during the feedback phase. From the literature study, managers are also advised to have clear, unambiguous and acceptable pre-set standards for a more effective feedback process (Krasman, 2011:24; Longenecker, 2010:38).

### 6.3.6 Secondary objective 6

#### **Establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' feedback skills.**

The literature study showed that subordinates with varying educational levels tend to have differing expectations, which ultimately influences their level of satisfaction with the communication process (Erdil & Tanova, 2015:187; Tschannen & Lee, 2012). It can be **concluded** that the pre-existing expectations of what an effective feedback phase should entail, could affect subordinates perception of their managers' feedback skills. The second article's results concur with this conclusion.

Empirical findings showed that there were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates with varied educational backgrounds regarding their managers' feedback skills (**Main finding 2.4 on p. 107**). Particularly, the subordinates with a degree or diploma had a slightly better perception of their managers' feedback skills than respondents with grade 12 had (**Main finding 2.6 on p. 107**). Since post-graduate subordinates also had better perceptions of their managers' feedback skills, it is **recommended** that managers set mutually acceptable objectives of the feedback process with their grade 12 level subordinates before starting it. This will create achievable expectations in the less qualified subordinates' perception of the feedback's effectiveness (Daoanis, 2012:49). This might add to the likelihood of their subordinates implementing the feedback into their performance and behaviour.

### 6.3.7 Secondary objective 7

#### **Investigate managers' message sending skills in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in three different industries.**

Subordinates had relatively positive perceptions about their managers' message sending skills (**Main finding 1.3 on p. 76**). From the results, it could be **concluded** that managers were exceptional at maintaining eye contact. However, their non-verbal communication left much to be desired. It is thus **recommended** that managers use non-verbal cues to promote trust within interactions with their subordinates. They should particularly refrain from looking over their subordinates' shoulder during conversations.

### 6.3.8 Secondary objective 8

**Determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills.**

The regularity of managers engaging in conversations with subordinates varies depending on the industry wherein the business operates (Chang *et al.*, 2006:2); this may influence subordinates' perception of their managers' message sending skills.

The first article's empirical results revealed a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from the three different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills (**Main finding 1.4. on p. 76**). Particularly, manufacturing industry subordinates had more positive perceptions of their managers' message sending skills than those from the retail industry did. The perceptions of subordinates from the services industry did not differ statistically from the other two industries (**Main finding 1.5 on p. 76**). It is thus **recommended** that managers from the retail industry improve their message sending skills. Based on the recommendation at Secondary objective 7, a good starting point might be their non-verbal communication.

### 6.3.9 Secondary objective 9

**Determine managers' ability to deal with general interference in the communication process as observed by their subordinates.**

Subordinates had relatively mediocre perceptions about their managers' ability to deal with general interference (**Main finding 1.3 on p. 76**). From the empirical findings, it could **conclude** that managers did not stop what they were preoccupied with when subordinates were talking to them. It is thus **recommended** that managers drop other matters during conversations with their subordinates. This shows that they perceived their subordinates' messages to be important.

### 6.3.10 Secondary objective 10

**Establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' ability to deal with general interference.**

The complexity of managers' messages to subordinates varies depending on the industry wherein the business operates (Chang *et al.*, 2006:2); this may influence subordinates' perception of their managers' ability to deal with general interference.

This study's first article showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of subordinates from the three different industries pertaining their managers' ability to deal with general interference (**Main finding 1.4 on p. 76**). Specifically, the manufacturing

industry subordinates had better perceptions of their managers' than those from the retail industry did. The perceptions of subordinates from the services industry did not differ statistically (**Main finding 1.6 on p. 76**). Based on the recommendation made for the previous secondary objective, it is **recommended** that retail industry specifically improves their ability to deal with general interference by dropping other matters when communicating with their subordinates. The literature study also showed that selecting appropriate mediums, depending on the messages that are sent, increases managers' ability to deal with general interference (Kupritz & Cowell, 2011:4).

#### **6.3.11 Secondary objective 11**

**Determine managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process as observed by subordinates with various educational levels.**

Subordinates at all the educational levels had marginally above average perceptions regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process (**Main finding 2.3 on p. 107**). From the third article's empirical findings it can be **concluded** that managers were exceptional at avoiding the use of unnecessary jargon. However, they tended to be overbearing when sharing information. It is thus **recommended** that managers determine the key issues that need to be communicated during the feedback phase, and only presenting information pertaining to that when giving feedback.

#### **6.3.12 Secondary objective 12**

**Determine whether there were statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases.**

There were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates with varied educational backgrounds regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases (**Main finding 2.4 on p. 107**). However, the *post hoc* tests did not specify among which groups these differences were (**Main finding 2.7 on p. 107**). It could be **concluded** that the effectiveness of managers' communication competencies did not increase along with the increased level of their subordinates' education (**Main finding 2.8 on p. 107**). A general **recommendation** on how to effectively deal with interference involves acquainting oneself with barriers of communication firstly (Erven, 2012; Pfeiffer, 1998).

### 6.3.13 Secondary objective 13

#### **Measure managers' overall communication competencies during the communication process as perceived by subordinates from different generations.**

Subordinates from all three generations had moderately above average perceptions regarding their managers' overall communication competencies (**Main finding 3.3 on p. 140**). It can be **concluded** from the results that there is still plenty of room for improvement in managers' overall communication competencies.

The literature suggests that when managers perceive communication as a process consisting of various elements, it helps them to identify areas that need attention. They will then be able to take the necessary steps to improve their proficiency in that lacking aspect (Thill and Bovée, 2013:50). Communication improvement is a continuous process and based on the findings from the third article; it is **recommended** that managers prioritise their listening skills if they want to improve their overall communication competencies.

### 6.3.14 Secondary objective 14

#### **Determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding their managers' various selected aspects of effective communication.**

The results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between subordinates' perceptions of their managers' feedback and message sending skills (**Main finding 3.4 on p. 140**).

