



Two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients in the South African motor insurance sector during the claim stage

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'The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing'—Socrates, Greek philosopher,
in the *Apology of Socrates* by Plato

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You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength
(Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher, in *Meditations*).

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is on the South African insurance landscape and the operations of the Motor Insurance Claims Department of Company X. Two parties are present in this communication process: the first is the claims administrator; that individual who manages clients' claims, communicates with clients on how the process works and what is needed from them, and provides feedback on whether their claims have been accepted or denied. The other party is the client. The research focuses on the nature of the two-way symmetrical communication model within the motor claims insurance sector between the above-mentioned parties to foster and maintain long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. The essence of this research is to establish if and how the two-way symmetrical model can be implemented in order to maintain clients and to prevent them from cancelling their policy with the insurer.

A qualitative research approach was used for this study in the form of semi-structured interviews with three managers and seven claims administrators of the Motor Insurance Claims Department.

After data analysis, it was clear that the claims administrator is in control of the communication with clients during the claims process and the only role clients play in this process is to supply documentation. Most of the time, clients do not understand their policy wording or terms and conditions. This lack of understanding inevitably leads to conflict. It is therefore important to recognise that this relationship does not build on the two-way symmetrical communication model where both claims administrators and their clients have equal opportunities in the communication process. The clients have little control or voice in the communication process. The Motor Insurance Claims Department does not allow its clients to voice their opinion or have any other input in the claims process.

At present, owing to the one-way flow of communication, it is clear that there is no relationship between the motor claims administrator and Company X's clients. It is evident that the Motor Insurance Claims Department needs to investigate and properly understand its clients' needs and build dialogue with them based on the data received from the research.

Key words: interpersonal communication management, motor insurance sector, motor insurance claims, motor insurance claims clients, stakeholder relationship management, two-way symmetrical communication

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ABBREVIATIONS

FSCA	Financial Sector Conduct Authority
NRF	National Research Foundation
NWU BaSSREC	North-West University Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
PPC	personal portfolio consultant

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Introduction and Context of the Study

The South African motor insurance sector is a specialised insurance category that protects its main stakeholder, namely its clients, from financial loss experienced through motor vehicle damage, accidents and total motor vehicle losses in the form of accident write-offs and stolen vehicles.

This research study focuses on a leading motor insurance company in South Africa, which will be referred to as 'Company X' for purposes of confidentiality. Company X commenced with its operations in the South African insurance sector over 20 years ago. The company has various departments. However, this study mainly delves into the Motor Insurance Claims Department.

Company X's Motor Insurance Department has over 46 000 policies. The Motor Insurance Claims Department has two main focus areas that both have a specific purpose. The first is dealing with lower-risk motor claims, which have a quicker claims pay-out rate, that concentrate on the windscreen, mechanical breakdown, tyre and rim, and scratches and dents vehicle claims. Clients generally become frustrated and angry with the claims administration process because they want these damages to be fixed as quickly as possible. Clients who have severe damage to their vehicle which prevents them from driving it become especially irate.

The second focus area is the higher-risk claim, which has a longer claims pay-out rate. This includes serious vehicle accidents that result in bodily harm or death; and stolen vehicles and hijacking, at times resulting in total loss of the vehicle. Many clients are left with anxiety and trauma as a result.

With the aforementioned in mind, it is important to note that the South African insurance sector as a whole is a highly competitive sector, with over 180 registered insurance companies in South Africa, according to the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA) (2023). Therefore, South African motor insurance clients have the opportunity to choose an insurance company that best meets their needs.

Taking into consideration the fact that establishing personal relationships with clients in the insurance industry takes place only when a claim is made and not during the policy inception stage (Schaerer *et al.*, 2011), and since Company X is part of over 180 FSCA-registered

insurance companies in South Africa, the creation of relationships with clients during the claim stage has become even more crucial for the long-term retention of clients.

The South African insurance landscape has changed the role of communication with its stakeholders and it has therefore become even more critical to create relationships with these stakeholders (Lane, 2014:13). The main form of communication that takes place with clients during the claim stage is interpersonal telephonic communication with the motor insurance claims administrator. This communication lasts from the start of the claim to its finalisation. The claims administrator is responsible for the registration, verification and processing of the claim up to the point where clients' vehicle repairs are authorised or payment is made to them for the claim. It is important to note that the claims administrator communicates with clients through a script that contains questions clients are required to answer. It can therefore be seen as 'question-and-answer communication'. This is a standard script that the claims administrator uses to register a claim with a client. Questions such as what the client's identity (ID) number is, how the accident happened and any further security questions are asked. This type of communication indicates a monologue from the claims administrator with the client.

West and Turner (2008:10) explain interpersonal communication as the process of sharing a message between two or more parties to create and foster meaning. Troester and Mester (2007:156) further add that interpersonal communication is an important context of corporate and professional relationship management, and forms the foundation of success in the corporate environment. Therefore, interpersonal communication is extremely important in creating long-term relationships and developing trust (Olkkonen, Tikkanen & Alajoutsijarvi, 2000:404).

Interpersonal communication with a client during the claim stage is where the relationship can be enhanced or destroyed. If the client is not satisfied with the overall claims process and the interpersonal communication, that client will either complain, insist on speaking to management or, even worse, cancel the policy and go to the Ombudsman for Short-term Insurance, resulting in them transferring to another insurance company that better answers in their needs. This is where conflict resolution through effective communication plays an integral role. The communication therefore needs to be professional and characterised by an understanding of the client's circumstances, empathising with his or her needs and building a relationship based on mutual understanding for the relationship to be maintained in the long term.

The aim should be to create meaningful communication, based on an understanding of the client's needs, and thus to create strong mutually beneficial long-term relationships. The two-way

symmetrical communication model should serve as the normative approach to communication between Company X and its clients to attain these goals.

1.2 Problem Statement

The aforementioned information was used to focus on the Motor Insurance Claims Department of Company X, which falls in the highly competitive South African insurance landscape with its more than 180 FSCA-registered insurance companies.

The issue at hand is that Company X must retain its clients in this competitive insurance sector by building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships through interpersonal two-way symmetrical communication.

The argument is made that if the two-way symmetrical communication model does not form the core of communication with clients, the relationship with them can be harmed, which indirectly results in clients cancelling their policy and moving to another insurance company that better answers in their needs.

1.2.1 General research question

Against this background, the following research question is posed:

To what extent does Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department manage its communication with clients two-way symmetrically at the claim stage to foster relationships?

1.2.2 Specific research questions

1. According to the literature, what guidelines have been established for two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients?
2. What is the management's perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?
3. What are the claims administrators' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To determine what guidelines have been established in the literature for two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients by means of a literature study.
2. To determine the managements' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients by conducting semi-structured interviews.
3. To determine claims administrators' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process in order to foster relationships with clients by conducting semi-structured interviews.

