



Internal communication to manage employer-employee relationships at the South African Medical Association (SAMA)

M Mulaudzi



orcid.org/0000-0002-7271-3363

Dissertation accepted for the degree *Magister Artium* in
Communication at the North-West University

Supervisor: Dr A Degenaar

Co-supervisor: Prof LB Sutton

Graduation: May 2026

DECLARATION

I, **Makhadzi Mulaudzi**, solemnly declare that this work is original and the result of my own labour. It has never, on any previous occasion, been presented in part or whole to any institution or board for the awarding of any degree.

I further declare that all information used and quoted has been duly acknowledged by complete references.

18 November 2025

SIGNATURE

DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank God for his grace (Ndia livhuwa Mudzimu wa tshilidzi). This dissertation is dedicated to my late brother, Thinashaka Vincent Mulaudzi, who always wanted the best for me as his little sister. You may be gone but not forgotten. I kept your words in my heart.

I would also like to quote a Tshivenda proverb that kept me going throughout my studies: 'Tshakule tshi wanwa nga muhovhi.' The path to reach distant or challenging goals requires one to work hard while staying determined.

To my employer, SAMA, thank you for the opportunity to conduct the study. Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to all my colleagues who participated in the study. It wouldn't be possible without you.

The study wouldn't be possible without the guidance of my supervisors. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Anette Degenaar and Dr Lucinda Bella-May Sutton, who provided me with continuous support throughout my journey. The path became challenging at times, but your guidance helped me to overcome obstacles while building my self-assurance to continue forward. I never thought of giving up because every time you reminded me that I could do this. Thank you for your patience and all your complete efforts to support me. You are all amazing.

To Prof Lynnette Fourie, I would like to extend my gratitude for your contribution from the beginning of the study. Particularly, your assistance on how to effectively structure and navigate my research.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my loved ones: people whom I call 'love of my life': my dad, Samson Mulaudzi; my mom, Ealina Mulaudzi, my daughter, Angel, my nephews, Zwothe and Zwivhuya. Thank you all for your love and support. Many are the times where you all have complained that you missed me so much, but you understood that every little chance I got, I had to focus on my studies. To my big sister, Tovhowani Mulaudzi, many are the times when you have sacrificed your sleep because of me. Thank you for all your love and support.

To my friends, my prayer warriors, and everyone who showed me support, I would like to say 'ndo livhuwa nga maanda' (thank you so much).

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the language and reference editors, Krüger Language Practitioners and Anneke Coetzee.

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is the South African Medical Association (SAMA), a non-statutory, non-profit professional organisation representing medical practitioners in both the public and private healthcare sectors in South Africa. The study investigates internal communication as a means of managing internal relationships between the employer and employees following organisational change and restructuring in 2022.

The research was informed by the following theoretical guidelines: strategic communication, grounded in two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management theories, to foster and maintain long-term relationships that are mutually beneficial between management and employees. These theoretical guidelines formed the literature review of the study. The purpose of the study is to determine how SAMA utilises internal communication to build internal relationships between management and employees.

A qualitative approach was applied using semi-structured interviews and focus groups for data collection. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted; five interviews with top-level management and eleven interviews with middle management of SAMA. Five focus group interviews were conducted with SAMA employees from various departments. The purpose was to gauge the perceptions of both management and employees on the nature of internal communication to manage employer-employee relationships at SAMA.

After gathering data from participants, it was analysed using qualitative content analysis. Findings reflect mixed perceptions of internal communication and relationship satisfaction, with only a minority of employees indicating satisfaction with their relationship with the organisation. The majority of employees expressed feelings of low morale and demotivation that negatively affected their work relationships. Although inconsistency in participants' perception was pointed out, the overall result from the study shows that internal communication serves as a strategic tool to build strong and good employer-employee relationships.

To successfully build relationships between employer and employees requires effective communication. In summary, it was found that efforts are made by SAMA to foster good relationships between management and employees through effective relationship-building strategies. The finding shows that there is an improvement in open communication with management and prioritising employees' well-being, particularly after the restructuring of the organisation. Open communication channels reflect openness, disclosure, trust, positivity and access as a strategy to build and maintain relationships. However, the results reflect mixed perceptions on the successful application of these strategies. Currently, the internal relationships

at SAMA between management and employees are unbalanced with opportunities for improvement. The research findings reflect the need for more effective strategic communication practices with employees to foster good internal relationships. Therefore, internal communication should be executed according to the theoretical guidelines of strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management to foster long term relationships.

Keywords: Change environment, employees, employer, internal communication, stakeholder relationship management, South African Medical Association (SAMA), strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NWU	North-West University
SAMA	South African Medical Association
HOU	Head of Unit
HOD	Head of Department
EXCO	Executive Committee
MANCO	Middle Management Committee
TLM	Top-level Management
MM	Middle Management
CEO	Chief executive officer
CPD	Continuous professional development

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	III
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	V
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE CASE ORGANISATION: SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (SAMA).....	2
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT	3
1.4 GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION.....	3
1.4.1 Specific research questions	3
1.5 GENERAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	4
1.5.1 Research objectives	4
1.6 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE	4
1.6.1 Strategic communication theory.....	4
1.6.2 Two-way symmetrical communication	5
1.6.3 Stakeholder relationship management theory	6
1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN	6
1.8 RESEARCH METHODS.....	7
1.8.1 Literature review	7

1.8.2	Empirical research methods	8
1.8.3	Semi-structured interviews.....	9
1.8.4	Focus groups.....	9
1.9	DATA ANALYSIS	10
1.10	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	11
1.11	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	11
1.12	CHAPTER LAYOUT.....	12
CHAPTER 2	LITERATURE STUDY	13
2.1	INTRODUCTION	13
2.2	CONCEPTUALISATION TO INVESTIGATE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SAMA.....	13
2.2.1	Understanding internal communication	14
2.3	STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	16
2.3.1	Purposive and intentional communication	16
2.3.2	Continuous and consistent process	17
2.3.3	Stakeholder-centricity	18
2.4	TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION	19
2.4.1	Research	19
2.4.2	Dialogue	20
2.4.3	Balanced communication.....	21
2.4.4	Collaboration and negotiation	22
2.4.5	Feedback.....	22

2.4.6	Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making.....	23
2.4.7	Transparency.....	24
2.5	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	25
2.5.1	Relationship-building strategies	25
2.5.1.1	Positivity	26
2.5.1.2	Openness or disclosure	26
2.5.1.3	Access.....	27
2.5.1.4	Assurances of legitimacy	28
2.5.1.5	Networking	28
2.5.1.6	Sharing of tasks.....	28
2.5.1.7	Dual concern	29
2.5.2	Relationship outcomes	31
2.5.2.1	Trust.....	31
2.5.2.2	Commitment.....	32
2.5.2.3	Control mutuality.....	33
2.5.2.4	Relationship satisfaction	34
2.5.3	Types of relationships.....	34
2.5.3.1	Exchange relationships versus communal relationships	35
2.6	CONCLUSION	36
CHAPTER 3	RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS	38
3.1	INTRODUCTION	38
3.2	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	38

3.3	THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH.....	39
3.4	THEORETICAL STATEMENT CONCEPTS AND CONSTRUCTS.....	41
3.5	RESEARCH METHODS.....	47
3.5.1	Purposeful sampling of SAMA participants	47
3.5.2	Sampling of semi-structured interview participants (management)	48
3.5.3	Semi-structured interviews.....	50
3.5.3.1	Interview schedule	54
3.5.3.2	Sampling of participants for focus group discussion	54
3.5.4	Focus groups.....	56
3.5.5	Moderator's guide.....	58
3.6	QUALITATIVE CONTENT DATA ANALYSIS	59
3.7	RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY	59
3.7.1	Reliability	59
3.7.2	Validity.....	60
3.7.3	Trustworthiness	61
3.7.4	Ethical considerations.....	61
3.8	CONCLUSION	62
CHAPTER 4	FINDINGS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF TOP AND MIDDLE MANAGEMENT AT SAMA.....	63
4.1	INTRODUCTION	63
4.2	STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	64
4.2.1	Purposive and intentional communication.....	64

4.2.1.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	64
4.2.1.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	65
4.2.2	Continuous and consistent process	67
4.2.2.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	67
4.2.2.2	Perception of middle management	68
4.2.3	Stakeholder-centricity	69
4.2.3.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	69
4.2.3.2	Perception of middle management	70
4.3	TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION.....	71
4.3.1	Research	71
4.3.1.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	71
4.3.1.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	72
4.3.2	Dialogue	73
4.3.2.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	73
4.3.2.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	74
4.3.3	Balanced communication.....	75
4.3.3.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	75
4.3.3.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	76
4.3.4	Collaboration and negotiation	77
4.3.4.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	77
4.3.4.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	77
4.3.5	Feedback.....	79

4.3.5.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	79
4.3.5.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	79
4.3.6	Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making.....	80
4.3.6.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	80
4.3.6.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	81
4.3.7	Transparency.....	83
4.3.7.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	83
4.3.7.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	84
4.4	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	85
4.4.1	Relationship-building strategies	85
4.4.1.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	86
4.4.1.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	87
4.4.2	Relationship outcomes	89
4.4.2.1	Trust.....	89
4.4.2.1.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	89
4.4.2.1.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	90
4.4.2.2	Commitment.....	91
4.4.2.2.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	91
4.4.2.2.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	92
4.4.2.3	Control mutuality.....	93
4.4.2.3.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	93
4.4.2.3.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	93

4.4.2.4	Relationship satisfaction	95
4.4.2.4.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	95
4.4.2.4.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	96
4.4.3	Exchange relationships vs communal relationships	97
4.4.3.1	Perceptions of top-level management.....	97
4.4.3.2	Perceptions of middle management.....	98
4.5	CONCLUSION	98
CHAPTER 5	FINDINGS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEES AT SAMA	104
5.1	INTRODUCTION	104
5.2	STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	104
5.2.1	Purposive and intentional	104
5.2.2	Continuous and consistent process	106
5.2.3	Stakeholder-centricity	108
5.3	TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION.....	109
5.3.1	Research.....	110
5.3.2	Dialogue	110
5.3.3	Balanced communication.....	111
5.3.4	Collaboration and negotiation	113
5.3.5	Feedback.....	114
5.3.6	Inclusiveness and participation in decision-making	115
5.3.7	Transparency.....	117

5.4	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT	119
5.4.1	Relationship-building strategies	119
5.4.2	Relationship outcomes	122
5.4.2.1	Trust	122
5.4.2.2	Commitment	123
5.4.2.3	Control mutuality.....	124
5.4.2.4	Relationship satisfaction	125
5.4.2.5	Exchange versus communal relationships	127
5.5	CONCLUSION	128
CHAPTER 6	CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH.....	132
6.1	INTRODUCTION	132
6.2	ANSWERING SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION 1.....	132
6.3	ANSWERING SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION 2.....	140
6.3.1	Strategic communication	140
6.3.1.1	Purposive and intentional communication.....	140
6.3.1.2	Continuous and consistent process	141
6.3.1.3	Stakeholder-centricity	141
6.3.2	Two-way symmetrical communication	142
6.3.2.1	Research.....	142
6.3.2.2	Dialogue	143
6.3.2.3	Balanced communication.....	143
6.3.2.4	Collaboration and negotiation	144

6.3.2.5	Feedback.....	145
6.3.2.6	Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making.....	145
6.3.2.7	Transparency.....	146
6.3.3	Stakeholder relationship management.....	147
6.3.3.1	Relationship-building strategies	147
6.3.3.2	Relationship outcomes	148
6.3.3.2.1	Trust.....	148
6.3.3.2.2	Commitment	148
6.3.3.2.3	Control mutuality.....	149
6.3.3.2.4	Relationship satisfaction	150
6.3.3.3	Types of relationships.....	151
6.4	ANSWERING SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION 3.....	152
6.4.1	Strategic communication	152
6.4.1.1	Purposive and intentional communication.....	152
6.4.1.2	Continuous and consistent process	152
6.4.1.3	Stakeholder-centricity	153
6.4.2	Two-way symmetrical communication	153
6.4.2.1	Research	153
6.4.2.2	Dialogue	153
6.4.2.3	Balanced communication.....	154
6.4.2.4	Collaboration and negotiation	154
6.4.2.5	Feedback.....	154

6.4.2.6	Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making.....	155
6.4.2.7	Transparency.....	155
6.4.3	Stakeholder relationship management.....	156
6.4.3.1	Relationship-building strategies	156
6.4.3.2	Relationship outcomes	156
6.4.3.2.1	Trust.....	156
6.4.3.2.2	Commitment	157
6.4.3.2.3	Control mutuality.....	157
6.4.3.2.4	Relationship satisfaction	157
6.4.3.3	Types of relationships.....	157
6.5	ANSWERING THE GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION.....	158
6.5.1	Strategic communication	158
6.5.2	Two-way symmetrical communication	159
6.5.3	Stakeholder relationship management.....	160
6.5.3.1	Relationship-building strategies	160
6.5.3.2	Relationship outcomes	161
6.5.3.3	Types of relationships: Exchange versus communal relationships.....	162
6.6	OVERALL PERSPECTIVE ON THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAMA’S INTERNAL COMMUNICATION.....	162
6.7	LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	164
	LIST OF REFERENCES	166
	ANNEXURE A: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER	180

ANNEXURE B: ETHICS TRAINING CERTIFICATE	182
ANNEXURE C: INVITATION TO INTERVIEWS.....	183
ANNEXURE D: DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER AND PARTICIPANT	186
ANNEXURE E ANNEXURE LETTER OF SUPPORT	187
ANNEXURE F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH MANAGEMENT OF SAMA	188
ANNEXURE G: MODERATOR’S GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS WITH EMPLOYEES OF SAMA.....	191
ANNEXURE H: TURNITIN REPORT	193
ANNEXURE I: PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE.....	194

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1:	Conceptualisation of the study	14
Table 3.1:	Research design	39
Table 3.2:	Theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs	41
Table 3.3:	Compilation of participants from management	50
Table 3.4:	Date for semi-structured interviews with the management of SAMA.....	53
Table 3.5:	Participants for focus group discussions	56
Table 3.6:	Dates and venues for focus groups.....	58
Table 4.1:	Summary of management perceptions	99
Table 5.1:	Summary of employees' perceptions	129
Table 6.1:	Summary of theoretical statements, concepts and constructs	134

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1:	Departments within SAMA	48
-------------	-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Internal communication can be regarded as a central organisational process through which employees share information, build relationships and shape organisational culture and values (Meng & Berger, 2008:523; Mmutle, 2018:52). For purposes of this study, internal communication is defined as the management of communication and relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders at different levels through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and relationship management (Lee & Yue, 2020:2; Welch & Jackson, 2007:179). This definition highlights that internal communication extends beyond the mere transmission of information; it also involves fostering positive stakeholder relationships, promoting engagement, ensuring alignment, and ultimately supporting organisational success.

The management of sound and productive relationships between organisations and their employees is critical for the organisation to achieve success (Govender & Bussin, 2020:4; Subramanian, 2017). To rebuild and maintain long-term, mutually beneficial relationships, organisations must communicate strategically, adopting a two-way symmetrical approach that encourages trust, honesty, openness, and dialogue between the organisation and its employees to enhance mutual understanding (Kim, 2021; Morsing & Schultz, 2006:326). Similarly, Grunig and Grunig (2008:329) argue that organisations should manage internal relationships with the same strategic attention afforded to external stakeholders. However, organisations frequently prioritise external stakeholder communication, neglecting internal stakeholders in the process.

Stakeholder relationship management theory underscores that employer–employee relationships should be mutually beneficial, with organisations benefiting from employees' skills, knowledge, and productivity, while employees expect fair remuneration, job security, and opportunities for growth (Che *et al.*, 2022:1; Jahansoozi, 2007:398). Effective internal communication therefore plays an important role in supporting these relationships. As Slabbert (2015:65) notes, strategic communication provides direction for organisations to maintain strong relationships through purposeful, outcome-driven internal communication efforts.

In this context, two-way symmetrical communication becomes essential for promoting dialogue, participation, and feedback, achieving outcomes such as trust, commitment, satisfaction, and mutual control (Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Kim, 2021:382). By engaging employees in a two-way symmetrical way, organisations are more likely to sustain long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with them (Mbhele & De Beer, 2021:76). Research further suggests that

organisations that apply two-way symmetrical communication in managing internal stakeholder relationships are better positioned to preserve these relationships during times of crisis (Kim, 2020:590).

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE CASE ORGANISATION: SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (SAMA)

The South African Medical Association (SAMA) is a non-statutory, non-profit professional organisation representing medical practitioners across both the public and private healthcare sectors in South Africa. SAMA also engages in global health matters. Established in 1927, SAMA functions as a membership organisation providing legal and labour relations services, as well as lobbying for the rights of medical practitioners (SAMA, 2023). The organisation employs approximately 115 employees and positions itself as an 'open system', influenced by internal and external forces such as economic conditions and advances in communication technologies (Baines, 2011:140).

SAMA was selected as the case for this research study, because it underwent significant organisational change and restructuring in 2022. These changes, which spanned over a year, involved revisions to its vision, mission, and structure. Like many organisations, SAMA's internal change created challenges such as conflict, uncertainty, disengagement, and mistrust, which strained relationships between management and employees (Bordia *et al.*, 2004; Kim & Rhee, 2011). SAMA itself acknowledged communication challenges during this period, noting that communication was often one-way, which further weakened employee–employer relationships.

In the aftermath of these changes, internal communication became essential for rebuilding trust, managing uncertainty, and aligning employees with organisational goals (Li *et al.*, 2021:2). Internal communication plays a role in shaping employees' perceptions, particularly in contexts where concerns about job security and future organisational direction may have arisen (Kim, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2021:5). Similarly, Sutton *et al.* (2022) contend that internal communication plays a pivotal part in an organisation's survival, and when organisations face internal communication challenges, it can threaten internal relationships. Therefore, guidelines from strategic communication, grounded in two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management theory (Lee, 2022:4), were used in this study to explore the nature of internal communication at SAMA to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between management and employees, specifically after changes in 2022, which could have an influence on these relationships later.

This study, therefore, investigates internal communication at SAMA, focusing on how it is used to manage internal relationships between the organisation and its employees.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Internal communication with employees is crucial for the success and survival of any organisation. When managed strategically and effectively, internal communication helps build and maintain strong and healthy employer–employee relationships. Therefore, it should be guided by the theoretical guidelines of strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management theories.

SAMA, a non-profit membership organisation representing medical practitioners, underwent a period of change and restructuring in 2022. This change, which involved a revision of its vision, mission, and structure, resulted in self-acknowledged challenges such as one-way information flow and a lack of transparency.

This organisation was specifically chosen for the purpose of this study to investigate the nature of its internal communication to build and maintain relationships with its employees, given the period of organisational change, which could still influence its current internal communication practices and relationships. Employees, as the most important stakeholders, require strong, long-term, and mutually beneficial relationships with the organisation to contribute to its success and sustainability. Therefore, this study addresses the need to explore SAMA's internal communication practices and considers how these may be more effectively utilised to build and maintain internal stakeholder relationships following organisational change.

1.4 GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION

From the above context and communication problem, the following general research question is posed:

How is internal communication utilised to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

1.4.1 Specific research questions

1. Which guidelines does the literature propose for internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management?

2. What are management's perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication in managing employer–employee relationships at SAMA?
3. What are employees' perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication in managing employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

1.5 GENERAL RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To determine how internal communication is utilised to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA.

1.5.1 Research objectives

1. To determine the guidelines that literature suggests for internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management, through a literature review.
2. To determine management's perception regarding the nature of internal communication in managing employer–employee relationships at SAMA, through semi-structured interviews.
3. To determine employees' perception regarding the nature of internal communication in managing employer–employee relationships at SAMA, through focus group discussions.

1.6 THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

1.6.1 Strategic communication theory

This study is first guided by strategic communication. Invariably, strategic communication is viewed as the strategic planning and management of effective internal communication, thereby enabling the organisation to attain its goals (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:4; Volk & Zerfass, 2020). By incorporating internal communication into strategic communication efforts, organisations can ensure that employees are informed, engaged, and aligned with the organisation's goals, ultimately contributing to overall success and effectiveness (Li *et al.*, 2021; Mmutle, 2018:56). Additionally, it contributes to the success of an organisation by fostering relationships with stakeholders that benefit both parties through internal, two-way communication (Steyn, 2007:139). This implies a continuous process informed by research into the needs of employees within the internal environment.

Strategic communication managers can integrate these relationships into organisational strategy, which suggests that the role of internal communication professionals should include environmental scanning as part of the efforts to define organisational goals (Slabbert, 2015:14).

Thus, the role of strategic communicators should prioritise building sustainable relationships with stakeholders, rather than merely mediating communication.

Strategic communication, particularly when viewed through the lens of two-way symmetrical communication, emphasises a transparent and dialogical approach between organisations and their stakeholders (Men & Stacks, 2014). Incorporating the principles of two-way symmetrical communication into strategic communication efforts represents a shift from the traditional, one-way communication approach to a more inclusive and effective one (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey, 2013). This approach acknowledges the complexity of modern stakeholder relationships and seeks to build trust and mutual understanding through open, honest, and ongoing dialogue.

In the context of SAMA, strategic communication can be more effective when it changes from monologue to dialogue and aligns overall internal communication in a strategic manner (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey, 2013:371). This, in turn, can help the organisation achieve its objectives and maintain relationships between employees and management.

1.6.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

In the field of public relations, two-way symmetrical communication emphasises interactive dialogue rather than one-sided monologue, ensuring that both the organisation and stakeholders share control of the engagement (Grunig & Kim, 2021:223). The primary objective of two-way symmetrical communication is to comprehend the needs of key stakeholders and to establish mutually beneficial long-term relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). It creates communication channels that promote openness and transparency between the organisation and stakeholders to achieve mutual understanding (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Lee, 2022). Therefore, during the period of change, the communication function should be strategically managed through symmetrical, two-way communication to strengthen employer–employee relationships.

Internal communication is generally achieved through two-way symmetrical communication, which asserts the importance of balanced dialogue between the organisation and employees to foster transparent communication and mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). The management of two-way symmetric communication should prioritise mutual understanding over strategic control of stakeholders. In addition, the organisation should value and prioritise the diverse voices of its stakeholders in all decision-making processes (Men & Stacks, 2014:306). In doing so, it ensures that decisions are fair, inclusive, and reflective of the needs and interests of all parties involved. This approach is critical for fostering collaboration, engagement, and relationship management between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Therefore, internal communication should encourage dialogue and employee participation in decision-making, leading to strong organisational relationships (Kim, 2020).

1.6.3 Stakeholder relationship management theory

Stakeholder relationship management theory originated from the general principles of public relations, which highlight the building and management of relationships between an organisation and its internal or external stakeholders (Barker & Angelopulo, 2006:202). Moreover, stakeholder relationship management theory is primarily concerned with managing organisational relationships with stakeholders to generate mutual benefits. Managing good internal relationships with employees of SAMA through effective internal communication can enhance organisational sustainability after change. The quality of an organisation's relationship with its key stakeholders, especially its employees, plays a crucial role in determining its effectiveness and ability to achieve strategic goals (De Beer & Rensburg, 2011:217).

Employees are among the most important stakeholder groups; therefore, it is important to maintain good relations with them (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). Furthermore, the foundation of relationship management stresses the importance of managing quality relationships between employees and management, which result in the following outcomes: trust, commitment, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction (Grunig, 1992:558). To achieve these outcomes, Hon and Grunig (1999) proposed relationship-building strategies, namely positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual concern (which includes cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises). Relationship strategies can be described as drivers for building relationships with internal stakeholders (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997). These strategies should be facilitated through internal, two-way symmetrical communication, which helps balance the interests of the organisation and its internal stakeholders (Heath, 2010:38).

1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which is broadly defined as a naturalistic study that uses non-numerical data. It seeks to understand and explore rather than to explain and manipulate variables (Nassaji, 2020:428).

The selection of this qualitative approach was informed and driven by the nature of the research questions, the objectives of the study, and the depth of understanding of the communication phenomenon under study. The current study seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of how strategic communication and two-way symmetrical communication manage the employer–

employee relationship at SAMA; hence, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate.

A flexible and iterative procedure was employed in qualitative research, emphasising the importance of acquiring a thorough and complex understanding of individuals lived experiences, the meanings they ascribe to those experiences, and their distinct perspectives (Harwell, 2011:148; Morgan, 2022:66). The current study clearly defined the research problem, questions, and objectives, which were systematically addressed through qualitative methods, including a literature review, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODS

1.8.1 Literature review

The literature review for the study focused on internal communication for managing employer–employee relationships at SAMA. The following databases were consulted to establish existing literature on the topic: NRF, NEXUS, Google Scholar, EBSCO-Host, and the NWU Library.

First, previous studies have investigated the same theories used for this study within an internal context, specifically strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management theory (Kim, 2021; Lee, 2022; Mbhele & De Beer, 2021; Men *et al.*, 2020; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Some internal communication studies focussed primarily on internal communication in the South African context, especially post-Covid (see e.g. Sutton & le Roux, 2025a; Sutton & le Roux, 2025b). These studies were used as the main resources to support this study. Moreover, the studies indicate a strong correlation between internal communication and employee engagement, which in turn leads to mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders across all organisational levels.

Other similar studies have been conducted on internal communication and stakeholder relationships management. The following are not the only previous studies; they represent a few of the existing MA and PhD studies that have a similar context and theory.

The first study is the utilisation of WhatsApp by North-West University's Student RAG Community Service in the management of relationships with internal stakeholders (Visagie, 2021). The second study was on internal communication in achieving employee engagement within a South African government department (Mbhele, 2016). The third study was Managing Organisational Change through Internal Communications: Management Consultants' Perspective (Van Zyl, 2022). The fourth study was on strategic internal communication in international non-governmental organisations. The focus of the study was not on managing relationships, but on

the strategic functioning of internal communication (Hume, 2010). Previous studies conducted on internal communication during change management have lacked a consistent focus on managing internal relationships.

Another relevant study conducted by Meintjes (2012) examined the strategic communication approach to managing stakeholder relationships in accordance with the King Report on Governance. Previous studies have established that strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder management are critical indicators for maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its key stakeholders.

The studies mentioned above indicate a substantial body of literature on internal communication, strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and relationship management. However, no prior research seems to have been conducted on internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships within the specific context of SAMA. The context of the current study on internal communication is unique due to several distinct characteristics, such as the communication environment, the nature of the organisation, and the context of previous change at the organisation, differentiating it from other areas of research. In addition, it is imperative to repeat studies as they greatly contribute to the formulation and advancement of theories by presenting additional evidence supporting or challenging existing theories.

1.8.2 Empirical research methods

In the context of the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with SAMA management, including top-level and middle management from various departments, as indicated in Figure 3.1. In addition, five focus group discussions were conducted with SAMA employees.

Before interviews and focus groups were conducted, a request was sent to the Human Resources Department for a list of employees who had been employed at SAMA for more than a year to purposefully select participants. The researcher excluded herself from the sampling criteria due to her employment at SAMA. A standard invitation letter, drafted from a document from the Human Resources Department, was sent to the Corporate Affairs Department, where a communication specialist facilitated the formal invitation to potential participants via email. The email introduced the study and included informed consent documentation (see Addendum C).

Including both management and employees in this research process was important, as their different roles are interconnected in achieving organisational success, specifically in the aftermath of change. For the current study, employees who have been employed for less than one year

were excluded from participating in both the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups. A detailed discussion of the research approach and process is discussed in Chapter 3.

1.8.3 Semi-structured interviews

The study used semi-structured interviews, which are defined as a method of gathering information from participants through a series of open-ended questions based on the research topic under investigation (Mouton, 1996; Walliman, 2021:99). Semi-structured interviews consist of various elements of structured and open-ended questions, allowing the researcher to engage in a formal interview with the participants, which makes it applicable to this study (Qu & Dumay, 2011:246)

Interviews were conducted between March 2025 and April 2025, each lasting approximately 40–60 minutes. They were carried out through Teams meetings and face-to-face in the SAMA boardroom. Sixteen interviews were conducted: five with top management (Heads of Department [HODs] forming part of the Executive Committee [EXCO]) and eleven with middle management (part of the middle management committee [MANCO]).

Participants were purposively selected based on their experiences with organisational communication, in line with research question 2. The data gathered from the interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using qualitative content analysis. The data analysis was informed by concepts and constructs of strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management derived from the literature review, ensuring that the findings align with the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2). A detailed discussion of the semi-structured interviews is presented in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.5.2).

1.8.4 Focus groups

A focus group is described as an in-depth discussion with a small, selected group of people to gather information on a particular topic under investigation (Morgan, 2002:142). Focus group discussions constitute a qualitative research method that involves a small group of individuals discussing a specific topic to obtain data on their collective viewpoints and the meanings underlying them (Collins & O'Brien, 2011:142). Focus groups are appropriate for this study as they facilitated in-depth understanding of the topic and produced rich qualitative data, which can assist and allow employee engagement (Collins & O'Brien, 2011:142). The focus group discussions specifically targeted SAMA employees to answer research question 3 on employees' perceptions.

A total of five focus group discussions were conducted, each group involving five SAMA employees. Four focus groups were conducted via Teams meeting and one face-to-face in the SAMA boardroom (see Section 3.5.4 and Table 3.6).

- The first focus group discussion was conducted with SAMA employees from the following departments: Education and Publishing, Corporate Affairs, Governance, and Professional Affairs. At the last minute, one participant was unable to attend.
- The second focus group was conducted with branch administrators from different regions reporting to Corporate Affairs.
- The third focus group was conducted with employees from Finance, Medical Protection, Operations, and Corporate Affairs.
- The fourth focus group was held with SAMA employees from the IT department, Medical Protection, Legal, SAMA Northwest, and Corporate Affairs.
- The fifth focus group was held with SAMA employees from Education and Publishing, and branch administrators from SAMA Goldfields and Transkei.

These employees were from different departments, and held different roles and responsibilities, as presented in Table 3.1 (see Section 3.5.3.2).

To ensure accurate data analysis from focus group discussions, focus group sessions were recorded digitally, transcribed verbatim, and analysed through qualitative content analysis. A detailed discussion of the focus group is presented in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.5.4).

1.9 DATA ANALYSIS

Data from both the semi-structured interviews and focus groups were analysed using qualitative content analysis. This method is described as one used to find, analyse, and report patterns within data (Bradshaw et al., 2017:6). To analyse data, the researcher transcribed the semi-structured interviews and focus groups verbatim, identifying recurring patterns and themes within the dataset. The data were analysed deductively, using the concept and constructs formulated from the literature study. Data will be securely stored on iCloud for five years.

The researcher developed and conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions aimed at collecting rich qualitative data from participants. Each session was carefully recorded and subsequently transcribed for accuracy in the findings. Following the transcription process, an in-depth qualitative data analysis was conducted to identify key patterns and insights within the data. After completion of rigorous analysis, the findings were systematically presented in Chapter 4, aligned with concepts and constructs established in the literature study.

After the dissertation is examined, the researcher will use the findings in the concluding chapter to compile a short report for distribution to management and the employees who participated. The report will include recommendations for future engagement and strategies, as well as reflections on improving internal communication. In addition, a note will be distributed to management and participants, indicating that a link to the Boloka dissertation will be shared with them. The dissertation will be publicly accessible, and appreciation will be expressed to participants for their valuable contributions. SAMA management will be encouraged to access and read the study.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study complied with the North-West University (NWU) Research Ethics Policy, guided by the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, equality, and respect. All requirements of the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) were followed, and approval was granted before any interviews or focus groups were conducted. The study was approved under ethics number NWU-01076-24-A7 (see Annexure A). Both the researcher and supervisors completed the required ethics training (see Annexure B).

Informed written consent was obtained from all participants for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to SAMA management and employees to ensure they clearly understood the research, their roles, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. All sessions were conducted in person or virtually, recorded with consent, and later transcribed by the researcher. Participant identities were kept anonymous, and all data were securely stored in a password-protected cloud folder. Upon completion, the data will be archived at NWU for five years, in line with institutional policy.

1.11 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study is to explore internal communication in managing employer–employee relationships at SAMA. The study contributes to the existing literature by offering insights into relationship management within SAMA following organisational change, through the lens of strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management.

On a practical level, the study's outcome and recommendations could help the organisation improve its internal communication strategies to maintain and improve relationships with employees. These findings and suggestions may also be adapted and explored in other similar organisations, especially those that have gone through change and may face internal communication and relationship challenges in its aftermath.

1.12 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Chapter 1: Introduction and context to the study

The study is set within the background and context of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA. This chapter provides the background and justification for the study, outlines the research problem, research questions, and objectives, and introduces the research approach and methods used to answer these questions.

Chapter 2: Literature study

The literature study in Chapter 2 includes internal communication as the context and two-way symmetrical communication, strategic communication, and stakeholder relationship management theories as theoretical guidelines that underpin the rest of the study.

Chapter 3: Research approach and methods

Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative research approach, describing the data collection techniques: qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The chapter also discusses sampling methods and how data transcripts are analysed through qualitative content analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings of semi-structured interviews on the perceptions of top and middle management at SAMA

This chapter presents the findings based on the data collected through semi-structured interviews with management participants at SAMA.

Chapter 5: Findings of focus group discussions on the perceptions of employees at SAMA

Chapter 5 discusses and interprets findings from focus groups with employees from different departments at SAMA.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

The final chapter presents a conclusion based on the study's objectives and literature study, addressing the general research question. Moreover, this chapter further addresses the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research on internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE STUDY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 presented and discussed the background, context, and planning of the study. The theoretical point of departure outlined in Chapter 1 argued that internal communication should be managed through strategic communication and two-way symmetrical communication to maintain relationships between management and employees. Therefore, in the context of internal communication at SAMA, it is important that internal communication efforts should not only disseminate information but also allow engagement and feedback from employees.

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the literature study and to identify theoretical guidelines for the rest of the study. The literature study is an essential component of academic research, providing a systematic and in-depth examination of existing literature related to the chosen topic. It enables researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge (Du Plooy, 2009:61).

The aim of this chapter is to answer the specific research question 1 (see Section 1.3.1):

Which guidelines does the literature suggest for internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management?

Accordingly, this chapter discusses the importance of internal communication and the value of internal stakeholder relationship management. The study will be guided by the following theories: strategic communication theory, two-way symmetrical communication theory, and stakeholder relationship management theory. Furthermore, the literature study aims to identify concepts and constructs from the theories above that serve as guidelines for investigating the communication and relationships at SAMA.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISATION TO INVESTIGATE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SAMA

This study was conducted according to the theoretical conceptualisation summarised in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Conceptualisation of the study

Domain:	Internal communication (from a corporate communication perspective)	
Main theoretical approaches:	Strategic communication	• Purposive and intentional communication • Continuous and consistent process • Stakeholder-centricity
	Two-way symmetrical communication model	• Research • Dialogue • Balanced communication • Collaboration and negotiation • Feedback • Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making • Transparency
	Stakeholder relationship management theory	• Relationship-building strategies, namely positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises). • Result in the following outcomes: trust, commitment, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction. • Two types of relationships: exchange versus communal relationships
Context:	SAMA, as an organisation, went through a change, which could still affect its internal communication and relationships. Therefore, it is important to manage the aftermath and maintain relationships.	

From the table above, the theoretical guidelines that underpin the study are discussed in the rest of the chapter.

2.2.1 Understanding internal communication

Internal communication falls within the discipline of corporate communication and often within the context of organisational communication, where employees are considered a vital internal public or stakeholder group. For the purpose of this study, stakeholders refer to the group of SAMA employees with whom the organisation must proactively build mutually beneficial relationships (Slabbert, 2015:3).

It is important to understand the concept of internal communication from a corporate communication perspective, and that it considers all communication that occurs within an organisation (Conrad & Poole, 2005:9). Internal communication is the process through which information is shared and exchanged across the organisation. It entails the seamless transmission of communication, ideas, and instructions among individuals, teams, and departments.

Internal communication is often regarded as an umbrella term describing all forms of communication within the organisation, such as employer–employee communication, internal marketing, and internal affairs (Verčič, *et al.*, 2014:233). It involves delivering appropriate strategic messages to employees in formats that are useful and acceptable to them, in a timely manner (Welch, 2012:250). Therefore, effective internal communication with employees is important for the success of any organisation, as it fosters effective engagement, collaboration, and positive relationships (Reyneke-Geyer & De Beer, 2024). Organisational change often brings uncertainty, anxiety, and fear among employees, threatening internal relationships. To manage the aftermath of change at SAMA (see section 1.2), effective internal communication is crucial for its success and sustainability (Li *et al.*, 2021:3). It is important to build and maintain employer–employee relationships through effective internal communication. The selection of the case (SAMA) was guided by its distinctive context and the significant changes it has undergone. While we recognise the relevance of change management and organisational change theories for organisations undergoing transformation, this study adopts a different theoretical focus. Since the data were collected after the change process (in 2025) rather than during it (in 2022), the research specifically employs strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management theoretical approaches as its guiding approaches.

Additionally, effective internal communication serves as a catalyst for achieving organisational goals by bridging communication gaps between management and employees (Mbhele, 2016:35). Ineffective internal communication can pose a threat to organisational relationships and impede goal achievement (Burger, 2018:30). A general goal of internal communication, as described by Yeomans (2007:221), is to build two-way relationships with employees to increase the effectiveness of the organisation, a principle that is also applicable to SAMA. Therefore, internal communication can be regarded as the strategic management of interaction through two-way communication that encourages feedback, leading to the formation of strategic relationships with employees (Slabbert, 2015:65).

Employees, management, and other team members are undeniably the most critical internal stakeholders of an organisation, wielding direct influence over organisational performance and

interactions with external stakeholders (Lee & Kim, 2021; Reyneke-Geyer & De Beer, 2024). Therefore, it is important to communicate in the appropriate manner, namely that of two-way symmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication in internal communication is based on principles of employee engagement, empowerment, and participation in decision-making (Mbhele & De Beer, 2021:163). This approach requires managers and employees to engage in open communication and actively listen to one another. In the context of SAMA, the organisation should engage its employees. Thus, internal communication is pivotal, acting as the backbone for relationship management and aligning stakeholders' needs with organisational goals.

Internal communication contributes to effective relationships between management and employees through interactive communication (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:183). Communicating strategically is particularly important for SAMA, as quality relationships contribute to the success and survival of the organisation. Internal communication about the vision, mission, goals, and activities of SAMA should target internal stakeholders. Furthermore, strategic communication and two-way symmetrical communication play an important role in the effective management of internal communication and internal stakeholder relationships.

2.3 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Strategic communication is the purposeful management of communication between an organisation and its key stakeholders over the long term to meet measurable objectives within a realistic timeframe (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:4; Plowman & Wakefield, 2013). It entails using various communication channels and strategies in a continuous and consistent manner to influence the attitudes, understanding, and actions of stakeholders (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007). From the definition above, the following key concepts of strategic communication have been identified: (i) purposive and intentional; (ii) consistent and continuous process; and (iii) stakeholder-centricity.

2.3.1 Purposive and intentional communication

Strategic communication can be defined as the purposive and intentional communication processes that align internal communication and relationship management with the overall organisational strategy; thereby enhancing strategic position (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:4; Overton-de Klerk & Oelofse, 2010:391). Strategic communication acknowledges that purposeful, intentional influence is the primary objective of communication within an organisation (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:10). Therefore, the purposive and intentional process involves crafting clear, concise messages with a specific objective in mind, aligned with the desired outcome within the internal environment (Steyn & Puth, 2000:60). By communicating purposefully and intentionally, SAMA can enhance its ability to communicate effectively and achieve its intended objective.

Strategic communication is closely linked to the specific organisational goals, aligning communication with an organisation's strategic goals rather than simply disseminating key messages (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:3). This alignment between communication and organisational goals ensures that every communication initiative directly supports the organisation's overarching mission (Zerfass & Volk, 2018). These goals may involve managing crises as well. To achieve these goals, SAMA's internal communication should be integrated into the organisation's strategic planning and daily operations, while adapting to emerging trends (Cornelissen, 2020:128).