However, there were statistically significant differences found between the perceptions of Generation Y and Baby Boomer subordinates regarding their managers' listening skills (**Main finding 3.5 on p. 140**).

Furthermore, subordinates descendant from Generation Y had statistically different perceptions about their managers' ability to deal with general interference as well as interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process from those that were descendent from Generation X and Baby Boomers (**Main finding 3.6 on p. 140**). Additionally, the results showed that Generation Y subordinates had the least favourable perceptions of all five aspects of their managers' aptitude. Baby Boomers consistently had the most positive perceptions of all these selected aspects, followed by Generation X subordinates (**Main finding 3.7 on p. 140**).

### 6.3.15 Secondary objective 15

**Determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding their managers' overall communication competencies.**

There were statistically significant differences found between the perceptions of subordinates from various generations regarding their managers' overall communication competencies (**Main finding 3.8 on p. 141**). Differences in these perceptions can be contributed to the various, and sometimes conflicting communication preferences between the generations (Nicholas, 2009:50).

The empirical results showed that subordinates who were descendent from Generation Y had statistically different perceptions about their managers' overall communication competencies from those that were descendent from Generation X and Baby Boomers (**Main finding 3.9 on p. 141**). Specifically, it was found that Generation Y subordinates had the least favourable perceptions regarding their managers' aptitude. It was also found that Baby Boomers had the most favourable perceptions, followed by Generation X subordinates (**Main finding 3.7 on p. 140**).

It can be **concluded** that managers seemed to have exhibited better communication competencies during interactions with subordinates descending from older generations than those that were descendent from younger generations (**Main finding 3.10 on p. 141**). The researcher deduced that managers and older subordinates might come from the same generations; thereby aligning their communication preferences and significantly increasing the older subordinates' perception of their managers' overall communication competencies.

Managers in a generationally diverse business are **recommended** to consciously and actively seek the younger generations out during interactions. This could be done by communicating with them in the ways which they prefer. From the literature, it is also recommended that managers integrate information and communication technologies into their interactions. This will aid in engaging Generation Y subordinates (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010:235).

### 6.3.16 Secondary objective 16

**Determine the practical significance of the statistical differences.**

All the statistical differences had negligible practical significance (**Main finding 1.7 on p. 76; Main finding 2.9 on p. 107 and Main finding 3.11 on p. 141**).

### 6.3.17 Secondary objective 17

#### **Identify the aspect of effective communication that managers were the most proficient in.**

The results showed that managers exceptionally excelled at their message sending aptitude, especially in their non-verbal ability to maintain good eye contact with their subordinates during conversations (**Main finding 3.12 on p. 141**). It is **recommended** that managers maintain their effective message sending skills by attempting to eliminate misinterpretations during conversations. Additionally, they should also continue to keep good eye contact as it adds credibility to messages that are being delivered.

### 6.3.18 Secondary objective 18

#### **Describe the aspect of the effective communication where managers had the most room for improvement.**

The aspect of effective communication that had the most room for improvement was found to be managers' listening skills (**Main finding 3.13 on p. 141**). From the empirical results, it can be **concluded** that managers seemed to specifically struggle with reading and reflecting their subordinates' emotions and non-verbal communication. In addition to focusing on reflecting subordinates' emotions during the communication process, it is **recommended** that managers continue to express their comprehension of what their subordinates have to say during conflict situations.

## **6.4 SUMMARY OF THE LINK BETWEEN THE SECONDARY OBJECTIVES AND MAIN FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY**

Table 6.1 provides a summary of the study's secondary objectives, the section in the questionnaire used to achieve the objective, the chapter in the study that addressed the objective and the main findings.

**Table 6.1: Summary of the study's objectives and findings**

Secondary objective		In chapter	Main finding	Section in Questionnaire
1	Develop a demographic profile of respondents who took part in the study.	3,4 & 5	1.1, 2.1 & 3.1	A
2	Provide insight in the communication process used by managers.	3,4 & 5	1.2, 2.2 & 3.2	B
3	Investigate managers' listening skills in the communication process as perceived by subordinates with various educational levels.	4	2.3	B
4	Determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' listening skills.	4	2.4 & 2.5	B
5	Measure managers' feedback skills in the communication process as perceived by subordinates with various educational levels.	4	2.3	B
6	Establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' feedback skills.	4	2.4 & 2.6	B
7	Investigate managers' message sending skills in the communication process as perceived by their subordinates in three different industries.	3	1.3	B
8	Determine whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' message sending skills.	3	1.4 & 1.5	B
9	Determine managers' ability to deal with general interference in the communication process as observed by their subordinates.	3	1.3	B
10	Establish whether statistical differences exist between the perceptions of subordinates from different industries regarding their managers' ability to deal with general interference.	3	1.4 & 1.6	B
11	Determine managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases of the communication process as observed by subordinates with various educational levels.	4	2.3	B
12	Determine whether there were statistical differences between the perceptions of subordinates from various educational backgrounds regarding their managers' ability to deal with interference during the listening and feedback phases.	4	2.4, 2.7 & 2.8	B

Continued: Table 6.1

Secondary objective		In chapter	Main finding	Section in Questionnaire
13	Measure managers' overall communication competencies during the communication process as perceived by subordinates from different generations.	5	3.3	B
14	Determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding their managers' various selected aspects of effective communication.	5	3.4, 3.5, 3.6 & 3.7	B
15	Determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the perceptions of subordinates from different generations regarding their managers' overall communication competencies.	5	3.7, 3.8, 3.9 & 3.10	B
16	Determine the practical significance of the statistical differences.	3, 4 & 5	1.7, 2.9 & 3.11	B
17	Identify the aspect of effective communication that managers were the most proficient in.	5	3.12	B
18	Describe the aspect of the effective communication where managers had the most room for improvement.	5	3.13	B

From Table 6.1 it is clear that all the secondary objectives have been achieved. Thus, it can be concluded that the primary objective, which was to investigate how subordinates from various industries, educational backgrounds, and generations perceived their managers' communication skills in South Africa, was achieved.