1.4 Central Theoretical Arguments

This study was guided by the meta-theoretical perspective of the cybernetic tradition, and the two-way symmetrical communication model and stakeholder relationship management theory that form the basis of the theoretical arguments for the study.

1.4.1 Meta-theoretical perspective: cybernetic tradition and systems theory

According to Littlejohn and Foss (2008:40), the cybernetics tradition explains communication concerning systems. Therefore, it can be argued that the systems theory can be used in a communication context as a theoretical approach within the cybernetics tradition. The systems theory explains that a system consists of sub-systems that influence one another. These sub-systems must therefore work together effectively to keep the system in equilibrium, maintain a balance and to achieve synergy (van Heerden, 2004). The subsystems are interdependent, meaning that one part of the system inevitably has a direct effect on the system as a whole (Apuke, 2018:22). To achieve equilibrium, balance and synergy, the systems should operate as open systems (Conrad & Poole, 2002), which implies that communication plays an integral role through dialogue and feedback with subsystems in the larger system (Apuke, 2018:22).

As per the aforementioned, the two-way symmetrical communication model can be seen as an interactive system of information, feedback and mutual control (Apuke, 2018:22). If Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department does not adopt a two-way symmetrical communication

approach with its clients based on dialogue, feedback and mutual understanding, the systems will not be able to reach the required equilibrium, balance and synergy, with dire consequences for the relationship between the company and its clients.

1.4.2 Two-way symmetrical communication model

The two-way symmetrical model of communication is based on research in order to create dialogue, which forms the primary key to building and maintaining long-term and mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their key stakeholders (Garnett & Kouzmin, 1997:262; Grunig, 1992:552; Heath, 2013:324; Ledingham & Brunig, 2000:65; Stepinska, 2014:115).

Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical model forms the core foundation of this research. For Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department, it is essential to communicate with clients in such a way that their needs, attitudes and perceptions are understood. Owing to the fact that clients who enter the claim stage go through traumatic events, ethical and transparent dialogue with them is of crucial importance. Dialogue must be based on understanding the client and interacting in such a way that strong long-term relationships are fostered. A two-way symmetrical approach is further needed to manage conflict between the Motor Insurance Claims Department and its clients.

1.4.3 Stakeholder relationship management theory

Hon and Grunig's (1999) stakeholder relationship management theory is focused on building relationships between organisations and their main stakeholders. These relationships are based on 'common interests and shared goals', which, over time, create mutually beneficial and long-term relationships (Ledingham & Baesecke, 2015:190). Continual improvement and fostering of relationships with key stakeholders are essential and an ongoing process, which results in positive added value for the organisation and its key stakeholders (Lindgreen *et al.*, 2012:351).

Hon and Grunig's (1999) theory is based on certain strategies for maintaining organisational and stakeholder relationships. These strategies are *access, openness, positivity, assurances, sharing of tasks* and *networking*. The authors also identified *control mutuality, trust, commitment* and *satisfaction* as the outcomes of strong, long-term relationships. Lastly, they identified two types of relationships, namely (1) *communal* and (2) *exchange*, that could be formed when implementing these strategies. Thus, Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department needs to apply strategies to build and maintain relationships with clients. The outcomes and types of

relationships should be a guide for measuring and managing the communication and overall relationship with clients. This therefore forms the basis on which mutually beneficial relationships with clients are built and result in strong, long-term relationships with them during the claim stage.

The above theoretical arguments form the basis of the theoretical framework that guides the study and are elaborated on in detail in Chapter 2.

1.5 Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was followed in this study. As explained by Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), qualitative research is used to deepen the understanding of the research topic in correlation with the literature study. A qualitative research approach can be explained as the collection of non-numerical data, for example, text and communication to find the motivations and reasons behind the answers (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

This approach was followed by means of semi-structured interviews with management and the claims administrators to investigate the participants' perceptions of their communication management to build and maintain relationships with clients. Through the qualitative interviews, a more in-depth understanding was gained on the perceptions, reasons and motivations of management and the claims administrators of their communication and relationship with their clients, especially during the claims process.

1.6 Research Methods

1.6.1 Literature study

Searches were conducted on the following databases in order to find credible resources based on the core literature used for this research: National Research Foundation (NRF), NEXUS, Catalogue of books: Ferdinand Postma Library (North-West University), EBSCOHost, Google Scholar, Emerald Online, ScienceDirect and Sabinet Online.

The following are examples of previous research studies that utilised two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management as theories:

- Cooper, A.D. 2009. Two-way communication: a win-win model for facing activist's pressure; a case study on McDonald's and Unilever's responses to Greenpeace.

- De Beer, L. 2015. Content management on the trade union Solidarity's Facebook page: a relationship management perspective.
- Eliasson, K. & Olsson, I. 2018. The one- or two-way route? A quantitative study on the effects of the one-way and two-way marketing communication on brand loyalty among members of loyalty programs in the beauty industry.
- Khoza, S. 2015. Strategic stakeholder relationship management in a professional organisation: an exploratory enquiry into SACOMM.
- Landsberg, T. 2014. Relationship management with managers of the nationwide branches of SEESA: a case study.
- Lane, A. 2014. Pragmatic two-way communication: a practitioner perspective on dialogue in public relations
- Ledingham, J.A. 2003. Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations.
- Le Roux, K. 2011. The relationship between corporate communication efforts, client communication satisfaction and client relationship satisfaction, and client economic contribution within a financial services organisation.
- Mainardes, E.W., Alves, H. & Raposo, M. 2012. A model for stakeholder classification and stakeholder relationships. Management and Economics Department and NECE, Center for Studies in Management Science, University of Beira Interior (UBI), Covilha, Portugal.
- Sutton, L.B. 2014. Internal communication to manage employee relations: North-West University Institutional Office's communication with the Potchefstroom Campus.
- Willacy, M. 2016. Two-way symmetric communication between public utilities and the public.

The aforementioned studies focus on theories similar to those of the present study. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that there is enough literature available to conduct this study. However, no study has been done in the motor insurance industry to see how two-way symmetrical communication is used to build relationships with clients on an interpersonal level during the claims process. This study is therefore unique and necessary for the specific context.

1.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

According to Anderson (1990:241), an interview is a qualitative technique for collecting data during the research process. A semi-structured interview is considered a conversation based on the general and specific research questions. These interviews aim to reveal the participant's underlying perspectives on the particular communication and relationship issues under discussion

(Wimmer & Dominick, 1991:148; Pitout, 1995:112). Thus, it gives the participants selected the opportunity to explain their answers verbally, resulting in more emotive and in-depth conversation.