Strategic communication provides guidance for effective communication strategies and internal relationship management between an organisation and its stakeholders (Hume, 2010:130). Internal communication management should operate as a strategic process, following a planned, deliberate approach rather than random, unintentional communication. Organisations should depend on purposive and intentional internal communication to achieve both operational success and long-term stability (Murphy, 2014:113; Wiggill, 2009). Internal communication is thus not an afterthought but a strategic requirement and pillar of strategic communication. In the context of SAMA, strategic, purposive, and intentional communication is required to reach both short-term and long-term organisational goals.

2.3.2 Continuous and consistent process

Strategic communication should be a continuous and consistent process across all internal communication channels. This ensures that messages are consistent, cohesive, and clear, supporting the organisation in reaching its goals (Van Ruler, 2018:372). Inconsistencies in communication may confuse stakeholders; therefore, communication professionals must ensure that messages are aligned with the key strategic objectives of the organisation (Kapferer, 2012).

An organisation should apply continuous and consistent communication to avoid contradictions and inconsistencies to its strategic communication (Aggerholm & Thomsen, 2014:173). Strategic communication professionals play a key role in delivering information that enables understanding among stakeholders, leading to change and action (Nothhaft & Schölzel; 2014:9). Therefore, internal communication should be a continuous and consistent process, rather than a once-off endeavour. However, care must be taken to prevent information overload, as this can make it challenging for employees to distinguish between what is important and what is not (Lewis & Nichols, 2014:541). When internal communication is well strategised, organisational goals are likely to be achieved (Hume & Leonard, 2014:2).

A consistent and continuous communication process improves effective communication and assists the organisation in maintaining good relationships between management and employees

(Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2003:2). Continuous communication should also be interactive and consistently reflected in the overall internal communication, enabling internal stakeholders to adapt to change (Van Ruler 2018:372). This ensures that employees remain engaged and ultimately support the desired organisational outcome (Hume, 2010:114). SAMA should invest in a continuous and consistent process when sharing information with employees. Consistency may help to ensure that all the members of the organisation are equipped with the same information, enabling them to engage in meaningful conversation and respond to inquiries with a unified voice (Men & Stacks, 2014:306).

2.3.3 Stakeholder-centricity

Strategic communication is stakeholder-centric, involving the identification, understanding, and prioritisation of stakeholder needs throughout the organisation's lifecycle to achieve a successful outcome (Lee, 2020; Slabbert & Barker, 2014). The stakeholder identification process is crucial, as it involves understanding the internal stakeholders (Bruning, 2002:45). Therefore, strategic communicators should practise two-way communication if they aspire to build sustainable relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Waters & Lemanski, 2011:154). Through such communication, the organisation can tailor messages to meet the diverse needs of its internal stakeholders, thereby building long-term relationships with them (Wiggill, 2009:60). When communication is strategically managed, SAMA can identify and balance the needs and interests of its internal stakeholders in alignment with organisational purpose (Grunig & Grunig, 2000:308-309). This, in turn, helps the organisation to achieve its target and builds relationships with its stakeholders (Ströh, 2007:128).

To achieve stakeholder-centric management, it is crucial to tailor communication that resonates with internal stakeholders at different organisational levels (Mahoney, 2011:145). As mentioned above, strategic communication should be an ongoing, interactive process involving research, analysis, execution, and evaluation of the needs of internal stakeholders (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007:13; Van Ruler, 2018:375). Environmental scanning can be applied to the process of building relationships with all internal stakeholders (Slabbert, 2012:46). SAMA should identify key employees and develop an effective strategic internal communication plan that addresses their needs while supporting organisational restructuring. Organisations such as SAMA should identify key employees and develop a strategic internal communication plan that meets their needs while supporting organisational restructuring.

From the discussion above, the following theoretical guideline has been formulated.

Theoretical guideline 1

It is imperative for SAMA to prioritise strategic communication to ensure that internal stakeholders are engaged and supported. Strategic communication is a **purposive and intentional** communication process that directly aligns communication efforts with an organisation's strategic objectives. It emphasises a **continuous and consistent** process of communication, ensuring that specific goals are achieved while prioritising **stakeholder-centric** perspectives at the forefront.

In the context of SAMA, when managing aftermath, communication with internal stakeholders should be both strategic and executed in a two-way symmetrical manner to build and maintain relationships after change. The following section discusses two-way symmetrical communication.

2.4 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

Two-way symmetrical communication is both a normative and ethical way of practicing communication management for a more effective achievement of organisational goals (Grunig & Grunig, 2013). In the context of an internal communication setting, symmetrical communication is defined as the willingness of an organisation to listen and respond to the concerns and interests of the internal stakeholders (Grunig, 1984). This model relies on research, maintaining balanced dialogue and feedback to effectively negotiate and collaborate with these stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). It prioritises transparent communication to establish mutual understanding, manage conflicts, and cultivate long-term relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Kelly *et al.*, 2010:191). From the above definition, two-way symmetrical communication includes the following key elements for the purpose of this study: (i) research, (ii) dialogue, (iii) balanced communication, (iv) collaboration and negotiation, (v) feedback, (vi) participation and inclusiveness in decision-making, and (vii) transparency.

2.4.1 Research

Research is one of the key elements of two-way symmetrical communication, with the main goal of understanding the needs of stakeholders and building mutual relationships rather than persuading them (Grunig & Grunig, 2008:328). Research refers to the process of evaluation in which the organisation gathers information about the needs of its stakeholders in relation to a specific subject (Gregory & Macnamara, 2019:3).

Research can serve as a learning process to help organisations understand stakeholder expectations, interests, and perceptions (Angelopulo & Barker, 2013:228). Organisations should conduct research as a means of evaluating and identifying what internal stakeholders' needs, wants, and beliefs about the organisation are. This will improve decision-making and achieve strategic goals (Steyn, 2012:47). Therefore, research can help management gather various ideas and make informed decisions through interactive communication.

In the context of SAMA, research will assist management in understanding the needs of employees and aligning its structures with stakeholders. In particular, it is advisable for the organisation to conduct regular research to ascertain the perceptions and viewpoints of internal stakeholders (Bruning, 2002:45). Furthermore, Grunig (2002) consider the two-way symmetrical model 'inherently ethical', as it attempts to balance the interests of the organisation and its stakeholders by resolving conflicts through research and effective internal communication (see Section 2.4.7 on ethical communication related to transparency). In the context of SAMA, conducting research can help the organisation address the interests of employees and facilitate conflict management.

2.4.2 Dialogue

Dialogue is a key component of two-way symmetrical communication. It fosters mutual understanding of symmetrical behaviour in an organisation (Grunig & Kim, 2021:85). Dialogue facilitates ongoing communication with a strict focus on establishing effective communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders, fostering transparent, sincere, and mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). In the context of SAMA, the organisation should prioritise dialogue to effectively engage with internal stakeholders and meet the demand for open communication.

For the purpose of this study, dialogue is defined as a two-way exchange in which an organisation actively listens to the diverse viewpoints of employees and responds appropriately to their concerns, thereby encouraging mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289; Kent & Lane, 2021:10; Mmutle, 2022:48). A two-way symmetrical approach prioritises dialogue over monologue, allowing both parties to exchange information that creates effective internal communication and conflict resolution (Van Ruler, 2018:369). This type of information exchange can establish a balanced dialogue between management and employees, encouraging transparent, sincere, and mutually beneficial relationships.

Dialogue serves as a management tool for conflict resolution, ensuring that the needs and voices of all parties are heard before generating solutions, which may strengthen relationships (Smith,

2013:176). Two-way symmetrical communication provides employees with opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue, have interactions, and share ideas with management (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Engaging in open dialogical communication can help employees develop a sense of belonging (Elving, 2005). Symmetrical communication systems, as described by Men (2014) encourage managers and their employees to engage in dialogue and listen to each other, reach mutual understanding and build relationships. Ströh (2007) and Mahoney (2011) further argue that employees are the strategic heart of the organisation; therefore, it is imperative to engage in dialogue to listen to their opinions and concerns regarding their duties and responsibilities.

For SAMA, internal communication should be approached in a dialogical manner. To mitigate confusion and conflict, management must maintain continuous dialogue with employees. In addition, internal communication should facilitate interactive engagement between employees and management, enabling employees to obtain clear and precise information about organisational activities and minimising potential misunderstandings.

2.4.3 Balanced communication

The two-way symmetrical model emphasises information exchange based on balanced communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). Balanced symmetrical communication involves equality in communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders, encouraging transparent and quality relationships that are mutually beneficial (Coombs & Holladay, 2012:881; Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). It implies that both parties have equal rights, responsibilities, and willingness to adjust their behaviour to accommodate one another's needs (Fawkes, 2012; Grunig, 2006:156). Within SAMA, fostering equal and balanced communication requires management to recognise employees as involved, communicative, and equal participants through various communication channels and technological platforms.

The practice of balanced communication between management and employees helps reduce uncertainty while promoting positive workplace behaviour (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Therefore, internal communication in the context of the two-way symmetrical model should follow a balanced approach (Lee, 2022:5), enabling employees to share their thoughts without fear of victimisation. In the case of SAMA, management should engage in equal communication with employees by promoting listening, interactive communication, and a willingness to accommodate one another. This will result in a better understanding of its internal stakeholders while effectively reducing uncertainties.

2.4.4 Collaboration and negotiation

Collaboration and negotiation are essential tools for effective communication in the symmetrical two-way communication model. Mergel and Greeves (2013) assert that these properties are crucial for organisational success. According to Slabbert (2012:40), collaboration is a process of two-way symmetrical communication in which both parties work together to achieve a shared goal, while negotiation entails a reciprocal exchange of ideas to reach a mutually beneficial agreement.

The practice of symmetrical two-way communication allows management to build an environment that promotes teamwork and gives employees a sense of importance and belonging (Men & Stacks, 2014:15). Consequently, two-way symmetrical communication should adopt a collaborative approach. The goals of fostering collaboration are enhancing negotiation, working together, equal communication, and mutual understanding between management and employees, leading to the formation of relationships (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Negotiation allows both parties to exchange their ideas and develop agreements that fulfil the needs of both parties (Johansen & Nielsen, 2011:205). Therefore, collaboration and negotiation with internal stakeholders (employees) require a collective common ground that represents a shared vision (Slabbert, 2012:111). In the context of SAMA, symmetrical internal communication that fosters collaboration and negotiation can encourage employees to engage in team discussions with management and work together to achieve the shared goal.

Furthermore, in the context of SAMA, symmetrical two-way communication facilitates the effective adaptation of organisational communication strategies, thereby promoting collaboration and the pursuit of continuous improvement (Kent & Lane, 2021:15). This approach emphasises the importance of management and employees understanding one another's viewpoints and adjusting their behaviour accordingly (Kim & Ni, 2010). Rather than participating in power struggles, both parties are encouraged to engage equitably in negotiations to attain outcomes that are mutually advantageous (Grunig & White, 1992:39).

2.4.5 Feedback

Feedback plays a crucial role in effective communication. It is the process of providing and receiving information, opinions, or reactions to a message that has been conveyed (Baker *et al.*, 2013:260). Feedback is the dynamic communication process that gauges how a message was perceived, facilitating understanding and assessing to what extent communication is effective between an organisation and its internal stakeholders (Baker *et al.*, 2013:262). Feedback within a two-way symmetrical communication setting fosters an environment where employees work

together (teamwork) (see Section 2.4.4), promotes open dialogue (see Section 2.4.2), and encourages understanding among team members (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196).

Communication should involve feedback to explore what internal stakeholders understand and accept from the organisation and vice versa (Angelopulo, 2013:49). Internal communication must therefore enable two-way communication and feedback to foster mutual understanding between the organisation and internal stakeholders (Morsing & Schultz, 2006:327). Feedback emphasises the importance of both providing timely feedback to internal stakeholders and the need for the organisation to receive feedback from these stakeholders (Baker *et al.*, 2013:262). Therefore, internal communication is not just about sending messages to internal stakeholders; it should strive to establish reciprocal communication from both parties (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:196). In the context of SAMA, feedback can provide valuable insight into both management and employee expectations and reach mutual agreement.

2.4.6 Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making

Two-symmetrical internal communication is based on the principles of employee inclusiveness and participation in decision-making and is often associated with a participatory organisational culture and structure (Grunig, 1992:564).

Participation and inclusiveness are key elements of two-way symmetrical communication because they promote effective engagement between the organisation and its employees (Greenwood, 2007:315). Two-way symmetrical communication emphasises that employees should be included and participate in decision-making and organisational activities (Slabbert, 2012:20). Participation can be defined as involvement in strategic decision-making through workgroups, teams, and in the setting of an organisational strategic agenda (Lee, 2022; Scholes *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, inclusiveness can be defined as the process of creating an environment where the voices of diverse internal stakeholders are heard, recognised, and valued (Slabbert, 2015).

Inclusiveness and participation highlight that the organisation should consider the voices and interests of internal stakeholders when making decisions that advance its strategic objectives (Meintjes, 2012:25). Arguably, communication should be open to the transformative effects of internal communication, potentially bringing stakeholders into the decision-making processes of the organisation (Morsing & Schultz, 2006:327).

When employees are actively included and participate, they are more likely to share ideas, opinions, and thoughts (Men & Stacks, 2014:11). At SAMA, participation and inclusiveness can

help both management and employees exchange ideas, encouraging employee participation and enhancing their sense of belonging. These concepts will also help management and employees engage in interactive communication by listening and responding to different perspectives and ideas, which aligns with feedback (see Section 2.4.5). This can foster mutual understanding among both parties. To strengthen the organisational goals from a stakeholder-inclusive and participative perspective, it can be argued that employees should be provided with a voice and meaningful access to decision-making processes and active participation.

2.4.7 Transparency

In two-way symmetrical communication, transparency demonstrates attributes of dialogue and feedback that foster mutual understanding (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). An organisation is characterised by its key stakeholders, and they demand transparency and meaningful communication to gain an understanding of the organisation and its activities.

Transparency is defined as an organisation's communication with employees in which all legally releasable information, positive or negative, is made available in an accurate, timely, and unequivocal manner, with the goal of improving employees' reasoning abilities and holding the organisation accountable for its actions, policies and practices (Men & Stacks, 2014:11). Similarly, DiStaso and Bortree (2012:511) defined transparency as the degree to which management shares information with stakeholders.

Kotter (1996) stated that open and transparent communication nurtures employee trust and positive attitudes, which are vital for the success and sustainability of an organisation. In the context of SAMA, transparent internal communication could help management provide open and clear information to employees, building trusting relationships with employees.

Based on the discussion of the two-way symmetrical communication model, the following theoretical argument was formulated.

Theoretical guideline 2

In the case of SAMA, two-way symmetrical communication involves actively listening to internal stakeholders through **research** and meaningful **dialogue**. This approach should create **balanced communication** aimed at fostering **collaboration and negotiation**, providing **feedback**, and encouraging **participation and inclusiveness in decision-making** between the organisation and stakeholders. Moreover, this form of communication emphasises openness and **transparency** to reach a mutual understanding between both parties.

In the context of SAMA, the organisation should communicate strategically and effectively with its internal stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication, which could strengthen relationships within the organisation. A crucial aspect of managing internal communication is building and maintaining relationships between the organisation and employees. The following section discusses stakeholder relationship management literature and relationship-cultivation strategies.

2.5 STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Jahansoozi (2007:398) posits that stakeholder relationship management theory focuses on the need for organisations to build mutually beneficial relationships with their key stakeholders, which impact an organisation's operational excellence. Stakeholder relationship management is the practice of building quality relationships with stakeholders, including employees. It is defined as the management function of communicating strategically to actively and effectively build and manage mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its key stakeholders (Meintjes & Grobler, 2014:7).

The importance of managing stakeholder relationships implies that employees are the most important group of people with whom an organisation interacts, and that their engagement and satisfaction are important for the success of the organisation. Therefore, it is essential to communicate internally and maintain relationships (Jahansoozi, 2007:399).

Management should not only acknowledge relationships with stakeholders; maintaining relationships with stakeholders is crucial, yet impossible without sufficient two-way symmetrical communication (Khoza, 2015). In this view, there is a need to reinforce two-way symmetrical communication within the context of relationship management. Furthermore, it can be argued that the mutually beneficial relationships that exist within an organisation are likely the result of effective two-way symmetrical communication (Waters & Lemanski, 2011:154). Therefore, SAMA managers should manage relationships with their internal stakeholders through relationship-building strategies based on two-way symmetrical principles (Hon & Grunig, 1999:14-16). The following section discusses the relationship-building strategies relevant to this study.

2.5.1 Relationship-building strategies

According to Hung (2007:459), relationship building is a continuous process. An organisation must not only maintain a relationship with its current stakeholders but also periodically restore failed or deteriorated ones. In addition, Hon and Grunig (1999:14-16) identify several strategies

to build relationships that can be executed through two-way symmetrical communication with internal stakeholders.

The relationship-building or cultivation strategies describe how an organisation communicates with its internal stakeholders, manages conflicts, builds positive relationships, or restores damaged relationships (Grunig & Huang; 2000). Grunig (2005:5) similarly describes relationship strategies as communication methods that an organisation utilises to develop new relationships and manage any conflicts that occur in relationships.

2.5.1.1 Positivity

Positivity is defined as the effort or commitment of the organisation to ensure that stakeholders feel content and comfortable in their relationship. This strategy emphasises that organisations should take necessary actions or steps to foster a positive environment with efforts to maintain stakeholders' relationship (Grunig, 1992:231; Wiggill, 2009:49). Both parties invest in making relationships more enjoyable. This means that the organisation can keep stakeholders content by addressing their issues or interests promptly and effectively (Ki & Hon, 2009).

Positivity emphasises that organisations should communicate in a manner that fosters positive engagements and maintains pleasant communication (Hon & Grunig, 1999:14). This implies that an organisation should encourage dialogue, negotiation, and active listening with stakeholders while promoting teamwork and mutual benefit, such as an enjoyable relationship for both parties (Grunig, 1992:231). The positivity strategy is linked to mutuality, satisfaction, and trust (Ki & Hon, 2009:256). When internal stakeholders feel comfortable in relationships, it can lead to trust between both parties.

An organisation like SAMA can achieve positivity through a symmetrical communication method that promotes dialogue and addresses the interests and concerns of employees, fostering strong relationships that are mutually beneficial for both parties.

2.5.1.2 Openness or disclosure

The second strategy involves openness or disclosure through which organisations and stakeholders engage in open communication (Wiggill, 2009:49). Openness or disclosure is defined as the effort of the organisation and its stakeholders to exchange ideas and disclose important information honestly. The organisation should provide internal stakeholders with information about the nature of the organisation and its activities (Ki & Hon, 2009:8). This includes a willingness to discuss the nature of the relationship with key stakeholders to meet their needs and provide access to information (Grunig & Huang, 2000:34).

This approach corresponds with ethical conduct, as described by Grunig (1992), involving open and transparent communication that enables both parties to share their genuine thoughts and feelings. Therefore, SAMA should share ideas with its internal stakeholders through open, ethical, and transparent communication, disclosing important information to build and maintain trust.

The openness strategy requires stakeholders to both receive and share transparent information (Ki & Hon, 2009:8). When employees are provided with relevant information, they can engage in effective communication and ask for further clarity from management. This, in turn, creates opportunities for both parties to learn about each other's needs. In the context of SAMA, this strategy requires both parties to engage in the process of sharing information through two-way communication, learning what is expected from each other with the new organisational structure. Therefore, stakeholders should feel comfortable with the process of sharing information, as it leads to mutual understanding and strengthens trust-based relationships. This strategy was found to correlate with commitment and mutuality of control (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon and Grunig, 1999) and acts as a predictor of relational satisfaction.

2.5.1.3 Access

Access refers to the effort of both organisations and stakeholders to be accessible to one another (Ki & Hon, 2009). For this study, access is defined as the process of providing stakeholders with information and access to the organisation's decision-making processes. According to Hon and Grunig (1999), the access strategy is linked to the efforts of an organisation to provide effective channels of communication to stakeholders to maintain contact with the organisation. Therefore, the organisation and stakeholders practise symmetrical communication, engaging in meaningful exchanges with feedback opportunities (Grunig & Huang, 2000:34). This enables the organisation to consider the needs of its stakeholders. Moreover, access can be achieved when SAMA management makes information available and accessible to employees, showing their commitment to relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999:15).

The goal of applying access strategies is to ensure that both parties can retrieve information from each other (Grunig & Huang, 2000). The access emphasis strategic approach can be employed to allow stakeholders to reach the organisation and, conversely, enable the organisation to approach stakeholders. Furthermore, when both parties have access to each other through the appropriate channels, they can create opportunities for meaningful conversations, sharing ideas and different viewpoints (Ki & Hon, 2009:6). In the context of SAMA, access will not only facilitate sharing information but will also build trust and mutual commitment to relationships that are mutually beneficial.

2.5.1.4 Assurances of legitimacy

This strategy concerns the efforts of both parties to ensure that concerns are addressed as legitimate and consistent with shared values and behaviours. This strategy also includes efforts to show commitment to maintaining relationships (Grunig, 1992:15). In the context of SAMA, when both parties demonstrate commitment, it can reduce the aftermath of change, such as uncertainty, and create a sense of stability. This implies that internal communication should be a two-way symmetrical communication process in which employees can engage in dialogue and ask questions of management. In addition, organisations should provide answers to ensure legitimacy. Hung (2005) further noted that addressing concerns through collaborative problem-solving promotes organisational legitimacy, as it illustrates commitment between both parties.

Ki and Hon (2009:9) demonstrated that assurances can be a primary predictor of the trust outcome indicator because they allow stakeholders to show commitment, address their concerns, and reach solutions. This strategy can contribute to building relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders, fostering trust when assurance legitimatises the concerns of other parties.

2.5.1.5 Networking

This strategy involves the efforts and willingness of the organisation to build shared networks or further relationships within the same stakeholder group (Grunig, 1992:231). The networking strategy also allows both parties to access knowledge and resources, promoting cooperation. When an organisation networks within the same group, it can strengthen relationships through information exchange and mutual recognition of the matters concerning the organisation (Ki & Hon, 2009:8). Networking serves as an effective relationship maintenance strategy to ensure mutual control (Ki & Hon, 2009; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

Building networks requires organisations to collaborate and share ideas with their internal stakeholders, helping both parties reach common goals in relationships, such as mutual control, trust, and satisfaction (Hon & Grunig 1999:15; Brunner & O'Connell Smeltzer, 2010:2). For an organisation like SAMA and its internal stakeholders, working together towards common goals can foster inclusiveness and participation (see Section 2.4.6), which can lead to better relationships.

2.5.1.6 Sharing of tasks

The sharing of tasks involves both organisations and their stakeholders collaborating to solve problems and to share responsibilities. This practice can assist management in establishing and

sustaining positive relationships with their employees (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Furthermore, Ki and Hon (2009) contend that when organisations distribute tasks among employees, it demonstrates effort and willingness to cooperate, work together, and share concerns.

Furthermore, organisations should engage stakeholders in decision-making processes, as this approach fosters mutual dependence, with both parties relying on one another, which strengthens trust and employee commitment (Canary & Stafford, 2013; Ki & Hon, 2009). Similarly, Hon and Grunig (1999) argue that the sharing of tasks strengthens communal relationships, where both parties benefit from working together to attain shared goals rather than focusing on one-sided interests.

This process of sharing ideas and problem-solving depends heavily on two-way symmetrical communication methods. Therefore, in the context of SAMA, a strong relationship with internal stakeholders can be built through two-way symmetrical communication, using the appropriate platforms for idea-sharing and dialogue to build internal relationships.

2.5.1.7 Dual concern

Dual concern, also referred to as the mixed-motives strategy, aims to balance stakeholder interests with the interests of the organisation. It emphasises the importance of balancing the interests of both organisations and their stakeholders with a goal of achieving mutually beneficial outcomes.

Dual concern strategies, such as cooperating, unconditionally constructive, and asserting win-win or no-deal, and keeping promises, represent a two-way symmetrical worldview. According to Hon and Grunig (1999:17), the following strategies are most effective in establishing and maintaining a long-term relationship.

- **Cooperation:** the goal of the organisation is to align stakeholder interests with organisational goals in a manner that benefits both parties. That is, building mutually beneficial relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999). They further argued that cooperation fosters mutual understanding between the organisation and its key stakeholders by ensuring that both parties feel valued (Grunig & Huang, 2000:23–53). Similarly to Heath and Coombs (2006), they contend that two-way symmetrical communication encourages dialogue and cooperation, which increases trust while reducing conflict and uncertainty. When an organisation such as SAMA cooperates with employees, they can move beyond transactional interaction to meaningful, long-term relationships based on trust (Ki & Hon, 2009).

- **Being unconditionally constructive:** The organisation's efforts are directed towards maintaining relationships at all costs. The concept of being unconditionally constructive, as introduced by Fisher and Brown (1989), requires both parties to maintain constructive behaviour in their relationships, even when the other party does not show the same intentions. The concept of being unconditionally constructive in organisational communication requires strategic communication that prioritises relationship development over organisational gain (Grunig & Huang, 2000). This approach suggests that organisations should engage in positive behaviour, as it will eventually cause stakeholders to respond positively and strengthen their relationship, trust, and cooperation (Dozier *et al.*, 1995).
- **Asserting win-win or no-deal:** According to Hon and Grunig (1999), the win-win or no-deal strategy requires organisations to seek agreements that benefit all stakeholders while avoiding deals that do not provide mutual benefit between both parties. The principle of Covey (1989) indicates that organisations should engage in agreements that create value for both parties involved. This strategy discourages only one party from gaining benefit; it emphasises efforts to maintain fairness in organisational relationships. According to Ki and Hon (2009), fairness-based strategies lead to increased trust and satisfaction and result in long-term commitment. Moreover, Ki and Hon (2009) assert that strategies based on fairness are predictors of trust, satisfaction, and long-term commitment.
- **Keeping promises:** The strategy of promise-keeping is a vital relationship maintenance strategy that builds trust and strengthens long-term commitment between organisations and their stakeholders (Hung, 2001). The organisation builds stakeholder trust through successful commitment fulfilment, such as service delivery and transparent communication practices (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Theoretical guideline 3

In the case of SAMA, building and maintaining mutual beneficiary relationships through internal symmetrical communication is essential for fostering a positive work environment and enhancing employee engagement. Relationship-building strategies such as **positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises)** should be employed to build and maintain relationships with internal stakeholders.

2.5.2 Relationship outcomes

Building relationships executed through a symmetrical worldview enables organisations and their stakeholders to both generate and receive benefits (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3). The implementation of relationship-building strategies (see Section 2.5.1) can help organisations create an inclusive environment for all stakeholders (Ki & Hon, 2009; Slabbert, 2015). This fosters healthy mutual relationships between the organisation and its internal stakeholders.

If organisations can apply the strategies above to successfully develop and maintain relationships with internal stakeholders, there are four main outcomes that indicate the quality of these relationships, including trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction.

2.5.2.1 Trust

Trust is the willingness of both the organisation and its employees to be open to one another through symmetrical two-way communication with confidence that the other party will consider its interests when making decisions (Grunig, 1998:4; Lee, 2022:8). Furthermore, trust occurs when both parties hold favourable perceptions of each other and allow relationships to reach expected outcomes (Ki & Hon, 2009:249; Wheelless & Grotz, 1977:251).

The process of building a trusting relationship between the organisation and its employees involves integrity, fairness, and dependability (Grunig & Huang, 2000:42-47). Trust can be achieved through three dimensions: integrity, dependability, and competence (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3).

- **Integrity:** The belief that an organisation upholds fairness and delivers promised actions or commitments through ethical principles that guide its operations with stakeholders. The management at SAMA needs to maintain fair treatment of all employees throughout the process of handling organisational change and its aftermath.
- **Dependability:** The perception or belief that an organisation will dependably deliver what it promises to stakeholders. This implies that an organisation bases its decision-making process on employees' needs and interests (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2013:64). Stakeholders focus on assessing their ability to rely on the organisation to honour its commitments. Therefore, SAMA can maintain trust by delivering on its promises through proper employee communication during and after internal change processes.
- **Competence:** The organisation demonstrates competence by delivering on its promises through its ability to meet stakeholders' needs and expectations. The organisation needs to

establish employee confidence that it will fulfil its promises. In the context of SAMA, employees must feel content and confident that the organisation will do as it has promised.

Trust is a core element of cooperative, effective relationships because it determines how well organisations interact with their stakeholders (Waters & Lemanski, 2011:159). It encourages mutual acceptance and openness between both parties, who become receptive to hearing each other's views or opinions (Wong & Cheung, 2005:70). Furthermore, trust can be achieved through stakeholders' ongoing participation in the organisation's actions and activities. Murphy (2002:2) further contends that organisations face challenges when having to rebuild trust with their employees. In this way, the organisation needs to establish two-way symmetrical communication with employees to develop trust, which will stabilise their relationships.

In the context of SAMA, it is crucial to build trust with employees by communicating openly and transparently with their employees (see Section 2.4.7) and committing to what has been promised. Through this, trust develops between management and employees, renewing and strengthening relationships. Jahansoozi (2007) further emphasises that transparency is critical to maintain relationships, especially when trust is lost.

2.5.2.2 Commitment

Commitment can be explained as the extent to which both organisations and its stakeholders consider it worthwhile to invest time and energy in building a long-term relationship (Grunig, 2002:2; Grunig & Huang, 2000:46). It also refers to a situation in which both parties in the relationship direct their emotional attachment towards ensuring a continuous relationship (Jo *et al.*, 2005:4). Commitment is regarded as important when the partners in a relationship recognise the costs and benefits involved for both parties and are willing to invest effort in sustaining mutually beneficial relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994:23).

In the organisational context, commitment can be linked to employees who remain committed to the organisation by believing in its goals and values and by putting in effort to maintain the relationship (Grunig & Huang, 2000:46; Wasti, 2003). Management should also place effort into building and maintaining long-term relationships with employees (Grunig & Huang, 2000:46). Therefore, in the context of SAMA, both parties should view the ongoing relationships as important and be willing to make efforts to sustain it.

Commitment is crucial for organisational outcomes, as it reduces turnover, increases employees' loyalty and engagement (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The relationship between management and the employee within SAMA should be mutual, and this strengthens employees' commitment,

especially when their needs are aligned with the organisational goals. Commitment is facilitated by engaging in open and honest communication, keeping promises, ensuring fairness, and involving stakeholders in decision-making processes.

2.5.2.3 Control mutuality

Control mutuality refers to the extent to which employer and employees agree on who has rightful control over the other in the relationship (Stafford & Canary, 1991:224). This concept reflects that power balance (or imbalance) and control lie at the centre of satisfaction with the amount of control each party holds in the relationship as they determine the extent to which both parties can influence one another (Grunig, 2002:2; Heath, 2006:100). However, two-way symmetrical communication may produce mutual control in relationships between organisations and employees (Hon & Brunner, 2002:3). This implies that both parties are equal and consider each other equal in the relationship, and organisations should not exercise power over employees to obtain their own goals (Pressly, 2016:31).

Applying Hon and Brunner's (2002:3) principle of control mutuality within organisational settings allows management and employees to engage in decision-making through effective communication, fostering positive outcomes. Moreover, Ki and Hon (2007) found that mutual control predicts positive attitudes towards the organisation. Grunig and Grunig (1992:311) contend for allowing participation in decision-making (see Section 2.4.6). Therefore, organisations assign stakeholders with responsibilities to exercise control. Similar to Holtzhausen and Fourie (2013:64), they argued that organisations should value the opinions and views of their stakeholders as legitimate and allow them to participate in decision-making. This involvement gives stakeholders a balanced level of control or influence. In addition, Greeff (2013:44) discussed control mutuality in the context of stakeholder management relationships, arguing that the importance of relationships increases when employees are consulting in organisational goal-setting and their needs are considered.

In the context of SAMA, management should understand the needs of employees and adapt to them. This means that management should share power with employees. This can be executed through two-way symmetrical communication, allowing mutual control between the organisation and employees. Furthermore, SAMA could practise including employees at different levels in decision-making, with the main goal of building honest and open relationships, leading to mutual control in the relationship.

2.5.2.4 Relationship satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction refers to the extent to which each party perceives the other's actions favourably and as reinforcing positive expectations of the relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999:2). Satisfaction encompasses both affection and emotion and is conceptualised as a response to the reinforcement of positive expectations (Grunig & Huang, 2000:45; Jo *et al.*, 2005:14). In relationships where satisfaction is present, both parties receive equal rewards that outweigh the costs (Grunig & Dozier, 2002:553). Both parties can measure relationship satisfaction by determining whether the needs and expectations of stakeholders in the relationship meet and exceed the expectations of both parties (Jo *et al.*, 2005).

Satisfaction is an indicator of a good or quality relationship because it reflects the degree to which both parties of the relationship are satisfied with each other (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Ki and Hon (2009) further note that when stakeholders are satisfied with the relationship, they are more likely to remain loyal, cooperative, and supportive; thereby keeping the relationship strong in the long term. In organisational communication, satisfaction arises when the organisation demonstrates attentiveness, responsiveness, and mutual support to its stakeholders (Jo *et al.*, 2005).

It is important for SAMA to consider the quality of employee satisfaction by determining whether employees are content with the benefits and rewards they receive. Satisfaction derives from the expectations within the relationship between stakeholders and the organisation (Ferguson, 2018). This means that the organisation should practise transparent communication (see Section 2.4.7) and responsiveness to concerns that shape whether stakeholders perceive the relationship as rewarding.

When employees interact with managers about their needs, they feel important and have a sense of belonging, which positively impacts organisational goals and vision (Mishra *et al.*, 2014:197). When employees engage with management, it fosters a sense of value, recognition, and belonging, which are central to determining whether individuals perceive a relationship as fulfilling and worthwhile (Ki & Hon, 2009).

2.5.3 Types of relationships

There are different relationships that exist between an organisation and its stakeholders, namely exchange relationships and communal relationships.

2.5.3.1 Exchange relationships versus communal relationships

Exchange relationships are defined as relationships in which rewards are provided to another party with the expectation of receiving benefits of similar value in return (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20). In such relationships, one party gives rewards to another only when they believe that they will receive the equivalent rewards, either immediately or in the future (Greeff, 2013:45). In practice, these relationships are based on mutuality rewards or reciprocal giving, where both parties provide benefit to one another (Hon & Grunig, 1999). This form of relationship is transactional in nature, as each party weighs the costs and rewards of continued engagement (Hon & Grunig, 1999:3).

Exchange relationships may create an environment wherein the needs and expectations of both parties are met. In an organisational context, for example, employees provide their skills and labour in exchange for tangible rewards such as salary and other resources (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2013:22).

By contrast, communal relationships develop over time and are concerned with the welfare of others, where both parties are willing to contribute without expecting something in return (Hon & Grunig, 1999:2–3). Unlike exchange relationships, which are based on the expectation of direct reciprocation (Clark & Mills, 1993; Greeff, 2013:45), communal relationships are characterised by two-way symmetrical communication, enabling both parties to engage in dialogue and offer input because they care about one another. Therefore, the organisation should prioritise communal rather than exchange relationships with its stakeholders. Stakeholders should experience control mutuality (see Section 2.5.2.2), feeling that their needs are important and considered (Greeff, 2013:54).

In terms of stakeholder relationship theory, communal relationships signify that the actions of the organisation are directed towards benefitting stakeholders, rather than self-interest (Greeff, 2013:54; Ki & Hon, 2007). These actions were found to contribute to the success of the organisation because when employees feel that their needs are met and taken into consideration, it fosters loyalty, trust, and long-term commitment. They perceive the organisation as caring (Greeff, 2013:45; Ki & Hon, 2007). In the context of SAMA, after a process of change, the organisation should prioritise a communal relationship, displaying care about the well-being of both management and employees.

The literature suggests that internal communication should be strategic and conducted in a two-way manner for organisations to manage employer–employee relationships. In addition, the

literature suggests that relationship management should be two-way symmetrical to achieve outcomes such as trust, control mutuality, commitment, and relationship satisfaction.

Theoretical guideline 4

SAMA should strive to build internal relationships through two-way symmetrical communication based on relationship-building strategies, resulting in employer–employee relationships that are long-term in nature and mutually beneficial. These relationships can be measured by the following outcomes: **trust, commitment, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction**, as indicated by the stakeholder relationship management theory.

In the context of SAMA, it is pertinent to build and maintain relationships with employees. Furthermore, internal communication should be employed with guidelines from the strategic communication theory and the two-way symmetrical communication model to foster healthy relationships with internal stakeholders at SAMA.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored internal communication and its role in the management of employee and organisational relationships. The literature suggests that it is important to build employer–employee relationships for organisational success and sustainability, which should be done through effective internal communication. This chapter explored how strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationships can be utilised to build and maintain long-term relationships in the context of a changing environment.

Chapter 2 answered the first specific research question:

Which guidelines does the literature pose for internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management?

The first theoretical argument asserts that for SAMA to build and maintain relationships with employees, strategic communication should be a **purposeful, intentional, continuous, consistent, and stakeholder-centric process** to achieve the long-term goals of the organisation. Strategic communication emphasises that the overall management of internal communication should be strategic.

The second theoretical argument suggests that SAMA should communicate in a two-way symmetrical manner to foster **research, dialogue, balanced communication, collaboration and negotiation, feedback, participation, transparency, and inclusiveness in decision-making** (see Section 2.4). The third theoretical argument states that relationship-building strategies such as **positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises)** should be used to build and maintain relationships between management and employees. This should help SAMA establish mutual understanding to manage conflicts and apply relationship-building strategies, cultivating long-term relationships between the organisation and its employees. In line with the fourth theoretical argument, SAMA should strive to build internal relationships through two-way symmetrical communication based on the relationship-building strategies, which in turn results in employer–employee relationships that are long-term in nature and mutually beneficial. Those relationships can be measured by the following outcomes: **trust, commitment, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction**, as indicated by the stakeholder relationship management theory.

The theories discussed in this chapter and the identification of concepts from the literature were necessary to answer research question 1, to guide the rest of the study, and ultimately to guide SAMA in building and maintaining relationships with its internal stakeholders. It should be noted that the literature does not necessarily point out a previous change in an organisation as the context for the theoretical guidelines, as is the case with SAMA in this study. Therefore, the extent to which a previous change in the organisation could have an influence on its current internal communication and relationships surfaces to a certain extent in the empirical findings (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

In the next chapter, the research approach and methods are discussed to guide the empirical part of the study and to explore participants' perceptions.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 discussed the theoretical points of departure for the study through the lenses of strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management theories, in the context of internal communication. The focus of the previous chapter was on how these theoretical approaches should be applied when building and maintaining relationships with internal stakeholders by identifying theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs to guide the rest of the study.

Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative research approach and research methods used to collect data. The data collection process, sampling techniques, and data analysis are also discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion about the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the qualitative approach and methods employed.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research designs are the specific procedures used in the research process, including data collection, processing, and report writing (Creswell, 2014:34). The research design allows the researcher to combine various components of research in a reasonably logical manner so that the research problem is handled efficiently. This provides information on how to carry out research using a particular method (Polit & Beck, 2017:743).

In this study, the research design was guided by the general research question that this study aims to answer:

How is internal communication utilised to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

This general research question was divided into three specific research questions. Table 3.1 below illustrates the specific research questions and the research method used to answer them, which is used as the research design that guides the study.

Table 3.1: Research design

Specific research question	Research method
Which guidelines does the literature pose for internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management?	Literature study (already answered in Chapter 2)
What are the management’s perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?	Semi-structured interviews
What are the employees’ perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?	Focus group discussions

3.3 THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

There are two research approaches for conducting a study, namely quantitative and qualitative. These two approaches differ in application in the context of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:24). Quantitative research involves collecting numerical data through questionnaires or experiments and applying statistical methods for analysis. The primary goal is to provide objective, quantitative, and quantitatively described empirical facts (Creswell, 2014:34). Conversely, qualitative research exclusively captures non-numerical data such as words, images, and sounds, to thoroughly examine subjective experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:95). This critical exploration is typically conducted through observatory practices, in-depth interviews, or focus group discussions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015)

The current study is guided by a qualitative research approach, which is broadly defined as a naturalistic study that uses non-numerical data. It seeks to understand and explore rather than to explain and manipulate variables (Nassaji, 2020:428). A researcher following a qualitative approach seeks to explore and understand the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of the participants (Creswell, 2014:34-35; Du Plooy, 2009:34). Therefore, qualitative research explores meaning, purpose, or reality (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:44).