## 6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In a developing country such as South Africa, the unavailability of secondary data limits the extent to which a researcher can conduct a comprehensive literature review. In this study, this included literature with regards to the industries, interference and especially the ability to deal with interference. Even with the inclusion of international sources, many of the sources used are not as current as ideally desired for the submission of articles. This potentially inhibits the researcher's ability to draw comparisons between the primary data they had collected and the secondary data already in existence; it may also limit insights and may potentially result in superficial arguments, recommendations and conclusions. Another limitation is the focus split between the manufacturing, services and retail industry under discussion of this study. Focusing on only one or two industries may have been more productive, with the latter options still providing the opportunity for comparisons.

With regard to Chapter 4 (Article 2), post-graduate subordinate responses were noticeably less than matriculate and graduate responses. Even though this is usually the case with most businesses, it may have influenced and limited the result interpretations. In Chapter 5 (Article 3),

the Silent Generation responses were significantly and disproportionately less than those from Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y subordinates. This is also representative of modern business, and that is the reason for this study excluding them when comparing the generations, and rather focusing on Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y when comparing the perceptions of the generations. With the absence of a sample frame under a non-probability sampling procedure, the structure of the empirical study was limited. Finally, when considering that a descriptive research design attempts to comprehensively discuss the study population, 931 participants would not be representative of South Africa's employed population with at least a matric qualification within the three industries.

### **6.5.1 Recommendations for future research**

Researchers may consider repeating this study in other, more developed countries and may go as far as to compare their literature study with the one followed during this study. Future research may also simply consider duplicating this study in neighbouring countries of approximately the same developmental and economic standing as South Africa such as Namibia and/or Botswana, to later compare the findings of the studies. Separate studies with the same constructs in each of the mentioned studies may be conducive to a narrower, more focused approach leading to potentially deeper insights. Further research might include an investigation into the relationship and comparison of communication competencies and related skills such as delegation. Future research might even consider gauging managers' perceptions of their communication skills and compare it to the perceptions of their subordinates so as to estimate a more accurate representation of managers' communication competence. Subsequent research could aim to determine whether there is a relationship between the differences of the subordinates' perceptions based on their generation and the generation of their managers. Furthermore, more advanced statistical techniques can be used to analyse better the data obtained through this study by utilising other statistical programs such as SAS (Statistical Analysis System). Finally, future researchers could use a qualitative research design so as to uncover underlying perceptions, attitudes, and motives.

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## **APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN THIS STUDY**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### **INVESTIGATING THE COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY**

#### **OF MANAGERS AS PERCEIVED BY THEIR SUBORDINATES**

This questionnaire forms part of a research project by the **School of Business Management, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus**. The researcher is: Mr. Mpumelelo Longweni (Tel: 018 285 2317, mail: 22965092@nwu.ac.za).

To be a good manager in an increasingly diverse business world, one of the most important skills to have is to manage relationships through effective communication. The central theme of this research is to investigate the communication competency of managers as perceived by their subordinates in establishing rapport and sustaining relationships in the day-to-day activities within businesses.

This questionnaire is divided into two sections. **Section A** contains demographic questions, while **Section B** measures the communication competency of managers as perceived by their subordinates. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Reference made to 'he' and 'him' in the items included in **Section B** refers to your manager (male or female), who's communication competency you are assessing.

**All your information is confidential.** Only overall results from all responses will be compiled and used. The aggregate data will only be used in research and articles to report on the communication competency of managers.

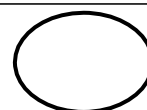
**We would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to share this information with us.**

**Please mark the applicable answer with an X.**

**Mark only one alternative.**

**For statistical purposes, it is important to complete ALL the questions.**

## SECTION A: MY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES



1.	Gender	Male	1	
		Female	2	
2.	Age in years			
3.	Race (for research purposes only)	Black	1	
		Brown	2	
		Asian	3	
		White	4	
		Other	5	
4.	The number of permanent employees in the business	6-50	1	
		51-200	2	
		200+	3	
5.	Industry	Manufacturing	1	
		Retail – e.g. supermarkets	2	
		Services – e.g. banks	3	
6.	Your highest qualification?	Grade 12	1	
		Diploma or Degree	2	
		Post-graduate Degree	3	
7.	Department or functional area	Customer relations	1	
		Finance	2	
		Human resources	3	
		Information technology	4	
		Operations / production	5	
		Administration	6	
		Sales / marketing	7	
		Other (please specify)	8	
8.	Have you completed any course to improve your communication competency?	Yes	1	
		No	2	

## SECTION B: YOUR MANAGER'S COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements regarding your manager: MY MANAGER:

SCALE: 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree

	STATEMENT	Strongly disagree to Strongly agree				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	concentrates on making sure I hear all the information he conveys to me.	1	2	3	4	5
2	avoids looking over my shoulder during a conversation.	1	2	3	4	5
3	is not preoccupied with other matters when I am sharing my concerns with him.	1	2	3	4	5
4	is specific in telling me how I can improve my work.	1	2	3	4	5
5	does not make negative judgements about others while talking to me.	1	2	3	4	5
6	makes eye contact while communicating with me.	1	2	3	4	5