In the first instance, the management team of the Motor Insurance Claims Department was purposively selected (see du Plooy, 2009) for semi-interviews. They included all three senior managers of the Motor Insurance Claims Department at Company X. These managers head the department of motor claims and are in charge of the claims administrators. Therefore, these three participants were purposively selected to answer specific research question 2 (see section 1.2.2) and to gain an understanding from managements' perspective of the communication and relationship management with clients during the claim stage.

Second, it is essential to understand the perceptions of the claims administrators who register, administer and process clients' claims, and act as the main communicators with clients during the claim stage. The aim was to answer specific research question 3 (see section 1.2.2).

Twenty-one motor claims administrators work for Company X. An invitation via electronic (email) was sent to all 21 administrators to participate in a semi-structured interview. The full population was therefore invited to participate (see du Plooy, 2009). In the end, seven interviews realised, which was when the point of saturation was reached (see Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The semi-structured interviews with management and administrators were conducted in the period 18 May 2022 – 25 August 2022 and each interview lasted approximately one hour. All the interviews took place in a scheduled workplace boardroom outside normal operating hours (during the administrators' lunch hour). The participants signed a confidentiality agreement and informed consent form, and took part in the research voluntarily.

The interview schedule for both management and administrators was developed based on the constructs and concepts identified in the literature on two-way symmetrical communication, and stakeholder relationship management strategies and outcomes (see Chapter 2). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Furthermore, the transcribed text of answers was analysed by means of qualitative content analysis according to the same concepts and constructs as identified in the literature (see du Plooy, 2009). Qualitative content analysis is a common method used to analyse certain data, information and phenomena from transcribed information received from qualitative research methods such as interview groups (Elo *et al.*, 2014:10). See Chapter 3 for more detail on the methodological process.

1.7 Ethical Considerations

For the purpose of this research, ethical clearance and an ethical clearance number from the North-West University Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (NWU BaSSREC) were obtained before the empirical part of the research commenced (ethics number: NWU-01122-21-S7). Both the researcher and the supervisors had completed the necessary ethics training.

Company X gave permission for the research study to be conducted, subject to certain conditions because the insurance sector in South Africa is exceedingly competitive meaning that the competitiveness of this company had not to be negatively impacted due to the publishing of information that other insurance companies could use to their advantage.

The participants of Company X (management members and the claims administrators involved in the research) remained anonymous in the reporting of the data – their identity was protected and all company-related information was kept confidential. The participants could withdraw from the study at any time; even though no participant did.

It should be noted that the researcher of this project (the MA student) holds a position primarily related to the study, namely as a training and development specialist in the Motor Insurance Claims Department at Company X.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The initial plan was to include the perspective of clients who hold policies at Company X. However, owing to the individual clients' Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) choices related to their policies at Company X, it was not possible to send out quantitative questionnaires to these clients. Therefore, these clients' claims could not form part of the study, since Company X is legally obligated to protect the personal information of its clients. This is the main limitation of this study: the fact that only Company X's perception was obtained (management and administrators) and that the clients' perception do not form part of the study.

The study was also conducted within one company and one department (i.e., Motor Insurance Claims Department). Therefore, the findings may not be generalised to other insurance companies or departments.

1.9 Significance of the study

Company X had never conducted proper research in the Motor Insurance Claims Department regarding the overall communication management and relationship management with its clients. Furthermore, the Motor Insurance Claims Department is a fairly new concept for Company X. Therefore, this study makes a practical contribution to the management and claims administrators at Company X to improve their communication in order to maintain relationships with clients during the claim stage.

No other research studies had been conducted before in the South African insurance sector based on two-way symmetrical communication within the interpersonal relationship management context. Therefore, the findings of this research will not only benefit Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department, but can be used as guidelines for other claims departments on how to properly communicate with clients during financial loss and trauma to build and maintain relationships with them.

Furthermore, little is known about the possible contribution of two-way symmetrical communication with clients in the insurance sector, more specifically at the claim stage. This study therefore aims to fill this gap and contribute to the body of knowledge in this specific context and sector.

1.10 Chapter layout

Chapter 1: Background, context and problem statement

In Chapter 1 the background of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department, together with the competitive South African insurance sector, is discussed. The problem statement and research questions were formulated to guide the rest of the study.

Chapter 2: Two-way symmetrical communication and stakeholder relationship management

In this chapter the theoretical framework is established in order to answer the first specific research question.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

The focus of Chapter 3 is on explaining the qualitative research approach and semi-structured interview research method used for the empirical part of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings obtained through the semi-structured interviews with management

In Chapter 4 the perceptions of management and the claims administrators via semi-structured interviews are analysed to answer the second specific research question.

Chapter 5: Findings obtained through the semi-structured interviews with claims administrators

In Chapter 5 the perceptions of the claims administrators via semi-structured interviews are analysed to answer the third specific research question.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

In Chapter 6 conclusions are drawn in order to answer the general research question. Furthermore, recommendations for Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department and for future studies are made.

CHAPTER 2: TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the background and context of this study were explained, and the research focus was highlighted. It was argued that the nature of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's communication with its motor insurance clients during the claim stage should be two-way symmetrical in nature, in order to build and maintain relationships with clients.

This argument is continued in Chapter 2, which focuses on the literature to answer the first research question (see section 1.2.2), namely

According to the literature, what guidelines have been established for two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients?

In this chapter, the systems theory within the cybernetics tradition is explained as part of a meta-theoretical perspective to guide the inquiry on the nature of communication to build and maintain relationships with clients in the motor insurance industry. After that, the theories that were used for this study to provide a theoretical framework are set out, namely the two-way symmetrical communication model and the stakeholder relationship management theory.

2.2 Meta-theoretical Perspective: Cybernetic Tradition and Systems Theory

Wiener (1985) explained cybernetics through a Greek term he created which translates as 'steersman'. This term describes the cybernetics approach as the main principle that controls or directs the system. Wiener (1985) was the first to merge the control theory with the communication theory as key principles in a system.

According to Heylighen & Joslyn (2001:2), cybernetics is depicted as the science that analyses theories of organisation in systems. In other words, cybernetics emphasises how systems use information, actions and communication to achieve its main goal without any interference in the system (Heylighen & Joslyn, 2001:2).

The cybernetics tradition mainly focuses on the components of feedback, control, the information theory and the communication theory (Mindell, 2002:11). The systems theory directly links with the cybernetic tradition as different types of systems must be studied in relation to feedback,

control and communication (Mindell, 2002:1). According to a cybernetics study conducted by Littlejohn and Foss (2008), to fully understand a group of clients, a company must understand their needs, and how they interact and influence one another. This statement directly argues that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must understand its clients' *needs*, and build *interaction* based on *shared meaning* and how both parties *influence* each other in the claims process.