Qualitative research is a methodology used to study the nature of phenomena and the character of events to gain understanding and interpret events based on the meanings that individuals

attribute to them (Creswell, 2014:4). Qualitative researchers construct interpretive meaning by understanding the participant's experience, perceptions of a particular phenomenon, or the topic under study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:100). This study aims to gain a complete understanding of how internal communication is managed in SAMA to build and maintain employer–employee relationships; hence, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate approach.

The guiding theoretical arguments of the study have been previously discussed in Chapter 2, through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management theoretical approaches. The theoretical points of departure were used deductively to assist the researcher in exploring and analysing pre-existing themes, concepts, and constructs. The study examined the perceptions of management and employees regarding the nature of internal communication in managing employer–employee relationships in SAMA. The researcher gained a broad understanding of their perceptions and feelings and the meaning they attach to internal communication with SAMA through interaction with participants in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

Furthermore, qualitative research is based on flexible and exploratory methods because it enables the researcher to change the type of data collected progressively, so that a deeper understanding of what is being investigated can be achieved (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:99). For the current study, qualitative research was executed through semi-structured interviews and focus groups that involved open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their views (Creswell, 2009:175; Du Plooy, 2009:199).

The selection of a qualitative research approach was informed by the nature of the research questions, the objectives of the study, and the depth of understanding of the communication phenomenon under study. In addition, the researcher selected a qualitative approach because it allowed the study to focus on specific groups of participants within SAMA to gather their views and perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication in the management of the employer-employee relationship. In addition, the views of the management and the SAMA employees are considered.

3.4 THEORETICAL STATEMENT CONCEPTS AND CONSTRUCTS

Previous literature was identified by conducting database searches, which was discussed in Section 1.8.1. The theoretical assertions presented in Table 3.2 below were derived from the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2. The theoretical guidelines provided the basis for the development of concepts and constructs, which subsequently informed the design of the research instrument used in this study's empirical research.

Table 3.2: Theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs

Theoretical statement	Concept	Construct	Operational definition
Theoretical statement 1 It is imperative for SAMA to prioritise strategic communication to ensure internal stakeholders are engaged and supported. Strategic communication is a purposive and intentional communication process that directly aligns communication efforts with an organisation's strategic objectives. It emphasises a continuous and consistent process of communication or delivering messages, ensuring that specific goals are achieved while	Strategic communication	Purposive and intentional communication	The purposive and intentional process involves crafting clear, concise messages with a specific objective, aligned with the desired outcome of the organisation. SAMA should proactively share information, address concerns, and actively engage employees.
		Consistent and continuous process	Consistent and continuous communication is defined as the ongoing and reliable process of dissemination of messages that are aligned with the goals and strategies of an organisation.
		Stakeholder-centricity	Stakeholder-centricity refers to the process in which the organisation identifies, understands and prioritises the needs of its internal stakeholders throughout its lifecycle to achieve the successful outcome. This approach focuses on the importance of addressing the needs and concerns of internal stakeholders to build trust and enhance engagement.

prioritising stakeholder-centric perspectives at the forefront.			
Theoretical statement 2 In the case of SAMA, two-way symmetrical refers to actively listening to internal stakeholders through conducting research and engaging in meaningful dialogue . This approach should create balanced communication with the goal of fostering collaboration and negotiation , and providing feedback to encourage participation and inclusiveness in decision-making between the organisation and stakeholders. Moreover, this form of communication emphasises openness and transparency to reach a	Two-way symmetrical communication	Research	Communication research is defined as a form of two-way communication exchange in which an organisation actively listens to the diverse viewpoints and responds appropriately to the concerns of its key stakeholders, such as employees, to encourage mutually beneficial relationships.
		Dialogue	Dialogue is a form of two-way communication exchange where an organisation listens to diverse viewpoints and responds appropriately to the concerns of its key stakeholders, such as employees.
		Balanced communication	Balanced communication involves equality in communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders to encourage transparent and quality relationships that are mutually beneficial.
		Collaboration and negotiation	Collaboration in the context of SAMA refers to a process of two-way communication where both parties work together to achieve a shared goal. Similarly, negotiation involves an exchange of ideas between parties to reach a mutually beneficial agreement for everyone involved.
		Feedback	Feedback is the response of the receiver which reflects how the message was perceived. It is an essential component for facilitating understanding and for assessing to what extent communication is effective between an organisation and its key stakeholders.

mutual understanding between both parties.		Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making	Inclusiveness refers to the process of creating an environment where the voices of diverse internal stakeholders are heard, recognised, and valued. Participation can be defined as involvement in strategic decision-making through workgroups and teams, as well as in the setting of the organisational strategic agenda.
		Transparency	Transparency is defined as an organisation's communication with employees to make all legally publishable information, whether positive or negative, available in an accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal manner, with the goal of improving employees' reasoning abilities and holding organisations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices.
Theoretical statement 3 In the case of SAMA, building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships through internal symmetrical communication is essential for fostering a positive work environment and enhancing employee engagement. Relationship-building strategies such as positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas and dual concern	Stakeholder relationship management	Relationship-building strategies	
		Positivity	Positivity is defined as the effort or commitment of the organisation to do whatever it takes to ensure that stakeholders feel content and pleasant in their relationships.
		Openness or disclosure	Openness or disclosure refers to the efforts of the organisation and its stakeholders to engage in open communication to exchange ideas and disclose important information honestly. This involves the willingness of the organisation to discuss the nature of relationships with their key stakeholders to cater to/meet their needs and access information.
		Access	Access refers to the efforts of both organisations and stakeholders to be accessible to one another. For the current study, access is defined as the process of providing stakeholders with information and access to the organisation's decision-making process.

(including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises) should be employed to build and maintain relationships with internal stakeholders.		Legitimacy assurances	The efforts of both parties to ensure that concerns are addressed or legitimatised in terms of shared values and behaviours. This strategy also includes efforts to demonstrate commitment to maintaining relationships, which in turn leads to increased satisfaction and commitment from both sides.
		Networking	This strategy involves the organisation's efforts and willingness to build networks or form more relationships. This shared networking takes place with the same group of people. Thus, an organisation builds relationships with the same group as its stakeholders to build shared networks.
		Sharing of tasks	Task-sharing involves both an organisation and its stakeholders sharing responsibilities and collaborating to solve problems. This can help both management and employees in building and maintaining relationships with one another.
		Dual concern Cooperation Being unconditionally constructive Asserting win-win or no-deal	Dual concern emphasises the importance of balancing interests of both organisations and their stakeholders with the goal of achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. • Cooperation: the goal of the organisation is to align the interests of the stakeholders with the organisational goals in a manner that benefits both parties (building relationships that are mutually beneficial)

		Keeping promises	• Being unconditionally constructive: the organisation prioritises the relationship, even if it means sacrificing some of its goals, or if its stakeholders do not reciprocate its good intentions. • Asserting win-win or no-deal: this strategy emphasises that if the organisation and its stakeholders cannot find a mutually beneficial solution, they commit to not making a deal that does not benefit both parties. • Keeping promises: this has been identified as an important relationship maintenance strategy, strengthening trust and long-term commitment between the organisation and its stakeholders.
Theoretical statement 4 SAMA should strive to build internal relationships through two-way symmetrical communication based on the relationship-building strategies, which in turn results in employer-employee relationships that are long-term and mutually beneficial in nature. Those relationships can be measured by the following outcomes: trust ,	Relationship outcomes (including the types of relationships)	Trust	Trust is the willingness of both the organisation and the employees to be open to each other through symmetrical two-way communication with confidence that the other parties will take their interests into account when making decisions. It can be achieved through a combination of three dimensions: integrity, dependability, and competence.
		Commitment	Commitment can be defined as the extent to which both organisations and their stakeholders feel that it is worth investing time and energy in building a long-term relationship.
		Control mutuality	Control mutuality refers to the extent to which the organisation and its employees agree on who has control over the other. This reflects the power balance (or imbalance) between both parties. However, true two-way symmetrical communication may produce mutual control in relationships between organisations and employees.

commitment, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction , as indicated by the stakeholder relationship management theory.		Relationship satisfaction	Relationship satisfaction refers to the extent to which each party perceives the approaches or actions of the other as being favourable in the relationship. This is a result of reinforcing positive expectations about the relationship. Both parties receive equal rewards that outweigh the costs to the relationship.
		Exchange vs communal relationships	Exchange relationships are defined as relationships in which rewards are provided to another party with the expectation of receiving benefits of similar value in return. This form of relationship is transactional in nature, as each party weighs the costs and rewards of continuing with engagement. Communal relationships are relationships that develop over time, and both parties are concerned about the welfare of the other and are willing to contribute without expecting anything in return, unlike exchange relationships, which are based on the expectation of direct reciprocation.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative data in this study were gathered from participants through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. This section explains the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as data collection methods, as well as the development of the interview schedules and moderator's guide.

The specific research question 2 was addressed using semi-structured interviews conducted with the management of SAMA:

What are the management's perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

Specific research question 3 was answered through focus group discussions with a sample comprising SAMA employees:

What are the management's perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

3.5.1 Purposeful sampling of SAMA participants

Sampling is the process of selecting responses from the population of interest in the research study. Sampling from the population allowed the researcher to obtain data rapidly and affordably, rather than attempting to reach every single member of the population (Dana & Turner, 2020; Polit & Beck, 2017). Sampling design can be grouped into two main categories: probability and non-probability sampling. The term 'probability sampling' refers to a sample that has a good chance of matching the target population (Du Plooy, 2009:115), whereas 'non-probability' refers to a method in which participants cannot be selected randomly (Bryman & Bell, 2017:170).

Creswell (2007:125) confirms that qualitative research often employs the principle of purposeful sampling in which participants are selected for a specific purpose. It also enables researchers to target specific populations or characteristics relevant to their research objectives (Creswell, 2014:147). This study applied purposeful sampling to select participants from SAMA to form various departments (Figure 3.1).

It should be noted that the researcher (student) is an employee of SAMA and was excluded from the sampling criteria. Furthermore, this process was facilitated by two individuals; one from the Human Resources Department and one from the Corporate Affairs Department (see Section 1.8.2 and Section 3.5.3.2).

The overall inclusion criteria for the current study were based on participants who had worked for SAMA for more than a year, had experience with organisational communication, and participated in the restructuring process (see Section 1.8.2). The study excluded former employees and current employees who had not been employed for more than a year. These criteria were specifically formulated because SAMA underwent changes in 2022, which could still influence the current internal communication and relationships. Participants were intentionally chosen to ensure they could effectively contribute to exploring the identified research problem (see Section 1.3).

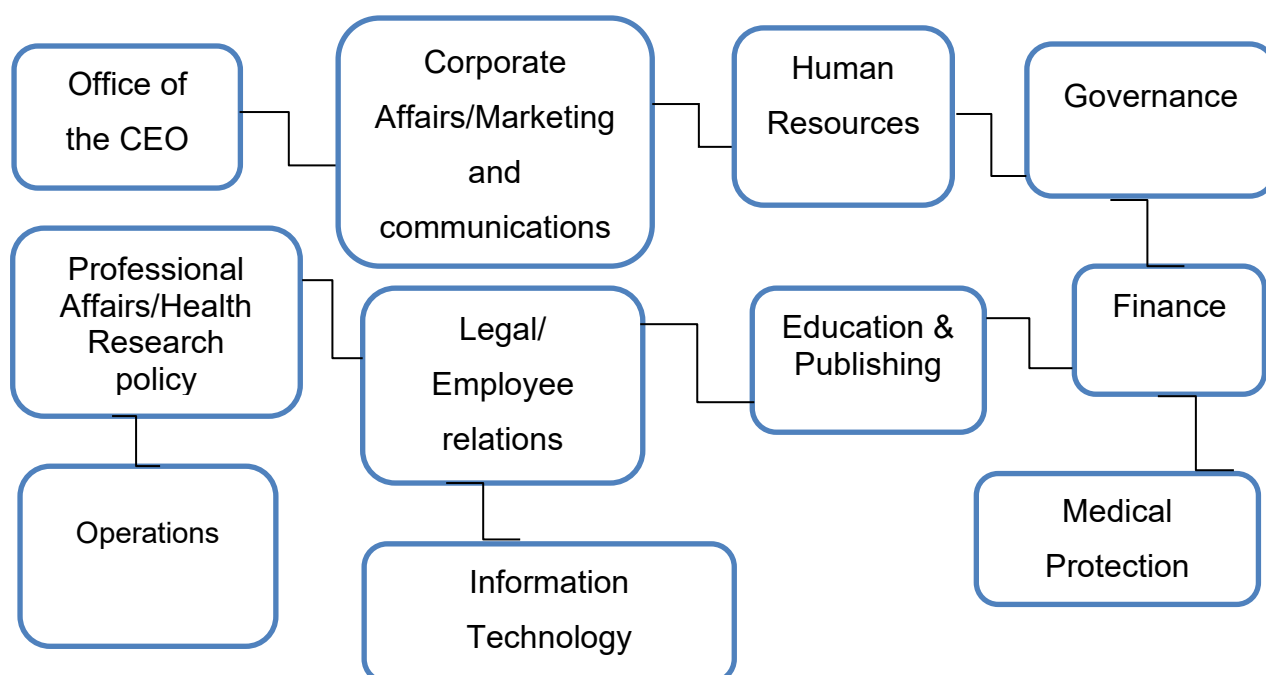


Figure 3.1: Departments within SAMA

There are eleven departments within SAMA responsible for various functions within the organisation. These departments are presented in Figure 3.1. The following section explains the sampling process for the management of SAMA.

3.5.2 Sampling of semi-structured interview participants (management)

When conducting a research study within an organisation, the sampling of participants is a crucial process to ensure that the right individuals are selected to represent the population being studied (Turner, 2020).

Purposive sampling was used as a valuable approach for selecting participants for the current study, as it enabled the researcher to target specific populations or characteristics relevant to their research objectives. Top and middle management were purposively selected,

considering their particular roles and expertise, to ensure that the selection was aligned with the objectives and focus of the study. These managers are essential contributors, as they have significant insights into the strategic frameworks, operational challenges, and everyday functions of the organisation. Management has valuable insights into an organisation's strategy, challenges, and operations that can enhance internal communication strategies. This management team plays an indispensable role in driving changes and managing their aftermath within the organisation. As a result, they should develop and maintain relationships with employees during the aftermath.

A total of sixteen interviews were conducted with SAMA management, representing various departments, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. Five interviews were conducted with top management (HOD), who are part of the executive committee (EXCO). Eleven interviews were conducted with middle management heads of units within the organisation (HOU), who form part of middle management (MANCO) (see Section 1.8.3). The interviews were primarily conducted via Teams meetings; however, four out of the sixteen interviews were conducted in face-to-face meetings, and recordings were made through an application on a device. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather management's perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA, based on the inclusion criteria mentioned above.

In the reporting of the data, participants were assigned pseudonyms and a number. For instance, participants at the top-level management were identified as TLM1 to TLM5, and the middle-level participants were referred to as MM1 to MM11. These pseudonyms were assigned to participants to help anonymise them, according to the ethical guidelines for this study (see Sections 1.10 and Section 3.7.4).

Table 3.3: Compilation of participants from management

Participants from departments at the top-level management (EXCO)	Participants from departments at the middle management (MANCO)
Human Resources	Corporate Affairs: Communication Specialist
Governance	Health Policy and Research
Education and Publishing	Professional Services
Legal Affairs	Clinical Coding
Information Technology	Human Resources
	Operations
	Legal/Employee Relations: Labour law
	Legal/Employee Relations: Employment Law
	Education and Publishing: Production
	Education and Publishing: Marketing and Sales
	Medical Protection

3.5.3 Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative research often employs semi-structured interviews as a data collection technique. These interviews are conducted with an individual, allowing researchers to gain valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the topic being studied (Du Plooy, 2009:199). Semi-structured interviews are conducted once and usually last between 30 minutes to over an hour, but follow-up interviews could follow (Babbie & Mouton, 2010:270). For the current study, interviews were conducted once with each participant, and no follow-up questions were asked.

Semi-structured interviews contain specific questions that outline the areas of study to be explored while allowing for flexibility, enabling participants to freely express their viewpoints, raise concerns, and adjust the interview's content (Williman, 2021:99). These interviews facilitate in-depth discussions, as respondents answer open-ended questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:270), and the interviewer can effectively probe deeper into the interviewee's responses, adjusting the order of topics covered to elicit more comprehensive and insightful responses (Gillham, 2005:41).

Semi-structured interviews are guided by an interview schedule that outlines the questions or topics the researcher intends to explore (McNeill & Chapman, 2005:29). These interviews

foster interactive dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee, promoting engagement to better understand participants' experiences and perceptions (Bailey, 2018:100). In general, structured and semi-structured interviews are effective tools for gaining insights into participants' experiences related to the central themes of the research area (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:183).

The first key advantage of semi-structured interviews is their ability to combine the structured approach of interviews with the flexibility of unstructured ones (Du Plooy, 2009:198). This adaptability allows researchers to address various topics during the interview process while maintaining a clear framework (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009:120). Secondly, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to facilitate a direct comparison of different responses of participants given to the same questions (Du Plooy, 2009:198). The emphasis in these interviews is on understanding and interpreting the participants' lived experiences.

A semi-structured interview is a suitable data collection method for research because it allows researchers to identify specific aspects of the phenomenon based on prior knowledge before conducting the interview (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009:176). Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to study individuals' perceptions and opinions. Finally, this format allows the participants the freedom to express meaningful opinions and perceptions while allowing the interviewer to maintain focus on the topic at hand (Qu & Dumay, 2011:246). They further explain that the semi-structured interview is generally based on an interview schedule (guide) and typically focuses on the main topic that provides a general structure for discussion (Qu & Dumay, 2011:246; Taylor, 2005:47).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were deemed a suitable data collection method, based on the advantages and processes described above. They were used to investigate management's perceptions of internal communication and its impact on employer–employee relationships at SAMA. The interview schedule was developed based on the theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs identified in theory (see Chapter 2) and guided the semi-structured interviews.

The Human Resource Department drafted the invitation letter for SAMA employees based on an example provided by the researcher, granting permission to the Communication Specialist from Corporate Affairs to send out communication. A formal letter was then emailed to the participants, containing a brief introduction and an explanation of the purpose of the study (see Section 1.8.2). Thereafter, the emailed participants were invited to reply directly to the researcher via email to schedule an interview at a date and time convenient to them. Following the distribution of the invitation, recruitment challenges were encountered. The researcher

conducted several follow-ups through phone calls and emails. Some members from top-level management who met the inclusion criteria were unavailable to participate. Nevertheless, the researcher successfully scheduled dates and conducted interviews with employees who consented to participate.

Each participant who volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview received a consent form to sign (see Addendum C). Although the letter explained the purpose of the study, some participants experienced difficulty reading and understanding the consent form. The researcher therefore explained its content before conducting the interviews. They were informed that their involvement would be for academic purposes only and were assured that their identities would remain confidential when reporting findings. Consent was also obtained for the recording of each interview.

During the interviews, answers were recorded digitally and transcribed via the Teams platform. For participants who experienced technical difficulties, and for those interviewed face to face, recordings were captured using a recording application on a mobile device.

A total of five interviews were conducted with the top-level management of SAMA. Additionally, eleven interviews were conducted with middle management. The semi-structured interviews took place via MS Teams and in person during March 2025 to April 2025. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, with some conducted on the same date at different times. Four interviews were conducted face to face and twelve via Teams.

Table 3.4: Date for semi-structured interviews with the management of SAMA

	Date	Venue
Top Management (HOD)		
HOD (2nd pilot) Human Resource	13 March 2025	Teams Meeting
HOD Legal	25 March 2025	SAMA Boardroom
HOD Information Technology	25 March 2025	Teams Meeting
HOD Governance	27 March 2025	Teams Meeting
HOD Education and Publishing	2 April 2025	Teams Meeting
Middle Management (HOU)		
Professional Affairs/Health Research policy	10 March 2025	Teams Meeting
Education and publishing sales and marketing	13 March 2025	Teams Meeting
Legal-Advisor	24 March 2025	Teams Meeting
Legal Employee relations	25 March 2025	SAMA Boardroom
Education and publishing Cape Town	27 March 2027	Teams Meeting
Professional Affairs: professional services	28 March 2025	Teams Meeting
Professional Affairs (Clinical Coding)	31 March 2025	Teams Meeting
Medical Protection	01 April 2025	SAMA Boardroom
Human Resource	11 April 2025	Teams Meeting
Operations	11 April 2025	SAMA Boardroom

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed promptly after each session to ensure that all responses and data were captured accurately. The transcription process enabled a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the information (see Section 3.6), which is presented in Chapter 4 of the study.

3.5.3.1 Interview schedule

Interview schedules are scripts created to assist the researcher in completing interviews within the available time. In addition, Greeff (2005: 296) asserts that the term 'interview schedule' is used to describe a question sheet that directs the interview. The interview schedule should consist of essential questions that a researcher should ask the participants, as well as examples of how and where to probe (Turner, 2010:755).

Developing an interview schedule before conducting interviews offers certain advantages. It aids the researchers in articulating objectives for the interview while also encouraging them to anticipate any challenges that might arise during the process (Greeff, 2005). Additionally, an interview schedule structures the discussion and enables the researcher to navigate through different sections easily (Liamputtong, 2011:76).

In this study, the theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs discussed in Chapter 2 were used to develop semi-structured interview questions. The researcher compiled an interview schedule based on questions constructed from the literature to gather information from the management and a communication specialist at SAMA (see Section 3.5.2).

A pilot interview was conducted with one member of middle management via a Teams meeting to gauge whether the questions are relevant and effectively aligned with the study's objectives. This pilot interview was also used to determine if participants would understand the questions. After the pilot interview, the research questions in the interview schedule were not adjusted, as all seemed suitable and understandable to the participant. Therefore, this participant's data was also used in the reporting of the data.

Please see Addendum D for the interview schedule used to conduct semi-structured interviews with management members at SAMA in this study.

3.5.3.2 Sampling of participants for focus group discussion

As a second data collection method, interviews were conducted with five focus groups, each comprising four to five employees from different departments, as outlined in Table 3.5. When planning focus group interviews, it is vital for the researcher to ensure that the participants reflect the qualities and diversity of the target demographic (Kitzinger, 2006:57; Nieuwenhuis & Van Woerkom, 2007:91).

A wide range of perspectives and experiences was gained from the participants in the focus groups, as these individuals were chosen from various organisational areas in SAMA. The

quality of the data gathered was improved by this careful selection procedure, which also led to more fruitful research findings (Kitzinger, 2006:58).

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for focus group discussions. The researcher excluded herself from the sampling process. The researcher carried out this process by requesting a list of SAMA employees who had been employed at SAMA for a year. A standard letter to invite participants was drafted by HR and was sent with a list of employees to a Communication Specialist from Corporate Affairs, who facilitated the process of sending the invitation by email (see Section 1.8.2). After the initial email was sent, the researcher faced challenges in obtaining participants. A follow-up was done through email, WhatsApp, and phone calls. Therefore, the researcher performed a convenience sampling and grouped participants together based on their willingness and availability to participate in the research study.

Employees are the most important stakeholders in any organisation; they form part of strategic planning, and their involvement and participation are crucial to the organisation's success (see Section 2.5). The inclusion criteria were based on the argument that employees contribute to the organisational goals and vision as well as the overall organisational structure (Kim, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2021). Their inclusion can provide invaluable insights into how they perceive internal communication and current relationships between employees and management.

In the context of SAMA, there are one hundred and fifteen (115) employees in the organisation. Sixty employees were eligible to participate in the study because they met the inclusion criteria of being employed in SAMA for more than one year. A total of 25 employees consented to participating in the focus group discussion. One participant was unavailable to join at the last minute, resulting in 24 participants for the focus group discussions. Their experience and understanding of the organisation's operations enabled them to offer informed feedback on internal communication and relationship management.

Table 3.5: Participants for focus group discussions

	Department and roles	
Group 1	Education and Publishing: Administrative	
	Corporate Affairs: Recruitment & retention officer	
	Governance: Administrative personnel	
	Education and Publishing: Editorial assistant	
	Professional Affairs (at the last minute, she was unavailable to join)	
Group 2	Branch Administrators in different regions reporting to Corporate Affairs, responsible for administration and recruitment	SAMA Limpopo
		SAMA Free State
		SAMA Gauteng North
		SAMA Broader Coastal
		SAMA Tygerberg
Group 3	Finance: Administrative/ Bookkeeper	
	Medical Protection: Membership Advisor	
	Medical Protection: Indemnity Assistant	
	Operations: Assistant	
	Corporate Affairs: Data analyst	
Group 4	Legal: Administrative	
	Information Technology: Web Developer and IT Administrator	
	Senior Branch Administrator: Lowveld Branch	
	Senior Branch Administrator: Northwest Branch	
Group 5	Senior Branch Administrator: KZN Coastal	
	Senior Branch Administrator: SAMA Goldfields	
	Operations & Professional Affairs Administrator	
	Branch Administrator: Transkei	
	Education & publishing: Senior Client Relationship Officer	

3.5.4 Focus groups

A focus group discussion is an example of an in-depth and open-ended discussion that is conducted with a small number of people. In a focus group, the number of participants is approximately five to six, though it can also have five to ten participants, depending on the nature of the study (Hennink, 2013:1). It is worth noting that focus group discussions typically employ more than one type of approach. They can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. These different approaches also depend on the discussion topic or the nature

of the participants (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013:132). Theories suggest that focus group discussions are facilitated by the researcher and should last between 45 minutes and 1 hour (Morgan, 2002:142). For the current study, the focus group discussions lasted for 40 minutes to an hour. The first focus group lasted 35 minutes, and participants found the research questions difficult.

Focus group discussions are a recognised qualitative research method used to gather in-depth insights and diverse viewpoints on specific topics (Creswell & Cresswell, 2018:164; Kitzinger, 2006:57). This method involves bringing together a carefully chosen group of individuals with relevant characteristics or experiences (Morgan, 2018:161). Focus groups are facilitated through structured and open-ended dialogues, which encourage participants to express their thoughts and feelings in detail (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013:131). Focus groups involve the following features: (i) they are useful in generating a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs; and (ii) they provide information about a range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about certain data (Kitzinger, 2006:57; Rabiee, 2004:656). For the current study, SAMA employees shared their perceptions and experiences regarding the topic under study with one another within the groups that they were assigned to. The researcher gained a better understanding of how participants perceived the internal communication and SAMA as an entire organisation.

The researcher acted as the moderator during the focus groups and started each discussion with a warm welcome, after which she introduced herself and explained the purpose of the focus group. Ground rules were established at the beginning of each focus group; for example, one person could speak at a time, participants should respect differing opinions, etc. The researcher also explained to the participants that their participation is voluntary and that if they felt uncomfortable during their participation, they could withdraw from the research process at any time. Permission to record the session was requested from the participants. Some sessions were recorded digitally via Teams, and the sessions with participants who had face-to-face interviews were recorded on the device. During focus group discussions, each participant was assigned a number for transcription purposes; for instance, participants for focus groups were identified as participants 1 to 5.

The focus groups were conducted in April 2025. Four sessions were held via MS Teams meetings, because the majority of participants were based outside of the head office. One focus group session was held in person in the boardroom of the head office, because all participants were physically available (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Dates and venues for focus groups

Focus group session	Date	Venue
Group 1	2 April 2025	MS Teams meeting
Group 2	8 April 2025	MS Teams meeting
Group 3	10 April 2025	SAMA Boardroom
Group 4	11 April 2025	MS Teams meeting
Group 5	17 April 2025	MS Teams meeting

3.5.5 Moderator's guide

To keep the sessions focused while encouraging free and spontaneous responses, the researcher (moderator) used a moderator's guide listing the main topics or themes to be covered in the session (Hennink, 2013:2-3). For the current study, it served as a roadmap that guided the researcher in covering the group discussions with employees at SAMA and ensured the discussions remained focused. The questions were purposefully structured to begin with broader contextual inquiries related to internal communication. Furthermore, the moderator's guide consists of the same concepts and constructs identified from strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management theory (see Chapter 2).

To ensure that the questions were relevant and effectively aligned with the study's objectives, the researcher carried out an informal pilot focus group discussion with the first focus group. The discussion was focused on gathering in-depth insights into their perceptions and experiences regarding internal communication practices at SAMA. The goal of engaging employees in focus groups was to identify specific areas of concern regarding the themes and questions asked, which subsequently informed the adjustments and refinement to the questions in the moderator's guide. This process enhanced the quality of the moderator's guide and ensured that it accurately captured employees' perceptions regarding internal communication within SAMA. Please see Addendum E for the moderator's guide used to conduct focus group discussions with SAMA employees.

Once data collection was completed from both semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the next step was to analyse the data. For the current study, data were analysed through qualitative content analysis.

3.6 QUALITATIVE CONTENT DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher employed qualitative content analysis for this study, a technique that assists researchers in examining the content of documents. This process is complex and involves various interconnected analyses and synthesis methods (Krippendorff, 2018:24). Qualitative content analysis constitutes a process that systematically identifies categories and patterns within the collected data through the application of coding methods. This approach allows researchers to articulate their findings in relation to established concepts and constructs within the academic literature, thereby enhancing the validity and significance of their contributions to the field (Daymon & Holloway, 2011:323; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Coding in qualitative research refers to the analytical process of categorising unprocessed data into meaningful categories that enhance interpretation (Krippendorff, 2018:128).

The researcher conducted a qualitative content analysis of the transcripts obtained through the interviews and focus groups. A deductive approach was used to analyse the transcriptions, applying the same concepts and constructs derived from the literature study in Chapter 2 to develop the interview schedule and moderator's guide. This helped identify key concepts and constructs relevant to the research topic, facilitating systematic coding of the data for deeper analysis and clearer interpretation.

First, data from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim into MS Word, meaning all dialogues and responses were captured word for word without alteration. Following the transcription phase, each theoretical construct was assigned a distinct colour. The coding phase included visually organising and arranging data from the transcripts into the colour-coding schemes. This organised, colour-coded data was then used for in-depth analysis, allowing the researcher to interpret findings in relation to the research questions and objectives, as well as the theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs that guided the study and were identified in Chapter 2. This structured coding and analysis process helped ensure a comprehensive understanding of the transcription data (Krippendorff, 2018:128).

3.7 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

3.7.1 Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is defined as the degree to which a study can be replicated by different researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2017:44). The reliability of qualitative research is particularly dependent on the uniformity of interpretations and the coherent application of the findings across different contexts (Du Plooy, 2009:121).

The current study integrates concepts and constructs from the literature study, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Additionally, the qualitative data analysis employs a content-based approach, drawing on theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs derived from the literature. Each of these components was designed to gather rich, qualitative data that contributes to a deeper understanding of the internal communication on managing employee–employer relationships at SAMA.

Furthermore, the qualitative data analysis adheres to a content-based framework, systematically examining the theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs that emerge from the literature. Moreover, data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were analysed through qualitative content analysis, ensuring accurate and detailed analysis of the findings. This approach enhances the credibility and reliability of the research outcomes.

3.7.2 Validity

The validity of a measurement instrument refers to its effectiveness in accurately assessing the construct it intends to measure (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:114). Furthermore, validity is defined as the degree to which an empirical study effectively captures the true significance of the concepts and constructs being investigated (Bryman & Bell, 2017:43). The degree to which the researcher's findings align with the study's objectives reflects reality and demonstrates integrity and quality (Krippendorff, 2018:362-263).

In the current study, various concepts and constructs were derived from established theoretical statements and frameworks. These concepts and constructs are considered valid, as they are directly related to the theoretical approaches explored in Chapter 2. Validity in this context supports the reliability of the findings and reinforces the credibility of the research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2017:44).

It is important to note that validity in qualitative research differs from that in quantitative research; qualitative researchers often refer to concepts such as 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity' (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:296). Therefore, in qualitative research, the concept of validity is often synonymous with trustworthiness, emphasising the importance of transparency, credibility, and the authentic representation of the data collected (Krippendorff, 2018:362). Similarly, Le Roux (2011) mentions that in the context of qualitative research, the notion of validity can also be interpreted as trustworthiness.

3.7.3 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the entire study in a comprehensive sense. The researcher can facilitate this judgement by establishing accuracy during the research process and by giving trials, allowing readers to understand how and why decisions were taken (Graneheim *et al.*, 2017:33). For the current study, the researcher ensured trustworthiness by maintaining credibility through the correct interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

To establish trustworthiness, a systematic approach to data collection and analysis was implemented. This process involved carefully designed methods and instruments for gathering data, ensuring that all protocols were followed (Babbie & Mouton, 2011:122). Every finding is presented in detail, providing a clear and transparent account of each stage in the research process. Furthermore, the researcher elaborates on the data collected, highlighting diverse perspectives and context to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the findings (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5).

3.7.4 Ethical considerations

In qualitative research involving human participants, several ethical principles need to be considered, such as voluntary participation, anonymity, doing no harm, confidentiality, not misleading participants, as well as the option to withdraw from the research at any time (Babbie & Mouton, 2011:521). The current study was conducted in accordance with the approved ethical standards of the North-West University. This was approved by the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) with the ethics number: NWU-01076-24-A7 (see Section 1.10, Addendum A and the BaSSREC ethics approval). Furthermore, no changes were made to the research approach or methods after the study was approved.

Prior to conducting research within SAMA, permission was obtained from both the Research and Policy Department and the Human Resources Department to include employees in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (see Addendum C). Additionally, before participants took part in the study, a consent form was distributed for them to read and sign to the effect that they understood all aspects of their informed consent (see Addendum B). This process of sending invitation letters with consent forms was facilitated by a Communication Specialist from Corporate Affairs (see Section 1.8.2).

When conducting research, several ethical considerations must be considered, including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation and right to withdraw

(Babbie & Mouton, 2011:28; Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). These ethical issues were discussed when the participants were informed about the research study, and their consent was acquired before proceeding with interviews (see Section 3.5.3). Furthermore, it was explained to the participants that participation in the study was voluntary, that no personal questions would be asked, and that they could withdraw from the research process at any time (see Section 3.5.4). The researcher emphasised that the collection of data was for academic purposes only. No potential risk was identified related to their participation in the study.

The researcher ensured anonymity and that information should only be known to the researcher and should not be made available to anyone else (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The researcher furthermore ensured that the participants' identities were kept anonymous and were not shared with anyone during or after the study. In addition, the researcher ensured that the research would not harm the participants in any manner.

3.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the qualitative research approach and two qualitative research methods (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) were discussed. These methods were used to gather data on the perceptions of management and employees regarding internal communication in managing relationships at SAMA.

The following two chapters discuss and analyse the findings from the semi-structured interviews with management at SAMA to answer specific research question 2 (Chapter 4) and findings from focus groups with employees at SAMA to answer specific research question 3 (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF TOP AND MIDDLE MANAGEMENT AT SAMA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the qualitative methodological approach used in this study. As described in Chapter 1, this study seeks to investigate the effects of internal communication on the management of employer–employee relationships at SAMA. It has been argued that effective internal communication practices should be employed to maintain positive employer–employee relationships. Therefore, internal communication should be conducted strategically, employing a two-way symmetrical communication approach, which is crucial for organisations to manage stakeholder relationships (see Section 1.2).

The primary objective of this study is to determine the nature and effects of internal communication in the workplace in building and maintaining mutually beneficial and strong relationships with employees in order to increase organisational effectiveness. This will be done without losing sight of the influence that previous internal changes at SAMA may have had on the current internal communication and relationships (see Section 2.2.1).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain views on the internal communication practices with participants drawn from the management level. The interviews contained specific questions that outlined the areas of study to be explored with the participants, allowing them to freely express their views on the questions asked. Participants from top and middle management were purposefully selected based on their different roles and responsibilities within SAMA (see Sections 1.7.3; Section 3.5.2 and Table 3.3). To anonymise participants, they were assigned abbreviations and numbers. For instance, participants at top-level management were identified as TLM1 to TLM5, and the middle management participants as MM1 to MM11 (see Section 3.6.2).

The findings are discussed according to the theoretical statements and defined concepts and constructs set out in Sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3, described in Chapter 3 and operationalised in Table 3.2.

This chapter analyses the views shared by the management during the semi-structured interviews conducted. These views answer specific research question 2:

What are management perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships within SAMA? (See Section 1.3.1)

4.2 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Strategic communication is the purposeful management of communication between an organisation and its key stakeholders on a long-term basis to meet measurable objectives in a realistic timeframe (see theoretical statement 1, Section 2.3, and Table 3.2).

4.2.1 Purposive and intentional communication

As previously defined, a purposive and intentional communication process involves crafting clear and concise messages with specific objectives aligned with the desired outcomes of the organisation (See Section 2.3.1 and Table 3.2).

4.2.1.1 Perceptions of top-level management

During the semi-structured interviews, when asked about intentional and purposeful communication, it appeared that this concept was viewed differently according to top-level management's roles and functions within the organisation. The general view among participants was that the internal communication process was clear and well managed. However, others at this level expressed a contrasting view, suggesting that it was not managed well. These differing perspectives may be the result of varied roles and experiences of participants, especially during the internal change management process. The roles of top-level management include strategic planning, effective communication, and driving change.

The responses of the majority of participants in this group showed that purposeful and intentional communication is mandatory and was used effectively to share important information, engage, and listen to employees during the restructuring process. In addition, they highlighted that the communication strategy clearly communicates the vision and mission of SAMA. They perceived communication within SAMA positively.

For example, participant TLM5 said that *'It's a mixed bag, because our communications have to deal first with our members, which is external communication, and then there is internal communication. I think on the internal communication side, during change, it works well whenever there is. Stuff, movements, or whatever it is we do, get notified timelessly, and it usually happens on more than one platform'*.

In addition, participant TLM1 indicated that while there may be some level of 'hierarchal red tape' in this approach (referring to the internal communication process), that can be justifiable.

The participant indicated that it is essential to create space for employees to share their thoughts and receive feedback.

What is shown from the sentiments of the participants above is that internal communication appeared to be purposeful and positive during the internal change process, reflecting an organisational culture that values strategic communication and recognises its importance in fostering clear and effective information sharing. They also recognise that platforms should be created for employees to share their thoughts. Literature similarly suggests that communication should be clear and aligned to the overall organisational objectives (see Section 2.3.1). Findings show that communication appears to be aligned with purposive and intentional communication.

In contrast to the above responses, participant TLM3 *consistently highlighted that a good, effective, unambiguous communication strategy is critical to driving internal changes within SAMA*. Therefore, communication should aim to ensure that everyone understands the message by it at the appropriate level. This participant also highlighted that it is important to acknowledge that most of the officials are not native English speakers, which contributes to many breakdowns in communication.

For example, TLM3 explained that *the company's communication strategy had good intentions but did not properly acknowledge the audience (employees)*. This participant observed that communication was pitched at a very high executive level. This confirms the need for a clear communication strategy for internal changes involving SAMA, and that employees at all levels are included in the development of such a strategy.

4.2.1.2 Perceptions of middle management

Participants from this group shared both similar and contrasting views on intentional and purposeful communication within SAMA. Perceptions may be influenced by different roles, which involve supporting strategic inputs by top management and ensuring the support of staff members. The various roles of both help create shared similarities and differences in terms of their perspectives on the effectiveness of internal communication within SAMA.

On a positive note, some participants indicated that there is improvement in communication since the major restructuring was implemented. Others expressed that communication within the organisation is clear and aligned with its goals, describing it as effective, intentional, and delivered through various platforms such as internal meetings and WhatsApp groups. They felt that this form of communication helps establish a good rapport between the leadership and employees by ensuring that everyone understands the rationale behind anticipated

changes and their potential effects on their positions. It is evident that the participants of this group believe that clear communication occurs primarily when leadership is involved. This view was shared by MM1, MM3, MM4, and MM5.

For example, participant MM3 contends that *'I think that they communicate well with the staff. I think once again, it's the communications department, plays an important role, acting on the management instruction to communicate to staff, and things are widely communicated on the WhatsApp and email.'*

Participant MM5 asserts that currently, *'communication is deliberate, with structured sessions for employee buy-in before changes are rolled out. There is clear accountability for management to lead communication within their teams. This includes defining the goals clearly, tracking and monitoring the performance management, and integrating communication to the overall performance goals.'* The responses of the participants above confirm that communication within SAMA has improved.