	STATEMENT	Strongly Strongly disagree agree				
		1	2	3	4	5
7	states in his own words the interpretation of my message to prevent misinterpretation.	1	2	3	4	5
8	makes sure I do not have an overload of information when giving an instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
9	stops with what he is busy with when I talk to him.	1	2	3	4	5
10	does not allow a poor relationship with a person detract him from effective listening.	1	2	3	4	5
11	does not let his emotions affect the way he communicates with me.	1	2	3	4	5
12	is able to sense how I feel without me having to tell him how I am feeling.	1	2	3	4	5
13	reflects my emotions to let me know that he understands how I am feeling.	1	2	3	4	5
14	avoids distractions when talking to me.	1	2	3	4	5
15	calms me down when I become angry by reflecting my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
16	does not interrupt me while I am speaking.	1	2	3	4	5
17	restates my words to make sure that he understands me correctly.	1	2	3	4	5
18	asks me for more information when someone has complained about me.	1	2	3	4	5
19	makes sure he understands what I am saying in a conflict situation.	1	2	3	4	5
20	does not have trouble handling conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
21	reads my non-verbal messages when I am in a conversation with him.	1	2	3	4	5
22	encourages two-way interaction with me by inviting a response.	1	2	3	4	5
23	does not justify his actions when I complain about something he has done wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
24	uses 'I' statements rather than 'you' statements in communicating with me.	1	2	3	4	5
25	does not get angry or defensive when I correct him.	1	2	3	4	5
26	leans towards me rather than away from me when talking.	1	2	3	4	5
27	probes for deeper information by asking questions during a conversation with me.	1	2	3	4	5
28	does not judge me by my past faults.	1	2	3	4	5
29	does not use technical language (jargon) that I do not understand.	1	2	3	4	5

**All information is confidential.  
Your time and participation is highly appreciated.**

## APPENDIX B: EDITORIAL POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS OF THE JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT



### Journal of Contemporary Management

#### Editorial policy

Last updated: 2015 07 01 (replacing all previous versions)

Web: [http://reference.sabinet.co.za/sa\\_epublication/jcman](http://reference.sabinet.co.za/sa_epublication/jcman)

Email: [info.jcman@gmail.com](mailto:info.jcman@gmail.com)

#### 1. Scope of the publication

This journal is an independent scientific e-publication for peer-reviewed contributions (nationally and internationally) to the interdisciplinary field of management theory, its application and practice in business and non-commercial organisations.

#### 2. Editorial policy

##### 2.1 Accreditation

The Journal of Contemporary Management is accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and therefore publishes only high quality contributions which are double-blind peer-reviewed to serve academics, other researchers and practitioners. It is an express purpose to maintain the accreditation status of the journal.

##### 2.2 Focus

The focus of the Journal of Contemporary Management is contemporary management issues and all articles must be within this orientation.

##### 2.3 Editorial requirements

The editorial requirements are designed to create an effective, efficient and economical reviewing and publishing process. Strict adherence to these basic requirements is therefore essential. The time from first submission of a manuscript to publication depends mainly on the following:

- the adherence to the editorial and referencing requirements;
- the response time taken by authors for submitting corrections made;
- the time taken by the reviewers;
- editorial processing time.

These requirements and guidelines are put in place to maintain the Department of Higher Education and Training accreditation status of the journal, and to shorten the turnaround time between manuscript submission and publication.

##### 2.4 Plagiarism and copyright infringements

Plagiarism and copyright infringements are not condoned by the Journal of Contemporary Management. Violation of either of these principles will result in immediate rejection of the manuscript and will be followed up with the author(s) and/or author(s)' institution(s). Contributions are accepted on the understanding that the authors have the legal right and authority for publication of the material, i.e. they have the legal right to publish the manuscript and everything contained in it. The editor, secretariat, editorial committee and reviewers of this journal cannot accept responsibility for the infringement of intellectual rights and copyright. With submitting a manuscript for possible publication, the authors declare that the manuscript is free from plagiarism and does not infringe copyright on any material used.

**2.5 Copyright on articles**

Copyright on all articles submitted to the Journal of Contemporary Management will be taken to imply transfer of copyright of the material to the Journal of Contemporary Management.

**2.6 The views expressed by contributors**

The views expressed by the contributors of articles are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board or publisher of the Journal of Contemporary Management. While every effort is made to ensure accurate reproduction, the editor and editorial board, the authors, advisers, publishers and their employees or agents shall not be responsible or in any way be liable for errors, omissions or inaccuracies in the publication, whether arising from negligence or otherwise or for any consequences arising therefrom.

**2.7 Articles submitted to other journals**

No articles that have been published elsewhere or are under consideration for publication elsewhere will be considered for publication in this journal. The authors also confirm that the submitted manuscript is sufficiently (in excess of 75 %) different from any other article by any of the same author(s). If required, the authors will submit a Turn-it-in report to verify this fact.

**2.8 Manuscript review**

All manuscripts submitted for publication will be pre-reviewed for technical compliance with editorial and referencing requirements, followed by a double-blind peer review of the scientific merit by at least two independent reviewers. However, the editorial committee reserves the right to make the final decision with respect to publication.

**2.9 Maximum publications per year**

Any author may publish a maximum of three articles in the Journal of Contemporary Management per volume (calendar year).

**2.10 Corresponding author**

One author per manuscript acts as the corresponding author on behalf of all the co-authors. That will be the agreed upon communication channel between the Journal of Contemporary Management and the authors of the manuscript.

**2.11 Acceptance of editorial policy**

Submission of a manuscript for possible publication implies that the author(s) subscribe(s) to the editorial policy of the Journal of Contemporary Management.

**3. Structure of manuscript**

A requirement for scientific work is the proper structuring of the report and its executive abstract. The following may form a good basis for the abstract and the manuscript:

- Introduction/background
- Problem/opportunity investigated
- Objective/purpose of the research
- Theoretical/conceptual framework
- Research methodology
- Findings and managerial implications
- Limitations of the research (+ implications on validity of research) / possible future research
- Conclusion: value/contribution of the research

#### 4. Manuscript review

##### 4.1 Review process

The process of review comprises the following steps.