A *system* can be explained as interacting units within an established internal and external environment (sub-systems) that responds and adapts to change from the environment to achieve balance or equilibrium (Cutlip *et al.*, 2006:176; Scholtes, 1998:58; van Rhee van Oudtshoorn, 2010). This balance can be seen as long-term financial survival, as well as long-term mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders (van Heerden, 2004; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). The present study applied the systems theory as the meta-theoretical perspective from which the other theories (i.e., two-way symmetrical model and stakeholder relationship management theory) are approached. A meta theory is a theory that analyses theoretical themes and identifies issues on the nature of social science. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:20), various meta-theories have evolved since the origins of modern social science in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The systems theory, the foundation on which the two-way symmetrical communication model is formed, is relevant to Hon and Gunig's (1984) communication model. Littlejohn and Foss (2008) explain the importance of the systems theory, which is applied to Company X's operations in this study. An insurance company must build strong, long-term relationships with its clients during the claim stage to achieve equilibrium in the competitive South African insurance sector. This should result in long-term survival in the South African insurance landscape.

Systems go through different processes to adapt, change or remain the same (Conrad & Poole, 2002:24). This is characterised by three different systems processes, namely (1) self-regulation, (2) adaptation and (3) self-renewal (p. 24).

Self-regulation, a term mostly used in social cognitive theory, means the ability of a system to manage behaviour and actions in relation to the external environment (Bandura, 1991:249). Self-regulation can also be seen as a set of psychological sub-functions that must continually be developed to create self-directed change (Bandura & Wood, 1989). According to Poyhonen (2004:01), *self-renewal* or *organisational system renewal* can be defined by the ability of the system to implement processes and maintain current processes.

Equilibrium in this relationship between the Motor Insurance Claims Department and the company's motor insurance clients is of crucial importance in building long-term mutually beneficial relationships with each other, which, in turn, leads to long-term financial success and competitiveness in the South African insurance landscape. Equilibrium can only be achieved in an open system. An *open organisation* can be defined as an organisation that is open to constantly changing and adapting to the sub-systems, as opposed to a *closed system* that is not open to change or adaptation (von Bertalanffy, 1968:32; Welch, 2020). Open systems exchange information with their most important sub-systems – in the context of this study they are Company X's clients. Company X must therefore adjust and adapt to accommodate its clients to achieve equilibrium, long-term relationships with these clients and overall long-term survival in the South African insurance sector (van Heerden, 2004). An organisation that has an open system takes input from the internal or external environment and turns it into positive output. The organisation then receives feedback on this output and adjusts according to this feedback (Joyce, 2009:4). Out of this, two-way symmetrical communication is formed by Company X receiving input (feedback) from its clients and converting it into positive output – meeting clients' needs to create long-term, mutually beneficial relationships (Joyce, 2009:4).

Adaptation is the process that defines an open system: when the system survives by adapting and surviving through the ongoing knowledge of stakeholders' needs and adapting to those needs thereby avoiding stagnation (Conrad & Poole, 2002:24). Adaptation plays an integral part in the survival of the system and if a system fails or does not achieve equilibrium, it is because the adaptation cycle is being ignored (Heil, 2017:4).

In the light of the information explained in this section, the field of research based on the symmetrical worldview that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must apply directly relates to the open system approach. If Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department adopts an open system approach, it should make use of research to understand its clients' needs. The output from clients could directly lead to mutual understanding, which Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department can use to adapt to its clients' needs, perceptions and views. Every action and communication directed at clients' needs should be based on the symmetrical worldview. Both the open system approach and the symmetrical worldview could create two-way symmetrical communication between the client and the Motor Insurance Claims Department, leading to a long-term relationship between the parties.

When looking back at the systems theory, Rowley (quoted in Sachs & Ruhli, 2011:40) explains that organisations function around the sub-systems of relationships with stakeholders. They must therefore function together coherently for the organisation to achieve equilibrium. It is important

to note that equilibrium within the system is achieved through relationship management with stakeholder groups and the relationships are managed through two-way communication.

2.3 Asymmetrical Worldview Versus Symmetrical Worldview

Grunig and White (1992:33) explained a *worldview* as ideas or knowledge that people use to make sense of new information. Pursuing this further, worldviews are an integral part of organisational communication management because organisations must understand human behaviour. Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must therefore understand its clients' behaviour.

According to Grunig and White (1992) and Mandelbaum (2020), the appropriate communication worldview

- **Is ethical:** Communication with key stakeholders is based on the truth and this, in turn, creates a comfortable environment based on trust;
- **Solves problems:** Mainly pertains to stakeholder relationships and any concerns that might hinder the communication and relationships with stakeholders, and continually maintains the relationship; and
- **Maintains relationships:** Builds strong, meaningful and long-term relationships with stakeholders by means of dialogue and meeting stakeholders' needs.

Organisational communication can be based on two main worldviews, namely (1) the asymmetrical worldview and (2) the symmetrical worldview which, in turn, leads to the communication model that the organisation will inevitably incorporate (Landsberg. 2014:28).

2.3.1 Asymmetrical worldview

The asymmetrical worldview links directly to a closed system approach (see section 2.2.), which is one-sided communication from the organisation. The organisation thus focuses on the input of stakeholders, without using the output to create strong relationships. In the nature of this, an organisation with an asymmetrical worldview will adapt to the behaviour of stakeholders, without changing the internal environment (Naudé, 2001:68).

In addition to the latter explanation of the asymmetrical worldview, Grunig and White (1992:43), and Naudé (2001:69) describes an organisation with an asymmetrical worldview as follows:

- **Closed system:** Information flows outside the organisation and does not flow in.
- **Internal orientation:** The organisation is internally focused and not concerned about external opinions/perceptions of the organisation from stakeholders.
- **Elitism:** The leaders of the organisation know what is best, and have more knowledge and decision making than the stakeholders. Therefore, there is no mutual control between the organisation and its clients.
- **Conservatism:** Change from external stakeholders is not important and is resisted.

It goes without saying that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department cannot function with an asymmetrical worldview. With an asymmetrical worldview, the Motor Insurance Claims Department will communicate with clients without understanding their needs, perceptions and opinions. If Company X functions as a closed system without influence from the external environment, the company will not be able to build and maintain a mutually beneficial, long-term relationship with its clients (key external stakeholders) which is crucial for the company's Motor Insurance Claims Department to survive in the long term in the competitive South African insurance landscape.

With this in mind, the symmetrical worldview as the proposed ideal approach for Company X in this study is explained next.