The majority of participants from this group pointed out that the concept of change management (restructuring) appears not to be clearly understood among internal stakeholders. They highlighted that there appeared to be insufficient communication and that the process was not clear to everyone. In addition, they perceived communication as reactive rather than proactive. They felt that the higher authorities at SAMA applied an authoritarian approach instead of an inclusive one when engaging in important changes that affect employees. Participants MM2, MM8, MM10, and MM12 reflected on these views.

The shared sentiment highlighted the critical gap in internal communication practices within SAMA concerning the management of internal change. The responses of participants above suggest that communication is in place; however, it appears to be unclear rather than clear and inclusive. The sentiment shared by the participants reflects the need for a proper diagnosis of communication issues and the development of a more effective strategy.

This discussion highlights differing perceptions across management levels within SAMA regarding purposive and intentional communication; while both management levels acknowledge clarity and intentionality, their experiences and evaluations differ significantly. Top management shared positive views on internal communication and believed that there had been an improvement, as shown by the implementation of the communication calendar. They also believed clear communication aligned with strategic goals was maintained through different channels within SAMA. They acknowledged sharing important information and engaging with and listening to employees during the restructuring process. By contrast, middle

management expressed that the restructuring implemented by SAMA appears not to be clearly understood among internal stakeholders. They emphasised the need for a proper diagnosis of communication issues and development of a more effective strategy.

The following section discusses findings on consistent and continuous communication based on the perceptions of different management levels presented in Section 3.5.2 and Table 3.3.

4.2.2 Continuous and consistent process

Continuous and consistent communication was previously defined as an ongoing and reliable process of message dissemination aligned with the goals and strategies of an organisation (see Sections 2.3.2 and Table 3.2).

During interviews, when asked about consistent and continuous communication, participants from top and middle management expressed differing views based on their roles and experiences within the organisation.

4.2.2.1 Perceptions of top-level management

The responses from the majority of participants from this group acknowledged consistent and continuous communication, pointing out that messages were disseminated through various reliable channels such as staff meetings, emails, and WhatsApp groups. They further mentioned CEO roundtables where regular, new information and feedback were provided to facilitate ongoing internal communication. Introductions of SAMA structures were presented and suggestion boxes utilised to ensure ongoing communication both during and after change. These channels were consistently used to ensure that SAMA's goals and strategies were communicated to the internal stakeholders.

The participant TLM4 indicated that *'the communication in SAMA is well structured and suitable for purpose [sic]'*. In support of this statement, this participant indicated that communication in SAMA is regular and that platforms are available. Additionally, the participant indicated that a communication team and EXCO are also available to contact employees. Meanwhile, TLM5 pointed out that *'internal communication (emails and WhatsApp) was consistent during internal changes, with Business Hour meetings held almost weekly. We met almost every week.'* This also confirms that communication within SAMA is perceived as continuous by the majority of participants who form the core of top management.

In contrast to the perceptions provided above, participant TLM3 noted that communication is inconsistent and expressed that sometimes *'decisions were communicated without a proper approach on how to adopt them.'* The participant further indicated that even with technological

advances in the communication space, such as WhatsApp, SAMA had failed to take full advantage of these tools, as they were used selectively for sharing information.

4.2.2.2 Perception of middle management

Participants from this group acknowledged the importance of organised communication initiatives for maintaining internal relationships despite past challenges. Five out of eleven participants hold the perception that SAMA practised consistent and continuous communication during the internal changes. Continuous initiatives such as Business Hour (a platform developed by SAMA to share information via Team's meetings), weekly updates, quarterly meetings, newsletter, emails, and 360-degree feedback on internal change through an anonymous survey and departmental debriefing to monitor the efforts of continuous communication were noted. Moreover, participants stated that SAMA is currently addressing consistent communication and strategic alignment. Participants MM1, MM3, MM5, MM12, and MM4 perceive communication within SAMA as being consistent.

MM12 contended that *'the staff was consistently being informed that SAMA is going through a restructuring process but didn't know when that was going to be implemented.'* The observation suggests that SAMA is making progress towards a more purposeful and organised communication framework. However, there is a need for a stronger emphasis on consistent messaging across departments to enable proactive communication planning. The literature study suggested that consistent and continuous communication can improve effective communication and assist the organisation in maintaining good internal relationships (see Section 2.3.2). What is evident from the findings is that SAMA appears to be improving purposeful and intentional communication.

In contrast, responses from the majority of participants indicated that although messages were reliably communicated, continuity was lacking due to cognitive overload and insufficient alignment initiatives. They further pointed out that while platforms such as WhatsApp and email groups reach internal stakeholders easily, overuse may cause information overload. Some participants observed a lack of efficiency and delay in the communication strategy in relation to the information filtering down across the organisation. These views were shared by participants MM2, MM5, MM6, MM9, MM10, and MM11.

For example, participant MM2 said that *'while communication via email is consistent, it often led to information overload, which made it difficult to keep up.'* Meanwhile, participant MM8 contended that internal communication efforts were not always consistent, with a lack of timely updates being part of the challenges. Participant MM11 further stated: *'the problem is the*

higher authorities and hierarchical approach to communication.' The responses above suggest that channels appear inconsistent and lack strategic alignment.

From the foregoing discussions, participants from top management perceived communication to be continuous and consistent; disseminating of messages through various reliable channels, such as staff meetings, emails, and WhatsApp groups. These channels were consistently used to ensure that the SAMA goals and strategies are communicated to the internal stakeholders. The majority of participants from middle management highlighted that messages were reliably communicated; however, continuity appears to have been lacking due to cognitive overload and insufficient alignment initiatives. The participants stressed the importance of continuous and consistent communication initiatives to maintain internal relationships, despite past challenges.

4.2.3 Stakeholder-centricity

The stakeholder-centric approach was defined as the process through which an organisation identifies, understands, and prioritises the needs of its key stakeholders throughout its lifecycle to achieve successful outcomes (see Section 2.3.3 and Table 3.2).

4.2.3.1 Perceptions of top-level management

During interviews on the stakeholder-centric approach, a common view among participants from this group is that there is a centralised strategy that aligns internal communication with the needs of employees. SAMA evaluated the needs of employees through Project Khula (research conducted by an external consultant after the change to gather data on the needs of internal stakeholders). Feedback from research was utilised to introduce benefits (medical aid, training platforms) in response to employee needs. Literature suggests that in the context of internal changes, organisations should identify and prioritise the needs of internal stakeholders with a goal of building long-term relationships (see Section 2.3.3).

For example, participant TLM1 emphasised a recognition of the needs and well-being of internal stakeholders (employees). The restructuring process and follow-up initiatives focused on employee morale and inclusion. This participant highlighted the need for continuous efforts to balance top-down communication and Project Khula without ignoring employee feedback.

Although the majority of participants at this level of management reflect knowledge of a strategy developed by departments to meet the specific needs of employees, participant TLM3 expressed the view that stakeholders' (employees') needs were not fully considered, and communication was often centralised to the executive.

4.2.3.2 Perception of middle management

They acknowledged a stakeholder-centric approach, pointing out that SAMA identifies and prioritises employee needs as stakeholder needs, and therefore communication is tailored to promote clarity and engagement, recognising that individuals receive information differently. For example, performance management design considers the feedback and comfort of employees within the organisation. The messages were tailored to include internal stakeholders at different levels across the organisation and to address their concerns. These insights emerged from the responses of three participants, namely MM3, MM5, and MM4, reflecting efforts to build long-term relationships.

Participant MM4 suggested that *‘during planning, stakeholders must encourage cross-departmental collaboration using digital platforms for ongoing engagements and feedback collection.’* Internal communication is aligned with organisational goals through a centralised strategy that departments adapt to suit their specific needs.

In contrast to the views of top-level management, the findings of participants from this group reflect that the internal communication and decision-making strategies that impact employees’ needs appear to lack inclusivity. Some participants felt that SAMA’s stakeholder-centric approach prioritises interests, understanding, and addressing the needs of external stakeholders over the needs of a broader range of internal ones. Participants MM1, MM2, and MM8 expressed that the changes implemented have caused uncertainty among employees, highlighting the need for customised strategic internal communication and a prioritisation of internal stakeholder needs.

Participant MM1 emphasised the need for a *‘stronger foothold’* for SAMA to achieve its goals effectively. *‘To do this, the company requires more staff to compare those the company currently have and must successfully implement its plans.’*

From the foregoing discussion on the stakeholder-centric approach, it is evident that top management is of the opinion that there is a central strategy for internal communication adopted by various departments to address stakeholder needs. Internal research was conducted through Project Khula to collect feedback from employees. The introduction of benefits (medical aid, training platforms) was in response to the needs and concerns of employees. However, middle management is of the opinion that SAMA prioritises the needs of external stakeholders and disregards the internal ones. They further emphasise the need for customised strategic internal communication and prioritising internal stakeholder needs.

Linking this to the theory stated in Section 2.3.3, it is evident that SAMA appears to be inconsistent in addressing the needs of employees.

The following section discusses findings on two-way symmetrical communication based on the perceptions of different management levels presented in Table 3.3.

4.3 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

Two-way symmetrical communication is both a normative and ethical way of practising communication management for the more effective achievement of organisational goals. In the context of an internal communication setting, symmetrical communication is defined as the willingness of an organisation to listen and respond to the concerns and interests of the stakeholders (see Section 2.2.3 and Table 3.2).

4.3.1 Research

Research here refers to the process of evaluation in which the organisation gathers information on the needs of its stakeholders in relation to the specific subject, such as the internal changing environment (see Section, 2.4.1 and Table 3.2).

4.3.1.1 Perceptions of top-level management

A common view among the participants of this group was that SAMA conducts internal research to better understand its employees. They indicated that the research that occurred in project Khula was inconsistent, as were the surveys, feedback gathered through meetings, focus groups, and listening sessions. This response demonstrates the efforts of SAMA to integrate research into its symmetrical two-way communication practices to gather valuable information while addressing employee needs in order to build mutually beneficial relationships. Literature suggests that in the context of a changing internal environment, the organisation must conduct research with the primary goal of understanding the needs of the stakeholders and managing the aftermath caused by change (see Section 2.4.1). The evidence from the TLM1, TLM2, TLM4, and TLM5 participants from this group indicates that SAMA is committed to the research process.

The participant TLM5 stated that Project Khula conducted post-restructuring surveys to evaluate the impact on the employees. *'To gather information from employees, SAMA used a dipstick where everyone was standing from a morale point of view and addressing employee's needs and address them.'* Meanwhile, participant TLM4 asserted that *'they conducted a change readiness assessment before proceeding with new change.'*

In contrast, participant TLM3 contended that a *'lack of proper audience research [was conducted] before communication strategies were deployed.'* This participant presented a contrasting view, that the external consultants (Project Khula) were used to conduct research after the change, indicating that the change was implemented without understanding the needs of employees. Although the participant above presented a contrasting view, the majority of participants acknowledged that consistent research on employees' needs was conducted.

4.3.1.2 Perceptions of middle management

The aggregate responses of the participants in this group highlighted that the changing environment is informed by adaptiveness and responsiveness to the needs of SAMA's stakeholders. They indicated that SAMA monitors the internal environment, adapts its strategies, and ensures that communication and organisational changes respond to stakeholder needs. In addition, it was observed that SAMA consistently conducts research through meetings, employee engagement surveys, focus groups, and feedback mechanisms to gauge employee sentiments. These initiatives are conducted before launching any campaign. This demonstrates a commitment to understanding and responding to the needs of the internal stakeholders.

Participant MM4 commented that there has been a greater emphasis on *'listening to employee voices'* through surveys, team check-ins, and open-door sessions with leadership, and using digital platforms for ongoing engagement and feedback collection. From the responses of the participants mentioned above, it is clear that they recognised that SAMA is committed to gathering information on employees' needs through the continuous feedback strategy.

In contrast, a common view among participants of this group is that there are informal research channels in place within SAMA. Nevertheless, it appears that there is little formal ongoing research to gather employee needs, workload realities, and internal change requirements. They contend that the lack of research, monitoring, and evaluation concerning internal stakeholders results in an insufficient understanding of their needs and viewpoints prior to the implementation of recent changes.

Participant MM3 commented *'that they engaged an external company to assist with the strategy for membership growth.'* This suggests that SAMA seems to prioritise researching the needs of external stakeholders over the internal ones. While participant MM8 explained that *'HR did a survey through email asking about satisfaction levels, but no one wanted to fill it out... but nobody's gonna fill that out. I do not think there is open two-way communication. And who really wants to fill out a survey?'*

What can be shown is that SAMA has attempted to evaluate the needs of external stakeholders; however, there is a notable gap in consistently evaluating the needs of internal stakeholders. This contrasts with the best practice suggested by the literature, which states that an organisation should conduct regular research to determine the perceptions and viewpoints of stakeholders regarding the internal change process (see Section 2.4.1). From the above discussion on research, the response from participants in top management indicated that SAMA conducted internal research through Project Khula and to understand its employees better. Middle management reflects the view that formal research or evaluation within SAMA is present; however, it is inconsistent, with a lack of continuous surveys.

4.3.2 Dialogue

Dialogue is a form of two-way communication exchange where an organisation listens to diverse viewpoints and responds appropriately to the concerns of its key stakeholders, such as employees, to encourage mutually beneficial relationships (see Section 2.4.2 and Table 3.2).

4.3.2.1 Perceptions of top-level management

Interviews with participants from this group indicate that dialogue is encouraged within SAMA to address concerns and the exchange of ideas between management and employees. This process is facilitated through various channels, such as WhatsApp groups, Teams meetings, executive roundtables (CEO), and one-on-one sessions between management and employees, including those who are not physically in the office, through Teams meetings. These platforms are implemented to change communication from monologue to dialogue, encourage employees to raise concerns, ask questions, receive feedback, and build internal relationships. Literature emphasises that in managing the internal change and its aftermath, an organisation should prioritise dialogue within its internal communication with its stakeholders (see Section 2.4.2).

Participants from this level describe effective means to foster open communication. Cascading communication from the Executive Committee (EXCO) to the Middle Management Committee (MANCO) to staff creates dialogue opportunities. While certain structures to facilitate this are in place, the comfort of the individual can influence their full participation in this communication. Although, participant TLM3 states that *'true dialogue was lacking; employees often did not feel safe to speak openly during meetings, leading to misunderstandings.'*

What is evident from the responses of the participants above is that various channels of communication are in place that foster dialogue. However, more efforts are needed to improve

dialogue and safety, foster trust and inclusion, and allow employees to participate and feel heard during the communication process. SAMA is committed to listening to various viewpoints and responding appropriately to them. This aligns with the principle of dialogue as outlined in the literature.

4.3.2.2 Perceptions of middle management

The minority of participants in this group acknowledged dialogue through open-door sessions, and team check-ins facilitated dialogue between management and employees. The effectiveness of these channels differs according to the individual's experience and perceptions. They felt dialogue between employees and management was evident in communicating a rollout for the new performance management system. What is evident from this process is that SAMA is intent on engaging in dialogue, listening to the ideas and needs of its employees, and responding to them appropriately. The framework states that in the context of a changing environment, organisations should prioritise dialogue to effectively engage with their internal stakeholders (see Section 2.4.2). These perceptions from the participants MM1, MM4, MM5, and MM3, are in line with the theory.

For instance, participant MM5 notes that there are regular two-way engagement sessions that provide staff with time to digest information in advance and participate in open communication in general meetings. Meanwhile, participant MM3 states that open meetings, where management invites employees to comment and ask questions, are held (e.g., performance bonuses meeting). *'We had a staff meeting about the specific issue that we just discussed, and it was an open forum.'* The above perceptions of participants reflect that opportunities for dialogue allow employees to express their views.

In contrast, some participants in this group shared different views on how SAMA practises dialogue to engage employees. Although another minority of participants believed that there is effective dialogue, most of the participants in this group highlighted a strong critique of the current practice of communication, especially the absence of genuine dialogue. They perceived communication as one-way, with internal stakeholders merely being informed of the decisions that management had made with little opportunity to engage in dialogue.

For instance, participant MM2 said that *'communication is always coming from the top going down to a point that one also gets to question how much the top, the leadership, is listening.'* Meanwhile, participant MM12 commented that *'open forums like Business Hour exist. Was a good platform whereby it can be used even to communicate to do better. Dialogue discouraged due to fear of victimisation.'*

From the above discussion on dialogue, it is evident from the information extracted from the interviews that the practice of dialogue within SAMA appears to be inconsistent. Participants in top management acknowledge that dialogue is encouraged within SAMA as a form of two-way communication through various channels. This is similar to the perceptions of some participants in middle management. However, the majority of middle management participants gave critiques of the absence of genuine dialogue due to the communication structure of SAMA, which appears to be hierarchical and one-way.

4.3.3 Balanced communication

Balanced symmetrical communication was explained as equality in communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders to encourage transparent and quality relationships that are mutually beneficial (see Section 2.4.3, and Table 3.2).

4.3.3.1 Perceptions of top-level management

When asked about balanced communication, participants of the above management level shared both different and similar perceptions. The common view among participants in this group reflects that SAMA demonstrates balanced communication through sharing information and promotes equal opportunities to engage in communication. They further acknowledged sharing of both negative and positive information, such as important information about internal changes, condolences, and membership statistics (these perceptions emerge from participants TLM1, TLM2, TLM4, and TLM5). While literature emphasises that for internal communication to be equal and mutually beneficial, SAMA should promote open channels and recognise employees as involved, communicative, and equal participants in communication (see Section 2.4.3).

Some participants highlighted gaps, such as the hierarchical communication approach, where inaccessible language and business jargon limit internal stakeholders from communicating effectively and equally with management. For instance, the TLM3 participant criticised the use of high-level language and emphasised the need for more accessible, balanced communication. *'I don't think there is equal opportunity because they focus a lot on what management wants to say, and we focus very little on the input of staff.'* Meanwhile, participant TLM5 echoed this sentiment by highlighting that meetings and WhatsApp groups provide channels for both employees and management to engage, although serious matters are more restricted.

4.3.3.2 Perceptions of middle management

From the semi-structured interviews, it is apparent that the majority of participants expressed the view that SAMA practises balanced communication through engaging with employees on the successes and challenges of the internal changes. Participants acknowledged that both positive and negative issues are shared, and specific channels allow employees to voice concerns, share ideas, and provide feedback. This equal communication was facilitated through initiatives such as cross-functional committees and focus groups between the management and employees. The response among the participants suggests that SAMA supports equal communication, wherein internal stakeholders engage in two-way symmetrical communication, demonstrating a strong commitment to fostering quality relationships.

When asked about balanced communication, a minority of the participants articulated perceptions that contrasted with those mentioned above. Participants from this group expressed the view that communication is unbalanced and predominantly top-down, with the flow of important information being controlled by top executives, resulting in employees often being caught unaware or confused. Literature suggests that balanced two-way symmetrical communication in managing the aftermath would enable the organisation to engage in equal communication with employees (see Section 2.4.3). Findings show the contrasting views of participants on the practice of balanced symmetrical communication.

Participants MM8 and MM7 acknowledged that proper channels of communication are in place; however, they are top-down communication with a lack of openness. Meanwhile, participant MM10 said that *'I can honestly say, many employees, some employees, feel as if they don't have an equal opportunity.'* The responses provided by the participants above reflect that internal stakeholders seem to have limited access to equal opportunities, which can impact matters related to internal communication, decision-making, and the exchange of ideas.

From the foregoing discussion on balanced communication, the perceptions of top management are that SAMA demonstrates balanced communication through sharing information and promotes equal opportunities to engage in communication. Some participants highlighted gaps, such as the hierarchical communication approach, where inaccessible language and business jargon limit employees from engaging in equal communication with management. While the majority of participants from middle management acknowledged that both positive and negative issues are shared, and specific channels allow employees to voice concerns, share ideas, and provide feedback, other participants from middle management

reflected challenges in engaging in equal communication with top-down communication controlled by higher executives.

4.3.4 Collaboration and negotiation

Collaboration in the context of SAMA was referred to as a two-way communication process in which both parties work together to achieve a shared goal. Similarly, negotiation involves an exchange of ideas between parties to reach a mutually beneficial agreement for all involved (see Section 2.4.4 and Table 3.2).

4.3.4.1 Perceptions of top-level management

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with management from various departments, as identified in Table 3.3 (see Section 3.5.2). Their overall perceptions reflect that negotiations and collaboration are present within SAMA, but their intensity and consistency vary across departments. The participants state that there was effective collaboration during organisational changes, such as the restructuring and debt-collection projects. The Human Resources Department has made progress in fostering collaboration in organisational activities through cross-departmental collaboration with line managers and leadership to achieve shared strategic goals. These initiatives have created a space where internal stakeholders are encouraged to share their ideas and engage in dialogue to reach mutual understanding between employees and management, as identified in Table 3.3. The framework suggests that collaboration and negotiation with key stakeholders requires a common ground representing a shared vision or goal (see Section 2.4.4). Findings show that there was effective collaboration during organisational changes.

According to TLM2 and TLM5, collaboration of participants occurred during restructuring. Departments worked together through HR initiatives and staff participation. *'We all have a common goal now, which is organisational growth, the strategy is clear.'* Meanwhile, TLM3 contends that some projects (like debt collection communication) showed effective collaboration across levels, seen as a success story. However, in general, collaboration was facilitated throughout the organisation. *'We communicated; we work together as a team from EXCO to branch administrators.'* Based on the responses among participants in this group, it is evident that SAMA has fostered a culture of collaboration and negotiation.

4.3.4.2 Perceptions of middle management

When asked about collaboration and negotiation, the majority of participants acknowledged that SAMA engaged in joint planning sessions, for example, the Human Resources

Department collaborating with EXCO (top management) and MANCO (middle management) in preparing documents for performance management and change management. Perceptions reflect that collaboration and negotiation are essential elements in achieving effective internal communication and shared goals at SAMA.

Participant MM5 said that management joint and negotiate on change management processes before roll-out. *'Sometimes we adjust our plans after consulting with stakeholders.'* Meanwhile, participant MM4 commented that *'heads are encouraged to cascade information in ways that resonate with their teams. Joint planning is ensured by involving both internal and external stakeholders in planning encouraging cross-departmental collaboration.'* This shows that SAMA engages in cross-departmental collaboration, understanding that the shared objective is to find a solution that meets everyone's needs.

However, not all participants agreed with this perspective; some participants identified ongoing issues. These participants reflected that decision-making is top-down with a lack of negotiation and collaboration, which, in turn, results in staff members feeling disconnected from internal change. Although implementing efforts such as Business Hour have attempted to create a platform of collaboration and sharing ideas, the participants in this group expressed that everyone works in communication silos, where departments and employees work independently. However, acceptance from other departments remains a challenge. They felt that the departments are not integrated to work together. Literature suggests that two-way symmetrical communication in managing the aftermath should take a collaborative approach to promote negotiations and working together (see Section 2.4.4). It is evident that SAMA seems to undermine the practice of collaboration and negotiation.

For example, participant MM2 asserted that *'bottom-up solutions are rarely integrated despite acknowledgment that employees could offer solutions. Change management processes lacked negotiation; mostly after-the-fact consultation.'* Similarly, participant MM9 said that *'very little evidence of collaboration; commands are issued without discussion. Timelines are not discussed with us. The biggest problem is that there are changes within the organisation and then you find out that us, the staff members, we don't know.'*

From the above discussion on collaboration and negotiation, it is evident that perceptions of management vary. The responses from top management reflect the importance of fostering a culture where both parties work together within SAMA to improve communication, decision-making, and overall organisational effectiveness. These participants further expressed that SAMA promotes working together and fosters mutual understanding towards shared objectives. The majority of responses from middle management, however, reflect a

lack of collaboration and negotiation in decision-making, although efforts such as Business Hour have attempted to create a platform of collaboration.

4.3.5 Feedback

Feedback is the response of the receiver which reflects how the message was perceived. It is an essential component for facilitating understanding and for assessing to what extent communication is effective between an organisation and its key stakeholders (see Section 2.4.5 and Table 3.2).

4.3.5.1 Perceptions of top-level management

When asked about feedback, participants from this group acknowledged feedback mechanisms within SAMA; however, consistency in their application and effectiveness appears to be a challenge. Participants highlighted that there are both formal and informal structures that facilitate feedback, such as direct engagement with the CEO, HR communication surveys (through Project Khula, external consultant). These mechanisms allow internal stakeholders to share ideas on the messages' effectiveness and how they were perceived. However, the effectiveness of these structures differs according to individuals' experience.

Participant TLM5 said that *'communication relies on participation and feedback to assess communication effectiveness. Feedback mechanisms include meetings where employees could raise concerns.'* Meanwhile, participant TLM2 contended that *'we can respond and come back in addition to one-on-one feedback, I suppose it is communicated quite effectively.'* This emphasises that some parts of management within SAMA acknowledges effective feedback via various channels.

In contrast, one participant stated that the reality reflected a hierarchical feedback system instead of an inclusive feedback system. For instance, participant TLM3 said that there were only limited and hierarchical feedback opportunities. Feedback loops were incomplete, leading to dissatisfaction. Staff are hesitant to provide honest feedback due to fear of retaliation.

4.3.5.2 Perceptions of middle management

The majority of participants acknowledged that SAMA prioritises open formal mechanisms for obtaining feedback, such as staff meetings, 360-degree surveys, CEO engagement sessions, and HR communication platforms like suggestion boxes to determine the effectiveness of communication with employees. Literature stresses the importance of providing timely feedback to stakeholders as well as the need for the organisation to receive feedback from

stakeholders (see Section 2.4.5). Findings show that there are multiple feedback channels available.

MM4 participant said that *'feedback loops could be more structured to ensure that employees see how their input influences decisions.'* Regular updates and opportunities for feedback are powerful in managing resistance and fostering a sense of shared purpose. The above perceptions of participants emphasise that SAMA attempts to recognise the importance of feedback.

In contrast, some participants perceived feedback mechanisms such as forums and meetings to be superficial, with management sometimes dismissing suggestions from employees. Employees, particularly during new performance management, should feel safe to give feedback, and management should address and implement suggestions, especially regarding changes.

For example, participant MM8 pointed to limited opportunity for feedback, lack of proper structures, and an often informal feedback mechanism. This is similar to participant MM2, who contended *'that minimal opportunity for feedback, often after decisions are already made. Example: The contracting process changed without proper consultation, leading to errors.'* These perceptions of participants above emphasise that feedback opportunities seem to be insufficient and highlight the importance of incorporating feedback from stakeholders in decision-making processes.

From the foregoing discussion on feedback, it is clear that participants from top management acknowledged formal and informal structures that facilitate feedback. Middle management reflected the view that open feedback opportunities are limited due to hierarchical barriers that exist within the organisation. The responses of participants from middle management emphasise a need for a more structured feedback mechanism that shows the extent of the effectiveness of communication between management and employees.

4.3.6 Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making

Participation was defined as involvement in strategic decision-making through workgroups. Similarly, inclusiveness was referred to as the process of creating an environment where the voices of diverse internal stakeholders are heard (see Section 2.4.6 and Table 3.2).

4.3.6.1 Perceptions of top-level management

When interviews were conducted with participants from this group, their general view acknowledged the importance of employees' participation and inclusion in internal change.

They highlighted the efforts of SAMA in fostering decision-making and engagement through available channels that promote the sharing of ideas. A common perception among participants of this group is that SAMA facilitates inclusive and participatory communication by including employees with relevant skills in decision-making. For instance, a continuous professional development (CPD) officer and marketing communication officer were cited as examples of how they were involved in decision-making with respect to expertise.

Participant TLM1 said that efforts to *'reduce siloed communication through platforms such as WhatsApp (suggestion boxes, HR channels) were introduced to allow for broader employee inclusiveness. I think the efforts since then have been an attempt to try and address some of those issues that had occurred. Sort of inclusiveness as well.'*

In contrast, challenges exist with regard to establishing complete inclusion due to minimal responses on how employees' contribution impacts decision-making. Participant TLM3 reflected a critical view of limited staff participation, mostly influenced from management, and that staff input was marginalised. For example, the performance management feedback session was perceived as not truly participatory. Although the participants mentioned above said that management provides opportunities for employees to contribute to decision-making, there was no reference to whether their contributions were considered by the management.

Although some participants in this group perceive effective inclusiveness as the norm, other participants reflect inconsistencies and concerns about inclusiveness within SAMA. Participant TLM3 asserted that a *'very siloed approach'* exists, and a *'lack of inclusivity in decision-making, and fear among employees hinder open participation.'* Literature emphasises that two-way symmetrical communication should foster employees' inclusion and participation in decision-making and organisational activities (see Section 2.4.6). Meanwhile, findings show that inclusion and participation appear to be inconsistently applied in the practice of inclusiveness, as suggested by the literature mentioned above. The perceptions mentioned above suggest that, despite the organisation's attempt to foster decision-making, the practice appears to exclude employees, leading to minimal response and input.

4.3.6.2 Perceptions of middle management

When asked about participation and inclusiveness, the majority of participants acknowledged that there are platforms fostering employees' participation and inclusiveness in decision-making during change. They mentioned effective communication and a culture that recognises employees' voices, encourages sharing ideas, and fosters decision-making to ensure that their contributions are considered. However, there was no evidence on whether their voices

contribute to internal changes or influence the decision-making by management. They highlighted that in 2024, there was another change in how SAMA measures performance, which was well-managed from a communication perspective, and the sharing of ideas was encouraged. The majority of participants emphasised that meaningful participation and inclusiveness entail more than simply being present; it entails contribution to decision-making. For instance, the participation of MANCO and EXCO in decision-making regarding issues such as performance measurement was perceived as effective inclusion and participation.

As another example, participant MM5 asserts that employees are encouraged to participate in Business Hour sessions. *'Staff meetings allow employees to contribute ideas and concerns. Public participation is central. We invite them to plan meetings.'* Meanwhile, participant MM4 stated that *'input from junior staff was directly incorporated to enhance our social media footprint.'* As previously mentioned in Section 2.4.6, the literature framework emphasises that organisations should value and recognise the voices of internal stakeholders. These actions reflect SAMA's effort to foster inclusion and participation by incorporating diverse voices in decision-making.

In contrast, other participants from this group highlight that the decision-making process occurs in a top-down manner, where strategic planning and internal changes occur without employee input. A common view perceived that the top-down approach contributes to staff members feeling excluded in the processes of internal change, with fear of expressing their honest opinions due to power dynamics. The majority of participants highlighted a lack of consideration of employees' voices, resulting in limited participation in decision-making. It is evident that the level of decision-making appears to be hampered by the hierarchical management approach. In addition, participants raised concerns about the effectiveness of the suggestion box, which is not being taken seriously. This suggests that responses or feedback to employees on how their input contributes to decisions appear to be ineffective. These perceptions reflect that inclusion and participation in decision-making seem to be inconsistent and lack a feedback mechanism.

For example, participant MM8 said that *'we didn't feel involved during the restructuring, it was authoritarian, not participative. We didn't feel like we were very involved... it was just a dictatorship of this is what is happening.'* Meanwhile, participant MM11 commented that *'staff [are] not given a real voice. Cannot participate freely; scared to speak because of retaliation.'* Participant MM10 said that *'meetings and suggestion boxes offer inclusive mechanisms, but not all voices are considered seriously afterward.'* This reflects that structures to enable participation and inclusion were in place; however, it appears to be limited because the employees' voices were not considered in decision-making.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that participants from top management acknowledged the importance of employees' participation and inclusion in internal change. Efforts were made to foster decision-making and engagement and promote the sharing of ideas. In comparison, some participants from middle management thought that no meaningful participation and inclusiveness were encouraged, nor was any contribution to decision-making. Moreover, there was no evidence on whether the voices of employees contribute to internal changes or influence management decisions. Despite evidence of employees participating in strategic decision-making, some middle management participants emphasise that participation and inclusion within SAMA remain a challenge due to the hierarchical, top-down culture, which was perceived to prevent employees' voices from being truly heard. Individuals' perceptions about the way SAMA promotes participation have informed how both management levels understand the organisational culture.

4.3.7 Transparency

Transparency was defined as an organisation's communication with employees to make all legally publishable information available, whether positive or negative, in an accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal manner, with the goal of improving employees' reasoning abilities and holding organisations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices (see Section 2.4.7 and Table 3.2).

4.3.7.1 Perceptions of top-level management

When an interview was conducted with the participants in this group, they pointed out improvements and critical challenges to transparency within SAMA during change. A common view from participants reflected that efforts to accomplish honest and open communication to increase transparency after restructuring were made through collaboration with other departments across the organisation. They expressed that many positive changes had occurred, and that regular channels for sharing information about changes were available. However, the approach to communication was perceived as top-down, and some information was withheld for confidentiality reasons. In addition, they perceived the current practice of internal communication to be transparent because of the open sharing of both positive and negative information, as well as organisational strategies. All these efforts were directed towards improving employees' reasoning abilities and holding the organisation accountable.

Participant TLM4 asserted that *'HR processes, like performance management, are structured to promote fairness, although not perfectly achieved. Business Hours and staff meetings*

partially contribute to transparency.' This reflects that there are initiatives and channels in place to foster transparency within SAMA.

However, some participants highlighted that improved internal communication structures and accountability remain a challenge in fostering transparency. For example, participant TLM3 said that *'lack of transparency in decisions; often no context is provided for decisions made.'* Communication often appeared as orders given due to insufficient context, making it seem like mere instructions to follow rather than an invitation for dialogue. This reflects a shortcoming or an inconsistency in fostering transparency, which could indicate unethical communication.

4.3.7.2 Perceptions of middle management

The majority of participants in this group expressed that SAMA practised transparency during internal changes, financial matters, and performance metrics, maintaining this openness even in the face of unfavourable developments. They facilitated the sharing of information through the open-door forum policy, WhatsApp group, and staff meetings. These efforts reflect an attempt to promote clear, honest, and open internal communication. However, challenges such as delays and unclear communication with respect to employee performance-related activities have resulted in uncertainty and dissatisfaction among employees. Although there are challenges in timely communication, participants viewed SAMA as committed to accountability, which is evidenced by the sharing of financial reports and open planning of budget breakdowns.

For example, participant MM3 contended that *'the leadership acknowledged errors in the communication of the performance bonus and pledged to improve transparency. And I think the information shared on these is honest, and it is an open forum. We publicly share budget breakdowns of what was spent and why.'* Perceptions from the participants above reflect that transparency has improved significantly. The framework states that open and transparent communication during and after change nurtures employee trust and a positive attitude towards change (see Section 2.4.7).

In contrast to the perceptions of the participants mentioned above, most of the participants expressed divergent perspectives about transparency in relation to SAMA, particularly with the decision-making, incentives, and communication approaches. The majority of participants in this group consistently highlighted the lack of openness in internal communication, specifically regarding policy change, financial decisions, and bonuses. In addition, they stated that information is withheld and updates are poorly timed. They also emphasised that the

restructuring was not inherently complex; instead, the lack of transparency and inadequate communication led the internal stakeholders to derive their own interpretations of the process.

For example, participant MM2 said that *'transparency is lacking, especially regarding incentives and how decisions are made. Incentive measurements and communication were inconsistent and unclear.'* Meanwhile, MM8 pointed out that *'change announcements were made after decisions had already been taken. Bonus structure changed without prior communication. Lack of information and openness being given to us right at the beginning.'* From the responses of the participants above, it appears communication is in place; however, there appears to be a lack of transparency in decision-making processes, specifically change in bonus structures.

The foregoing discussion on transparency reveals a divergence in the perceptions held by top and middle management. The top management, along with certain individuals in the middle management, noted improvements and significant challenges. They perceived initiatives aimed at fostering clear, open, and honest communication as instrumental in enhancing transparency following the restructuring process. In contrast, the majority of middle management highlighted a withholding of information, policy changes, financial decisions, and bonuses.

The following section discusses findings on the management of stakeholders' relationships based on perceptions of different management levels presented in (see Section 3.5.2 and Table 3.3).

4.4 STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Stakeholder relationship management was defined as the management function of communicating strategically to build and manage mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its key stakeholders (see Section 2.5 and Table 3.2).

4.4.1 Relationship-building strategies

In the case of SAMA, building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships through internal symmetrical communication fosters a positive work environment, enhances employee engagement, and manages the aftermath of change. Relationship-building strategies such as ***positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises)*** are relevant to this study. They

can be executed through internal, two-way symmetrical communication (see Section 2.5.1 and Table 3.2).

4.4.1.1 Perceptions of top-level management

From the semi-structured interviews with participants about their perceptions of strategies to build and maintain relationships with internal stakeholders, it was evident that they believed initiatives that focus on **positivity** are in place. The organisation makes efforts to do whatever it takes to ensure that stakeholders feel content and have more pleasant relationships. Both parties invest in making relationships more enjoyable (see Section 2.5.1.1). Furthermore, participants perceived a **sharing of ideas** and **working together** between the middle and top management when drafting documents for performance management and change management.

A prevalent perspective among participants in this group reflected that SAMA demonstrates **legitimacy and assurances** through open communication with internal stakeholders, showing commitment to stakeholders, with the primary goal of building and maintaining long-term relationships. Literature defines legitimacy assurance as the efforts of both parties to ensure that concerns are addressed or legitimatised in terms of shared values and behaviours (see Section 2.5.1.4 and Table 3.2).

Furthermore, these participants' general views reflect a conscious effort to establish **openness or disclosure** as a strategy to build relationships with employees. This involves the willingness of the organisation to discuss the nature of relationships with their key stakeholders to cater to/meet their needs and provide access to information. Through ethical, open, and transparent communication, organisations may disclose important information (see Section 2.5.1.2). Aligned with the **openness or disclosure** strategy, **access** was described as the efforts of both organisations and stakeholders to be accessible to one another. For the current study, access was defined as the process of providing stakeholders with information and access to the organisation's decision-making process (see Section 2.5.1.3). The majority of participants acknowledged that management grants employees access to the organisation's decision making-processes. They expressed that an **access** and **openness or disclosure** strategy was in place to share information to ensure that employees feel comfortable, supported, and encouraged. They stated that they engage with their direct line manager when seeking clarity regarding internal changes. Literature suggests that accessing information is important, especially when managing the aftermath of change and building employer–employee relationships that are mutually beneficial (see Section 2.5.1.4).

Participant TLM1 said that *'wellness initiatives and positive reinforcement strategies through HR management's commitment to employee wellbeing [are] acknowledged. There have been positive changes.'* Meanwhile, participant TLM4 highlighted recognition of changes and improvements since the new CEO joined. They expressed appreciation of efforts like training opportunities and medical aid improvements.

However, participant TLM3 presented a contrasting view, noting that **access** to communication channels was hierarchical, where open channels existed mainly to executives and *'junior employees struggled to access meaningful participation spaces'*. Based on the response of the above participant, it is evident that, although there are formal structures for accessing communication, they seemed to be hierarchical. What these views show is that **openness or disclosure** is reserved mainly for top executives, while junior employees struggle to engage in meaningful dialogue, which may influence the practice of **control mutuality** (see Section 2.5.2.2). They emphasised a need for fair opportunities for everyone to access information; however, the practice has often seemed more hierarchical than accessible to employees at the lower level.

4.4.1.2 Perceptions of middle management

During the semi-structured interviews, a shared sentiment of **positivity and access to information** from participants reflected that SAMA has effective engagement with employees to provide information through various platforms, leading to the formation of relationships. The majority of participants acknowledged improvement in the sharing of tasks through joint ventures between top and middle management on drafting the performance policy. Moreover, they acknowledged greater access to open communication with leadership, particularly after the restructuring, reflecting **openness or disclosure** as a strategy. A general perception of the participants was that **openness or disclosure** and **legitimacy assurances** were maintained through continuous dialogue to clarify the restructuring process and to ensure that employees are informed, engaged, and supported, thereby mitigating the uncertainty brought about by internal changes. In addition, they expressed various strategies employed by an organisation to maintain trust among members, show commitment to each other, and maintain strong internal relationships. This is in line with the relationship-building strategies: **access and openness, legitimacy and assurance**.

Participant MM5 said that *'employees can engage with managers regularly to [have] easy access to updates. So, we have clearly in the performance management put these values, particularly, and openness between the parties, which is the employer and employee'*. Meanwhile, participant MM8 commented that *'SAMA does communicate through its various*

channels when it comes to any kind of structural change or implementing changes, etc, keeping relationships with employees’. The responses of the participants above emphasise that honest and open channels of accessing information are in place. Literature suggests that the sharing of information should be in the manner of two-way symmetrical communication to facilitate effective communication and ensure employees feel content in relationships with the employer (see Section 2.5.1.1).