- On receipt of a manuscript, a reference number is allocated (e.g. JCM 12-09). Please use this number in the email subject line of all correspondence [volume 12, article received 09].
- The manuscript is then sent for technical review and, if necessary, returned to the corresponding author for amendments. The focus of this pre-review is the conforming to editorial and referencing requirements.
- On receipt of the corrected manuscript, it is scrutinised for confirmation that all the corrections were done satisfactorily.
- The manuscript is then sent to at least two independent scientific reviewers.
- On receipt of at least two review reports with recommendations, the editor will decide on publication or not. This decision is final and no further discussion will be entered into.
- If recommended for publication, the author(s) must address the recommendations of the reviewers (if any) and provide a letter to indicate how the recommendations were incorporated in the manuscript.
- On receipt of the corrected manuscript and explanatory letter, the manuscript is scrutinised for confirmation that corrections were done satisfactorily.
- Thereafter, the manuscript is typeset for publication. If need be, the editorial staff will request specific changes to ensure the quality and presentation of the final article.
- The corresponding author will receive a copy of the typeset manuscript in PDF format to verify that it is correct. No changes can be made after final acceptance by the corresponding author.
- The editor prepares an invoice for payment and sends it to the corresponding author. The corresponding author is responsible for payment and for sending proof of payment to the editor (editor.jcman@gmail.com).
- Once payment is verified, the editor will arrange for publication of the article. The author will be notified and receives a PDF copy of the final article.

##### 4.2 Technical review

The purpose of the technical review is to prepare the manuscript for submission to the scientific reviewers. Their main task is to determine if an article reflects scientifically sound research and is reported in an academically justified manner. The reviewers' attention should be mainly on scholarly merits and not be distracted by technical sloppiness. For this reason, some formatting is done during the technical review to get a uniform layout for all articles (similar to the published version). *Authors must not change the preliminary formatting or remove the headers and footers that were inserted during the technical review.*

All identifying details of the authors are removed from the manuscript to ensure an anonymous (blind) review. In turn, the identity of the reviewers will also not be revealed to the authors (hence double blind). This process has a positive influence on the acceptance rate of manuscripts for publication. The technical review is concerned with adherence to the editorial requirements as set out below, and concentrates on the subject field, abstract, key phrases, language, length; layout and presentation of figures and tables; references. If needed, the article as well as a report, are returned to the authors to rectify the indicated errors.

##### 4.3 Scientific review

The main points that will be considered in the scientific review process are:

<i>Purpose of article</i>	Are the title and the purpose of the article clear? Does the abstract cover the essence of the article
<i>Relevance and significance</i>	How relevant is the article in the current theory, application or practice? Would readers benefit from reading it?

<i>Originality and complexity</i>	How original is the topic covered in the article? Is there anything new? Does it only cover the basics or is there more to it?
<i>Underlying theory</i>	Is the terminology used well defined? Is the theoretical background sufficient? Is the material well integrated?
<i>Quality of arguments</i>	Are the arguments clear and consistent? Is the sequence of arguments and subsections logical?
<i>Scientific contribution</i>	Is there sufficient contribution to the knowledge base of the output? Is the contribution clearly indicated?
<i>Presentation</i>	Is the quality of the article acceptable (layout, tables, graphs, diagrams, legibility, etc.)? Is the grammar used correctly?
<i>References</i>	Are there sufficient references in the article to reliable sources? Are the sources well-balanced, representative and recent? Please note that references to Wikipedia should be kept to a minimum.

#### 5. COMMUNICATION

- All administrative communication to the journal, including manuscript submissions and reviews, should be directed to the secretariat at [info.jcman@gmail.com](mailto:info.jcman@gmail.com).
- Communication from the journal will be with the corresponding author, who is deemed to communicate decisions and submissions on behalf of consenting co-authors.

#### 6. PUBLICATION FEE

Fees payable at acceptance of article for publication: for articles with one or more authors associated with a South African institution of Higher Education: R100 per A4 page; for all other articles from South Africa: R500 per article; non-South-African USD 25 per page; email proof of payment to [editor.jcman@gmail.com](mailto:editor.jcman@gmail.com) **AND** the Editorial officer at [info.jcman@gmail.com](mailto:info.jcman@gmail.com). The preferred mode of payment is ETF's (electronic funds transfers) because that is the most efficient in reducing/avoiding bank costs and time for clearance of funds.

**Note: the reference number facilitates in the identification of the payment.**

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<b>Account type:</b>	Savings account	<b>Account holder:</b>	AC Lessing
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<b>Reference number:</b>	Article reference number		



# Journal of Contemporary Management

## Guidelines for authors

Last updated: 2014 01 06 (replacing all previous versions)

Web: [http://reference.sabinet.co.za/oa\\_publication/jcman](http://reference.sabinet.co.za/oa_publication/jcman)

Email: [info.jcman@gmail.com](mailto:info.jcman@gmail.com)

### 1. Introduction

All articles must be consistent in appearance with the other articles in the same volume. Equally so, an article must display consistent characteristics within itself. To facilitate this consistency, the guidelines for authors contain the editorial and reference (bibliographic) requirements. These aspects are the main focus for the technical pre-review before the manuscript is submitted for the scientific review.

### 2. Editorial requirements

Prospective authors must follow the following guidelines:

- **Field:** The article must address contemporary management issues.
- **Title of article:** it must be short, inviting and representing the main focus of the article.
- **Abstract:** 100 to 200 words; in a structured way it should present the essence of the research, e.g. background, research problem, objectives and methodology, implications of the findings and the contribution of the research.
- **Key phrases:** at least four relevant phrases or terms alphabetically sequenced.
- **Article length:** 4000 to 7000 words (excluding abstract, key phrases and list of references).
- **Word processor:** MS-Word, Arial 11, full justified, 1.5 line spacing; no open lines between paragraphs; all lines starting at the left margin.
- **Language:** English (UK) – not US – and spelling adjusted accordingly (e.g.; catalogue and not catalog; centre and not center; labour and not labor; organisation and not organization); the manuscript must be proofread and language edited. The editor reserves the right to request a certificate as proof of language editing.