2.3.2 Symmetrical worldview

A symmetrical worldview consists of the process of collaboration and compromise, which facilitates understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders (Landsberg, 2014:32). Grunig and White (1992:43–44) and Naudé (2001:71) explained the following assumptions for a symmetrical worldview:

- **Interdependence:** Organisations cannot isolate themselves from the external environment. This therefore explains that the company and its stakeholders have influence over each other and adapt to each other's needs (see section 2.2).
- **Open system:** The organisation is open to interacting with external clients, adapting to the symmetrical viewpoint and open system approach to achieve equilibrium and synergy between the systems and sub-systems (see section 2.2).
- **Moving equilibrium:** Organisations strive to be in equilibrium with their clients, who are constantly changing with the environment (see section 2.2).

- **Equality:** Clients are given equal opportunities, and any client can provide valuable input to the company and vice versa.
- **Responsibility:** Organisations and stakeholders must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions.
- **Conflict resolution:** Conflict is resolved through negotiation, communication and compromise, and not through violence, manipulation or coercion. This is how strong relationships are built with clients.
- **Stakeholder liberalism:** The company negotiates with other clients so that the interests of clients are taken care of.

The assumptions by Grunig and White (1992:43–44) indicate that a company with a symmetrical worldview adopts an open system approach. This approach is open to change from external stakeholders, understanding these stakeholders' needs and acting accordingly to these needs. In the process, the two-way symmetrical communication model will be adopted, as explained in section 2.2 in more detail.

The use of research and dialogue to gain a thorough understanding of stakeholders' needs, perceptions and viewpoints is of primary importance (Landsberg, 2014:26). This statement alone explains that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must identify and understand its clients, especially during the claim stage. This output from clients is therefore used to understand and adapt to their needs and create two-way symmetrical communication with clients, based on mutual understanding. Consequently, this should create the core foundation of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department – the use of research and dialogue to understand its clients' needs.

The worldview that an organisation adopts directly influences the type of communication model that the organisation will make use of (Naudé, 2001:68). Organisations with an asymmetric worldview will largely implement asymmetric communication models, while organisations with a symmetrical worldview will adopt the symmetrical communication model.

Within each worldview there are certain communication models that support each worldview. These communication models will now be discussed in further detail.

2.4 Communication Models

Grunig and his research team established four models of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:27; Grunig & White, 1992:39). These models consist of one-way, as well as two-way communication. Of these models, the two-way symmetric model is the focus in this research.

2.4.1 Press agency model

The first one-way communication model is better known as the *press agency model* which was practised from the middle of the 19th century, as explained by Grunig and Grunig (1992:287). This model is used by corporate communication practitioners to create and publish stories to the external public that are not based on value or truth (Laskin, 2009:38). This model is therefore based on one-way communication where truth is not of primary importance and the main goal is publicity (Laskin, 2009:40). This model focuses on intuitive persuasion and propaganda used to gain the public's support, often using unsavoury methods (the public being fooled in the process). The communication is therefore misleading and unethical, and very little to no research is used in this model (Grunig & White, 1992:18).

2.4.2 Public information model

Developed largely by Ivy Lee in the early 1900s in response to the publicity of organisations, the public information model addresses the need to regain the public's trust through an open policy (the public to be informed). This model is considered to be the dissemination of information through the media, and controlled media such as newsletters, pamphlets and direct mail. In comparison with the press agency model, this model focuses on true facts that are communicated (Bowen *et al.*, 2010).

This model also uses one-way communication to allow information to flow from organisations to stakeholders (Laskin, 2009:40). Organisations that use the public information model value truth and transparency in order to explain their own actions. The purpose of this model is to keep stakeholders informed about the organisation's activities. The stakeholders are therefore not persuaded, but rather informed (Grunig & White, 1992:18).

2.4.3 Two-way asymmetrical communication model

The two-way asymmetrical model was developed during World War I. Edward Bernays was one of several leading practitioners who helped create this model, assisted by the scientific opinion

poll conducted in the 1900s (Matthee, 2011:36). The two-way asymmetrical communication model indicates that communication management is regarded as a scientific/research attempt to persuade stakeholders solely for the benefit of the organisation (Laskin, 2009:38). This model is asymmetric in nature due to the fact that the communication is meant to persuade stakeholders. However, it is two-way in nature because the stakeholders are considered through research (Hanthasia & Suyono, 2014:3). Stakeholders therefore have no power over, or impact on, the organisation (Matthee, 2011:36). The organisation strives to align the perceptions of the stakeholders with those of the organisation (Hanthasia & Suyono, 2014:3). The result of this communication model is unbalanced as the organisation expects its stakeholders to change but is not itself willing to change and adapt to the needs and views of these stakeholders (Laskin, 2009:38).

The two-way symmetrical communication model, which forms the foundation of this research study, will now be discussed in order to identify the constructs of two-way symmetrical communication that are utilised in the empirical part of this study.

2.4.4 Two-way symmetrical communication model

The two-way symmetrical communication model was officially introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. Two-way symmetrical communication was first described by Grunig and Hunt (1984) as a form of public relations, and Grunig and Grunig (1992) explain that the two-way symmetrical model is a standard of excellence and professionalism in corporate communication management. Symmetrical communication can be compared to diatonic communication in which organisations and their stakeholders attempt to reach a consensus that is beneficial to both parties (Childers, 1989:87).

The two-way symmetrical communication model puts organisations and their stakeholders in conversation with one another (Childers, 1989:91; Kent & Lane, 2021). Two-way communication focuses on the exchange of information between parties in the form of *dialogue* – communication that is two-way, whereby the company and clients adapt to each other's needs and perceptions, which creates long-term, mutually beneficial relationships (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000:160). This directly links to the open system approach and the symmetrical worldview as research is used to understand stakeholders' needs to create dialogue based on these needs (Landsberg, 2014:32). This statement also directly links to Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department and to understanding its clients' needs. Once these needs are understood, dialogue must be created with this as the core foundation.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified dialogue within the two-way symmetrical model which leads to *mutual understanding* and responsiveness. Therefore, the main purpose and focus of symmetrical communication are to create mutual understanding and dialogue rather than influence and persuasion (Kent & Lane, 2021). The dialogue must be based on research into the clients' needs; therefore, truly understanding the perceptions, needs and behaviours of the stakeholders by means of ethical research and dialogue. If these stakeholders' needs are understood, strong, long-term relationships with these stakeholders could be built, and mutually beneficial benefits for both the stakeholders and the organisation can be created (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288). It is important to take note that participation and balanced communication directly link to dialogue and mutual understanding between both parties.