In contrast to the perception of the participants above, the responses of some of the participants in this group reflected that there seems to be some deficiencies in sharing information about internal changes, with participants pointing out that an **openness or disclosure** strategy appears to be lacking. They expressed that communication focused on social cohesion rather than effectively communicating organisational changes. They said that they had learned about major changes first through external media, reflecting inconsistencies in **access** to information. Due to the selective nature of information shared, it was perceived to be based on authoritative power preferences, rather than transparency, which is a challenge. Another shortcoming that was identified is an environment where employees feel discouraged from asking questions, reflecting that **sharing of tasks** and **legitimacy assurances** seem to be lacking.

Participant MM7 said that they communicate and have meetings. *‘I just don’t think it is set up in a way where it is a two-way communication.’* Meanwhile, participant MM9 asserted that executives selectively share information. *‘Information is shared at the discretion of the executive committee.’* Literature suggests that it is important to provide employees with information concerning their job security and that communication should be in the form of a two-way symmetrical model to build trust, relationships, and address uncertainty (see Section 2.5.1.4). From the responses of the participants, it is evident that this practice seemed to be compromised within SAMA.

From the foregoing discussion on relationship-building strategies, the responses from top management reflect a belief that **positivity**-driven initiatives and open communication strategies are in place to build and maintain long-term relationships during change. Open and transparent communication are the primary goal of building and maintaining long-term relationships. During change particularly, **legitimacy and assurances** are essential. Strategies must be employed to share information to ensure that employees feel comfortable, supported, and encouraged regarding internal changes. However, no discussion of the nature of relationships with key stakeholders was mentioned.

Participants from middle management expressed the view that transparent information and continuous dialogue were maintained to clarify the restructuring process, reflecting **openness or disclosure and access strategies**. Communication was focused on social cohesion rather than on effectively communicating organisational changes. Other challenges were also encountered, such as the selective nature of information-sharing based on authoritative power preferences rather than transparency, reflecting a lack of **openness or disclosure**.

The following section discusses findings on the outcome of stakeholder relationships with management based on the perceptions of management.

4.4.2 Relationship outcomes

Building relationships should be backed by a two-way symmetrical communication style, as it enables organisations and their stakeholders to both generate and receive benefits (see Section 2.5.2 and Table 3.2).

4.4.2.1 Trust

Trust was described as the willingness of both the organisation and its employees to be open to one another through symmetrical two-way communication, having confidence that the other parties will consider their interests when making decisions. It can be achieved through a combination of three dimensions, namely **integrity, dependability, and competence** (see Section 2.5.2.1).

4.4.2.1.1 Perceptions of top-level management

When asked about their perceptions of trust in this group, participants highlighted the improvement of trust within the organisation, particularly in relation to leadership's actions to engage employees. Among the trust and confidence elements, some participants stated that there was fairness, flexibility, and an improvement in leadership's commitment to delivering on promises. They expressed that the recognition of past errors by leadership has created a culture in which employees feel more confident in organisational commitments. The development of trust is not seen as a one-time achievement, but as a continuous process shaped by actions and communication over time that leads to the effectiveness of relationships.

Participant TLM4 said that leadership apologising and explaining delays in communication about incentives reflected efforts to rebuild or maintain employee trust. When people see consistency and honesty in communication, they start to trust the message. *'It's taken time, but we've built trust by showing we mean what we say.'* Meanwhile, participant TLM5 said that

'confidence that SAMA delivers on promises, based on visible changes and CEO-driven improvements. I am confident SAMA does do the things that it says it will do.'

4.4.2.1.2 Perceptions of middle management

The perceptions of a minority of participants among this group reflected that there are efforts to improve trust through engagement and listening to employees, thereby fostering mutual respect. They emphasised that trust is contingent on consistent and reliable actions, specifically mentioning the CEO's role in follow-up actions and improvements after the 2022 restructuring as ways to rebuild trust. Participants highlighted the importance of leadership engaging directly with staff to foster trust and the importance of 360-degree feedback as a mechanism to cultivate mutual accountability. The framework suggests that when employers communicate openly with employees and commit to delivering on what has been promised, trust can be developed between two parties (see Section 2.2.4.2.1).

Participant MM3 asserted that trust in management's commitment continues to improve communication, based on the CEO's later actions. *'Trust doesn't come easy, but consistent action builds it. When we do what we say, slowly the trust builds'*. Meanwhile, participant MM5 commented that *'improvements made post-2022 restructuring acknowledge past mistakes and work to rebuild trust. Feedback fosters mutual accountability and trust. If we say something, we follow through. Trust is earned by being honest and reliable.'*

In contrast, the overall views from the majority of participants at SAMA suggests a lack of trust between the workforce and the leadership, driven by ineffective communication with few feedback opportunities. They expressed that crucial decision-making processes, most notably during and after the organisational restructuring of 2022, contributed to mistrust. They also acknowledged ongoing challenges, noting the presence of communication silos and lingering mistrust between employers and employees, suggesting that the process of earning trust is gradual and requires sustained effort and honesty. In addition, participants from this group reported mistrust, especially regarding whether leadership truly listens and addresses the concerns of the employees.

For instance, participant MM8 said that *'distrust grew during the restructuring because of a lack of communication. Employees found out about changes after they were already decided. There is lot of distrust, pushback from us with regards to change.'* While participant MM7 said that a general *'lack of trust noted among employees, who prefer private conversations. Trust is everything. Once staff trust you, communication flows more easily. I have not seen any mechanism that's in place for that. I have not seen such a mechanism that promotes people*

to be trusted.' The responses of participants above indicate challenges related to trust within the organisation, as observed by the majority of participants. Their views further reflect that trust between employees and management is lacking.

From the foregoing discussion on trust, participants at the management level reflect differing perceptions of trust within an organisation. Top management believes in improving trust within the organisation, particularly in relation to leadership behaviour and open communication with internal stakeholders. However, a majority of middle management participants contrasted this by expressing feelings of mistrust. This suggests differing experiences or perceptions between different levels of management on trust-related issues.

4.4.2.2 Commitment

Commitment is defined here as the extent to which both organisations and their stakeholders feel that it is worth investing time and energy with a goal of building a long-term relationship (see Section 2.5.2.2).

4.4.2.2.1 Perceptions of top-level management

Participants in this group highlighted that the SAMA leadership reflects commitment by placing efforts on employees' well-being, training, and open communication rather than treating these efforts as mere formalities. The overview of the participants suggests that low staff turnover serves as evidence of SAMA's commitment to employee loyalty and long-term relationships. Participants acknowledged commitment through retention and alignment of employees' needs with organisational values and goals. These findings emphasise a positive attitude towards the organisation that reflects commitment, pointing to a stable and engaged work environment. This shared commitment improves the organisational culture, increases employee satisfaction, and ultimately helps ensure long-term relationships with internal stakeholders.

For instance, participant TLM2 expressed their view that positive attitudes and commitment are present, pointing out that they have been employed at SAMA for 21 years. Meanwhile, participant TLM4 said that the commitment was demonstrated by HR delaying culture change projects until the organisation was ready. *'There's a genuine commitment from leadership to communicate well.'* The responses of the participants above reflect leadership's dedication to maintaining open communication, which underscores a commitment to building relationships within the organisation.

4.4.2.2.2 Perceptions of middle management

The seven participants from this group expressed that commitment within SAMA is reflected by the employees' commitment to staying with the organisation for the long term. The general view of the participants highlights commitment through open communication, and strategy alignment to the organisational goals reflects a genuine desire to build relationships. Moreover, offering full-time employment opportunities, enhancing engagement and benefits indicate that SAMA is committed to ensuring that the needs are aligned within the organisation with the overall goal of building long-term relationships. This effort reflects an intention to improve mutual commitment between SAMA and its employees, which fosters a cohesive, purpose-driven working environment.

Participant MM3 said that commitment was demonstrated by *'management's visible efforts to build strategies for organisational goals like membership growth. Continuous communication to maintain long-term relationships. You know this thing that is currently going on with weight loss challenges and the fitness challenges, et cetera.'* Meanwhile, participant MM5 expressed the view that commitment was shown by organisation-wide *'job grading to ensure fairness. Investment in employee wellness and mental health programs. We are committed to responding and serving. Even during hard times, we continue engaging.'*

In contrast, a minority of participants from this group highlighted a lack of commitment or divided commitment between the organisation and its internal stakeholders. They observed the willingness of the newly appointed leaders to improve employees' relationships with the organisation. However, this is complicated by the conduct of other leaders who preserve a hierarchical separation in fostering collaboration and decision-making. This friction suggests a transitional phase in SAMA's leadership culture, where initiatives to foster commitment exist alongside traditional mindsets resistant to change.

Participant MM1 asserted that EXCO *'shows a desire for long-term relationships with employees, but with significant gaps in addressing staff needs. But I do think I do think there has been an improvement.'* Meanwhile, participant MM10 said that *'employees do not perceive SAMA as committed to building or maintaining long-term relationships. For example: lack of initiatives beyond standard service awards. No, I don't think SAMA, they've got any idea on long-term relationship.'* The responses of the participants above suggest that SAMA lacks commitment to fostering long-term relationships with its employees, as evidenced by the absence of initiatives beyond typical service awards.

From the foregoing discussion on commitment, it is evident that participants from top management and other groups of middle management share a similar sentiment. They stated that SAMA and its employees are committed to reaching out to each other, pointing out employee dedication, their intentions to stay with the organisation in the long term, and the efforts of the organisation to provide employees with permanent jobs and benefits. However, the majority of participants from the other group of middle management reflected challenges and concerns about how the organisation handles long-term relationships with their employees.

4.4.2.3 Control mutuality

Control mutuality was described as the extent to which the organisation and its employees agree on who has control over the other. This reflects the power balance (or imbalance) between both parties. However, true two-way symmetrical communication may produce mutual control in relationships between organisations and employees (see Section 2.5.2.3 and Table 3.2).

4.4.2.3.1 Perceptions of top-level management

Four participants presented common views regarding the mutuality of control within SAMA. All participants in this group describe a communication mechanism where management retains significant control, and they further indicated that management retains sensitive information to maintain the organisation's reputation. Moreover, participants of this group stated that there are mechanisms to foster control mutuality, which allows employees to voice their opinions and policies to promote feedback. However, their effectiveness varies depending on the content and individual willingness to engage.

Participant TLM1 said that *'communication is not fully equal. Management controls sensitive information to protect reputation. Employees have channels to express themselves, but within controlled boundaries'*. Participant TLM3 said that *'control over communication was heavily biased towards management. Employees had little to no input into communication processes'*. It is clear that there is an imbalance in communication control within the organisation, with management having the upper hand in decision-making and information dissemination, while employees have limited influence.

4.4.2.3.2 Perceptions of middle management

Participants in this group acknowledged that there is shared control between the management and employees. A minority of those participants emphasised the importance of both

employees and management having the opportunity to express their views and contribute to discussions. They highlighted control mutuality, citing the fact that the input of employees was integrated into strategies, such as those used for social media. In addition, they said communication is portrayed as a vital tool for encouraging control mutuality, feedback, and balancing power.

Participant MM3 said that both employees and management *are 'having opportunities to raise issues and contribute to discussions. We can't dictate – they must feel they have a say too. It's shared control, we plan together.'* Meanwhile, participant MM4 said that *'shared decision-making and staff input into social media strategy'* was present. *'Communication encourages participation and feedback, balancing influence.'* The responses of the participants above highlight more equitable power dynamics within SAMA and two-way symmetrical communication that promotes mutual control.

In contrast to the perceptions above, participants in this group expressed the view that control mutuality is mainly top-down, where management has dominant control, filters information, and limits employees' input. They highlighted limitations on opportunities to influence decisions and share control over organisational processes. It is evident from the responses of the participants that common control between management and internal stakeholders appears to be lacking, indicating that the voices of employees are excluded from strategic decisions. Literature suggests that when managing an aftermath through two-way symmetrical communication, organisations should share power with the employees to enable mutual control between both parties (see Section 2.5.2.3). Findings show contrasting views on how mutual control is perceived among the middle management.

Participant MM1 stated *'Lack of employee input into strategy suggests low control mutuality: management controls major decisions. And positioning the talent pool in such a way that they that that they can utilise us to the maximum. And because they are not willing to listen. They are not utilising us effectively'*. Participant MM2 echoed this sentiment by stating that *'management maintains control; mutual influence in communication is limited. Leadership relies on authority rather than collaboration.'* Participant MM8 said that *'decision-making is top-down; employees don't feel they have a say. Decisions that are made at high level; it's a dictatorship. We must just do.'*

From the foregoing discussion on control mutuality, participants in top management reflected an environment that is characterised by a significant imbalance of control between management and employees. Middle management expressed that their input in strategic decisions is minimal, indicating a low level of mutual control. The majority of participants

highlighted the challenges of different individuals regarding the nature of decision-making and communication within the organisation. The general responses reflect a critical view of the hierarchical and authoritative approach to management within the organisation, pointing to disconnect and a lack of collaborative communication between leadership and employees.

4.4.2.4 Relationship satisfaction

Satisfaction encompasses both affection and emotion and is conceptualised as a response to the reinforcement of the positive expectations of a relationship. Both parties receive equal rewards that outweigh the costs to the relationship (see Section 2.5.2.4 and Table 3.2).

4.4.2.4.1 Perceptions of top-level management

The responses of participants among this group generally reflected relationship satisfaction between management and employees, although there are notable areas for improvement. Only three participants from this group took the view that SAMA made efforts to build positive workplace culture through the Human Resources initiatives that promote positive expectations, such as the provision of medical aid and wellness programmes. These visible rewards were perceived to reinforce interpersonal relationships. Mutual respect was perceived to contribute significantly to employee satisfaction. It is evident from the responses of the participants that internal stakeholders are more satisfied when they are informed, heard and supported, especially during and after the period of change. Moreover, top management expressed the view that good relationships with employees through improved communication strategies foster transparency and mutual understanding, improving employees' morale.

TLM1 and TLM2 reported high levels of satisfaction, citing good interpersonal relationships and attributing this to effective workplace culture, adaptable work arrangements, and mutual support between the organisation and its staff. Participant TLM4 reinforced this optimistic perspective by highlighting long-term employee retention as an indirect sign of satisfaction. Similarly, participant TLM5 shared these views, stressing the organisation's attentiveness to employee feedback and the positive impact of enhanced communication on morale and engagement. The responses among participants of this group reflected the importance of effective internal communication in maintaining relationship satisfaction within SAMA.

However, participant TLM3 offered a contrasting perspective on relationship satisfaction, stating that it was low, especially because of poor communication culture and ineffective leadership decisions, such as using external consultants instead of fostering internal collaboration. Although good benefits and flexibility were noted, the poor culture

overshadowed these positives. This response underscores that while organisational efforts exist, their effectiveness is not evenly experienced across the board.

4.4.2.4.2 Perceptions of middle management

A majority of participants from this group reflected a high level of satisfaction with relationships, depending on the leadership styles. The common view suggested that satisfaction is high due to supportive environments and good interpersonal relations, although it was suggested that satisfaction may vary between departments. Participants expressed satisfaction with how things are communicated and managed within their own departments, but advised that more focus should be placed on fostering mutual understanding and collaboration among employees. The presence of a strong ethical manager is highlighted as a factor in ensuring fair rewards and employee satisfaction. In addition, the responses of the participants highlighted that newer employees report higher satisfaction compared to those who have been working at SAMA for a long time. This indicates a level of contentment with the operational processes in place in the participants' departments and a desire for this satisfaction to be a common sentiment across the organisation.

Participant MM4 said that *'overall, employee relationships with SAMA are improving, though not without areas for growth'*. Meanwhile, participant MM5 recognised that *'full satisfaction is still a work in progress.'* Current efforts are building a foundation for improved employer–employee relationships. The responses of the participants above reflect the nature of employee relationships with SAMA. Although relationships are generally improving, there is still room for growth.

In contrast, some participants of this group expressed dissatisfaction driven by a perception of being unappreciated, devalued, and isolated from the leadership of the organisation, experiencing a lack of recognition and rewards. Participants frequently perceived unequal communication, limited assistance, unequal treatment within departments, and a lack of escalation channels as important causes of low morale. These factors appear to present SAMA with challenges in maintaining strong relationships with its employees.

For instance, participant MM2 expressed general dissatisfaction with the employee–organisation relationship. *'Only a minority of employees are happy, often because they feel stuck rather than genuinely satisfied.'* Meanwhile, participant MM10 said that *'relationship satisfaction is difficult to gauge; the environment feels stagnant due to the small size and lack of escalation options. It's difficult to tell you that question.'* The responses of the participants above indicate challenges with respect to relationship satisfaction due to small organisational

size and limited upward mobility, demonstrating significant barriers to achieving relationship satisfaction.

From the foregoing discussion on relationship satisfaction, it is evident that top management and a certain group of middle management are satisfied with the relationship between the organisation and its internal stakeholders. While there are positive efforts to building workplace culture through the Human Resource initiatives, some participants from middle management indicated challenges, inadequate communication, limited assistance, and unequal treatment within departments, which reflect dissatisfaction with relationships.

4.4.3 Exchange relationships vs communal relationships

Exchange relationships are defined as relationships in which rewards are provided to another party with the expectation of receiving similar value of benefits in return. This form of relationship is transactional in nature, as each party weighs the costs and rewards of continuing with engagement. Communal relationships, however, develop over time, and the parties are concerned about the welfare of others, with both parties being willing to contribute without expecting something in return (see Section 2.5.3.1 and Table 3.2).

4.4.3.1 Perceptions of top-level management

Participants from this group pointed to efforts to create communal relationships as well as intentional initiatives, such as open communication, aimed at fostering a community where both parties show care for one another. Participants highlighted a significant emphasis on collective objectives, a dedicated approach to acknowledging employees as essential contributors, and an effort to treat them with respect. Furthermore, the Human Resources Department was regarded as integral to fostering communal relationships by caring for employees, providing welfare and wellness initiatives, and acknowledging personal achievements. Programmes such as feedback sessions emphasise an organisational model that values collaboration and attentiveness to employees' needs, as well as prioritising mutual rewards across the organisation. The mention of medical aid training platforms being provided reflects exchange relationships where employees work and receive transactional rewards.

Participant *TLM4* stated that *'initiatives like entertainment committee events, Business Hour meetings, and open feedback channels promote communal relationships. Provision of medical aid training platforms were a response to requests. There is an honest attempt to be attentive.'* At the same time, participant *TLM2* praised HR's role in *'fostering a communal culture through wellness initiatives and celebrations. Recognition of personal milestones on WhatsApp groups comes into play.'*

4.4.3.2 Perceptions of middle management

Four out of eleven participants from this group confirmed that mutual communal ties exist at SAMA, showing a culture that prioritises equal mutual rewards over commercial interests. Common views are that different efforts by SAMA, such as health initiatives, social activities, and flexible work arrangements, reflect a genuine commitment to employee support beyond mere job performance. These programmes exemplify SAMA's dedication to fostering relationships built on empathy, shared goals, and emotional support. The relationship between the organisation and its employees is based on support, mutual care, and receiving equal rewards that outweigh transactional relationships. This practice of support, mutual care, and clear communication enhances trust and collaboration among team members.

Participant MM4 stated that *'leadership efforts to listen, support, and engage staff reflect communal values. Employee assistance programmes and wellness services show care beyond transactional needs.'* Participant MM5 said that *'wellness programmes, work-from-home flexibility, and leave policies show care beyond just work output. Organisation's efforts reflect care for the well-being of employees as individuals.'*

From the foregoing discussion on mutual communal relationships within SAMA, both management levels recognised communal relationships where both parties are expected to care for each other to maintain the relationship. There is a genuine commitment to mutual support, care, and to offering equal rewards that transcend mere transactional relationships. This approach aligns with the organisation's values and mission as public servants.

4.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from semi-structured interviews with top and middle management, as presented in Table 4.1 on the next page, answer specific research question 2: *What are the management's perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?* (see Section 1.3.1).

Table 4.1: Summary of management perceptions

Strategic communication		
Purposive and intentional communication	TLM	• Internal communication was perceived to be clear and well-managed during change. • Clear communication aligned with strategic goals through different channels within SAMA.
	MM	• Perceived internal communication to be clear and to establish a good rapport between leadership and employees. • Internal communication during change appeared to be insufficient or lacking due to cognitive overload. • Expressed the need for a proper diagnosis of internal communication issues and finding the best strategy to communicate change.
Continuous and consistent process	TLM	• Messages were perceived to be disseminated through various reliable channels such as staff meetings, emails and WhatsApp groups. • Recognised improvement through ongoing internal communication, particularly during change.
	MM	• Messages were perceived to be reliably communicated; however, continuity appeared to be lacking due to cognitive overload. • Internal communication about change was viewed as somewhat inefficient. • Emphasised the importance of internal communication initiatives to maintain internal relationships, despite past challenges of internal change.
Stakeholder-centricity	TLM	• Various departments adopted a central strategy for internal communication to meet employees' needs and address their concerns. • Internal research was conducted through Project Khula to gather and respond to the needs and concerns of employees.
	MM	• Prioritised the needs of external stakeholders and disregards the internal ones. • Emphasised the need for customised strategic internal communication and a prioritisation of internal stakeholder needs.

Two-way symmetrical communication		
Research	TLM	- Insufficient audience research before the implementation of internal change and communication strategies. - Conducted once-off internal research through Project Khula, surveys, and focus groups to better understand its employees after the change.
	MM	Formal research or evaluation is present; however, it is inconsistent with the lack of continuous surveys.
Dialogue	TLM	Dialogue is encouraged through various channels of communication.
	MM	Lack of dialogue due to the communication structure of SAMA, which appears to be hierarchical and one-way.
Balanced communication	TLM	Although mechanisms exist to share information and promote equal communication, complex businesses were viewed as limiting stakeholders from communicating equally with management.
	MM	Challenges in engaging in equal communication with top-down communication controlled by top executives.
Collaboration and negotiation	TLM	- Emphasised the importance of fostering a culture where both parties work together during changes to improve overall organisational effectiveness and decision-making. - Fostering collaboration in organisational activities through cross-departmental collaboration to achieve shared strategic goals.
	MM	Platforms promote working together towards shared objectives, but there is a lack of collaboration and negotiation when it comes to decision-making.
Feedback	TLM	Open feedback opportunities discussions are in place; however, they are limited due to hierarchical barriers.

	MM	Emphasised a need for a more structured feedback mechanism to influence the decision-making process in the internal change.
Participation and inclusiveness	TLM	- Acknowledged the importance of employees' participation and inclusion in internal change. - Improvement in communication and decision-making by recognising the voices of diverse stakeholders. - Persistent gaps in the inclusive approach to internal communication. - Inclusiveness and participation to ensure that employees feel valued and empowered to engage in decision-making and promote the sharing of ideas.
	MM	- Participating in strategic decision-making remains a challenge due to the hierarchical top-down culture, limiting voices from truly being heard. - Efforts to incorporate diverse voices into decision-making. - Mechanisms are in place to foster inclusiveness; however, they seem to be inconsistently applied. - Meaningful participation and contribution to decision-making. - Challenges due to the hierarchical top-down culture, which prevents employees' voices from being truly heard.
Transparency	TLM	Improvements in transparency, but significant internal communication challenges.
	MM	Perceived initiatives aimed at fostering clear, open, and honest communication following the restructuring process.
Stakeholder relationship management		
Relationship building strategies		
Positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of	TLM	- Belief that positivity-driven initiatives and open communication strategies are in place to build and maintain long-term relationships during change. - Legitimacy and assurances through open and transparent communication are the primary goals of building and maintaining long-term relationships, particularly during change. - Access and openness or disclosure strategies are in place to share information to ensure that employees feel comfortable, supported, and encouraged regarding internal changes.

legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises)		• However, no discussion of the nature of relationships with key stakeholders was mentioned. (Lack of openness). • Sharing of tasks through joint ventures between top and middle management on drafting the performance policy.
	MM	• Access and openness, legitimacy and assurance through transparent information and continuous dialogue were maintained to clarify the restructuring process. • Inconsistencies in access to information. First learning about major changes through external media. • Openness or disclosure communication focused on social cohesion rather than effectively communicating organisational changes. • The selective nature of information shared based on authoritarian power preferences rather than transparency, reflecting a lack of openness or disclosure.
Relationship outcomes		
Trust	TLM	• Improved trust within the organisation, particularly in relation to leadership behaviour and open communication with employees.
	MM	• Mistrust and disconnection from the organisation during the change.
Commitment	TLM	• SAMA and its employees are committed to reaching out to one another. • Employees' dedication and intentions to stay with the organisation for the long term. • Efforts of the organisation to provide employees with permanent jobs and benefits.
	MM	• Challenges and concerns about how the organisation handles long-term relationships with its employees.
Control mutuality	TLM & MM	• Unequal control between management and employees in maintaining the reputation of the organisation. • Minimal input on strategic decisions, indicating low mutual control. • Challenges with the nature of decision-making and communication within an organisation.

Relationship satisfaction	TLM	- Relationship satisfaction between the organisation and internal stakeholders. Positive efforts to build a workplace culture through the Human Resource initiatives.
	MM	Challenges indicated inadequate communication, limited assistance, and unequal treatment within departments, which reflects dissatisfaction with relationships.
Exchange versus communal relationships	TLM & MM	- Open communication fosters a community where both parties show care for one another. - Both parties receive equal rewards over commercial interest. - A genuine commitment to employee support beyond mere job performance. - Relationships are built on empathy, shared goals, and emotional support.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEES AT SAMA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed findings from the perceptions of top and middle management of SAMA. This chapter discusses findings from the focus group with SAMA employees from various departments (see Figure 1.3). Employees are important, given their functional roles within the organisation. It is imperative to communicate strategically with them, as employees could impact the success and survival of the organisation (see Sections 1.2 and 3.5.3.2). A total of five focus group interviews were conducted with SAMA employees to gather their perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA. These employees undertake various roles and responsibilities within their respective departments (see Figure 3.1 and Table 3.5).

This chapter answers the specific research question 3:

What are the employees' perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

5.2 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

As previously defined, a purposive and intentional communication process involves crafting clear and concise messages with specific objectives aligned with the desired outcomes of the organisation (see Section 2.3.1 and Table 3.2).

5.2.1 Purposive and intentional

Purposiveness and intentionality were previously described as the crafting of clear, concise messages with a specific objective, aligned with the desired outcomes of the organisation (see Section 2.3.2 and Table 3.5).

During focus group interviews, when asked about purposive and intentional communication, it became evident that participants' perceptions varied with regards to sharing clear information aligned with organisational goals during change. In addition, these participants hold different roles and responsibilities within their respective departments, which contributes to different perceptions.

The common emerging perceptions from the minority of participants of the two focus group interviews acknowledged purposive and intentional communication during internal changes. During focus group discussions, it was evident that participants commonly perceived sharing information and addressing employees' concerns to ensure effective participation and reduce corridor discussions. Furthermore, some participants perceived efforts to align purposive and intentional communication with organisational goals during internal changes. They also identified areas where communication can be improved, such as listening to employees and engaging with them. The literature suggests that purposeful and intentional communication enhances an organisation's ability to communicate clearly, effectively, and achieve its intended objectives (see Section 2.3.2). Findings indicate positive, purposeful, and intentional communication at SAMA during the change.

The findings above were drawn from participants from focus groups 1 and 3, which consisted of SAMA administrative personnel from the following departments: Corporate Affairs, Governance, Education, and Publishing. This could explain why they shared similar sentiments.

In contrast, the majority of participants of the three focus groups perceived a purposeful and intentional communication with external stakeholders, and that effective information about internal changes was not shared with employees. During focus group interviews, it was evident that the majority of participants criticised how purposiveness and intentionality were pursued. They pointed out incidents in which terminology relating to retrenchment was introduced, without sufficient explanation to employees. Participants further explained that while information was shared, it appeared to lack clarity, leading to employees asking for clarification amongst themselves. Comments such as *'adapt or leave'*, *'being uncertain and figuring out what will happen next'*, and *'leaving during restructuring'* were made. This implies that even when someone needs clarification, instead of contacting management, they tend to rely on others with better knowledge to interpret and communicate the content. Similarly, the other participants highlighted the discrepancy between communication about internal change and their daily experiences within SAMA, highlighting that messages often appear to be misaligned with organisational goals and practice. They further emphasised that when sharing information during change, it is imperative to maintain clarity and effectiveness, along with monitoring efforts to ensure understanding across the organisation.

The perceptions above were mainly from participants from focus groups 2, 4 and 5, all of which consisted of SAMA employees from different departments responsible for web development and IT administration, recruitment and client service, which could explain the sentiments they expressed (see Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5).

For instance, participant 3 said that *'we get internal communication from corridor talks. That is all we get information about. That is where we get, if you want to know something, what is happening in this company, just go to someone's desk a friend and buy lunch.'* Participant 4 said that *'they just implement something or ideas to implement something, and then we only talk about that specific topic during that time. There is no follow-up. They just implement something.'* From the perceptions of the participants above, it is evident that they are trying to communicate clearly; however, the practice appears to have inconsistencies, which could lead to gaps in clear communication.

From the above discussion on purposeful and intentional communication, it is evident that it is perceived differently. A minority of participants from two focus groups perceived purposeful and intentional communication positively and recognised a well-defined communication structure to improve clarity and potentially mitigate corridor discussions. They emphasised that when sharing information, clarity and effectiveness should be maintained to ensure understanding across the organisation. In comparison, the majority of the participants from three focus groups perceived the practice of intentional and purposive communication to be inconsistent, particularly during a period of a changing environment. They further perceived that although information was shared, it appeared to lack clarity, leading to employees seeking clarity amongst themselves.

5.2.2 Continuous and consistent process

Continuous and consistent communication was defined as the ongoing and reliable process of disseminating communication aligned with the goals of the organisation (see Section 2.3.2 and Table 3.5).

During the focus group discussion, when asked about continuous, consistent communication, it was apparent that it was viewed differently among participants from various departments. Participants commonly perceived that while communication efforts are in place, particularly during changes, they appear to lack continuity and follow-up. In contrast, other participants perceived effective, consistent, and continuous communication across the organisation.

The majority of participants in two focus groups reported efforts to maintain continuous and consistent communication during and after change. They highlighted that SAMA's proactive approach in establishing a comprehensive framework for continuous information sharing and evaluating its strategies ensured effective communication during change. In addition, the participants acknowledged SAMA's positive efforts to monitor structured communication to ensure consistency across different channels. They perceived these efforts as strategically

aligned with the organisational goals in line with internal changes. During focus groups, it was evident that SAMA regularly monitors and evaluates its communication efforts through surveys to gather employees' feedback regarding internal changes. The literature suggests that internal communication should be a continuous and well-strategised process to manage internal change and its aftermath to achieve organisational goals (see Section 2.3.2.). Findings showed the continuous information sharing and evaluation of strategies to ensure effective communication.

In contrast, during focus group discussions, participants reported delays in communication and notifications often received at the last minute, reflecting inconsistency. Similarly, the majority of participants of the three groups perceived that structured, consistent, and continuous communication seemed to be lacking, leading to irregular and selective information during change. During focus group discussions, some participants reported that they had learned about important developments through social networks rather than by receiving updates via official channels, underscoring a gap in internal communication. The prevailing sentiments reflected that communication is often once-off, suggesting a need for the organisation to prioritise timely, ongoing, and effective internal communication. For instance, they pointed out that the timing of communication is inconsistent, with good news being shared quickly and continuously, whereas negative information, such as restructuring, is often delayed, causing anxiety among employees. The discussions among the participants highlighted the importance of maintaining continuous communication to reduce uncertainty and manage the aftermath of internal changes.

For instance, three participants from different focus groups echoed the perceptions above. One participant from group 2 said *'the inconsistency, but I just want to add that even with being an employee on a personal level, there is inconsistency because we are not aware [of communication, because some messages are private.]'* Meanwhile, one participant from group 5 said that *'they get to be informed about things on a later stage. However, with the current WhatsApp group communication seems to be way much better even though is not a formal platform.'* One participant from group 4 said *'there was a lack of communication and for me, a big example is that their whole restructuring exercise and that was stress'*. These perceptions were predominantly expressed by participants in focus groups 2, 3, and 4 from the following departments: operation, medical protection, corporate affairs, finance, and IT (see Figure 3.1, Section 3.5.3.2, and Table 3.5). This could explain why they perceived communication as once-off events instead of an ongoing process.

From the foregoing discussion on continuous and consistent communication, it is evident that the responses of the participants presented contrasting views. Some participants perceived

communication structures as being in place; however, they appeared to lack consistency with no follow-up. Participants perceived positive efforts for continuous information sharing and evaluation of strategies to ensure effective communication during change. In contrast, a majority of participants emphasised the need for the organisation to prioritise timely responses and effective internal communication. Moreover, other participants highlighted the importance of maintaining continuous communication in managing the aftermath of internal changes, as well as delays in communication.

5.2.3 Stakeholder-centricity

A stakeholder-centric approach refers to the process in which the organisation identifies and prioritises the needs of its key stakeholders (see Section 2.3.3 and Table 3.2).

When asked about the stakeholder-centric approach, the majority of participants from groups provided answers reflecting that efforts to build relationships seem recognised. However, a common perception among the majority of participants was that the organisation should aim to understand the concerns and needs of employees rather than forcing changes that they have planned and expecting internal stakeholders to agree. They emphasised that they want their views to be considered and to not just be consulted for the sake of being consulted.

During focus group interviews with SAMA employees, a common perception from a minority of participants from two groups was that SAMA tried to conduct surveys to gather employees' needs while achieving a successful outcome in the context of change. However, they expressed that they rarely received feedback on the results of the surveys or how their needs would be specifically addressed after internal changes. During focus groups, other participants said that the ability to speak and address employee needs depends on individual relationships with management. These perceptions were mainly from participants from focus groups 1 and 3, consisting of financial personnel, data analysts, client service personnel, and administrative assistants from the departments indicated in Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5.

In contrast, during the three focus group discussions, the majority of participants expressed that during the internal change process, decisions seemed to be made without engaging the employees and consulting their needs. Similarly, some participants highlighted challenges with research, such as unresolved inquiries, neglected feedback, and the need to address employee concerns, which limited opportunities to engage in dialogue with management. During the focus group, participants highlighted that, although SAMA acknowledges its stakeholders, there appeared to be slight gaps in understanding and prioritising the needs of the internal stakeholders, specifically when managing the aftermath. Some participants

expressed that employees' needs, such as resources for personal development, seem not to be prioritised and are often neglected, specifically in the period of change. A common perception is that SAMA prioritises the needs of external stakeholders over the needs of internal stakeholders, leading to employees feeling less valued. For instance, participant 3 from focus group 4 echoed the sentiment above by stating that *'communication is good. However, they get to work and focus on drafting their own communication to external members.'*

The perception above emphasises that, although SAMA prioritises communication with its external stakeholders, addressing their needs during the aftermath of change appears to be a challenge. The literature emphasises that when managing aftermath, communication should be managed strategically; the organisation can identify its key stakeholders and balance their needs and interests (see Section 2.3.3). However, the above findings showed that communication efforts within SAMA prioritise external stakeholders' needs above those of the internal stakeholders. This is evident from the comment that pointed out that communication efforts are directed towards the external stakeholders. These perceptions were mainly from focus groups 3 and 4, which consisted of SAMA employees from various departments responsible for administration and members with the roles of Operations Assistant, Web Developer, and Membership Advisor, identified in Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5. This might account for their perceptions.

From the discussion on the stakeholder-centric approach with participants from various focus groups, it is evident that a minority of participants noticed SAMA's efforts to acknowledge its key stakeholders. Meanwhile, some participants pointed out challenges in addressing the needs of internal stakeholders due to the organisation's efforts to prioritise external stakeholders. Moreover, some emphasised a need for the organisation to understand their concerns and needs. Focus group discussions highlighted challenges in internal communication, including unresolved inquiries, neglected feedback, and unmet employee needs, impacting dialogue with management.

The findings above illustrate how employees perceive stakeholder-centricity within the internal changing environment of SAMA. The following section discusses the findings of how employees perceive communication.

5.3 TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

Symmetrical communication was defined as the willingness of an organisation to listen and respond to its stakeholders (see Section 2.4 and Table 3.2).

5.3.1 Research

Research refers to the process of evaluation in which the organisation gathers information on the needs of its stakeholders in relation to a specific subject, such as a changing internal environment (see Section 2.4.1 and Table 3.2).

The analysis of research derived from the two focus group discussions revealed that surveys were conducted by an external consultant to gather information on the needs and sentiments of the employees after the change. However, the challenges identified by the participants during these discussions indicated that, despite the administering of surveys to evaluate the needs of employees, feedback on solutions to address these needs was rarely provided. Participant 1 from focus group 4 highlighted that SAMA presented an inconsistent formal survey to employees during internal transformations. The participants referenced meetings with external companies to research communication platforms. Moreover, while this approach is available, the current strategy appears to lack consistency in comprehensive research.

Literature emphasises that research should be utilised as a learning process to help organisations understand their stakeholders' expectations, interests, and perceptions (see Section 2.4.1). Findings reflect that the current research strategy appears to lack consistency, which could lead to gaps in understanding stakeholders' needs.

From the discussion on research, it is evident that the majority of participants didn't provide their perceptions, indicating a possible lack of research channels utilised by SAMA to gather information on employees' needs. Surveys were conducted by external consultants to gather employee insights after organisational changes. However, it was perceived to lack follow-up. Research was conducted on communication platforms, suggesting that the efforts were technological rather than gathering employees' perceptions about internal change.

5.3.2 Dialogue

Dialogue was defined as a form of two-way communication exchange where an organisation listens to diverse viewpoints and responds appropriately to encourage mutually beneficial relationships (see Section 2.4.2).

During focus group discussions, the responses of participants regarding dialogue indicated that the practice of engagement and interactive communication seemed to be lacking during change. Participants from the three focus groups pointed out that communication appears to be marked by insufficient dialogue structures throughout the internal change process. They described internal communication as a one-sided monologue. One participant said, '*we were*

addressed and that's it, no chance to engage.' This indicates that their opportunities for interactive engagement seem to be minimal. For example, changes in policy and performance management occur annually without justification or consultation. Moreover, they continuously referenced refraining from voicing their ideas due to a fear of victimisation. These responses were mainly from participants from focus groups, 1, 2, and 3. Consequently, this may explain why employees feel that communication appears to be one-way.

The literature emphasises that dialogue should allow internal stakeholders to engage in interactive communication and receive feedback from the employer (see Section 2.4.2). Findings show efforts to deliver messages to internal stakeholders; however, engaging in interactive communication opportunities appears to be a challenge.

Furthermore, the overall responses of the participants in the two focus groups reflected that opportunities for dialogue between the management and employees appear to be limited. Moreover, they pointed out instances where leadership mentioned that they do not have an open-door policy. One participant from group 3 asserts that communication often ends up in corridor discussions instead of open dialogue. In addition, they emphasised the importance of dialogical communication when asking questions because it provides clarity. Participant 1 from focus group 2 also emphasised the need for an environment where employees can ask questions and express their concerns and ideas. This reflects the importance of open interactive communication within the organisation.

From the discussion on dialogue, it is apparent that the majority of participants expressed the view that dialogue appears to be marked by insufficient dialogue structures throughout the internal change process. The majority of participants expressed concerns about the limited interactive communication characterising internal communication as one-sided or a monologue. In addition, participants felt that dialogue in internal communication practices appears to be lacking. This indicates that their opportunities for interactive engagement seem to be minimal due to a fear of victimisation for voicing their ideas.

5.3.3 Balanced communication

Balanced symmetrical communication involves equality in communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders, encouraging transparent and quality relationships that are mutually beneficial (see Section 2.4.3 and Table 3.2).

During focus group discussions, when asked about balanced communication, it was apparent that the participants shared a similar view. The majority of the participants shared a common sentiment that there are inconsistencies in the equal and transparent sharing of information.

There is also minimal engagement in dialogue between employees and management, leading to employees engaging in informal discussions among themselves (corridor discussions).