Note: when a direct citation from an American source is made (i.e. in quotation marks), the original (American) spelling is retained. Likewise, the American spelling in the title of an article or name of a journal is also retained in the original spelling.

- **Formatting and styling:** will be done by the journal's secretariat.
- **Headings:** All headings need to be numbered; use maximum three levels of headings, e.g. 1. , 1.1 , 1.1.1. Note that if a 1.1 is used, there must be at least a 1.2.
- **Figures and tables:** Figures and tables can be used in the article. Since the article is formatted by the journal secretariat in a predetermined style set for consistency, the figures and tables can easily be distorted. To eliminate or reduce these distortions, some precautions can be taken by the authors. The following examples will help to clarify these precautions.
  - In the text, illustrations, graphs, maps and similar visual aids are referred to as "figures"; "tables" have proper column and row headings.

- Only high quality figures and tables may be used.
- A figure or table is first announced in the text before it is placed to interpret/explain/discuss the figure/table.
- When using decimals in a table, be consistent with the number of decimals used. Use the decimal point as symbol – not the decimal comma.
- Ensure that the row and column totals (if given) add up properly (avoid rounding errors).
- The use of colour, shading, artwork and other enhancements are welcome to make a more professional presentation.
- Number the figures/tables consecutively from 1 onwards throughout the manuscript (and not per section); figures and tables are numbered separately.
- The body of the figure/table fits within the page margins, and all parts are clearly visible and legible. The body of the figure is embedded in the article, and presented as type JPG; the body of the table is formatted in Arial narrow 11, single spacing.
- The body of the table/figure is always followed with the relevant source reference. Please note that "author" is not enough. The source of the figure/table and any software used to calculate or present the numbers in the figure/table should be listed. Examples: *Source: Adapted from Schulte 2013:15*; *Source: Calculated from survey results*.
- **Footnotes** may be used, if needed. These should be numbered sequentially. Notes are only permissible when it is necessary to clarify a specific point and it is undesirable to include the explanation in the text because the logical flow of the argument may be disrupted.
- **Bold typeface** in the text should be avoided as far as possible. Accentuation should be done by using italic typeface. Foreign words (e.g. *pro rata*, *status quo*, *et al.*) should be in italic typeface.
- **Acknowledgements** (e.g. as required for research grants or assistance to the research) or other considerations (except for personal messages), if needed, should be placed in a block at the end of the article just before the list of references
- **Checklist** before submission of the article:
  - proofreading of the manuscript;
  - checking adherence to the technical requirements (including formatting of references) of the Journal of Contemporary Management;
  - cross-checking all sources referred to in-text with the list of references;
  - language editing by a qualified language expert and a subject specialist is strongly recommended;
  - completion and inclusion of manuscript submission form with manuscript.

### 3. References

An adapted Harvard method must be used, namely short identifying references in the text and a more comprehensive reference list at the end of the manuscript, detailing all the sources referred to in the text. All references in the text must be included in the reference list and vice versa.

Authors should take care to use works that are recent. Depending on the topic of the article, the majority of the references should be from the current and previous two calendar years, with fewer references to older works.

Authors should take care to present a balanced reference list, with works from all three categories: books; journals; internet and other sources, whether paper, electronic, verbal, audio or video origin.

### 3.1 References in the text

Each reference to the work of someone else needs to be acknowledged. The surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) appear in parentheses (brackets) after the citation. Depending on the number of authors of the work referred to, the following serve as examples: Coetzee 2012:123 (a single author); Coetzee & Makanya 2012:246 (two authors); Coetzee *et al.* 2013:357 (more than two authors are involved). With the first reference of more than two authors, all authors are listed, but *et al.* is used in subsequent references. (Note the punctuation and italics when using *et al.*). In the case of *et al.* references, all authors are listed in the reference list.

When the reference is within a sentence, the date and page numbers are between brackets; a reference with more than one author is indicated as "and" [e.g. ... Coetzee and Makanya (2012:246) are of the opinion ...]

When the reference is listed between brackets, the date and page numbers are not between brackets; a reference with more than one author is indicated as "&" [e.g. text ... (Coetzee & Makanya 2012:246).]

The "page number" in the examples above is replaced with the words "internet" or "interview" as appropriate, e.g. Scheepers 2013:interview; Taylor 2013:internet. Note that there is no space after the colon.

When more than one reference is used to support a specific point, the references are sequenced alphabetic-numerically, e.g. Batty 2012:44; Coetzee 2011:123; Coetzee 2013:412; Coetzee & Makanya 2014:246; Coetzee *et al.* 2010:357; Donovan 2011:14. In the case of more than one work by the same surname (Coetzee in the example) the references are sorted in date sequence. Also, the sequence is first the single author, then two authors and then more than two (*et al.*)

The use of Anon (for anonymous) should be avoided as far as possible: the references are used to give support for arguments by calling on an expert – and it is unlikely that an expert is "anonymous".

The use of Wikipedia as reference should be kept to a minimum. If Wikipedia is used, the authors need to find other sources to verify the Wikipedia content (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing\\_Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Citing_Wikipedia)).

The author's name as it is referenced in the text must appear in the list of references. Sometimes a long name is conveniently replaced by an acronym or abbreviation in the in-text references, e.g. NTB is used as the "author" for all in-text references in the place of the full name of Namibia Tourism Board. In the reference list an additional entry is given: NTB *see* NAMIBIA TOURISM BOARD. This additional entry (the *see*-reference) is done only once per specific acronym although it can be applicable for various references, e.g. in-text: NTB 2006:10; NTB 2008:15, NTB 2010a:25; NTB 2010b:16.

**Note:** there is no comma following the author's name; the page reference is preceded by a colon.

### 3.2 Reference list at the end of the text

The reference list is formatted in Arial Narrow, 11 pt line spacing (on paragraph formatting): 6pt before; 6pt after, single line paragraph spacing (that is, no open lines between entries); full justified.