Two-way symmetrical communication focuses on the foundation of exchanging *ethical* informative dialogue, which results in understanding clients' needs. Once clients' needs are understood, positive changes in attitudes, perceptions and behaviours, both for the organisation and its stakeholders, will develop (Grunig, 1992:29; Makwambeni & Matsika, 2022). Freeman *et al.* (2007) explain the two-way symmetrical communication process as engagement and that organisations are successful when they create valuable conversations with stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

From the above, the argument is made that the use of two-way symmetrical communication enhances and strengthens the development and maintenance of the relationship between stakeholders and the organisation, as the needs of the stakeholders are understood through dialogue and conversation with the stakeholders. This further creates mutually beneficial, long-term relationships, as it develops feedback and establishes an understanding between an organisation and its stakeholders (Grunig, 1992:552; Sutton *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, organisations are most likely more successful when they engage in dialogue with stakeholders through open conversation and understanding their needs (Heino and Anttiroiko, 2015). Importantly, this is how Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department should engage with its clients. Based on two-way symmetrical communication, the company must engage in open dialogue and through research understand its clients' needs during the claim stage.

Furthermore, Rogers (1961) explained more than 60 years ago that two-way communication could only be implemented effectively when there was a focus on warmth, genuineness, empathy, care and concern, in which one party reflected the other's experiences and suggested ways to understand its needs. Both parties must openly express their feelings and concerns in a supportive and accepting environment (Bohm, 2006; Lee, 2021).

With the study on two-way symmetrical communication, one party cannot convince another party of its own viewpoint. The emphasis is on *collaboration* and shared learning between two parties. As a result, Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's communication with its clients must be based on empathy for its clients' circumstances, researching and understanding the needs of the client, and on true concern, warmth and genuineness.

Once the organisation and its clients understand each other's needs, and these needs are communicated and met in the form of dialogue, other elements such as *negotiation*, *mutual respect* and successful *conflict resolution* will be increased in the relationship. Company X's claims department therefore needs to know exactly who its clients are, how these clients must be treated, and what concerns and issues the clients may have to avoid conflict.

This includes incorporating conflict resolution strategies such as bargaining and negotiation. Strategic conflict resolution can bring changes to the stakeholders' attitudes and behaviour, as well as the company's (Grunig & White, 1992:39). In this way, Company X can take care of problems, issues and potential conflict that are essential to its clients. The skills of *negotiation* and *bargaining* must be incorporated for the company to build a long-term relationship with its clients based on trustworthy communication, even if conflict arises. The conflict can be managed to create a stronger relationship, understand the client better and not allowing the conflict to damage the relationship, which might lead to cancellation of the policy.

According to Bruning and Ledingham (2003:160), two-way communication between the organisation and its stakeholders facilitates *transparency*, and the freedom to negotiate, work together and resolve issues and conflict that affect both parties and is based on mutual respect. Two-way symmetrical communication requires both parties to adapt and change constantly following the communication they receive from each other, as they mutually influence each other (Kim, 2021; Scholes & Clutterbuck, 1998:228). In this regard, organisations that adapt to the variety of stakeholders that they have will be able to manage the relationship more successfully, provide guidance, solve conflict, and gain co-operation and trust from their stakeholders, based on mutual respect.

Grunig *et al.* (2002:15) describe two-way symmetrical communication as a balancing effort between the needs of the organisation and its stakeholders, as each party's behaviour can change to meet the other's expectations. Grunig *et al.* (2002:15) further explain that organisations must strive for two-way symmetrical communication in order to maintain a *balance* between the needs of the organisation and its stakeholders. Communication flow between an organisation and its stakeholders that is not balanced, does not take place in a two-way symmetrical manner, as

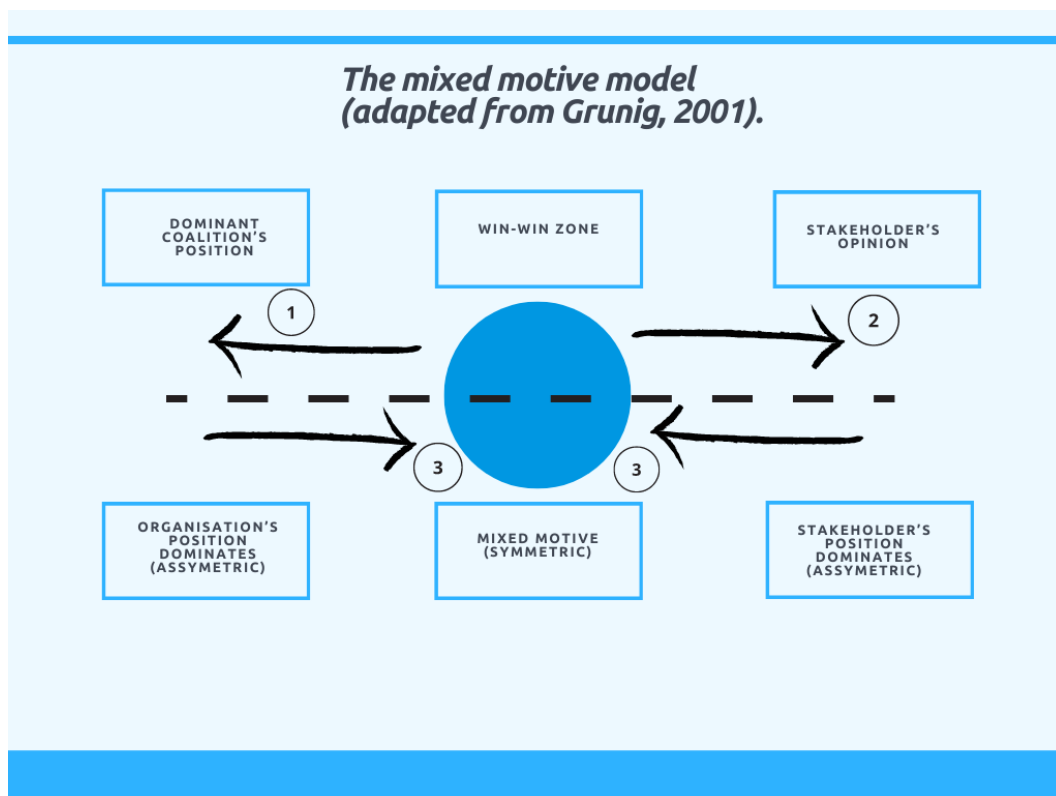
the communication is unbalanced and uneven (Makwambeni & Matsika, 2022). The communication therefore does not comply with the principles of true two-way symmetrical communication flow which must be transparent, participatory and balanced (Sutton, 2020). Balance in the communication process ensures that both parties are actively involved in the communication process. Communication must be balanced between both parties in order for the organisation's values and needs to be aligned with the values and needs of the stakeholders (Sutton, 2020).

Balance in the communication process between the organisation and its stakeholders is equally as important as the *participation* of both parties in the communication process. According to Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009:07), participation in communication is a two-way and horizontal approach between both parties involved. Participation in communication leads to development and empowerment of both parties in the relationship (Kim, 2021). Without the participation of both parties in the communication and relationship, empowerment and development are not achieved (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009:07).