During focus group discussions, a common view among participants of two focus groups was that the current practices of internal communication within SAMA appeared to lack transparency, exchange of ideas, and feedback, leading to unbalanced communication, particularly when addressing the aftermath of change. The participants highlighted unequal communication and mentioned that some colleagues have access to information, while others do not. Participants felt that balanced communication is departmentalised, pointing out that being able to engage in equal communication depends on which department you work for. The participants also emphasised the need for equal communication to ensure that everyone is informed about the changes. These responses were primarily from focus groups 2 and 4, consisting of participants who perform various functions within their respective departments (see Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5).

Furthermore, during two focus group discussions with SAMA employees, the majority of the participants expressed that the imbalanced communication hinders effective, open engagement when managing internal change. The overall responses of participants reflected issues such as a lack of open communication and no open-door policy with the higher executives, leading to employees feeling excluded and disconnected from the organisation after the major changes. Similarly, others expressed that they were concerned their ideas were not fully considered, as it appears that there was no action on their suggestions, and they do not feel heard due to unequal interactive communication. In addition, other participants expressed that they were excluded from internal change as communication flows from top down, with few opportunities to engage and address concerns or exchange ideas and provide feedback. The participants emphasised that equal communication would make employees feel trusted and respected, increasing their motivation and morale, especially after internal changes.

Literature emphasises that when managing aftermath, communication should be balanced in a two-way, symmetrical fashion, where both parties feel secure and at ease when sharing their opinions and thoughts (see Section 2.4.3). The findings above show that employees' voices may not be heard due to unequal communication. They were mainly from focus groups 4 and 5, which consisted of employees who perform various roles and responsibilities. This could explain why they perceive internal communication as unbalanced (see Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5).

From the focus group discussion with SAMA employees, participants reflected that communication is inconsistent, leading employees to rely on corridor talks. In addition, participants revealed that some employees receive information earlier than others, reflecting unequal sharing of information. The majority of participants emphasised the need for inclusive and equal access to information to ensure that everyone is informed about internal changes.

5.3.4 Collaboration and negotiation

Collaboration in the context of SAMA refers to a process of two-way communication where both parties work together to achieve a shared goal. Similarly, negotiation involves an exchange of ideas between parties to reach a mutually beneficial agreement for everyone involved (see Section 2.4.4 and Table 3.5).

During focus group discussions, when asked about collaboration and negotiation during internal changes, it was evident that it was perceived differently. The majority of participants from various groups expressed that collaboration appears to be inconsistent across the organisation, whereas participants from the fourth focus group shared that working together with shared goals varies by department.

When focus groups were conducted with the second and third groups, the overall responses reflected that negotiation and collaboration seem to be inconsistent and insufficient, with several barriers obstructing effective two-way interaction. They expressed that the interaction seemed to be one-sided and hierarchical rather than an engaging and meaningful dialogue that facilitates working together towards shared goals. The majority of the participants pointed out that there is also a slight disconnect between the employees and the organisation. They named '*interns working with no support, insufficient handover*', and '*informal communication*' as problems leading to a breakdown in the internal structures intended to promote working together. This indicates that collaboration and negotiation between employees who work together is lacking. During two focus group discussions, participants pointed out that they are instructed to simply perform tasks given to them rather than to engage in meaningful tasks and collaborate. Furthermore, the majority of participants expressed the view that all employees across the organisation should operate in a unified manner rather than in separate groups. They believe that being part of one organisation should mean that all members are aligned towards the organisational goals, treated equally, and working together.

The literature emphasises that collaboration and negotiation can lead employees engaging in team discussions with their employers and working together to achieve shared goals of the organisation (see Section 2.4.7). However, findings show that interaction at SAMA seems to

be one-sided and hierarchical rather than engaging participants in meaningful dialogue that facilitates the sharing of ideas and collaboration towards shared goals.

Participants' overall view from the fourth group was that collaboration and the sharing of ideas seem to operate differently across the organisation. The majority of the participants expressed that some departments work together and share ideas during internal changes. They noted that employees within their departments interact and have mutual agreement. Participant 2 asserted that *'we tend to communicate quite well within our department and we are good at helping or helping each other out, in terms of what is said in the document when it comes to concerns and expectations to evolve over time.'* This reflects collaboration and engagement in effective dialogue to reach common objectives and proactively handle expectations. In contrast, participant 4 stated that *'they don't ask us what you think about doing it that way.'* The responses of the participants above highlight a significant shortfall in broader organisational collaboration and negotiation practices.

From the discussion on collaboration and negotiation, it is clear that the responses of participants reflect that they often merely follow instructions rather than engage in meaningful tasks and collaboration with one another. The common view from these participants emphasised that employees should work together towards the common goal despite their geographic location. Based on the overall responses of participants from various groups, it is evident that negotiation and collaboration practices could be improved after internal changes, as current methods sometimes appear to hinder effective two-way interaction.

5.3.5 Feedback

Feedback is the response of the receiver of a message, which reflects how the message was perceived (see Section 2.4.5).

During focus group discussions on feedback, the overall responses of the participants across focus groups reflected the view that although feedback channels are available, they are inconsistently used. The majority of participants said that feedback channels seem to be ineffective, leading to frustrations among employees. They stated that feedback sessions were conducted via HR surveys to encourage employees to share their thoughts about internal changes; however, receiving feedback seemed to be a challenge. Participants further expressed that when they ask questions in meetings, they were frequently advised to address their questions outside the formal meeting context. Participants from focus group 1 asserted that *'we give our thoughts, but nothing comes back, not even a thank you,'* highlighting that feedback from the leadership appears to be lacking. In addition, participant 1 from focus group

2 emphasised the need for an environment where employees can ask questions, and express their concerns and ideas.

Participants also pointed out that when they receive feedback, it appears to be top-down and directive rather than collaborative, where employees can also share feedback to contribute to the activities of the organisation. They further stated that employees are expected to comply rather than to provide feedback to management. For instance, participant 2 from focus group 2 recognised that *'giving feedback to a person gives clarity.'* In the same vein, a majority of participants emphasised the importance of feedback in providing clarity and effective engagement to improve understanding.

From the perception of employees from focus groups, it is evident that SAMA provides feedback; however, it appears to be done inconsistently, resulting in employee dissatisfaction. The results of the focus groups show that employees need an environment that fosters teamwork with effective feedback responses. Emphasis should be placed on the establishment of feedback channels that enable mutual exchange between employees and management because this approach will increase understanding and employee participation.

5.3.6 Inclusiveness and participation in decision-making

Inclusiveness refers to the process of creating an environment where the voices of diverse internal stakeholders are heard, recognised, and valued (see Sections 2.4.6 and Table 3.5).

During focus group discussions, when asked about inclusiveness, the responses of the participants reflected that there are gaps in the practice of inclusiveness, particularly during change. A minority of participants recognised the commitment of the organisation to ensure that all internal stakeholders are included in decision-making. A majority of participants expressed exclusion, especially those employees who are based in other provinces, often feeling left out of internal communication and other activities within the organisation. In addition, participants highlighted that unequal access to communication reflects exclusion and unfairness, with some employees receiving information earlier than others.

When asked about inclusiveness and participation, participants from four focus groups expressed that internal communication within SAMA appears to lack inclusiveness. The majority of participants repeatedly pointed out that decisions appear to be made without consulting employees across the organisation and felt they were excluded from internal change, leading to uncertainty. They felt that support and sharing of ideas were lacking, and that decision-making was hierarchical. These circumstances impact their ability to participate, adapt, and respond to changes effectively. Moreover, participants expressed reluctance to

express their opinions and concerns due to a fear of victimisation; however, they stated they were grateful they were employed. These findings reflect that employees seem to fear sharing their ideas and concerns. The literature emphasises that an organisation should create an environment where the voices of diverse internal stakeholders are heard, recognised, and valued (see Section 2.4.6). Findings show opportunities for employees to voice their ideas; however, it appears that they fear victimisation.

Furthermore, other participants reflected that participation and inclusiveness during internal changes appeared to be lacking. Moreover, participants from four focus groups expressed exclusionary behaviour from the top executives, noting that employees are not only kept uninformed but also feel undervalued, as their opinions seem not to be incorporated into the final decisions. In addition, they further expressed that invitations to participate in meetings are often given on short notice, leading to some employees feeling behind or excluded, especially those employees in different geographical locations. For example, participant 2 asserted that communication is not that effective because everything occurs within the head office. This reflects that communication is centralised, where decisions are made in the head office, excluding other employees in the region or in different locations. In addition, the participants highlighted that the effectiveness of inclusiveness and participation varies between departments and leadership styles. Other participants stated that some individuals are reluctant to participate in communication, and not everyone feels comfortable raising issues or asking questions in such public settings. The above perceptions were from focus groups 1, 2, 3, and 4, consisting of employees from various departments (see Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5).

In addition, participants asserted that the role of communication is to keep employees updated and informed of the reasons for changes, as well as to ensure that they are included and able to participate in organisational activities. The majority of the participants expressed that employees are expected to agree without proper, understandable communication first taking place, which leads to employees feeling reluctant to participate in the change process. Furthermore, other participants emphasised the need to provide more formal, structured, and decentralised channels of communication, which in turn would help to close this gap and ensure that all employees are well informed, included, and able to participate in internal changes. This view suggests that communication within SAMA does not seem to be particularly purposeful during change. These perceptions were mainly from participants from focus group 5, including administrative personnel and a relationship officer (see Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5).

From the foregoing discussion on collaboration and negotiation, it is evident that this matter was perceived differently by some. Although some participants expressed belief in the organisation's commitment to ensuring that all internal stakeholders are included and able to participate in decision-making, the majority expressed that decisions seem to be made without consulting employees across the organisation and they felt excluded in internal change, leading to uncertainty.

5.3.7 Transparency

Transparency was defined as an organisation's communication with employees to make all legally publishable information available, whether positive or negative, in an accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal manner (see Section 2.4.7 and Table 3.5).

When asked about transparency, the responses of the majority of participants from the various groups reflected the view that transparency within SAMA is a holistic process that not only promotes the timely and honest sharing of information, but also fosters consistency and honest communication across different channels.

During focus group discussions, participants stated that while there are efforts to demonstrate transparency, inconsistencies remain in information sharing during change throughout the organisation. This practice appears to diminish the perception of transparency, despite the efforts to disseminate information. For instance, one participant from focus group 1 expressed frustration with changes in performance contracts being communicated at the last minute, suggesting a lack of timely disclosure. The perspectives expressed are attributed to participants in focus group 1, comprising employees representing different departments, including Finance, Operations, Medical Protection, and Governance (see Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5). The cross-departmental participation in focus groups may account for shared similar sentiments as participants highlighted inconsistencies in sharing information during change throughout the organisation.

Furthermore, a majority of participants from the three focus groups expressed common views that reflected certain gaps in internal communication, particularly in relation to the dissemination of honest and transparent information. They indicated that SAMA seems to withhold information, especially when sharing matters about internal changes. This withholding of information was compared to protecting children from difficult truths. The belief is that employees should be treated as mature and capable of handling honest information. They repeatedly indicated that information is only available to certain individuals, while others do not have access to it. During focus group discussions, a majority of participants said that

access to information matters. They would learn about policy changes mainly from personal acquaintances within the organisation, rather than through formal channels, leading to misunderstandings and distrust. They felt that the lack of transparency causes frustration and uncertainty. Participants emphasised the importance of transparency, honesty, and open communication to prevent issues and feelings of being less valued among employees. The above perceptions were derived from the third, fourth and fifth focus groups conducted with SAMA employees from the following departments: IT, Medical Protection, Legal, SAMA Northwest, and Corporate Affairs (see Section 3.5.3.2 and Table 3.5).

For instance, participant 1 from group 3 asserted that *‘even if it is a sensitive issue, minimal sharing of information can help to stop the corridor talk.’* Participant 2 from group 4 also expressed frustration and mistrust when employees are excluded from essential information.

The responses of participants above emphasise that communication efforts were in place; however, they appeared to lack the transparency necessary for sharing open information and understanding changes. In addition, these circumstances reflect the need for symmetrical two-way communication when sharing information, where employees can engage in dialogue with leadership. The literature suggests that open and transparent communication during and after change nurtures employee trust and positive attitudes toward change (see Section 2.4.7). Meanwhile, the above findings show that access to information through corridor discussions and personal relationships leads to distrust. This suggests that open communication, even at a minimal level, might reduce mistrust, speculation, and misinformation among employees.

From the foregoing discussion on transparency, it can be seen that participants from different focus groups expressed mixed views on the current practice of transparency within SAMA in the context of internal changes. It is evident from the overall responses that there are efforts to promote transparency by sharing honest communication during changes. However, a majority of participants perceived that information was withheld, especially when communicating internal changes. Furthermore, the manner in which the organisation shares information is perceived to lack consistency. Participants emphasised that consistent, honest, and timely communication is critical to improve transparency and ensure employees feel informed and valued.

The findings above discussed how employees perceived transparency in the context of the changing internal environment of SAMA. The next section discusses the findings of employees and how they perceive the stakeholders’ relationship with the organisation.

5.4 STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Stakeholder relationship management is the practice of building quality relationships with stakeholders, including employees. Stakeholder relationship management is defined as the management function of communicating strategically to actively and effectively build and manage mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its key stakeholders (see Section 2.5).

5.4.1 Relationship-building strategies

The relationship building or cultivation strategies describe the way the organisation communicates with its internal stakeholders, manages conflicts, and builds or restores good relationships (see Section 2.5.1).

When asked about **positivity**, it was evident that it was viewed differently by different respondents. A minority of participants acknowledged **positive** efforts to build relationships among employees, whereas a majority stated that the practice of positivity within SAMA seems to be inconsistent. None of the participants from the second and fifth groups provided any strategies. **Positivity** was defined as an effort or commitment by the organisation to do whatever it takes to ensure that stakeholders feel content and more pleasant in their relationships (see Section 2.5.1.1).

During focus groups, the majority of participants perceived that pursuing **positivity** through wellness builds relationships with employees during change. They pointed out that social events organised with a focus on team building were the norm rather than building personal relationships between management and employees. Literature suggests that **positivity** strategy is a strong predictor of mutuality, satisfaction, and trust in control (see Section 2.5.1.1). Findings of this research demonstrate effective communication between employees but minimal opportunities to exchange their ideas with management. These responses were primarily from focus groups 1 and 3, which consisted of employees from different departments responsible for membership advisors, Financial Assistant, Client Liaison, Editorial Personnel, Administrative Personnel, and Operations Assistant (see Section 3.5.5.2.1). This composition could explain why these participants perceived positivity initiatives differently within the organisation.

The participants from the fourth focus group expressed the view that the organisation displayed inconsistency in communication and positivity in building relationships. The participants said that **positivity** was introduced with the intention of maintaining relationships and bringing about change; however, they pointed to inconsistencies rather than a continuous

strategy. Participants noted a continuous pattern where the organisation hires external facilitators to run programmes, but these programmes are of short duration. As a result, the intended changes do not materialise, and employees get back to their usual routines without any tangible progress being made.

When asked about openness, the majority of participants from all five groups shared similar sentiments. During the focus group discussion, the majority of participants expressed that **openness or disclosure** is present at SAMA to ensure that employees are informed and engaged during change. However, the open-door policy seems to be a challenge, reflecting that **access** to management and communication is limited. The term open-door policy refers to the practice of an employer and employee to engage in open communication without barriers. **Openness or disclosure** was defined as the efforts of the organisation and its stakeholders to engage in open communication to exchange ideas and disclose important information honestly. (see Section 2.5.1.2).

The organisation appears to have a structured and hierarchical environment wherein ongoing dialogue appears to be limited, and employees may feel restrained in sharing their opinions. Literature emphasises the importance of the organisation being willing to discuss the nature of the relationship with their key stakeholders to cater to/meet their needs and provide access to information (see Section 2.5.1.2). Based on the responses of participants, it is evident that reflecting such strategies as **openness or disclosure**, **sharing of tasks**, and **access** appear to be limited or inconsistently applied.

For the current study, access was defined as the process of providing stakeholders with information and access to the organisation's decision-making processes (see Section 2.5.1.3). During focus group discussions, some participants acknowledged that there are efforts to improve the provision of information and **access** to decision-making. Meanwhile, other participants perceived **access** to be limited, specifically during change. They would rather access information through corridor discussions. For example, participant 1 said *'It's not easy to access certain information, that's what I can see.'* These responses were primarily from focus groups 2 and 3 (see Section 3.5.5.2.1). Consequently, this may explain why SAMA employees feel that access to communication often appears to be limited.

The majority of participants highlighted the importance of exercising caution when accessing and sharing information during changes, to ensure that no breaches that could result in harm to the organisation occur. This reflects **access and legitimacy or assurance** strategies. Other participants from the fourth and fifth focus groups highlighted that there are efforts to make information about internal change and its aftermath available to employees. However,

this practice often seems unbalanced and is hindered by hierarchical levels and communication barriers. Literature suggests that organisations and stakeholders should practise the symmetrical communication strategy when they engage in meaningful engagement and provide feedback opportunities (see Section 2.5.1.3). Findings show that communication appears to be hierarchical, creating delays in information dissemination and effective engagement with feedback opportunities between employees and management.

During focus groups, a common view was that open communication with the internal stakeholders existed; however, it seems to lack **legitimacy and assurances**, leading to uncertainty and frustration about how SAMA is committed to employees. In addition, participants perceived ineffective open communication and exclusion, with decisions seemingly imposed on employees without proper dialogue. **Legitimacy and assurances** were defined as the efforts of both parties to ensure that concerns are addressed or legitimate in terms of shared values and behaviours (see Section 2.5.1.4).

The majority of participants from four group discussions reflected inconsistencies in legitimacy and assurance due to the withholding of information on financial matters. Literature suggests that both parties involved should make an effort to commit to the relationship, which in turn leads to more satisfaction and commitment from both sides (see Section 2.5.1.4). From the responses of participants, it is evident that the practice of this ideal seems to be hindered by ineffective engagement between employees and management.

In the foregoing discussion on relationship-building strategies, participants emphasised that the application of **positivity** strategies to build relationships within SAMA appears to be inconsistent. It is evident that the organisation's positivity strategy relies on social committee activities to strengthen relationships among employees. Participants stated that social events focused on team building rather than addressing relationships between management and employees. Furthermore, while a minority of participants from various groups shared the view that **openness or disclosure** policies are present to ensure that employees are informed and engaged during change, it seems to rely on authority and is inconsistently practised. The majority of participants expressed the view that there is a lack of openness and no open-door policy, leading many employees to feel less comfortable engaging in communication. This reflects an inconsistent openness or disclosure policy.

In addition, a majority of participants from various groups highlighted that there is limited access to important information, leading to employees feeling anxious. It is evident that access to information seems to be restricted due to selective information sharing and receiving from informal channels. Regarding legitimacy or assurance, while a minority acknowledged open

communication with the internal stakeholders, the majority of participants perceived that commitment to ensuring legitimacy and assurance was directed towards building relationships with external stakeholders.

The findings above discussed relationship-building strategies. The next section will discuss the findings of employees on the relationship's outcomes.

5.4.2 Relationship outcomes

Relationships should be built through symmetrical communication, which enables organisations and their stakeholders to generate and receive benefits (see Section 2.6).

5.4.2.1 Trust

Trust is a fundamental aspect of a cooperative relationship and plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of relationships. It encourages interpersonal acceptance and openness of expression of views from both parties (see Section 2.6.1).

Focus group discussions with participants from five focus groups reflected a prevailing sentiment of mistrust and a lack of support from leadership, which contributes to organisational challenges in addressing internal changes. This inconsistency contributes to feelings of exclusion and uncertainty, hindering effective information sharing and creating an environment of suspicion and mistrust. However, the majority of the participants emphasised the importance of transparency and clear communication to foster trust between internal stakeholders within SAMA, especially during change. Participants emphasised the importance of addressing these issues by highlighting the need for discretion when trusting colleagues and handling confidential matters.

Literature suggests that the process of building a trusting relationship between the organisation and employees involves integrity, fairness, and dependability (see Section 2.6.1). Findings show that there may be challenges with the practice of trust within SAMA.

In addition, the majority of the participants perceived favouritism and inconsistency in the way leadership addresses the needs of stakeholders, as well as instances of unfairness in the way appointments are made, which may contribute to feelings of mistrust. They emphasised that trust is crucial to building internal relationships and promoting open communication, yet the existing environment seems to be characterised by mistrust, uncertainty, and selective information sharing. In addition, participants emphasised the importance of transparency and clear communication from the leadership to foster trust within the SAMA.

Participants from focus group 2 said, *'then there's the stress, there's lack of trust within the employees themselves. Yeah, because I mean, you look at one person, you ask, where did you get the information from?'* This sentiment reflected the fact that employees don't trust one another and doubt the credibility of information shared by the organisation. Participant 5 said that *'trust builds trust and cuts down on the confusion when communication is clear.'* These statements emphasise the importance of building trust within the organisation.

The majority of participants reflected notable challenges concerning trust within the organisation. This often stems from a sense of limited support from leadership, which affects how internal changes are managed. The majority of participants generally believe that trust seems to be hampered by a lack of transparency, leading to suspicion and doubts regarding information shared across the organisation. Participants suggested that clear and honest communication is essential to foster trust and engagement within SAMA.

5.4.2.2 Commitment

Commitment can be defined as the extent to which both organisations and their stakeholders feel it is worth investing time and energy to build a long-term relationship (see Section 2.5.2.2).

From the focus group discussion, a minority of participants from three focus groups provided their perceptions on commitment to long-term relationships, expressing their view that the majority of employees seem not to recognise the efforts of the organisation to commit to long-term relationships.

During focus group discussions, a minority of participants said that commitment was evidenced by personal dedication to work responsibilities and employees investing their time and efforts to achieve organisational objectives. The participants from across different departments show their ongoing commitment by working during difficult times. They further mentioned that they maintain their responsibilities because they want to do good work and make meaningful contributions, demonstrating efforts to invest time and energy to build a long-term relationship. Literature suggests that commitment is crucial to the organisation, reducing turnover and increasing employees' loyalty and effective engagement with the organisation (see Section 2.5.2.2).

Participants from focus group 2 stated that receiving information and responsibilities creates feelings of organisational pride, which prompts employees to show their deep emotional connection with their work. Similarly, participant 3 stated that employees demonstrate their dedication through work affection, which drives them to continue their efforts despite insufficient recognition. The responses of participants emphasised efforts to maintain their

emotional well-being and commitment to work even when their efforts receive no recognition or circumstances are challenging.

In addition, employees can demonstrate their commitment through active participation and by committing to teamwork, while improving communication. They further explained that they actively support open communication and teamwork because they understand these values create mutual benefits for both personal and organisational growth, building relationships among employees and their management. The literature suggests that the outcome of commitment is crucial for the organisation, reduces turnover, enables effective management, and increases employees' loyalty to the organisation (see Section 2.5.2.2).

However, findings from the focus group reflected that SAMA employees do not feel their organisation displays true commitment towards them. The employees feel unimportant because they believe that their value to the company is minimal. This is apparent from their comments, for example, a participant from focus group 3 said, '*You have to be grateful that you are employed,*' and '*No one says thank you.*' The organisation appears not to show enough appreciation for employees' work because it lacks proper recognition of their efforts.

The focus group discussions on commitment demonstrate that SAMA employees held different views about their dedication to maintaining long-term relationships. The employees expressed the view that commitment is one-sided because they demonstrate personal commitment to their work through meaningful contributions, yet receiving recognition seems to be a challenge. This makes employees feel undervalued.

5.4.2.3 Control mutuality

Control mutuality refers to the extent to which the employer and employees agree on who has the proper amount of control over the other. This reflects the power imbalance between both parties; however, the two-way symmetrical communication may produce mutual control in relationships between employer and employees (see Section 2.5.2.3).

During focus groups, the majority of participants from four focus groups voiced the sentiment that management holds dominant control, which may limit employees' autonomy and influence. They also highlighted the concerning practices of control mutuality where influence on decisions appeared to be based on favouritism, possibly overlooking important input from other employees. They further pointed to the power imbalance between employees and top management.

Literature suggests that control mutuality advocates that both parties are equal and should consider one another. This means that the employer should not exercise power over employees to obtain their own goals (see Section 2.5.2.3). The responses of participants showed that control mutuality within SAMA may be affected by a hierarchical culture in decision-making.

For instance, participant 1 from focus group 2 emphasised the above by stating that *'Leadership implement something or ideas to and then we only talk about that specific topic during that time once.'* From the response above, it is evident that SAMA appears to practise internal communication in the context of asymmetrical communication, where leadership holds more control over decision-making. At the same time, employees' inputs seem not to be recognised. This indicates that employees have less influence on their management due to barriers to effective engagement, and this affects their willingness to communicate openly.

Participants from four focus groups felt that there is a power imbalance between management and employees. There seems to be a perception of insufficient consultation and collaboration in decision-making, reflecting an imbalance in the control shared between management and employees. This would seem to indicate that common control between management and employees is inconsistently practised.

In the context of the foregoing discussion on control mutuality, the responses from participants across different focus groups indicated a perception of an imbalance in authority to make decisions between management and employees. It appears there is a sentiment that management holds predominant control, which may limit employees' autonomy and influence.

5.4.2.4 Relationship satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction refers to the extent to which each party perceives the approaches or actions of the other as favourable in a relationship. This has the result of reinforcing positive expectations about the relationship. Both parties receive equal rewards that outweigh the costs to the relationship (see Section 2.5.2.4).

During the focus group discussion, it became evident that the participants shared different opinions; some expressed relationship satisfaction, whereas others expressed dissatisfaction. The majority of participants in three focus groups expressed low satisfaction with their relationship with the management but were satisfied with their relationship with colleagues. Moreover, participants reflected an imbalance in the relationship as there are minimal equal rewards for their work. Some participants expressed satisfaction with their relationship with colleagues rather than with the organisation, while others highlighted that SAMA is a positive

environment. Other participants mentioned that their motivation to work is primarily for the colleagues they interact with, rather than the company brand or the organisation itself. This shows that employees maintain relationships among themselves, leading both parties to feel positively about one another.

Furthermore, the majority of participants reflected relationship dissatisfaction, pointing out that taking actions to promote common understanding and working together with leadership seemed to be a challenge. They also expressed lower relationship satisfaction within the organisation, mainly due to a feeling of exclusion, being overworked, and lacking support from the leadership. A majority of the participants also echoed this sentiment by highlighting that their relationships with management appeared not to be maintained during internal changes. They pointed out that they were performing various roles, and trying to satisfy the expectations of leadership with insufficient rewards, leading to challenges in maintaining long-term relationships.

For instance, participant 4 quantified relationship satisfaction and pointed to a lack of inclusion, stating that *'I'm at 30-40% satisfaction, feel excluded. I will be honest with regard about the work relationship.'* Meanwhile, participant 3 said that *'I'm satisfied at 10%, but on top of that 10%, divide it by 2%–5%'*, reflecting a high level of dissatisfaction with the internal relationship. This suggests that emotional and psychological needs seem to be unfulfilled. Another participant from focus group 5 stated that *'I'm working because I need to work.'* This shows that the reason for working is based on necessity rather than a deep interest or loyalty to the company. The perceptions of participants reflected only slight or minimal satisfaction with the organisation.

Literature suggests that when employees interact with their managers regarding their needs, they feel satisfied (see Section 2.6.4). Findings show mixed perception of relationship satisfaction at SAMA, with the majority of employees feeling demotivated, impacting their work relations negatively.

In contrast, a minority of participants from the fourth focus group shared their sentiments regarding relationship satisfaction. They acknowledged departmental relationship satisfaction, with effective internal communication, cooperation, support from colleagues, and satisfaction with the organisation's initiatives. They added that they are highly satisfied with their relationships because they are currently maintaining existing relationships with fellow employees, as they have worked together before, and building relationships with the newly appointed leadership. These responses of participants substantiate the viewpoint that

fostering mutual understanding and responsiveness enhances the quality of relationships within SAMA.

It is evident from the foregoing discussions with participants from various focus groups that the majority of them expressed dissatisfaction with their relationships with SAMA. Participants noted a slight gap between their expectations and reality in relationships, mentioning aspects such as emotional and psychological fulfilment, feelings of exclusion, overwork, demotivation, insufficient recognition, and unclear communication about rewards. Other participants expressed satisfaction with the organisation, specifically with interdepartmental relationships.

5.4.2.5 Exchange versus communal relationships

Communal relationships refer to relationships in which both parties expect the relationship to be communal and both parties show concern for the welfare of the other. Both parties receive equal rewards that outweigh the costs to the relationship (see Section 1.7.2). Exchange relationships, on the other hand, were defined as relationships in which rewards are provided to another party with the expectation of receiving similar value or benefits in return.

During focus group discussions, it was clear that the majority of participants perceived a gap between employees and management, suggesting that caring for employees' welfare seemed not to be deemed important across the organisation. A minority of participants acknowledged the efforts to foster exchange relationships where internal stakeholders receive equal rewards for their contributions to the organisation.

Participants expressed that SAMA seemed to be struggling to foster mutually beneficial relationships with its internal stakeholders. It appears that there is limited evidence of open communication, shared rewards, or mutual concern across different parts of the organisation.

Participants from two focus group discussions described exchange relationships, arguing that SAMA creates the impression that rewards are provided to its internal stakeholders by introducing new policies and employees' benefits. They highlighted that the policies seem to favour the interests of the organisation over the welfare of employees. Employees are required to pay for their own medical and study expenses; they feel that they do not receive adequate rewards. Although there are open communication platforms for employees to engage with the leadership and express their concerns, they fear being victimised. These responses were shared among participants from focus groups 1 and 3, from various departments (see Section 3.5.5.2.1).

Literature suggests that in mutual communal relationships, both parties expect the relationships to be communal and both parties show concern for the welfare of the other (see Section 1.7.2). It is evident that SAMA attempts to foster communal relationships; however, the efforts seem to benefit the organisation's interests over its employees' welfare. Other participants similarly felt that their expectations were only partially met, and they mentioned some frustration because their problems remain unresolved.

In contrast, a minority of participants from the fourth focus group acknowledged communal relationships among employees. The majority of participants highlighted that there is mutual help and collaboration among employees, and that this reduced information asymmetry. Moreover, other employees expressed the ability to address problems directly with their line manager, who responds promptly, showing a potentially different experience with management depending on one's position or direct supervisor. Based on the responses of participants, it is evident that mutual care varies based on an employee's position or relationship with their direct manager. One participant highlighted that *'Everyone needs to look past what level you start on, valuing the input others have.'* This reflects the view that the employer, employees, and the organisation as a whole should care for each other. By doing so, communal relationships will be fostered. Moreover, participants emphasised recognition, inclusion, and equal consideration from leadership.

In the discussion above on communal relationships, participants highlighted issues within SAMA that hinder the establishment of such relationships. Some participants expressed the view that SAMA cares for its internal stakeholders by introducing new policies and medical benefits; however, participants believed all these efforts seemed to benefit the organisation over its employees. Participants stated that SAMA encounters difficulty in fostering mutually beneficial relationships because of insufficient communication, a lack of shared rewards, or a mutual concern among the internal stakeholders.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings presented in this chapter are summarised in Table 5.1 on the next page, answering specific research question 3:

What are the employees' perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

Table 5.1: Summary of employees' perceptions

Strategic communication	
Purposeful and international communication	• Perceived a well-defined internal communication structure during change to improve clarity and potentially mitigate corridor discussions. • Intentional and purposive internal communication appears to be inconsistent, particularly during a period of a changing environment. • Emphasised that when sharing information, clarity and effectiveness should be maintained to ensure understanding across the organisation.
Continuous and Consistent process	• Acknowledged internal communication during changes; however, it appears to lack consistency with no follow-up. • Delayed communication. Expressed the importance of maintaining continuous communication to manage the aftermath stemming from internal changes.
Stakeholder-centricity	• Emphasised a need to conduct surveys during internal change to address the needs of internal stakeholders, as the organisation's efforts are perceived to prioritise external stakeholders. • Challenges in internal communication, including unresolved inquiries. Feedback and employee needs seem to be neglected, which affects dialogue with management.
Two-way symmetrical communication	
Research	• Surveys were conducted by an external consultant to ascertain the needs and sentiments of the employees after the change. • Research was on communication platforms, suggesting that the efforts were focused on technology rather than gathering employees' perceptions about internal change.
Dialogue	• Interactive communication during internal change appears to be lacking, characterising internal communication as one-sided or a monologue.

Balanced communication	• Unbalanced communication, leading employees to rely on corridor talks. • Participants revealed that some employees receive information earlier than others, reflecting unequal sharing of information. • Emphasis on the need for inclusive and equal access to information to ensure that everyone is informed about internal changes.
Collaboration and negotiation	• Negotiation and collaboration practices could be improved after the internal change, as current methods sometimes appear to hinder effective two-way interaction. • Employees within SAMA should work together towards the common goal despite their geographic location.
Inclusiveness and participation in decision-making	• Commitment of the organisation to ensure that all internal stakeholders are included and participate in the decision-making process. • Decisions seem to be made without consulting employees across the organisation, and employees feel excluded in internal change, leading to uncertainty.
Feedback	• SAMA maintains feedback; however, it appears to be inconsistently practised, which results in employee dissatisfaction. • There is a lack of feedback on surveys that were conducted to collect employee input or contributions. • Feedback channels that enable mutual exchange between employees and management to foster better understanding are needed.
Transparency	• Information is withheld, especially when communicating about internal changes. • Internal communication was perceived to lack consistency in how information about internal change is shared across the organisation.
Relationship-building strategies	
Positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual	• The application of positivity strategy to build relationships within SAMA appears to be inconsistent during change. • Positivity through social events is focused on teambuilding rather than addressing relationships between management and employees.

concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises)	• Openness or disclosure is in place to ensure that employees are informed and engaged during changes; however, it seems to rely on authority and is inconsistently practised. • Access to information seems to be restricted due to selective information sharing and receiving information from informal channels. • Commitment to ensure legitimacy and assurance was directed towards building relationships with external stakeholders.
Relationship outcomes	
Trust	• Challenges exist concerning trust within the organisation, which often stems from a sense of limited support from leadership and affects how internal changes are managed.
Commitment	• Commitment is one-sided because they demonstrate personal commitment, yet recognition seems to be a challenge. • Employees seem not to recognise the efforts of the organisation to commit to long-term relationships.
Control mutuality	• Management holds predominant control, which may limit employees' autonomy and influence. • Decision-making authority is imbalanced between management and employees.
Relationship satisfaction	• Dissatisfaction with the relationship with SAMA. • Participants noted a slight gap between their expectations and reality in relationships, mentioning aspects such as emotional and psychological fulfilment.
Exchange versus communal relationships	• Relationship-building efforts seem to benefit the organisation over its employees. • The perceptions of employees expressed that communal relations exist within SAMA, but they are not equally experienced across the organisation.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The current study aimed to investigate how internal communication is utilised to manage employer–employee relationships, answering the general research question. As established in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.1), SAMA has navigated a changing environment. The research problem reflects that the aftermath of organisational change, if not properly strategically managed, could bring about uncertainty within the internal context of an organisation (see Section 1.3). To address the research problem, the study explored the aspects of strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and relationship management to answer the general and specific research questions.

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and outlined the methodological approach of the study, including the background, context, and problem statement (see Section 1.2), the research questions (see Section 1.3.1), and the objectives of the study (see Section 1.4). Chapter 2 addressed the first specific research question, identifying theoretical concepts and constructs to guide the study (see Section 1.3.1). Chapter 3 elaborated on the qualitative research approach, detailing the methodologies used, namely semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Chapter 4 analysed and presented the findings of management’s perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication derived from the semi-structured interviews. Chapter 5 elaborated on the findings regarding the employees’ perceptions of the nature of internal communication derived from focus group discussions.

The aim of Chapter 6 is to answer the general research question, acknowledge limitations, and provide recommendations for future research.

6.2 ANSWERING SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The first specific research question asked:

What guidelines does the literature pose for internal communication to manage employer-employee relationships through strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management?

This specific research question was answered through the literature study in Chapter 2, and the identified guidelines are presented in Table 3.2, where the theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs are illustrated.

The first research question can be answered as follows: literature indicates that organisations should utilise strategic internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships through purposeful, intentional, and continuous efforts, which maintain consistency while focusing on stakeholder needs. Therefore, the approach to internal communication should be in the manner of two-way symmetrical communication, delivering research-based dialogue, which combines balanced information with collaborative negotiation, feedback, inclusive decision-making, and transparent practices. The implementation of these elements within relationship-building strategies that include positivity, openness and access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, idea-sharing, and dual concern will create long-term relationships that strengthen mutual **trust**, **commitment**, **control mutuality** and **stakeholder** satisfaction.

Table 3.2 is duplicated below as Table 6.1 to facilitate easy reference.

Table 6.1: Summary of theoretical statements, concepts and constructs

Theoretical statement	Concept	Construct	Operational definition
Theoretical statement 1 It is imperative for SAMA to prioritise strategic communication to ensure internal stakeholders are engaged and supported. Strategic communication is a purposive and intentional communication process that directly aligns communication efforts with an organisation's strategic objectives. It emphasises a continuous and consistent process of communication or delivering messages, ensuring that specific goals are achieved while prioritising stakeholder-centric perspectives at the forefront.	Strategic communication	Purposive and intentional communication	The purposive and intentional process involves crafting clear, concise messages with a specific objective, aligned with the desired outcome of the organisation. SAMA should proactively share information, address concerns, and actively engage employees.
		Consistent and continuous process	Consistent and continuous communication is defined as the ongoing and reliable process of dissemination of messages that are aligned with the goals and strategies of an organisation.
		Stakeholder-centricity	Stakeholder-centricity refers to the process in which the organisation identifies, understands and prioritises the needs of its internal stakeholders throughout its lifecycle to achieve the successful outcome. This approach focuses on the importance of addressing the needs and concerns of internal stakeholders to build trust and enhance engagement.

Theoretical statement 2 In the case of SAMA, two-way symmetrical refers to actively listening to internal stakeholders through conducting research and engaging in meaningful dialogue. This approach should create balanced communication with the goal of fostering collaboration and negotiation, and providing feedback to encourage participation and inclusiveness in decision-making between the organisation and stakeholders. Moreover, this form of communication emphasises openness and transparency to reach a mutual understanding between both parties.	Two-way symmetrical communication	Research	Communication research is defined as a form of two-way communication exchange in which an organisation actively listens to the diverse viewpoints and responds appropriately to the concerns of its key stakeholders, such as employees, to encourage mutually beneficial relationships.
		Dialogue	Dialogue is a form of two-way communication exchange where an organisation listens to diverse viewpoints and responds appropriately to the concerns of its key stakeholders, such as employees.
		Balanced communication	Balanced communication involves equality in communication between the organisation and its internal stakeholders to encourage transparent and quality relationships that are mutually beneficial.
		Collaboration and negotiation	Collaboration in the context of SAMA refers to a process of two-way communication where both parties work together to achieve a shared goal. Similarly, negotiation involves an exchange of ideas between parties to reach a mutually beneficial agreement for everyone involved.
		Feedback	Feedback is the response of the receiver which reflects how the message was perceived. It is an essential component for facilitating understanding and for assessing to what extent communication is effective between an organisation and its key stakeholders.
		Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making	Inclusiveness refers to the process of creating an environment where the voices of diverse internal stakeholders are heard, recognised, and valued. Participation can be defined as involvement in strategic decision-making through workgroups and teams, as well as in the setting of the organisational strategic agenda.