All sources referred to in the text (and only those) must be included in a single, combined reference list (i.e. one combined alphabetical list with books, journals, internet and other). The purpose of this list is mainly to give credit for the work of others that influenced this article, and to identify these sources sufficiently to assist the reader (and other researchers) to access the same material, either for verification or further research. It is therefore important that all the relevant information must be included in the reference list.

The sources are sorted in alphabetical-numerical sequence as discussed above. If more than one work is published by the same author(s) in a specific year, the works need to be distinguished by an a, b .... e.g. 2010a, 2010b, 2010c. The letter attached to the date of publication remains a part of the reference and is also used as such in the text, e.g. Brown 2010c:159.

Note:

- There is one (and only one) space between the various items (elements) of the reference.
- The author (surname and initials) is printed in bold and in capitals. There are no full stops after the initials of authors (except for the last one which serves as the end of the author item).
- All the authors of the referenced work are listed (not only the first one), and in the same sequence as in the referenced work.
- The year is not in bold and not in brackets. In the rare case where a year is not indicated in the publication, the abbreviation nd (no date) is used. A full stop indicates the end of the year item.
- The title of the book is in normal font (not in italics, underlined or in quotation marks) and without unnecessary capital letters as is customary on the title page of a book. This item ends with a full stop.
- The edition is indicated except for the first edition of the book, e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. or 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Note the use of the superscript and the abbreviation. It is not in brackets.
- The place of publication refers to the town or city (and not only the country). In the case of American publications, the state is added as the official two letters abbreviation (without full stops), e.g. Englewood Cliffs NJ (for New Jersey) or Dallas, TX (for Texas). For non-American towns/cities the country abbreviation can be added, except for well-known cities (e.g. Pretoria, London) the country can be omitted. It is useful for the reader to know where the source is from if the publication is not in a well-known town or where the same name of town can be in different countries, e.g. Wellington, NZ.
- The publisher is stated without its legal business identification, e.g. without indications of Inc., Ltd. or (Pty) Ltd or & Co or & Sons. Hence, John Wiley & Sons is given as Wiley.
- A note is optional and is used for additional information about the referenced work. This can be used freely in the case of academic works (e.g. inaugural lectures; dissertations and theses) and conference works, as well as where it is appropriate.
- The guidelines about the author and other elements as discussed are applicable to all types of reference sources.

The type of work referenced will influence the format of the reference list entry. The following serve as explanations with examples:

### 3.2.1 Books

Standard format

**AUTHOR A.** Year. Title of book. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher. (Optional note.)

**AUTHOR A & AUTHOR B.** Year. Title of book. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher. (Optional note.)

**AUTHOR A, AUTHOR B, AUTHOR C & AUTHOR D.** Year. Title of book. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher. (Optional note.)

**AUTHOR A & AUTHOR B (eds).** Year. Title of book. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher. (Optional note.)

**AUTHOR A.** Year. Title of relevant chapter. In **AUTHOR A & AUTHOR B (eds).** Title of book. Edition. Place of publication: Publisher. pp. x-y. (Optional note.)

Examples:

**ATKINSON D.** 2012. *Spazas, hawkers and policy challenges.* Bloemfontein: University of the Free State (Centre for Development Support). (Unpublished.)

**BISWAS-DIENER R.** 2010. *Predicting positive psychology coaching.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Wiley.

**BARNES J & BLACK A.** 2011. *Multinational strategy, industrial policy and local capability: a comparison of automotive industry development in South Africa and Thailand.* Paris: GERPISA. (19th conference, 8 – 10 June.)

**JOHNSON AB, DUDLEY SM & PETERSON HJ.** 2010. *The principles of scientific research.* 10<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Wiley.

LEWIS BR. 2007. Managing service quality. In DALE BG, VAN DER WIELE T & VAN WAAARDEN J (eds). *Managing quality*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. pp. 231-331.

NAMIBIA TOURISM BOARD. 2011. Media release. On: NTB Celebrates 10 years of development and business excellence. [Internet: <http://www.namibiatourism.com.na/uploadedFiles/NamibiaTourism/>; downloaded on 2013-01-28]

NTB see NAMIBIA TOURISM BOARD.

OVEDO AM, THOMAS MR & KARAKURUM-OZDEMIR K. 2009. Economic informality - causes, costs, and policies: a literature survey. Washington DC: World Bank. (Working paper no. 167.)

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA. 1995. Labour Relations Act, No. 66 of 1995. Pretoria: Government Printer. (Government Gazette 366:16861.

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA. 1996. South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996. Pretoria: Government Printer.

SLABBERT E, KRUGER M, VMERS P, SAAYMAN M & SAAYMAN A. 2009. The socio-economic impact of visitors to the ABSA KKNK in Oudshoorn. Potchefstroom: Institute for Tourism and Leisure Studies.

ZIKMUND WG & BABIN BJ. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western.

### 3.2.2 Journals

#### Standard format

AUTHOR A. Year. Title of article. *Name of Journal* X(Y)Z, MM.

#### Note:

- In the standard format, X refers to the volume number, Y refers to the issue number, Z refers to the pages of the article and MM refers to the month or season of the publication, if applicable. If there is only one issue per year (as is the case with the *Journal of Contemporary Management*) the volume number is followed directly by the colon and page number(s).
- There is no comma after the name of the journal and a colon precedes the page numbers of the article. An indication of the month or season of the journal issue is used (if applicable).
- The name of the journal is in *italics* with all significant words starting in uppercase (not words like and, in, of).

#### Examples:

NICHOLSON B. 2007. Biometric manipulation: some managerial challenges. *Journal of Ethics* 3(2):25-53, Winter.

STEYN TFJ, MOSTERT PG & DE JAGER JNW. 2008. The influence of length of relationship, gender and age on the relationship intention of short-term insurance clients: an exploratory study. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences* 11(2):139-156, Jun.