2.4.5 Mixed-motives model

The two-way symmetrical model is classified as a normative ideal for corporate communication management since this model explains how corporate communication should be practised in an ideal environment (Heath, 2013:38). In organisational practice a different model is often used, which is better known as the *mixed-motives model*. This model incorporates both the asymmetrical and symmetrical models of communication.

According to the mixed-motives model, no party in the relationship should have more control than the other (symmetrical model). According to Heath (2013:12), the mixed-motives model is proposed where the two dominant parties can mutually influence each other and persuade each other (asymmetrically) to reach a win–win situation. Both parties therefore communicate on an equal basis with each other in which the organisation and its stakeholders can persuade and influence each other to reach an agreement (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:11). Through this process, symmetrical communication is created. The organisation can therefore address the issues in the right way in order to build mutually beneficial relationships that hold a win–win situation for both parties (Wiggill, 2009:27).



Source: Adapted from Grunig (2001)

Figure 2.1: The mixed-motives model

Figure 2.1 is used to explain the following aspects of the mixed-motives model:

1. **Pure asymmetry:** Communication used to dominate stakeholders, accept dominant coalition's position.
2. **Pure co-operation model:** Communication used to convince dominant coalition to cave in to stakeholder's position.
3. **Two-way model:** Communication used to move stakeholder, dominant coalition or both to acceptable 'win-win' zone.

It can be argued that Company X could potentially implement the mixed-motives model, as this model is more suitable for the practical context of communication. However, the ideal should still be to pursue the normative two-way symmetrical communication model to build and maintain relationships with clients during the claim stage.

2.5 Interpersonal Communication

What makes this research study unique is the fact that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department communicates interpersonally with clients via telephone conversations during the

claim stage. Therefore, interpersonal communication is briefly explained for the purpose of contextualising the study.

Interpersonal communication is the most common context of stakeholder organisational relationship building, and interpersonal communication skills are the foundation of success in an organisation (Troester & Mester, 2007:156). Interpersonal communication skills are important in attempting to create long-term relationship building and the development of trust (Olkkonen, Tikkanen & Alajoutsijarvi, 2000:404). Bruning and Ledingham (1999:158) argue that if an interpersonal relationship can exist between an organisation and its stakeholders, it is evident that both parties should be aware of each other's perspectives, needs and views, and that both parties can influence each other.

From the aforementioned, it is evident that if Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department enhances skills to create impactful interpersonal communication with its clients and vice versa, trust can be developed which, in turn, can create a long-term relationship. It is important for Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department and its clients to understand each other's needs, as well as viewpoints, which will benefit both parties.

Sethi and Seth (2009:33) argue that the process of interpersonal communication involves two main fundamentals, namely (1) how the sender communicates the message to the receiver and (2) how the receiver experiences the feedback. This can include the sender's tone of voice and information communicated to the receiver. The response of the receiver will depict the nature of the communication that will take place between both parties (p. 34). Interpersonal communication takes place both with verbal and non-verbal communication – and it is the emotions that are identified in the non-verbal communication (p. 33).

It is argued that the interpersonal communication between administrators in the Motor Insurance Claims Department at Company X and its clients should be two-way symmetrically in nature to build relationships with these clients. Therefore, Hon and Grunig's (1999) stakeholder relationship management theory is discussed next as a guideline that is used in the present study for how a relationship can be established, maintained and evaluated.

2.6 Stakeholder Relationship Management Theory

The core focus of the stakeholder relationship management theory is to promote and protect the interests and wellbeing of stakeholders and, in turn, to influence the organisation (Phillips *et al.*, 2003:481). All organisations depend on relationships with their stakeholders for long-term survival

(Taylor *et al.*, 2001:266). It is therefore clear that the relationship with stakeholders is of the utmost importance for long-term organisational survival (Ledingham, 2003; Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016), especially in the context of the competitive South African insurance landscape.

The stakeholder relationship management theory was developed by Hon and Grunig (1999) in which they explain how relationships with stakeholders should be established and maintained. Hung (2004:459) argued that relationship management was an ongoing process where the organisation not only had to maintain and build relationships with stakeholders, but could also repair damaged relationships.

The stakeholder relationship management theory is in line with two other theoretical concepts that are mentioned in this chapter: (1) the systems theory (as explained in section 2.2), and (2) Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way symmetrical communication model (as explained in section 1.4.2). When an organisation realises its interdependence with its stakeholders, the organisation will work collaboratively with them to ensure long-term survival (Hung, 2004:396; Sutton *et al.*, 2024).

Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department should utilise the stakeholder relationship management theory to create mutually beneficial relationships with its clients and repair damaged relationships for the survival of the organisation. This could be done by implementing Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship-building strategies.

2.6.1 Relationship-building strategies

To build long-term relationships with stakeholders, the following relationship-building strategies must be followed by Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department (Plowman, 1998:245; Hon & Grunig, 1999:13; Hung, 2004:266; Grunig, 2006:168):

- **Assurance:** Where the stakeholders allow access to the party involved and the organisation allows access to the stakeholders in decision making. Each party will go to the other with complaints or queries.
- **Networking:** This construct suggests that the organisation build relationships with the same interest groups as the groups with whom their stakeholders are building relationships.
- **Sharing tasks:** Both parties must unite to solve problems together. This is essential for building strong relationships based on solutions and not damaging relationships.
- **Access:** One party gives access to the other party's decision-making processes. This again shows that both parties have control over each other.

- **Openness:** Both parties involved (organisation and its stakeholders) are open to sharing feelings and ideas.
- **Positivity:** This includes anything that one of the parties involved does for the benefit of the relationship with the other party.
- **Dual concern:** Balancing the interests of the organisation with the interests of stakeholders. One party's interest should not be emphasised over the other.

The following mutual care strategies are symmetrical in nature and can therefore also be used to build organisational stakeholder relationships (Hung, 2004:266; Grunig, 2006:168):

- **Collaboration:** Both parties must work as a team to meet their needs and achieve a mutually beneficial relationship. *Collaboration* in this case is of the utmost importance as both parties' needs are being met with a focus on mutually beneficial relationships.
- **Unconditionally helpful:** Both parties do what they think is best for the relationship.
- **Win-win situation:** If both parties cannot find a common solution to a problem or issue that is beneficial to both parties, there is no agreement.
- **Mutual control:** One party demonstrates its appreciation for the supporting beliefs and actions of the other party. One party uses the input from the other party and uses the output to adapt to the party's needs.
- **Sense of responsibility:** One party acts responsibly towards the other party who supports it.
- **Reporting:** The main party complies with legal and ethical requirements.
- **Nurturing the relationship:** One party accepts the importance of supporting the other party and therefore makes it part of the decision-making processes. Communication therefore incorporates the needs and views of one of the parties in the decision-making processes.