		Transparency	Transparency is defined as an organisation's communication with employees to make all legally publishable information, whether positive or negative, available in an accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal manner, with the goal of improving employees' reasoning abilities and holding organisations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices.
Theoretical statement 3 In the case of SAMA, building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships through internal symmetrical communication is essential for fostering a positive work environment and enhancing employee engagement. Relationship-building strategies such as positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises) should be employed to build and	Stakeholder relationship management	Relationship building strategies	
		Positivity	Positivity is defined as the effort or commitment of the organisation to do whatever it takes to ensure that stakeholders feel content and pleasant in their relationships.
		Openness or disclosure	Openness or disclosure refers to the efforts of the organisation and its stakeholders to engage in open communication to exchange ideas and disclose important information honestly. This involves the willingness of the organisation to discuss the nature of relationships with their key stakeholders to cater to/meet their needs and access information.
		Access	Access refers to the efforts of both organisations and stakeholders to be accessible to one another. For the current study, access is defined as the process of providing stakeholders with information and access to the organisation's decision-making process.
		Legitimacy assurances	The efforts of both parties to ensure that concerns are addressed or legitimatised in terms of shared values and behaviours. This strategy also includes efforts to demonstrate commitment to maintaining relationships, which in turn leads to increased satisfaction and commitment from both sides.

maintain relationships with internal stakeholders.		Networking	This strategy involves the organisation's efforts and willingness to build networks or form more relationships. This shared networking takes place with the same group of people. Thus, an organisation builds relationships with the same group as its stakeholders to build shared networks.
		Sharing of tasks	Task-sharing involves both an organisation and its stakeholders sharing responsibilities and collaborating to solve problems. This can help both management and employees in building and maintaining relationships with one another.
		Dual concern Cooperation Being unconditionally constructive Asserting win-win or no-deal Keeping promises	Dual concern emphasises the importance of balancing interests of both organisations and their stakeholders with the goal of achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. • Cooperation: the goal of the organisation is to align the interests of the stakeholders with the organisational goals in a manner that benefits both parties (building relationships that are mutually beneficial).

			• Being unconditionally constructive: The organisation prioritises the relationship, even if it means sacrificing some of its goals, or if its stakeholders do not reciprocate its good intentions. • Asserting win-win or no-deal: this strategy emphasises that if the organisation and its stakeholders cannot find a mutually beneficial solution, they commit to not making a deal that does not benefit both parties. • Keeping promises: this has been identified as an important relationship maintenance strategy, strengthening trust and long-term commitment between the organisation and its stakeholders.
Theoretical statement 4 SAMA should strive to build internal relationships through two-way symmetrical communication based on the relationship-building strategies, which in turn results in employer-employee relationships that are long-term and mutually beneficial in nature. Those relationships can be measured by the following outcomes: trust ,	Relationship outcomes (including the types of relationships)	Trust	Trust is the willingness of both the organisation and the employees to be open to each other through symmetrical two-way communication with confidence that the other parties will take their interests into account when making decisions. It can be achieved through a combination of three dimensions: integrity, dependability, and competence.
		Commitment	Commitment can be defined as the extent to which both organisations and their stakeholders feel that it is worth investing time and energy in building a long-term relationship.
		Control mutuality	Control mutuality refers to the extent to which the organisation and its employees agree on who has control over the other. This reflects the power balance (or imbalance) between both parties. However, true two-way

commitment, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction , as indicated by the stakeholder relationship management theory.			symmetrical communication may produce mutual control in relationships between organisations and employees.
		Relationship satisfaction	Relationship satisfaction refers to the extent to which each party perceives the approaches or actions of the other as being favourable in the relationship. This is a result of reinforcing positive expectations about the relationship. Both parties receive equal rewards that outweigh the costs to the relationship.
		Exchange vs communal relationships	Exchange relationships are defined as relationships in which rewards are provided to another party with the expectation of receiving benefits of similar value in return. This form of relationship is transactional in nature, as each party weighs the costs and rewards of continuing with engagement. Communal relationships are relationships that develop over time, and both parties are concerned about the welfare of the other and are willing to contribute without expecting anything in return, unlike exchange relationships, which are based on the expectation of direct reciprocation.

6.3 ANSWERING SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The second research question asked:

What are the management's perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer-employee relationships at SAMA?

The following perceptions of management were gathered through semi-structured interviews.

6.3.1 Strategic communication

6.3.1.1 Purposive and intentional communication

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

From top management perspective, internal communication was purposefully and intentionally structured. They highlighted that the internal communication process was clear and well-managed, aligned with strategic goals, and effectively executed. They further recognised the importance of engaging with employees and listening to their feedback throughout the restructuring process. The insights from top management's perceptions reflected an organisational culture that values strategic communication. However, other participants at this level expressed a contrasting view, indicating that it was not managed well (see Section 4.2.1.1). They specifically emphasised that communication should ensure that everyone understands the key messages, considering that many employees are non-native English speakers.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

From middle management's perspective, different views emerged regarding purposive and intentional communication (see Section 4.2.1.2). Some participants perceived internal communication as clear and established a good relationship between management and employees. In contrast, other participants perceived internal communication during change as being insufficient, rather than clear and inclusive. These views underscored the perceived inconsistency in clarity and inclusion, suggesting that existing communication efforts seem to be insufficient when communicating change. Furthermore, the responses of the participants emphasised the need for a proper diagnosis of internal communication problems and the best strategy to communicate change.

6.3.1.2 Continuous and consistent process

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Top-level management acknowledged that regular and reliable dissemination of messages through channels such as staff meetings, emails and WhatsApp groups contributed to a recognised improvement in internal communication practices (see Section 4.2.2.1). They felt that top-level management is proactive in using these channels to ensure that SAMA's goals and strategies are clearly communicated to internal stakeholders. This perceived consistent communication approach during change has, in their view, reinforced effective alignment between top management and employees, facilitating effective internal change and fostering a collaborative environment. Other participants presented contrasting views, indicating that although platforms for sharing communication are in place, they seem to lack continuity due to selective information sharing.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

Participants in this group expressed the view that internal communication was reliable in providing information about internal changes; however, continuity appears to be lacking. They noted that the challenges are largely attributed to cognitive overload and a lack of adequate alignment initiatives (see Section 4.2.2.2). Conversely, other participants emphasised the importance of improving internal communication initiatives to maintain and strengthen internal relationships despite these past challenges. Therefore, they emphasised the need for targeted strategies to overcome these barriers and improve the flow and efficiency of communication between departments within the organisation. In addition, current internal communication practices within SAMA were perceived to improve consistent communication and strategic alignment.

6.3.1.3 Stakeholder-centricity

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Participants from top-level management perceived stakeholder-centric processes through a central strategy for internal communication and believed it was effectively implemented across various departments to meet employees' needs and concerns (see Section 4.2.3.1). Furthermore, they highlighted that SAMA initiated internal research through Project Khula, conducted by an external consultant to understand and evaluate the needs of internal stakeholders after the change. The feedback gathered from Project Khula was used to introduce new benefits in response to meeting the specific needs and concerns of the employees, with a goal of building long-term relationships.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

Some participants stated that good internal communication was in place, but employees' input in strategic decisions seemed to be lacking, making it less stakeholder-centric (see Section 4.2.3.2). Furthermore, the majority felt that current internal communication strategies do not adequately foster inclusion, as they often appear to prioritise the needs of external stakeholders over those of internal ones. The responses of the participants emphasised the need for a tailored approach that focuses on strategic internal communication, ensuring that the needs of internal stakeholders are prioritised and effectively addressed.

6.3.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

6.3.2.1 Research

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

With regards to research, the participants from top-level management acknowledged that SAMA actively conducted internal research after the change through Project Khula, with regular employee surveys and various feedback mechanisms, including meetings. These initiatives are perceived as important steps for gathering information on the needs and interests of employees and fostering mutually beneficial relationships (see Section 4.3.1.1). However, a recurring perception is that ongoing research to evaluate employees' needs is often insufficient or occurs primarily after major internal changes have already been implemented.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

The management of this group acknowledged that SAMA conducts formal research, pointing out that the process was informed by reorienting to the needs of its stakeholders (see Section 4.3.1.2). Majority participants presented contrasting views, pointing out that research appears not to be conducted continuously, with gaps in the regularity of surveys and structured feedback initiatives.

6.3.2.2 Dialogue

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

The majority of top-level management acknowledged that dialogue was actively promoted throughout the organisation. They also stated that commitment to dialogue extends beyond just communication; it ensures inclusivity of employees who operate remotely (based outside the head office) (see Section 4.3.2.1). They acknowledged efforts to foster dialogue, emphasising the value of cascading communication, information, and feedback flow from the Executive Committee (EXCO) to the Middle Management Committee (MANCO), and subsequently to all staff members. This structured cascade ensures the consistent sharing of key messages and creates opportunities for employees at all levels to engage in dialogue with the management. They emphasised that further efforts are needed to improve dialogue and inclusion, allowing employees to participate and feel heard during the communication process.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

A minority of participants acknowledged that SAMA facilitated dialogue between management and employees during change. They highlighted that the new performance management system was effectively communicated to both employees and management, enabling them to engage in dialogue (see Section 4.3.3.2). However, a majority of the participants in this group presented critiques, pointing to the absence of genuine dialogue in the communication structure of SAMA, which appears to be hierarchical and one-way. These channels were perceived primarily to serve information dissemination, with internal stakeholders merely being informed of the decisions management has made, with little opportunity for dialogue.

6.3.2.3 Balanced communication

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

A majority of participants in this group reflected the view that SAMA demonstrates balanced communication by sharing information and promoting equal opportunities to engage in communication (see Section 4.3.3.1). The majority of participants acknowledged sharing of both negative and positive information, such as important information about internal changes. A minority of participants highlighted gaps, such as the hierarchical communication approach, where inaccessible language and business jargon limit internal stakeholders from communicating effectively and equally with management.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

The majority of participants expressed the view that SAMA practises balanced communication by engaging with employees (see Section 4.3.3.2). Participants acknowledged that both positive and negative issues are shared, and specific channels allow employees to voice concerns, share ideas, and provide feedback. Participants from this group stated that communication is unbalanced and predominantly top-down, with the flow of important information being controlled by top executives, resulting in employees often being caught unaware or confused.

6.3.2.4 Collaboration and negotiation

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

The responses of top-level management reflected the importance of fostering a culture in which both parties work together within the SAMA to improve communication, decision-making, and overall organisational effectiveness (see Section 4.3.4.1). The responses indicated a belief that negotiation and collaboration are present within SAMA, although their intensity and consistency vary between departments. These participants further expressed that SAMA promotes collaboration and fosters mutual understanding to work towards shared objectives between management and employees during organisational changes such as restructuring and a debt collection project.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

A minority of participants from middle management acknowledged that SAMA engaged in joint planning sessions, for example, the Human Resources Department collaborating with EXCO (top management) and MANCO (middle management) in preparing the documents for performance management and change management (see Section 4.3.4.2). Meanwhile, the majority of participants presented contrasting views, expressing the opinion that collaboration and negotiation are lacking in decision-making processes. However, efforts such as Business Hours have attempted to create a platform for collaboration. These participants stated that decision-making is top-down, with a lack of negotiation and cooperation, which, in turn, results in staff members feeling disconnected from internal change.

6.3.2.5 Feedback

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Participants from top management felt that formal and informal structures exist to facilitate feedback. However, effectiveness appears to be a challenge. They also stated that mechanisms exist that allow internal stakeholders to share ideas and provide input on how messages were perceived (see Section 4.3.5.1); however, the effectiveness of these feedback structures differs according to the individual's experience. In contrast, one participant noted a hierarchical instead of an inclusive feedback system at SAMA. In addition, they further felt that feedback processes were incomplete, leading to dissatisfaction, and employees were hesitant to provide honest feedback due to a fear of retaliation.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

According to the perspectives of middle management, open feedback opportunities are limited due to hierarchical barriers that exist within the organisation. The majority of participants perceived feedback mechanisms, such as forums and meetings, to be superficial, with management sometimes dismissing employees' suggestions (see Section 4.3.5.2). They emphasised the need for a more structured feedback mechanism that clearly shows the extent of the effectiveness of communication between management and employees. Employees, particularly during new performance management processes, should feel safe to give feedback, and management should address and implement suggestions, especially those related to changes.

6.3.2.6 Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

The participants in top-level management recognised the importance of employee participation and inclusion (see Section 4.3.6.1). They mentioned efforts to promote decision-making and participation to promote the sharing of ideas. They further highlighted that SAMA facilitates inclusive and participative communication by including employees with relevant skills in decision-making. For example, a continuous professional development (CPD) officer and marketing communication officer were cited as examples of how they were involved in decision-making with respect to expertise.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

Middle management expressed the view that no meaningful participation and inclusiveness to decision-making were encouraged. In addition, there is no evidence that their voices contribute to internal changes or influence management decisions (see Section 4.3.6.2). Despite evidence of employees participating in strategic decision-making, some middle management participants highlight that participation and inclusiveness within SAMA remain challenging due to the hierarchical top-down culture, which was perceived to prevent employees' voices from being truly heard. Individuals' perceptions about the way SAMA promotes participation have informed how both management levels understand the organisational culture.

In addition, there is no evidence that their voices contribute to internal changes or influence management decisions (see Section 4.3.6.2). Despite evidence of employees participating in strategic decision-making, some middle management participants highlight that participation and inclusiveness within SAMA remain challenging due to the hierarchical top-down culture, which was perceived to prevent employees' voices from being truly heard. Individuals' perceptions about the way SAMA promotes participation have informed how both management levels understand the organisational culture.

6.3.2.7 Transparency

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

The majority of participants from top-level management noted both improvements and significant internal communication challenges. They shared a common perception of the need for open and honest communication to increase transparency after restructuring through collaboration with other departments across the organisation (see Section 4.3.7.1). They expressed that many positive changes had occurred, and regular channels for sharing information about change were in place. However, the approach to communication was perceived as top-down, and the withholding of some information was justified on the grounds of confidentiality.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

The majority of the participants in this group expressed the view that SAMA practised transparency during internal changes, in financial matters, and in handling performance metrics, maintaining this openness even in the face of unfavourable developments (see Section 4.3.7.2). In contrast, middle managers highlighted the withholding of information and a lack of openness in internal communication, specifically regarding policy change and financial decisions.

6.3.3 Stakeholder relationship management

6.3.3.1 Relationship-building strategies

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Participants from this group believe that initiatives that focus on positivity are in place. They further acknowledged that SAMA demonstrates legitimacy and assurances through open communication with internal stakeholders to show commitment to each other, with the primary goal of building and maintaining long-term relationships (see Section 4.4.1.1). The majority of the participants demonstrated their understanding of building relationships through openness or disclosure as a strategic approach to building relationships with employees. They indicated that the access and openness or disclosure strategy was in place to enable the sharing of information. This is to ensure that employees feel comfortable, supported, and encouraged, and that they engage with their direct line manager to seek clarity regarding internal changes.

In contrast, some participants observed that communication access followed a hierarchical structure because middle management, along with junior staff members, faced challenges in reaching meaningful areas of participation. They further emphasised that openness or disclosure was mainly for top executives, while junior employees struggled to engage in meaningful dialogue and exchange ideas with management.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

From the perspective of middle management, positivity and access to information strategies were found to foster effective engagement with employees, providing information through various platforms, which leads to the formation of relationships (see Section 4.4.1.2). The majority of the participants acknowledged the improvement in access to open communication and leadership, particularly after the restructuring, reflecting openness or disclosure as a strategy. They also noted that openness or disclosure and legitimacy assurances were maintained through continuous dialogue to clarify the restructuring process. The main argument is that various strategies, such as access and openness or disclosure, legitimacy, and assurance, are used by an organisation to maintain trust, show mutual commitment, and foster strong internal relationships.

In contrast, the majority perceived that an openness or disclosure strategy appears to be lacking. They expressed the view that communication within the organisation focused on social cohesion rather than on effectively communicating organisational changes. They further stated that they often learned about major changes first through external media, indicating inconsistencies in

access to information. Other challenges were noted, such as the selective nature of the information shared, and an environment where employees feel discouraged from asking questions. This indicates inconsistencies in the sharing of tasks, and legitimacy assurances appear to be lacking.

6.3.3.2 Relationship outcomes

6.3.3.2.1 Trust

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

The participants acknowledged an improvement in trust within the organisation, particularly in relation to management behaviour and in maintaining open dialogue with employees (see Section 4.4.2.1.1). The top-level management team believe that trust develops through three essential elements: fairness, flexibility, and leadership commitment to deliver on what has been promised. They expressed that by leadership acknowledging past errors, an environment is established where employees trust and feel more confident in organisational commitments. Moreover, trust is not viewed as a one-time achievement, but as a continuous process over time. Therefore, trust between both parties is important and can lead to the formation of relationships.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

Some participants in this group believe that the efforts of the organisation are directed towards improving trust through engagement and listening to employees to foster mutual respect (see Section 4.4.2.1.2). However, the majority of middle management participants contrasted this by expressing feelings of ongoing distrust between the employees and the leadership, and inconsistent communication with few opportunities for feedback. They expressed the view that crucial decision-making processes, most notably during and after the organisational restructuring of 2022, created mistrust between employees and management. In addition, participants in this group expressed mistrust, particularly regarding whether leadership truly listens and addresses employees' concerns. Thus, mistrust can harm or damage relationships between management and employees.

6.3.3.2.2 Commitment

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Participants in this group recognised commitment through management efforts that focus on the well-being of the employee, training, and maintaining open communication. They explained that

the low staff turnover serves as evidence of the commitment of SAMA to employee loyalty and long-term relationships (see Section 4.4.2.2.1). The participants highlighted that commitment through retention and alignment of employees' needs with organisational values and goals creates long-term relationships. This shared commitment improves the work culture, increases employee satisfaction at SAMA, and ultimately helps ensure long-term relationships with internal stakeholders.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

Participants in this group believe that SAMA demonstrates its commitment through its employees and their intentions to stay with the organisation for the long term. Participants believe that aligning with organisational goals demonstrates the intention to build lasting relationships with employees (see Section 4.4.2.2.2). The perceived commitment through alignment of the strategy with the organisational goals reflects a genuine desire to build relationships. This effort reflects an improvement in commitment. The mutual understanding between SAMA and its employees contributes to a cohesive, purpose-driven work environment. In the context of SAMA, the commitment to long-term relationships is based on employees' retention, well-being, and training.

6.3.3.2.3 Control mutuality

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Top-level management presented common views on the mutuality of control within SAMA. They highlighted an environment characterised by a major power imbalance of control because management holds much more control than employees (see Section 4.4.2.3.1). Therefore, there are mechanisms to foster control mutuality, which allows employees to voice their opinions and suggest policies to promote power balance. However, their effectiveness varies depending on their content and individuals' willingness to engage. They explained that management retains significant control and sensitive information to maintain the organisation's reputation.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

A minority of participants from the focus group acknowledged that there is shared control between management and employees. They further emphasised the importance of both employees and management having the opportunity to express their views and contribute to discussions (see Section 4.4.2.3.2). In addition, they highlighted shared control mutuality, where employees' ideas are considered and influence SAMA's social media strategies. In contrast, the majority of participants described a top-down control, where management has dominant control, filters information and limits employees' input. It is evident from the participants' responses that control mutuality between management employees appears to be lacking.

6.3.3.2.4 Relationship satisfaction

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Satisfaction in the relationship is seen in the way management engages with employees. Participants perceived SAMA positively and noted intentions to build relationships, as the organisation established a favourable workplace culture through human resource initiatives that promote positive expectations, such as the provision of medical aid and a wellness programme (see Section 4.4.2.4.1). These visible rewards were perceived to strengthen interpersonal relationships and mutual respect, significantly contributing to employee satisfaction. It is evident from the responses of the participants that they believe employees are more satisfied when they are engaged, heard, and supported.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

The majority of the participants in this group reflected a high level of satisfaction with relationships. Furthermore, they acknowledged satisfaction through supportive environments and good interpersonal relationships, although it is suggested that relationship satisfaction differs between different departments (see Section 4.4.2.4.2). In addition, they described relationship satisfaction within departments and effective engagement with management. This led to mutual understanding and fostered positive expectations of relationships. Their view indicates a level of satisfaction with the operational processes and a desire for this satisfaction to be a common sentiment throughout the organisation. In contrast, some participants in this group felt dissatisfaction because they did not receive appreciation, lacked recognition, and felt disconnected from the leadership of the organisation.

6.3.3.3 Types of relationships

Exchange relationships versus Communal relationships

The definition of exchange relationships describes situations where parties give rewards to each other while expecting an equivalent value in exchange. However, communal relationships require time to develop because both parties focus on helping the other, while giving without expecting anything back (see Section 2.5.3.1).

- **Perceptions of top-level management**

Perceptions in this group indicated efforts to develop communal relationships, with management displaying care, respect, and collective goals that prioritise the welfare of the employee (see Section 4.4.3.1). The Human Resources Department plays a vital role in building communal relationships through wellness programmes, personal development initiatives, open communication channels, and recognition programmes. However, some elements of exchange relationships were perceived, and they mentioned transactional benefits such as medical aid and training opportunities, where employees receive rewards in return for their contribution to the organisation.

- **Perceptions of middle management**

The findings of semi-structured interviews indicated that communal relationships with management reflected communal relationships rather than exchange relationships (see Section 4.4.3.2). Moreover, while exchange relationships are characterised by transaction, middle management acknowledged that SAMA demonstrates an element of communal relationships that prioritises equal mutual rewards over commercial interests without requiring immediate returns. In addition, the common view is that SAMA demonstrates its commitment to employee support through health initiatives, social activities, and flexible work arrangements, which display a genuine commitment to employee support beyond merely job performance. This emphasis on communal relationships not only strengthens collaboration and emotional support but also enhances relational outcomes such as trust and satisfaction.

6.4 ANSWERING SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION 3

The third research question asked:

What are the employees' perceptions regarding the nature of internal communication to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

6.4.1 Strategic communication

6.4.1.1 Purposive and intentional communication

During focus groups, employees presented contrasting views on purposive and intentional communication at SAMA (see Section 5.2.1). A minority of participants, mainly from administrative departments (Corporate Affairs, Governance, Education, and Publishing), perceived internal communication to be clear and well-managed, structured, and aligned with organisational objectives. Furthermore, they acknowledged that internal communication helped reduce corridor discussions, fostered employee participation, and addressed concerns effectively. This finding demonstrates that when internal communication is clear, mutual internal understanding is improved and opportunities for building good relationships between management and employees are created.

In contrast, most of the participants, particularly from operational and technical departments, perceived internal communication as inconsistent. They claimed focus was placed on effective communication to external stakeholders. They further criticised internal communication, pointing out that messages about internal change, such as restructuring and retrenchment, were introduced without sufficient explanation. This practice was perceived to create uncertainty and increased employees' reliance on informal information channels for clarity. They also expressed the need for a proper diagnosis, transparent and inclusive internal communication issues, and finding the best strategy to communicate change.

6.4.1.2 Continuous and consistent process

During focus group discussions, some participants acknowledged the efforts of the organisation to disseminate a consistent message through various reliable channels such as staff meetings, emails, and WhatsApp groups, to preserve continuity (see Section 5.2.2). They observed improvement in internal communication, especially during change. In their view, these initiatives and efforts were perceived as strategically aligned with organisational goals, engaging employees through continuous and consistent messaging, easing the uncertainty.

In contrast, most of the participants expressed concern about delays in internal communication, noting that the flow of information is often distributed in a selective manner. They acknowledged that while internal communication exists, it appears to lack consistency and continuity, particularly in the case of sensitive or negative developments such as restructuring. Some participants explained that they sometimes receive important updates through informal channels, such as social media. In addition, they further emphasised the need for timely and continuous communication to effectively manage the aftermath of change and foster stronger relationships between management and employees.

6.4.1.3 Stakeholder-centricity

The majority of employees recognised that the organisation attempted to conduct surveys and consultations to gather the needs of the employees (see Section 5.2.3). Although common perceptions of participants reflected gaps in the way employees respond, these efforts were perceived to be incomplete, with a lack of follow-up and tangible responses to employees' needs.

Furthermore, the majority of participants in the focus groups expressed that while the organisation recognises employees as important stakeholders, the organisation's efforts are directed at prioritising external stakeholders. They expressed that their concerns and needs are often overlooked or only superficially acknowledged. They further emphasised the need to conduct surveys during internal change to address the needs of internal stakeholders.

6.4.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

6.4.2.1 Research

The participants acknowledged that surveys were conducted by an external consultant to gather the needs and interests of employees after the change (see Section 5.3.1); however, the process appeared to be inconsistent, lacked transparency and continuity, and offered ineffective feedback to employees. This inconsistency in the research conducted was perceived to hinder the management of strategic learning and the understanding of employees' interests and expectations. Furthermore, the minimal responses from the participants regarding the research suggest a lack of knowledge or insufficient engagement with existing research channels or mechanisms.

6.4.2.2 Dialogue

During the focus group with SAMA employees, participants acknowledged that dialogue within the internal communication process appears to be limited and mostly one-way (see Section 5.3.2).

Furthermore, participants constantly mentioned that internal communication during the change was a monologue, with minimal opportunities for engagement with management. The majority of the participants believed that the lack of dialogue was influenced by the hesitance of the management to promote an open-door policy, leading to employees feeling constrained from engaging in meaningful dialogue with management due to a fear of victimisation.

6.4.2.3 Balanced communication

The findings from the focus group described internal communication as unbalanced and unpredictable. The majority of participants stated that information sharing appears to lack transparency, and they depend on informal discussions to obtain information (corridor talks and the grapevine) (see Section 5.3.3). The participants stated that information sharing was departmentalised, with some employees receiving information earlier than others, reflecting unequal information sharing that resulted in feelings of exclusion and mistrust. Participants perceived the current practice of two-way communication as top-down, which creates barriers to effective engagement in balanced communication between management and employees. They also stressed that all employees need equal access to information, as this practice will create internal awareness and active participation during organisational changes. This practice would create trust and strengthen relationships, particularly in the aftermath of organisational change.

6.4.2.4 Collaboration and negotiation

During focus group discussions, the majority of participants explained that collaboration and sharing of ideas seem to operate differently across the organisation. (see Section 5.3.4). They emphasised that collaboration and negotiation practices should be improved after the internal change, as the current practice sometimes appears to hinder effective two-way interaction. Some participants said that they often follow instructions rather than engage in meaningful tasks and collaboration with one another. The common recommendation from these participants is that employees should work together towards the common goal despite their geographic location.

6.4.2.5 Feedback

From the perception of employees who participated in the focus groups, it is evident that SAMA maintains feedback; however, it appears to be inconsistently practised, which results in employee dissatisfaction. During focus group discussions, the majority of participants explained that while surveys were conducted to collect employee input or contributions, responses or acknowledgement were lacking, implying that feedback mechanisms were insufficient. The results of the focus groups showed that employees need an environment that fosters teamwork

with effective feedback responses. The establishment of feedback channels that enable mutual exchange between employees and management was recommended, as this approach will lead to a better understanding and increased employee participation.

6.4.2.6 Participation and inclusiveness in decision-making

It is evident that the employees believed that SAMA has made some attempts to involve the employees, but most felt excluded from important decision-making processes when major organisational changes occur (see Section 5.3.4). They pointed out that the management made important decisions about internal changes, and some employees appeared to receive updates before others, which led to perceptions of limitations for participation in decision-making. Employees who work outside of the head office headquarters in different provinces reported stronger feelings of detachment because they believed that all important decisions and communication activities take place at the head office. Moreover, employees perceived available channels for idea sharing to be limited, and the lack of employee involvement in decision-making processes has created uncertainty and a feeling of being undervalued. The level of inclusiveness and participation in SAMA depends on the approach of departmental leadership because some teams maintain an open dialogue, while others do not.

6.4.2.7 Transparency

It is evident from the general responses that there are efforts to promote transparency through honest communication, although inconsistencies and challenges were pointed out. From the foregoing discussion on transparency, the majority of participants perceived transparency as important, especially when communicating important information (see Section 5.3.6). They expressed that the current practice of transparency within SAMA appears to be lacking, as participants perceived efforts to conceal information, especially when communicating about internal changes. In addition, internal communication is perceived to lack consistency in how information is shared throughout the organisation. Participants emphasised that consistent, honest, and timely communication is critical for improving transparency and ensuring employees feel informed and valued. Furthermore, employees consistently stated that transparency should extend beyond basic information sharing because it requires honest and effective communication across the organisational channels.

6.4.3 Stakeholder relationship management

6.4.3.1 Relationship-building strategies

From the focus group discussions with SAMA employees, it is evident that the majority feel that the practice of positivity strategy appears to be inconsistent because team-building initiatives or activities are focused on maintaining relationships among employees rather than strengthening good relationships with management. The majority of participants perceived a lack of effective engagement and exchange of ideas as a barrier to positivity and building trusting relationships. Furthermore, the majority of participants across focus groups acknowledged that openness or disclosure is intended to inform and engage employees during organisational changes. However, they noted that communication seems to be structured in a manner that reflects hierarchical levels, resulting in minimal opportunities for dialogue and sharing ideas or concerns with management, indicating that openness or disclosure seems to be inconsistent.

During focus groups, a majority of participants stated that access to information and participation in the organisational decision-making process appeared to be limited due to hierarchical structures and inconsistency, particularly when addressing the internal changes. This would lead employees to rely on informal channels, such as corridor conversations, to access important information. In addition, a majority of participants stated that SAMA appeared to focus on building relationships with external stakeholders through its commitment to legitimacy and assurance.

6.4.3.2 Relationship outcomes

6.4.3.2.1 Trust

The findings reflect the mistrust among employees and management. The majority of participants expressed challenges concerning trust within the organisation, often stemming from a sense of limited support from leadership, which affects how internal changes are managed (see Section 5.4.2.). Most participants believe that a lack of transparency and ineffective communication led to mistrust and perceptions of favouritism when addressing employees' needs. The practice of mistrust was viewed not only as affecting relationships between employees and management, but also as affecting trust among employees. The general findings from focus groups emphasise the need for transparency, fairness, and open communication from management to rebuild and strengthen trust, with the goal of building long-term relationships.

6.4.3.2.2 Commitment

From the focus group discussion, a minority of participants from three focus groups provided their perceptions on commitment to long-term relationships, expressing their view that the majority of employees seem not to recognise the organisation's efforts to commit to long-term relationships (see Section 5.4.2.2). However, a minority of participants from focus group discussions on commitment stated that SAMA employees held different views about their dedication to maintaining long-term relationships. The employees indicated that commitment is one-sided because they demonstrate personal commitment to their work through meaningful contributions yet fail to receive recognition. This makes them feel undervalued.

6.4.3.2.3 Control mutuality

Findings across focus groups reflected that control mutuality within the organisation is perceived as limited, with a clear imbalance of power. Management is perceived to hold dominant control, which may limit employees' autonomy and influence (see Section 5.4.2.3). Furthermore, a common sentiment is that decision-making is largely top-down, with minimal engagement and genuine collaboration with employees. Participants also highlighted some concerning practices, where decisions might be subtly influenced by bias or favouritism, leading to important input or contributions from employees being overlooked. Despite the accepted practice of mutual control outlined in the literature, the current practice appears asymmetrical, with management retaining more primary control. This leads to employees feeling less willing to communicate openly or engage meaningfully with organisational processes.

6.4.3.2.4 Relationship satisfaction

The responses of the employees indicate that the overall satisfaction with the relationship within SAMA is low, with the majority of the employees expressing dissatisfaction with the organisation (see Section 5.4.2.4). Participants perceived unclear communication about rewards and policy changes, as well as limited support, as unfavourable. They expressed a slight gap between their expectations and reality in relationships, mentioning aspects such as a lack of emotional and psychological fulfilment, leading to demotivation. However, some of the participants reflected satisfaction in relationships between employees and within specific departments, pointing out the importance of support, mutual understanding, and effective internal communication within teams.

6.4.3.3 Types of relationships

Some participants expressed positive experiences in communal relationships at the departmental level, where the mutual help, collaboration, and responsive management practices of the

employees contributed to a stronger sense of communal relationships and improved two-way symmetrical communication (see Section 5.4.2.4). The employees expressed that there are communal relationships within the SAMA, but they are not equally experienced throughout the organisation, often depending on one's position, department, or relationship with direct line managers.

Findings from focus groups indicate that communal relationships within SAMA are generally underdeveloped, with gaps between employees and management regarding mutual concern and shared benefits. Most participants stated that exchange relationships are common, pointing out that there are some organisational initiatives, such as new policies and benefit offerings. Employees largely perceive these efforts as favouring the organisation's interests rather than genuinely supporting employee welfare. Many participants highlighted a lack of open communication, insufficient shared rewards, and inconsistent demonstration of care for employee well-being, indicating that communal relationships are pursued inconsistently.

6.5 ANSWERING THE GENERAL RESEARCH QUESTION

The general research question for this study reads as follows:

How is internal communication utilised to manage employer–employee relationships at SAMA?

6.5.1 Strategic communication

When referring to theoretical guideline 1, strategic communication is **purposive and intentional** communication, with a great emphasis on a **continuous and consistent** process of communication, while keeping **stakeholder-centric** perspectives at the forefront (see Section 2.3.3).

Internal communication within SAMA is managed strategically between management and employees with a goal of managing the aftermath of change and maintaining relationships. Therefore, it serves **as purposive and intentional** communication designed to provide clear information across the organisation. The efforts of a **continuous and consistent** internal communication process are used beyond just sharing information, but also as initiatives to prioritise employees' engagement. Furthermore, internal communication is utilised to maintain **stakeholder-centricity** through gathering and evaluating employees' needs with a goal of building long-term relationships with employees. Moreover, more effort is placed on prioritising the needs and relations with external stakeholders over the employees.

It can be deduced that although SAMA employs internal communication as a strategic management of internal relationships, its effectiveness seems to be limited. Internal communication is often neither clear nor inclusive due to a hierarchical approach and language barriers. As a result, employees tend to seek further clarification from their colleagues. Furthermore, internal communication lacks a mechanism to provide effective feedback on how employees' needs will be addressed, leading to misunderstandings between employees and management.

6.5.2 Two-way symmetrical communication

When referring to theoretical guideline 2 in the case of SAMA, two-way symmetrical communication involves actively listening to internal stakeholders by conducting **research** and engaging in meaningful **dialogue** (see Section 2.4.7).

The South African Medical Association (SAMA) practises internal communication in the context of two-way symmetrical communication as a mechanism to manage relationships between management and employees. It is evident that SAMA employed **research** through an external consultant to conduct surveys, focus groups, and regular meetings. Therefore, internal communication is utilised to gather employees' feelings and perceptions after change. These efforts are designed to understand employee needs, provide feedback, and foster engagement to encourage mutually beneficial relationships. The organisation appears to lack a consistent approach to providing **feedback** to employees, indicating that internal communication is sometimes utilised inconsistently.

The organisation (SAMA) demonstrates its commitment to **inclusiveness** through its established systems, which enable all members to participate in internal communication. Therefore, internal communication within SAMA provides employees with multiple dialogue channels, such as WhatsApp groups, team meetings, executive roundtables, and open-door sessions, fostering effective engagement between management and employees. Despite the efforts of internal communication to engage employees, the practice tends to be top-down, with minimal opportunities for employees to engage in **dialogue** and **participate** actively or ask questions. Moreover, these practices often hinder access to equal information, effective **inclusiveness in decision-making**, collaboration, and equal **balanced communication** between management and employees.

Internal communication at SAMA is employed to maintain **transparency**, which directly affects employee trust during times of organisational transformation. The organisation has attempted to distribute financial and organisational information, but the process lacks consistency and

frequently experiences delays. The absence of prompt and open communication between management and employees leads to confusion and mistrust among employees.

In conclusion, SAMA demonstrates its dedication to research-based dialogue and feedback sessions. These help manage employer–employee relationships through their internal communication practices, which are executed by two-way symmetrical communication. The organisation's hierarchical structure, along with its inconsistent feedback systems, unequal information sharing, and restricted employee participation, prevents it from achieving complete two-way symmetrical communication. SAMA should establish internal communication systems, providing employees with equal access to information while actively seeking and responding to their feedback to build stronger relationships.

6.5.3 Stakeholder relationship management

6.5.3.1 Relationship-building strategies

Theoretical guideline 3 emphasises the importance of building and maintaining relationships within SAMA through strategies such as **positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas, and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal, and keeping promises)** to develop strong relationships that are long-term and mutually beneficial. This will foster a positive work environment and enhance effective engagement between management and employees (see Section 2.5.1.7).

The organisation (SAMA) applies core strategies such as positivity, openness or disclosure, access, legitimacy assurance, and sharing of ideas through two-way symmetrical communication as part of its effective internal communication practice to foster strong relationships. Internal communication promotes an open communication policy and shared decision-making, which aims to promote dialogue and foster **positivity** and **openness or disclosure** strategies. The hierarchical structure creates barriers for employees to express their concerns openly, as it makes them hesitant to share their thoughts. This hinders the effectiveness of **positivity strategy**. Furthermore, **access, positivity, and legitimacy/assurance** strategies reflected information accessibility and employee involvement in decision-making processes, intending to build long-term relationships.

Internal communication is often utilised as an effective strategy to foster **positivity**. In SAMA, it is encouraged by social committees. While these strategies are in place, they seem not to improve the relationship between employees and management. The organisation applies an effective, ethical, and transparent internal communication approach to demonstrate its commitment to

maintaining trust through legitimacy assurance. Furthermore, **legitimacy assurances** within SAMA face criticism because it appears to prioritise external stakeholders over internal stakeholders when showing dedication and handling their concerns.

Lastly, evidence from the interviews and focus groups suggests that SAMA does not actively prioritise dual concern as a relationship-building strategy (which includes cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no-deal and keeping promises). These strategies were rarely mentioned when participants were asked about practices used to build and maintain relationships. It is recommended, however, that SAMA integrate these strategies more intentionally to strengthen internal relationships with employees in future.

In conclusion, when stakeholder relationship management is executed through two-way symmetrical communication, it creates opportunities for researching stakeholders' needs, engaging in dialogue, listening, providing feedback, and encouraging participation between management and employees. This means that internal communication, together with the relationship-building strategies, serves as a pillar to maintain relationships, build trust, and create engagement within SAMA.

6.5.3.2 Relationship outcomes

Theoretical guideline 4 suggests that SAMA should strive to build internal relationships through two-way symmetrical communication based on the relationship-building strategies, which results in employer–employee relationships that can be measured by the following outcomes: **trust**, **commitment**, **control mutuality**, and **relationship satisfaction** (see Section 2.5.3.1).

The organisation attempts to foster **trust**, but the inconsistency of its practice and selective information sharing leads to mistrust of the commitment and promises of the organisation. SAMA demonstrates its **commitment** to building long-term relationships through wellness initiatives and offering employees permanent positions, yet it lacks consistent evidence of ongoing commitment. Regarding **control mutuality**, sensitive information is centralised at the management level, while employees lack influence in decision-making. Efforts are made to foster **relationship satisfaction** through human resources (HR) initiatives to create positive work expectations in relationships where both parties receive equal rewards. These efforts or initiatives seem to be practised inconsistently because of insufficient recognition and minimal decision-making opportunities.

In conclusion, the main finding is that SAMA attempts to build strong employer–employee relationships through two-way symmetrical communication, with a goal of targeting outcomes such as **trust**, **commitment**, **control mutuality** and **relationship satisfaction**. However, the

organisation faces ongoing challenges in achieving these relationship outcomes due to its hierarchical structure, inconsistent communication, and limited employee participation opportunities.

6.5.3.3 Types of relationships: Exchange versus communal relationships

The main finding is that SAMA employs two-way symmetrical communication to build communal relationships that are based on mutual respect and care between management and employees. However, this practice appears to be mainly transactional; the organisation focuses on achieving its goals and objectives, which leads to reward systems that measure employee value through organisational success instead of showing genuine care for their relationships.

In conclusion, the imbalance between organisational interests and employee needs constrains the formation of communal relationships within SAMA. To address this, the organisation should shift from transactional practices and prioritise the building of a more collaborative internal environment, with a focus on fostering communal relationships between management and employees.

6.6 OVERALL PERSPECTIVE ON THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAMA'S INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

In conclusion, suggestions follow for SAMA from the theoretical guidelines and findings from the general research questions.

From the strategic communication perspective, the overall perceptions from different members of management and employees are that purposeful internal communication within SAMA is perceived as strategically aligned, reliable, and clear when sharing information. While management and employees perceive clarity and intent to build relationships, there are perceptions that strategic messaging applies a top-down method, which restricts employees' participation.

SAMA should ensure that intentional and purposeful communication is clear, sufficient, and inclusive throughout the organisation. This form of communication should not be practised as a once-off event; instead, it should be maintained as a continuous and consistent process. In addition, inclusiveness in communication must consider the diverse languages of the employees, which means that communication should be crafted in an easily understood language. In addition, SAMA must ensure continuous and consistent communication and provide employees with feedback on how their needs will be addressed. Therefore, SAMA must ensure stakeholder-

centricity. This means that management should develop relationships that allow employees to engage in meaningful conversations and address their needs.