TSARENKO Y & TQJIB DR. 2011. A transactional model of forgiveness in the service failure context: a customer-driven approach. *Journal of Services Marketing* 25(5):381-392.

WEEKS RV & ERASMUS LD. 2013. Organisational culture and climate: elusive pieces in the healthcare technology management puzzle. *Journal of Contemporary Management* 10: 39-58.

### 3.2.3 Internet

#### Standard format

AUTHOR A. Year. Title of contribution. [Internet: complete URL with the hyperlink removed; downloaded on date.]

#### Examples:

BERGER G, SINHA A & PAWELCZYK K. 2012. South African mobile generation: study on South African young people on mobiles. [Internet: [www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAP\\_resources\\_mobilegeneration.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAP_resources_mobilegeneration.pdf); downloaded on 2013-02-26.]

NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH. 2012. E-health strategy for South Africa 2012-2016. [[http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/statedocs/2012/eHealth\\_Strategy\\_South\\_Africa\\_2012-2016.pdf](http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/statedocs/2012/eHealth_Strategy_South_Africa_2012-2016.pdf); downloaded on 2012-12-14]

THE MITRE CORPORATION. 2006. Electronic health records overview. [<http://www.himss.org/content/files/Code%20180%20MITRE%20Key%20Components%20of%20an%20EHR.pdf>; downloaded on 15 December 2012]

## Note:

- The URL is comprehensive (the full web address). When the URL is long and spans the line end, put a blank space in at the end of the line to force a new line.
- The hyperlink is removed (blue, underlined and with a click diverting to the web page).
- Also note that the specific web page needs to be included in the URL – not only the portal of the corporate website.

**3.2.4 Academic works**

## Standard format

AUTHOR A. Year. Title of speech/research study. Town/city: University. (Note.)

## Examples:

MOSTERT PG. 2012. Understanding consumers' intentions in building long-term relationships with organisations. Polchefstroom: North-West University. (Inaugural address 23 Feb. 2012.)

VAN ZYL C. 2005. Optimum market-positioning models for South African arts festivals scenarios. Pretoria: University of South Africa. (DCom-thesis.)

**3.2.5 Conference papers**

## Standard format

AUTHOR A, AUTHOR B, AUTHOR C & AUTHOR D. Year. Title of conference paper. Town/city of conference: Name of association/institute. (x<sup>th</sup> conference of ..., date of conference.) (Optional: any other notes.)

## Examples:

NEL D & BOSHOFF C. 2012. Customer equity drivers predicting brand switching: a multinomial logit model. Stellenbosch: SAIMS. (24<sup>th</sup> conference of the Southern African Institute for Management Scientists; 9-11 Sep.) (Work-in-progress presentation.)

VENTER E & FARRINGTON S. 2013. Selected relational-based factors influencing the satisfaction and commitment levels of non-family employees in family businesses. Polchefstroom: SAIMS. (25<sup>th</sup> conference of the Southern African Institute for Management Scientists; 15-17 Sep.)

**3.2.6 Interviews**

## Standard format

AUTHOR A. Year. Title of discussion. (Interview: date, place; note on record of interview (i.e. how is it available for verification or follow-up research; note to identify the interviewee and justify its expertise.)

## Examples:

SCHEEPERS C. 2013. The application of PMBOK® principles in participating in international school choir competitions. (Interview: 6 December, Kempton Park; interview notes in possession of researcher; Mr Cor Scheepers is the PRINCE2® & PMBOK® Leader at Kaizania Academies; email: cor.scheepers@kaizaniaacademies.co.za.)

VAN DER WESTHUIZEN AC. 2013. Considerations for retirement planning: pitfalls in the current financial climate. (Interview: 14 June, Pretoria; audio recording of interview in possession of researcher; Dr Anton van der Westhuizen is CEO of Protea Investments Ltd; email: CEO@ProteaInvestments.co.za.)

**4. CLOSURE**

The list of references must be regarded as an integrated part of the research process and the reporting of the results. The purpose of the references is twofold: it acknowledges the contribution of others and assists in subsequent research.

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## APPENDIX C: ASSISTANCE IN THE STATISTICAL ANALYSES



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22 September 2016

To whom it may concern

**RE: DISSERTATION OF MR MPUMELELO LONGWENI (STUDENT NUMBER: 22965092)**

I hereby confirm that I have analysed the data and assisted with the interpretation of the results of the dissertation of Mr Mpumelelo Longweni (Student Number: 22965092).

However, any opinions, findings or recommendations expressed in this document are entirely of the author. The Subject Specialist in Statistics does not accept responsibility for the correctness of the reporting of the results.

Yours sincerely

**M.E. Sonono (PhD)**



**Subject Specialist: Statistics – Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences**

## APPENDIX D: CONFIRMATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



Dynamic Language &  
Translation Specialists

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Tel: 018 293 3046  
Cell: 082 878 5183  
antoinettebisschoff@mweb.co.za  
CC No: 1995/017794/23

Tuesday, 18 April 2017

To whom it may concern,

**Re: Letter of confirmation of language editing**

The dissertation "**Managers' communication skills as perceived by their subordinates**" by **Mpumelelo Longweni** was language, technically and typographically edited. The citations, sources and referencing technique applied were also checked to comply with NWU university guidelines. Final corrections as suggested remain the responsibility of the student.

**Antoinette Bisschoff**

Officially approved language editor of the NWU since 1998  
Member of SA Translators Institute (no. 100181)

**Precision ... to the last letter**

**APPENDIX E: CONFIRMATION OF TECHNICAL EDITING**

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**RE: LETTER OF CONFIRMATION OF TECHNICAL EDITING**

Herewith the undersignees confirm that the dissertation titled:

*“Managers’ communication skills as perceived by their subordinates”*

has been checked and corrected technically, which includes all figures, tables, graphs and the layout of the text as well as the aspects of the contents.

EP Beukes & E Oosthuizen

April, 2017