From the two-way symmetrical perspective, the overall findings from both management levels and employees acknowledge that SAMA practises two-way symmetrical communication with opportunity for dialogue, participation, and feedback. However, it maintains a hierarchical communication system, which limits employees from participating in meaningful dialogue about decision-making processes. SAMA should maintain effective relationships between management and employees through symmetric two-way communication that includes research, dialogue, balanced communication, collaboration and negotiation, feedback, participation, inclusion in decision-making, and transparency in communication.

SAMA must conduct consistent research to evaluate and gather the needs of employees. Research feedback must be used to respond to the needs and interests of employees. Therefore, it is important for management to engage in dialogue, listening to and addressing employee concerns. This will build relationship satisfaction and limit the fear of participation that some employees experience, which keeps them from speaking or engaging freely with the management. Moreover, symmetrical two-way communication posits that communication should be balanced, thereby facilitating open communication and equal access to information between management and employees with the goal of achieving balanced relationships. Therefore, SAMA should foster balanced communication across the organisation.

Collaboration and negotiation are the key components of two-way symmetrical communication, ensuring that internal stakeholders work together towards their common goals. Therefore, SAMA should foster full collaboration and negotiation, with both parties working together to develop good relationships between management and employees that are long-term and mutually beneficial. It is important for SAMA to shift from power structures and hierarchical decision-making processes to inclusivity, ensuring that all employees are included and participate equally in decision-making, especially when managing the aftermath of change. With regards to transparency, the organisation should maintain continuous communication through prompt disclosure of accurate information, which can lead to trust.

From a stakeholder relationship management perspective, the overall perceptions reflect that SAMA uses relationship-building strategies through positivity, legitimacy and openness or disclosure. The effectiveness of strategies is sometimes compromised by hierarchical barriers and selective information sharing. Employees also have limited opportunities to contribute. The management and employees understand that trust issues and unfair treatment practices affect relationship development.

To incorporate or utilise internal communication in stakeholder relationship management, a more consistent application of two-way symmetrical communication with more inclusive practices is needed to ensure that all employees have equal access to information and opportunities for meaningful engagement. A strong commitment to managing internal relationships is also needed. Therefore, it is recommended that SAMA invest in building internal relationships through effective communication and ensuring that employees are included in organisational activities. By doing so, SAMA can achieve the outcomes of improved relationships, trust, commitment, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction. These are key indicators of the effectiveness of relationships between management and employees.

The changing organisational context confirms that all the above recommendations are even more critical during and after periods of restructuring and change. At such times, shifting internal environments play an even greater role in shaping internal communication, making it essential to strengthen employer–employee relationships through strategic communication practices grounded in relationship management theories and two-way symmetrical communication.

6.7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It is acknowledged that this study has certain limitations, and from the findings of the research on internal communication and employer–employee relationships in SAMA, the following recommendations are proposed for future research to improve relationship management and organisational communication practices:

The first limitation is that the study was based on internal communication to manage the employer–employee relationship at SAMA. Therefore, the study focused on one organisation. As a result, the research findings of this study cannot be generalised to different organisations because they are drawn from a single organisation with a unique communication system, culture, and management style.

The second research limitation arises from the qualitative research approach that applied semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The research method provided detailed participant insights that might differ from those of other employees in different organisations.

The researcher's employment at SAMA created a third limitation, as it potentially affected how participants accessed the study and how they responded to the research questions. The researcher faced difficulties in obtaining the participation of top executives, which resulted in the underrepresentation of top management viewpoints in the collected data.

Future research should investigate relationship management through the lens of organisational change processes and their aftermath. Research in this area would explain how internal communication strategies provide effective support for internal relationships during organisational changes and in the subsequent rebuilding phase. This will guide the organisation to understand the effectiveness of communication when managing the relationship with both internal and external stakeholders. The research design or methodology applied in this study can be replicated in other organisations that have undergone changes and seek to build or manage relationships with key stakeholders.

The current research excluded key external stakeholders who interact with SAMA through communication channels more frequently. Future research should include these stakeholders to better understand the overall alignment of organisational communication with external relationship management. Furthermore, including external stakeholders can guide the overall alignment of organisational communication with external relationship management by understanding how communication extends beyond internal relationships. Therefore, future research can take a quantitative approach to conducting surveys or questionnaires with external stakeholders.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Aggerholm, H.K. & Thomsen, C. 2014. Strategic communication: the role of polyphony in management team meetings. In: Holtzhausen, D.R. & Zerfass, A., eds. *The Routledge handbook of strategic communication*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 172-189.
- Angelopulo, G. 2013. The drivers of student enrolment and retention: a stakeholder perception analysis in higher education. *Perspectives in Education*, 31(1):49-65.
- Angelopulo, G.C. & Barker, R. 2013. *Integrated organisational communication*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. 2011. *The practice of social research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Bailey, C.A. 2018. *A guide to qualitative field research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Baines, D. 2011. Resistance as emotional work: the Australian and Canadian non-profit social services. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 42(2):139-156.
- Baker, A., Perreault, D., Reid, A. & Blanchard, C.M. 2013. Feedback and organizations: feedback is good, feedback-friendly culture is better. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne*, 54(4):260-268.
- Barker, R. & Angelopulo, G. 2006. *Integrated organisational communication*. Lansdowne: Juta.
- Bordia, P., Hunt, E., Paulsen, N., Tourish, D. & DiFonzo, N. 2004. Uncertainty during organizational change: is it all about control? *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 13(3):345-365.
- Bradshaw, C., Atkinson, S. & Doody, O. 2017. Employing a qualitative description approach in health care research. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 4.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393617742282>
- Broom, G.M., Casey, S. & Ritchey, J. 1997. Toward a concept and theory of organization-public relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9(2):83-98.
- Bruning, S.D., 2002. Relationship building as a retention strategy: Linking relationship attitudes and satisfaction evaluations to behavioral outcomes. *Public Relations Review*, 28(1), pp.39-48.

Brunner, L.S. & O'Connell Smeltzer, S.C. 2010. *Brunner & Suddarth's textbook of medical-surgical nursing*. 12th ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Bryman, A. & Bell, E. 2017. *Business research methods: ethical considerations*.

https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/ethical-considerations/#google_vignette Date of access: 19 Sep. 2024.

Burger, A.C.D. 2018. *Exploring communication between managers and employees within selected South African organisations*. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Dissertation – MCom).

Canary, D.J. & Stafford, L. 2013. Preservation of relational characteristics: maintenance strategies, equity, and locus of control. In: Kalbfleisch, P.J., ed. *Interpersonal communication: evolving interpersonal relationships*. New York, NY: Psychology Press. pp. 237-259.

Che, Y., Zhu, J. & Huang, H. 2022. How does employee-organization relationship affect work engagement and work well-being of knowledge-based employees? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 814324. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.814324>

Collins, J.W. & O'Brien, N.P., eds. 2011. *The Greenwood dictionary of education*. 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood.

Conrad, C. & Poole, M.S. 2005. *Strategic organisational communication: in a global economy*. 6th ed. Belmont CA: Thompson Wadsworth.

Coombs, W.T. & Holladay, J.S. 2012. The paracrisis: the challenges created by publicly managing crisis prevention. *Public Relations Review*, 38(3):408-415.

Cooper, D. & Schindler, P. 2011. *Business research methods*. 11th ed. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.

Cornelissen, J. 2020. *Corporate communication: a guide to theory and practice*. 6th ed. London: Sage.

Covey, S. R. 1989. *The seven habits of highly effective people: restoring the character ethic*. London: Simon and Schuster.

Creswell, J. W. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Creswell, J.W. 2009. Mapping the field of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 3(2):95-108.
- Creswell, J.W. 2014. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. 2018. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- De Beer, E. & Rensburg, R. 2011. Towards a theoretical framework for the governing of stakeholder relationships: a perspective from South Africa. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 11(4):208-225.
- DiStaso, M.W. & Bortree, D.S. 2012. Multi-method analysis of transparency in social media practices: survey, interviews and content analysis. *Public Relations Review*, 38(3):511-514.
- Dozier, D.M, Grunig, L.A. & Grunig, J.E. 1995. *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Du Plooy, G.M. 2009. *Communication research: techniques, methods and applications*. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Juta.
- Du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C. & Bezuidenhout, R. 2014. *Research matters*. Claremont: Juta.
- Elving, W.J. 2005. The role of communication in organisational change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 10(2):129-138.
- Fawkes, J. 2012. Interpreting ethics: public relations and strong hermeneutics. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 1(2):117-140.
- Ferguson, M.A. 2018. Building theory in public relations: interorganizational relationships as a public relations paradigm. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 30(4):164-178.
- Fisher, R. & Brown, S. 1989. *Getting together: building relationships as we negotiate*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Frandsen, F. & Johansen, W. 2017. *Organizational crisis communication: a multivocal approach*. London: Sage.
- Gillham, B. 2005. *Research interviewing: the range of techniques*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Govender, M. & Bussin, M.H. 2020. Performance management and employee engagement: a South African perspective. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(1):1-19.

Graneheim, U.H., Lindgren, B.M. & Lundman, B. 2017. Methodological challenges in qualitative content analysis: a discussion paper. *Nurse Education Today*, 56:29-34.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2017.06.002>

Greeff, M. 2005. Information collection: interviewing. In: De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L., eds. *Research at grassroots: for the social sciences and human services professions*. 3rd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Greeff, W.J. 2013. Precedent predictions and present practice: a stakeholder theory account of safety communication significance for the mining and construction industries of South Africa. *Communicare*, 32(1):38-57.

Greenwood, M. 2007. Stakeholder engagement: beyond the myth of corporate responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 74(4):315-327.

Gregory, A. & Macnamara, J. 2019. An evaluation u-turn: from narrow organisational objectives to broad accountability. *Public Relations Review*, 45(5), 101838.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.101838>

Grunig, J.E. 1992. The development of public relations research in the United States and its status in communication science. In: Avenarius, H. & Armbricht, W., eds. *Ist Public Relations Eine Wissenschaft?* Opladen: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. pp. 103-132.

Grunig, J.E. 2002. *Qualitative methods for assessing relationships between organizations and publics*. https://instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2002_AssessingRelations.pdf Date of access: 19 Sep. 2024.

Grunig, J.E. 2006. Research in public relations: current status and new directions. *Anàlisi: quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, 34:49-65.

Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L.A. 2000. Public relations in strategic management and strategic management of public relations: theory and evidence from the IABC Excellence project. *Journalism Studies*, 1(2):303-321.

Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L.A. 2008. Excellence theory in public relations: past, present, and future. In: Zerfass, A., Van Ruler, B. & Sriramesh, K., eds. *Public relations research: European and*

international perspectives and innovations. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. pp. 327-347.

Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L.A. 2013. Models of public relations and communication. In: Grunig, J.E., ed. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 285-325.

Grunig, J.E. & Huang, Y.-H. 2000. From organisational effectiveness to relationship indicators: antecedents of relationships, public relations strategies, and relationship outcomes. In: Ledingham, J.A. & Bruning, S.D., eds. *Public relations as relationship management: a relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum. pp. 23-53.

Grunig, J.E. & Hunt, T. 1984. *Managing public relations*. San Diego, CA: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston.

Grunig, J.E. & Kim, J.N. 2021. The four models of public relations and their research legacy. In: Valentini, C., ed. *Public relations*. Berlin: De Gruyter. pp. 277-312.

Grunig, J.E. & White, J. 1992. The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice. In: Grunig, J.E., ed. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 31-64.

Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., Van Ruler, B., Verčič, D. & Sriramesh, K. 2007. Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1):3-35.

Harwell, M.R. 2011. Research design in qualitative/quantitative/mixed methods. In: Conrad, C.F. & Serlin, R.C., eds. *The Sage handbook for research in education: pursuing ideas as the keystone of exemplary inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 147-164.

Heath, J. 2006. Business ethics without stakeholders. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 16(4):533-557.

Heath, R.L., ed. 2010. *The Sage handbook of public relations*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Heath, R.L. & Coombs, W.T. 2006. *Today's public relations: an introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hennink, M.M. 2013. *Focus group discussions*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Holtzhausen, L. & Fourie, L.M. 2013. The relationship between corporate identity-management constructs and relationship-management constructs: a case study of the North-West University. *Communicare*, 32(1):58-83.

Hon, L.C. & Grunig, J.E. 1999. *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. https://instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines_Measuring_Relationships.pdf Date of access: 19 Sep. 2024.

Hume, J.M. 2010. *Strategic internal communication in international non-governmental organisations*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria. (Thesis – PhD).

Hume, J. & Leonard, A. 2014. Exploring the strategic potential of internal communication in international non-governmental organisations. *Public Relations Review*, 40(2):294-304.

Hung, C.J.F. 2001. *Toward a normative theory of relationship management*. College Park, MD: (Thesis – PhD).

Hung, C.J.F. 2005. Exploring types of organization-public relationships and their implications for relationship management in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(4):393-426.

Hung, C.J.F. 2007. Toward the theory of relationship management in public relations: how to cultivate quality relationships? In: Toth, E.L., ed. *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: challenges for the next generation*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 443-476.

Jahansoozi, J. 2007. When interests collide: the story of an industry-community relationship. Stirling: University of Stirling. (Thesis – PhD). <http://hdl.handle.net/1893/337>

Jo, S., Hon, L.C. & Brunner, B.R. 2005. Organisation-public relationships: measurement validation in a university setting. *Journal of Communication Management*, 9(1):14-27.

Kelly, K.S., Laskin, A.V. & Rosenstein, G.A. 2010. Investor relations: two-way symmetrical practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(2):182-208.

Kent, M.L. & Lane, A. 2021. Two-way communication, symmetry, negative spaces, and dialogue. *Public Relations Review*, 47(2), 102014. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102014>

Khoza, S. 2015. *Strategic stakeholder relationship management in a professional organisation: an exploratory enquiry into SACOMM*. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis – PhD).

- Ki, E.J. & Hon, L.C. 2007. Testing the linkages among the organization–public relationship and attitude and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 19(1):1-23.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260709336593>
- Ki, E.J. & Hon, L.C. 2009. Causal linkages between relationship cultivation strategies and relationship quality outcomes. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 3(4):242-263.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15531180903218630>
- Kim, J.N. & Ni, L. 2010. Seeing the forest through the trees: the behavioral, strategic management paradigm of public relations and its future. In: Heath, R.L., ed. *The Sage handbook of public relations*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage. pp. 35-57.
- Kim, J.N. & Rhee, Y. 2011. Strategic thinking about employee communication behavior (ECB) in public relations: testing the models of megaphoning and scouting effects in Korea, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(3):243-268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2011.582204>
- Kim, Y. 2020. Organizational resilience and employee work-role performance after a crisis: exploring the effects of organizational resilience on internal crisis communication. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 32(1-2):47-75.
- Kim, Y. 2021. Building organizational resilience through strategic internal communication and organization-employee relationships. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 49(5):589-608.
- Kitzinger, J. 2006. Focus groups. In: Pope, C. & Mays, N., eds. *Qualitative research in health care*. 3rd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell. pp. 21-31. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470750841.ch3>
- Kotter, J.P. 1996. *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Krippendorff, K. 2018. *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Le Roux, A. 2011. The interface between identity and change: how in-service teachers use discursive strategies to cope with educational change. *Education as Change*, 15(2):303-316.
- Lee, Y.C. 2020. Communicating sustainable development: effects of stakeholder-centric perceived sustainability. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 27(4):1540-1551.

Lee, Y. 2022. Dynamics of symmetrical communication within organizations: the impacts of channel usage of CEO, managers, and peers. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 59(1):3-21.

Lee, Y. & Kim, J. 2021. Cultivating employee creativity through strategic internal communication: the role of leadership, symmetry, and feedback seeking behaviors. *Public Relations Review*, 47(1), 101998. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101998>

Lee, Y. & Yue, C.A. 2020. Status of internal communication research in public relations: an analysis of published articles in nine scholarly journals from 1970 to 2019. *Public Relations Review*, 46(3), 101906. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101906>

Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. 2010. *Practical research: planning and design*. 9th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. 2015. *Practical research*. London: Pearson Education.

Lewis, B.K & Nichols, C.2014. Social media and strategic communication: an examination of theory and practice in communication research. In: Holtzhausen, D.R. & Zerfass, A., eds. *The Routledge handbook of strategic communication*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 545-560.

Li, J.Y., Sun, R., Tao, W. & Lee, Y. 2021. Employee coping with organizational change in the face of a pandemic: the role of transparent internal communication. *Public Relations Review*, 47(1), 101984. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101984>

Liamputtong, P. 2011. *Focus group methodology: principle and practice*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Lopez, V. & Whitehead, D. 2013. *Sampling data and data collection in qualitative research*. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dean-Whitehead/post/How many participants are too few in a qualitative study/attachment/59d657a679197b80779ade22/AS%3A535171319296000%401504606193549/download/4e+-+2nd+proof+-+ch+7.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dean-Whitehead/post/How_many_participants_are_too_few_in_a_qualitative_study/attachment/59d657a679197b80779ade22/AS%3A535171319296000%401504606193549/download/4e+-+2nd+proof+-+ch+7.pdf) Date of access: 19 Aug. 2025.

Mahoney, J. 2011. Horizons in strategic communication: theorising a paradigm shift. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 5(3):143-153.

Mbhele, S. 2016. *Internal communication in achieving employee engagement within a South African government department*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria. (Dissertation - MPhil).

- Mbhele, S. & De Beer, E. 2021. Achieving employee engagement through effective internal communication. *Communicare*, 40(2):153-182.
- McNeill, P. & Chapman, S. 2005. *Research methods*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.
- Meintjes, C. 2012. A strategic communication approach to managing stakeholder relationships according to the King report on governance. Pretoria: University of Pretoria. (Thesis – PhD).
- Meintjes, C. & Grobler, A.F. 2014. Do public relations professionals understand corporate governance issues well enough to advise companies on stakeholder relationship management? *Public Relations Review*, 40(2):161-170.
- Men, L.R. & Stacks, D. 2014. The effects of authentic leadership on strategic internal communication and employee-organisation relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(4):301-324.
- Men, L.R., Neill, M. & Yue, C.A. 2020. Examining the effects of symmetrical internal communication and employee engagement on organizational change outcomes. *Public Relations Journal*, 13(4):1-19.
- Meng, J. & Berger, B.K. 2008. How top business communicators measure the return on investment (ROI) of organization's internal communication efforts. In: Dodd, M.D. & Yamamura, K., eds. *Ethical issues for public relations practice in a multicultural world: 13th International Public Relations Research Conference*. pp. 521-538.
https://www.academia.edu/download/31673389/IPRRC_13_Proceedings.pdf#page=521 Date of access: 19 Jun. 2025.
- Mergel, I. & Greeves, B. 2013. *Social media in the public sector field guide: designing and implementing strategies and policies*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Mishra, K., Boynton, L. & Mishra, A. 2014. Driving employee engagement: the expanded role of internal communications. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 51(2):183-202.
- Mmutle, T.J. 2018. *Strategic communication management for governance and sustainability: a participatory communication perspective for inclusive citizenry engagement*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria. (Thesis – PhD). <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/69929>
- Mmutle, T. 2022. (Re-) Positioning and recognising the influence of internal communication on employee engagement for maximum organisational performance. *Communicare*, 41(1):46-62.

- Morgan, D.L. 2002. Focus group interviewing. In: Gubrium, J.F. & Holstein, J.A., eds. *Handbook of interview research: context and method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 141-160.
- Morgan, D.L. 2018. *Basic and advanced focus groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morgan, H. 2022. Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1):64-77.
- Morgan, R.M. & Hunt, S.D. 1994. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3):20-38.
- Morsing, M. & Schultz, M. 2006. Corporate social responsibility communication: stakeholder information, response, and involvement strategies. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 15(4):323-338.
- Mouton, J. 1996. *Understanding social research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Murphy, M. 2002. *Organisational change and firm performance*. (OECD Science, Technology and Industry Working Papers, 2002/14). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/615168153531>
- Murphy, P. 2014. Contextual distortion: strategic communication versus the networked nature of nearly everything. In: Holtzhausen, D.R. & Zerfass, A., eds. *The Routledge handbook of strategic communication*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 113-126.
- Nassaji, H. 2020. Good qualitative research. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(4):427-431.
- Nieuwenhuis, L.F.M. & Van Woerkom, M. 2007. Goal rationalities as a framework for evaluating the learning potential of the workplace. *Human Resource Development Review*, 6(1):64-83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484306296432>
- Nothhaft, H. & Schölzel, H. 2014. (Re-) reading Clausewitz: The strategy discourse and its implications for strategic communication. In: Holtzhausen, D.R. & Zerfass, A., eds. *The Routledge handbook of strategic communication*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 18-33.
- Overton-de Klerk, N. & Oelofse, E. 2010. Poor communities as corporate stakeholders: a bottom-up research approach. *Communicatio*, 36(3):388-408.
- Overton-de Klerk, N. & Verwey, S. 2013. Towards an emerging paradigm of strategic communication: core driving forces. *Communicatio*, 39(3):362-382.

- Plowman, K.D & Wakefield, R.I. 2013. Strategic communication and conflict resolution: contributions to institutionalization in public relations. In: Sriramesh, K., Zerfass, A. & Kim, J-N., eds. *Public relations and communication management: current trends and emerging topics*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp. 163-177.
- Polit, D.F. & Beck, C.T. 2017. *Nursing research: generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice*. 10th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer.
- Pressly, J.J. 2016. *Building and maintaining relationships with alumni through social media: a comparative study*. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis – PhD).
- Qu, S.Q. & Dumay, J. 2011. The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(3):238-264.
- Rabiee, F. 2004. Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 63(4):655-660.
- Reyneke-Geyer, A. & De Beer, E. 2024. Employee engagement in the South African short-term insurance sector: repositioning communication climate as a job resource. *Communicare*, 43(2):2-18.
- Scholes, K., Johnson, G. & Whittington, R. 2002. *Exploring corporate strategy*. Hoboken, NJ: Financial Times Prentice Hall.
- Slabbert, Y. 2012. *A strategic sequential, integrated, sustainable organisation-stakeholder relationship (SISOSR) model for building stakeholder partnerships: a corporate communication perspective*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. (Thesis – PhD).
- Slabbert, Y. 2015. A strategic organisation-stakeholder relationship-building model: an external organisational-orientated perspective. *Communitas*, 20:62-83.
- Slabbert, Y. & Barker, R. 2014. Towards a new model to describe the organisation-stakeholder relationship-building process: a strategic corporate communication perspective. *Communicatio*, 40(1):69-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2014.875481>
- Smith, R. 2013. *Public relations: the basics*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Stafford, L. & Canary, D.J. 1991. Maintenance strategies and romantic relationship type, gender and relational characteristics. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8(2):217-242.

- Steyn, B. & Puth, G. 2000. *Corporate communication strategy*. Sandown: Heinemann.
- Steyn, B. 2007. Contribution of public relations to organizational strategy formulation. In: Toth, E.L., ed. *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: Challenges for the next generation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 137-172.
- Steyn, B. 2012. Strategic role of public relations in the process of 'integrated reporting': an exploratory study. *Sinergie, rivista di studi e ricerche*, 88:53-72.
- Ströh, U. 2007. Relationships and participation: a complexity science approach to change communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(2):123-137.
- Subramanian, K.R. 2017. Influence of social media in interpersonal communication. *International Journal of Scientific Progress and Research*, 38(2):70-75.
- Sutton, L.B., Le Roux, T. & Fourie, L.M. 2022. Internal communication in a diverse and developing world context: challenges for corporate South Africa. *Communicare*, 41(2):90-102.
- Sutton, L.B. & Le Roux, T. 2025a. Internal communication challenges in corporate South Africa after the COVID-19 pandemic. *Communicare*, 44(3): 2-14.
- Sutton, L.B. & Le Roux, T. 2025b. Sustainable internal communication and digital trends amidst an energy crisis: Can a middle ground be found in South Africa? *Journal of Communication Management*, 29 (5): 1-17.
- Turner, D.W. 2010. Qualitative interview design: a practical guide for novice investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3):754-760. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2010.1178>
- Turner, D.P. 2020. Sampling methods in research design. *Headache: The Journal of Head & Face Pain*, 60(1):8-12.
- Van den Bos, K. & Lind, E.A. 2002. Uncertainty management by means of fairness judgments. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 34:1-60. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(02\)80003-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(02)80003-X)
- Van Ruler, B. 2018. Communication theory: an underrated pillar on which strategic communication rests. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4):367-381.

Van Ruler, B. 2020. Communication theory: an underrated pillar on which strategic communication rests. In: Nothhaft, H., Werder, K.P., Verčič, D. & Zerfass, A., eds. *Future directions of strategic communication*. London: Routledge. pp. 39-53.

Van Zyl, D. 2022. *Managing organisational change through internal communications: management consultants' perspective*. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg. (Dissertation – MA).

Verčič, A.T., Verčič, D. & Sriramesh, K. 2012. Internal communication: definition, parameters, and the future. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2):223-230.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.019>

Verwey, S. & Du Plooy-Cilliers, F. 2003. *Strategic organisational communication: paradigms and paradoxes*. Sandown: Heinemann Publishers.

Visagie, B. 2021. *The utilization of WhatsApp by Northwest University's Student RAG Community Service in the management of relationships with internal stakeholders*. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis – PhD).

Walliman, N. 2021. *Research methods: the basics*. London: Routledge.

Wasti, S.A. 2003. Organizational commitment, turnover intentions and the influence of cultural values. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 76(3):303-321.

Waters, R.D. & Lemanski, J.L. 2011. Revisiting strategic communication's past to understand the present: examining the direction and nature of communication on Fortune 500 and Philanthropy 400 web sites. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16(2):150-169.

Welch, M. 2012. Appropriateness and acceptability: employee perspectives of internal communication. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2):246-254.

Welch, M. & Jackson, P.R. 2007. Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 12(2):177-198.

Wheless, L.R. & Grotz, J. 1977. The measurement of trust and its relationship to self-disclosure. *Human Communication Research*, 3(3):250-257.

Wiggill, M.N. 2009. *Strategic communication management in the non-profit adult literacy sector*. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis – PhD).

Wong, P.S.P. & Cheung, S.O. 2005. Structural equation model of trust and partnering success. *Journal of Management in Engineering*, 21(2):70-80.

Zerfass, A. & Volk, S.C. 2018. How communication departments contribute to corporate success: the communications contributions framework. *Journal of Communication Management*, 22(4):397-415.

Zhang, Y. & Wildemuth, B.M. 2009. Qualitative analysis of content. In: Wildemuth, B.M., ed. *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*. 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. pp. 318-329.

ANNEXURE A: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222

Fax: 018 299-4910

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics
Committee (BaSSREC)**

**Faculty of Humanities Ethics Office for Research,
Training and Support**

Tel: 018 285 2457

Email: [Janelize Morelli@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Janelize.Morelli@nwu.ac.za)

Senate Committee for Research Ethics

Tel: 016 103 4446

Email: Fezwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

14 February 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)** on **11/02/2025**, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Internal communication to manage employer-employee relationships at the South African Medical Association (SAMA).

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr. A. Degenaar and Dr. L.B. Sutton

Student/Research Team: M. Mulaudzi (37438182)

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	1	0	7	6	-	2	4	-	A	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Institution Study Number Year Status
Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single study

Commencement date: 11/02/2025

Risk: Low risk

Expiry date: 11/02/2026

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.

- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the BaSSREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and BaSSREC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the BaSSREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- BaSSREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via BaSSREC-Admin@nwu.ac.za.

The BaSSREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the BaSSREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof. Janelize Morelli

Deputy Chairperson NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

ANNEXURE B: ETHICS TRAINING CERTIFICATE



Faculty of
Humanities

CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE

This certificate is awarded to

Makhadzi Mulaudzi

In recognition of attending the Faculty of Humanities' Ethics
Training Session on Friday, 8 March 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Nel', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Professor Mirna Nel
Deputy Dean Research and Innovation
Faculty of Humanities

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Coetzee van Rooy', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Professor Susan Coetzee van Rooy
Deputy Chairperson: ECLM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erhabor Idemudia', is positioned above a horizontal line.

Professor Erhabor Idemudia
Chairperson: BaSSREC, HSSREC
and EMELTEN-REC

8 March 2024
Date



ANNEXURE C: INVITATION TO INTERVIEWS

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@samedical.org> **On Behalf Of** MarComm
Sent: 05 March 2025 13:13
To: Makhadzi Mulaudzi <makhadzim@samedical.org>
Subject: Request for Participation

Dear colleagues,

Please see the attached request for your kind attention.

Thank you

Kind Regards,
Marketing and Communications on behalf of Human Resources
The South African Medical Association NPC

THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION NPC

Block F Castle Walk Corporate Park, Nossob Street, Erasmuskloof Ext3,
Pretoria, 0181, South Africa

T +27 (0) 12 481 2000 • F +27 (0) 481 2100 • online@samedical.org
www.samedical.org



Dear One SAMA,

I hope this message finds you well.

It is with great pleasure that we announce that Ms. Makhadzi Mulaudzi has registered and is in the process of completing her Master's Degree in Communication studies at North-West University. As part of the requirements to conclude her studies, she is conducting a research study on Internal Communication, specifically focusing on addressing and managing gaps in Employer-Employee Relationships at the South African Medical Association (SAMA). This research is being supervised by Dr. Anette Degenaar and Dr. Lucinda Sutton, Senior Lecturers at North-West University.

To successfully complete her research, Ms. Mulaudzi requires the full support of everyone at SAMA, and we kindly ask for your participation in the upcoming focus groups and semi-structured interview sessions that will be arranged over the next few weeks.

Executive Summary of the Research Topic:

The purpose of this research is to explore the effectiveness of internal communication practices at SAMA and how these practices influence employer-employee relationships, particularly in the context of an evolving internal environment.

As part of this study, Ms. Mulaudzi respectfully requests the opportunity to conduct semi-structured interviews or focus group sessions with you. The aim is to gather employees' perspectives on internal communication. Your insights and experiences would be invaluable in understanding the current landscape and identifying potential areas for improvement.

Process guidelines

1. Please note that **participation is voluntary**, you may choose to withdraw from answering specific questions without negative consequences to you. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:
2. Complete a brief consent form to participate in the study.
3. Participate in a 45 minute in-person or via Teams interview

Confidentiality: Your responses are confidential and will be used exclusively for research purposes. Please rest assured that no identifying information will be included in any reports or publications resulting from this study.

Should you be interested in participating in the research study; please do not hesitate to contact Ms Makhadzi Mulaudzi:

Email - makhadzim@samedical.org
Number - 012 481 2156/ 076 528 9307

Dr M Mzukwa (Chairperson), Prof A Dhai (Vice-Chairperson), Prof. M Mabenge (President), Dr M Nodikida (CEO)
The South African Medical Association NPC
Reg. No: 1927/000136/08

Page | 1



Research Timelines

1. Communicate your interest to participate by: 10 March 2025
2. Duration of the study: 7 Weeks (March - April 2025).

Thank you in advance for participating and contributing to the research study that has the potential to enhance the relationship between employees and management of SAMA. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out. You can also contact my supervisors at Anette.Degenaar@nwu or Lucinda.Sutton@nwu.ac.za

Kind Regards.

makhadzim@samedical.org

[Cell: 0765289307](tel:0765289307)

ANNEXURE D: DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER AND PARTICIPANT

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I, A. S. [redacted] agree to take part in a research study entitled: "Internal communication to manage employer-employee relationships at the South African Medical Association (SAMA)".

I declare that:

- I provide *informed consent*.
 - Thus, I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
 - Thus, I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I provide *voluntary consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
 - Thus, I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
 - Thus, I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I provide *specific consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
 - I provide *specific consent*. Thus, I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the semi-structured interview and focus group discussion.

Signed at (place) Pretoria on (date) 24/03 20 25

A. S. [redacted]
Signature of participant

W. [redacted]
Signature of witness

- You may contact me again ☒ Yes ☐ No
- I would like a summary of the findings of this research ☒ Yes ☐ No
- I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed ☒ Yes ☐ No

The best way to reach me is:

ANNEXURE E ANNEXURE LETTER OF SUPPORT



THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Tel: +27 (0)12 481 2000 | Fax: +27 (0)12 481 2100 | www.samedical.org
Block F | Castle Walk Office Park | Nossob Street | Erasmuskloof | Ext 3 | Pretoria | 0181
PO Box 74789 | Lynnwood Ridge | 0040
Reg No 1927/000136/08 | NPC

To : Makhadzi Mulaudzi

From: Dr Mhlengi V Ncube

Date: 2 November 2024

RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE STUDY TITLED "INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TO MANAGE EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (SAMA)."

This letter serves to confirm that the South African Medical Association supports the above study and will allow you to interview the relevant study participants subject to the provision of ethical clearance from your institution.

Wishing you all the best in your research.

Kind regards,

Dr Mhlengi Vella Ncube
Head of Unit: Health Policy and Research
South African Medical Association
Tel: (012) 481 2057 Fax:(012)
481 2100 email:
mhlengin@samedical.org

ANNEXURE F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH MANAGEMENT OF SAMA

Good day,

I appreciate your time and willingness to contribute to this research study.

This study aims to explore how internal communication influences employer-employee relationships at SAMA. The following questions are centered on internal communication in the context of SAMA who went through change in 2022, utilising the key concepts of strategic communication, two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management theory.

Please note that there are no correct or incorrect responses. I am interested in your views and insights regarding this topic.

- Your responses will be kept confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous during the analysis and reporting of the results.
- No information regarding the organisation will be shared in any other materials. Participation is intended for academic purposes only.

May I request to record this section for the purpose of my analysis.

General internal communication questions	• Can you please tell me what your job description/key performance area is? • How long have you been in your current position? • How would you describe the current internal communication practices within SAMA?
Strategic communication	
Purposive and intentional	• To what extent does SAMA communicate information and engage employees? • How is the effectiveness of these efforts measured? (Probe: what best practices are in place to ensure employee buy-in? Additionally, how often does SAMA monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its communication efforts, including the most effective methods for assessment and their influence on decision-making?)
Consistent and continuous process Research	• How does SAMA align its internal communication with its organisational goals across different departments while ensuring a stakeholder-centric approach through consistent and continuous engagement?

Stakeholder-centricity Inclusiveness & participation	Probe: how does SAMA identify and prioritise the needs of internal stakeholders, fostering inclusiveness and participation in decision-making processes? Please provide examples of communication strategies or measures implemented to address stakeholder concerns and enhance engagement?
Two-way symmetrical communication	
Dialogue Feedback	To what extent does management facilitate open communication with employees? To what extent is there opportunity to provide feedback? Please give examples?
Balanced communication Participation and inclusiveness to decision-making Participation and collaboration	To what extent do you think that there is equal opportunity for both employees and management to participate in the communication process? Can you please provide examples of how this is done? Probe: Can you provide examples of how equal communication has facilitated better understanding between SAMA and its employees?
Transparency	- What specific mechanisms are in place for honestly sharing both positive and negative information with employees? - In your own view, would it be beneficial for SAMA to share both positive and negative information regarding the organisation?
Relationship-building strategies	
positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no deal and keeping promises)	What strategies do SAMA employ to foster relationships with employees? Please provide examples of these strategies.
Relationship outcomes	
Trust	How confident are you that SAMA will / can accomplish what it says it will do? Can you give examples of why you feel that way?

Control mutuality	To what extent do you feel you have any control over what SAMA does that affects you? Why?
Commitment	- Can you provide examples that suggest that SAMA wants to maintain a long-term commitment to a relationship with employees or does not want to maintain such a relationship? - Do you believe SAMA has the spirit to sustain the long-term commitment?
Relationship satisfaction Exchange vs Communal relationship	How satisfied are you with the relationship that SAMA employees have with the organisation? Please explain the reasons for your satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and feel free to share specific instances that influenced your feelings. (Probe: Are there aspects of the relationship that you feel could be improved? How do you think effective communication plays a role in enhancing or diminishing your satisfaction with these relationships)

ANNEXURE G: MODERATOR'S GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS WITH EMPLOYEES OF SAMA.

General internal communication	How would you describe the current communication practices within SAMA?
Strategic communication	
Purposive and intentional	- How does SAMA align its employee communication strategies with broader strategic objectives during change? - Follow-up: How does this impact engagement and adaptability?
Consistent and continuous process	To what extent does SAMA communicate the same messages across different channels? (Probe: In what ways do you believe clear and regular communication has impacted your ability to understand the goals of SAMA?)
Stakeholder-centric Research	In what ways does SAMA utilise specific methods or tools to identify and prioritise the needs of its stakeholders throughout their engagement with the organisation? (Probe: Given the evolving nature of stakeholder concerns, how adequate are SAMA's current practices in understanding and prioritising those needs?)
Two-way symmetrical communication	
Dialogue Feedback	How does SAMA promote open dialogue and feedback with employees? Follow-up: To what extent do you feel communication channels are used to make employees feel heard and valued?
Balanced communication Collaboration and negotiation Inclusiveness, participation in decision making and transparency Participation and collaboration	- In what ways does equal information sharing contribute to a shared understanding among employees at SAMA? (Probe: could you provide examples of communication tools or methods that have effectively facilitated a sense of equality between management and staff? - How do you perceive the transparency of SAMA's communication, and what improvements could enhance clarity and trust?

Relationship-building Strategies	
Positivity, openness or disclosure, access, assurance of legitimacy, networking, sharing of ideas and dual concern (including cooperation, being unconditionally constructive, win-win or no deal and keeping promises)	Provide specific examples of the strategies that SAMA employs to build relationships with employees. (Focus on the relationship-buildings strategies as themes when probing)
Relationship outcome	
Trust	• How confident are you that SAMA can accomplish what it says it will do? Can you give examples of why you feel that way?
Control mutuality	• To what extent do you feel you have any control over what SAMA does that affects you? Why?
Commitment	• Can you provide any examples that suggest that SAMA wants to maintain a long-term commitment to a relationship with employees or does not want to maintain such a relationship?
Relationship satisfaction Exchange vs communal relationships	• How would you evaluate your overall level of satisfaction regarding your relationship with SAMA? In your opinion, have your expectations been adequately met or even exceeded? Could you please elaborate or justify?

ANNEXURE H: TURNITIN REPORT

20558481:Mulaudzi_Chapters1-6_LBS21Oct25.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

12%
SIMILARITY INDEX

10%
INTERNET SOURCES

9%
PUBLICATIONS

3%
STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	1 %
2	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	1 %
3	Submitted to North West University Student Paper	1 %
4	dspace.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
5	repository.up.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
6	lucris.lub.lu.se Internet Source	<1 %
7	Submitted to University of South Africa Student Paper	<1 %
8	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	<1 %
9	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1 %

ANNEXURE I: PROOFREADING CERTIFICATE



KRÜGER LANGUAGE PRACTITIONERS

Certificate of Proofreading

391 Walter Sisulu Street
Miederpark
Potchefstroom
2531
17/11/2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Mirrycke Krüger, hereby confirm that Krüger Language Practitioners have proofread:

Internal communication to manage employer-employee relationships at the South African Medical Association (SAMA)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mirrycke Krüger'.

Mirrycke Krüger
SATI member and PEG member
Certified and Qualified Language Practitioner
info@krugerlangprac.co.za

Disclaimer

During the proofreading process, the assigned language practitioner uses track changes and the comment tool to make corrections and suggestions. The client works through these track changes and rejects or accepts them. Thus, this document cannot be a direct representation of the language practitioner's work. Furthermore, Krüger Language Practitioners cannot guarantee that the client did not include new sections after receiving the proofread document.

Proofreading services exclude reference checking; it is exclusively concerned with the appearance of the references according to a specific style. Reference checking is a separate and costlier service. If major errors are found in the appearance of the references, such as using a mixture of APA and Harvard style references, consistently making the same mistakes, or incorrectly applying a reference style throughout the text, the client is instructed to revise them. The practice also cannot guarantee that the client understood or corrected these errors. Proofreading services excludes fixing references.

Furthermore, proofreading services are also distinct from editing services, which means that the content and overall composition of the text is solely addressed by the client (or a third-party service provider other than Krüger Language Practitioners). Proofreading is primarily concerned with syntax, grammar, punctuation, minor formatting errors, inconsistencies, and the appearance of references. Proofreading is synonymous with language editing.

If any doubt exists as to whether this certificate was indeed issued to the specific client named on this form, contact us to confirm whether he/she was our client.