To evaluate the quality of the relationships that were built through these strategies, Hon and Grunig (1999) developed relationship outcomes, guided by two types of relationships.

2.6.2 Relationship outcomes

Hon and Grunig (1999) argue that the outcomes of strong relationships are strengthened by the type of relationships that can exist between an organisation and its stakeholders. A distinction is made between *exchange* and *communal relationships* (Hon & Grunig, 1999:20; Hung, 2004:396).

Exchange relationships can be explained as one party giving input only to gain something out of the relationship. Grunig and Hon (1999:3) confirm further that one party benefits the other party

for future beneficial gain expected from that other party. In contrast to this, *communal relationships* arise when organisations devote time and effort to promoting the wellbeing of stakeholders (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2010:22). The essence of communal relationships is that one party does something for the other party, without expecting anything in return. This is also not always feasible in practice. The one usually gives something and expects something in return.

Further to the aforementioned, Hon and Grunig (1999:2) identified four outcomes in terms of which strong, long-term relationships should be measured and evaluated. These outcomes are (1) *trust*, (2) *commitment*, (3) *satisfaction* and (4) *mutual control*.

2.6.2.1 Trust

Trust develops when one party believes in the other party's integrity, reliability and competence. Furthermore, trust is built on past experiences and is one party's willingness to open up to the other party (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2010:24). Therefore, trust is built over time and is not a short-term process.

The three dimensions of trust named above (integrity, reliability and competence) (Grunig & Hon, 1999:3; Jo & Shim, 2005) are understood as follows:

- **Integrity** is the belief that an organisation will act fairly and ethically towards its stakeholders and does not deceive them. This is especially important in the Motor Insurance Claims Department as it must act fairly and ethically towards its clients during the motor claims process.
- **Reliability** focuses on the fact that behaviours and communication are constant and consistent. Stakeholders therefore rely on the organisation's actions and communication. The key focus area here is constant communication with clients during the whole claims process, and not just in the registration phase.
- **Competence** is when the organisation has the ability to do what it undertook to do. Stakeholders thus have confidence in the organisation's skills, abilities and performance. Pursuing this further clearly indicates that clients must feel that their claim is in good hands and believe that the Motor Insurance Claims Department will do as it has promised.

Trust results in stakeholders being continually informed about the organisation's behaviours and communication. This explains why the Motor Insurance Claims Department must continually communicate with its client during each stage of the motor claims process. Jones (1995) and Galbreath (2006:1109) argue that this development of trust and co-operation between

stakeholders and the organisation leads to mutually beneficial relationships. This, in turn, improves the performance of both the stakeholders and the organisation (Galbreath, 2006:1109). Therefore, Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department and its clients must trust each other fully during the claims process.

2.6.2.2 Commitment

Commitment can be explained as both the organisation and stakeholders investing time and energy in their relationship to maintain and promote the relationship (Hutton, 1999:208; Hon & Grunig, 1999:2). The stakeholders thus experience that the organisation wants to build a long-term relationship with them which, in turn, leads to loyal stakeholders (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2010:26). Hence, this is exactly what Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must strive for: not only creating long-term relationships, but also creating loyal clients. Further to this, to create and maintain commitment between the organisation and the stakeholder, *ethics* and *transparency* are extremely important (Jahansoozi, 2007:14). Organisations that act transparently, responsibly and ethically are in a better position to enjoy the commitment of stakeholders, compared with organisations that do not act in this way (Galbreath, 2006:1115). This statement explains the important nature of the relationship between Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department and its clients, and that this relationship must be based on transparency and ethics (see section 2.4.4).

2.6.2.3 Relationship satisfaction

Hon and Grunig (1999:2) describe relationship satisfaction as the extent to which each party views and approaches the other favourably, due to the fact that positive expectations about the relationship are strengthened. Satisfaction in a relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs (Hon & Grunig, 1999:2). Both parties are therefore satisfied with the benefits they get out of the relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999:2). As a result, stakeholders have the impression that they and their input are important to the organisation (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2010:24). Thus stakeholders have an equal opportunity in the communication process to influence the organisation. From this statement, it is evident that Company X's motor claims department must build strong, long-term relationships with its clients based on communication. This relationship must be beneficial for both parties, with both parties having equal shared interests and input in the relationship.

2.6.2.4 Mutual control

Mutual control, as described by Hon and Grunig (1999:2), is when the stakeholder and the organisation work together and both parties have equal control over each other. Stakeholders become part of the decision-making process and have a certain degree of *control* over situations and events in the organisation (Holtzhausen & Fourie, 2010:27). This also means that both parties must have equal opportunities to provide input and feedback in the relationship. Both the organisation and the stakeholder benefit from a mutual relationship, and both can have control in the organisation. This beneficial relationship can only take place successfully if feedback and input from the stakeholder takes priority, and not only from the organisation (van Dyk, 2007:43).

In terms of the aforementioned, as well as the open system approach that was mentioned in section 2.2, Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must understand its clients' needs and adapt to them. Both the Motor Insurance Claims Department and its clients must have equal control over each other, and the needs of both the department and the client must be in balance with each other.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter various theories were identified and clarified, with a view to answering specific research question 1: *According to the literature, what guidelines have been established for two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients?*

To answer this question, this chapter commenced with the systems theory that developed from the cybernetics meta-theoretical tradition. Based on the systems theory as meta-theoretical perspective for this study, emphasis was placed on the open system approach that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must apply, whereby the Motor Insurance Claims Department is in ongoing, open communication with clients and use input from clients via research to *understand* their needs, perceptions and values, also of both parties, and act on them. The combined input from Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department and output of clients will lead to equilibrium and synergy.

This links directly to the symmetrical worldview that the company's Motor Insurance Claims Department must strive towards, which involves *negotiation*, *dialogue* and *compromise* between the Motor Insurance Claims Department and its clients. This worldview further identifies that the relationship between Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department and its clients must be one where each party has influence over the other and there is equality between both parties.

Evidence states that when an organisation adopts a symmetrical worldview, it will automatically make use of the two-way symmetrical communication model when communicating with its stakeholders. The two-way symmetrical communication model forms the core of this research with the main focus on *ethical* research to *understand* the clients, act on these clients input by means of *dialogue* and *ethical negotiation* to create *mutually beneficial relationships*. These are the guidelines Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must follow when communicating two-way symmetrically with clients.

Together with the two-way symmetrical communication model, Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must make use of Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship-building strategies to build long-term relationships with clients, and to achieve the outcomes of trust, commitment, mutual control and relationship satisfaction in the relationship.

In conclusion, Table 2.1 summarises the themes identified in the literature to guide the rest of the study and as the answer to specific research question 1.

Table 2.1: Identified themes from the literature

Two-way symmetrical model	
Themes	Description
Dialogue and mutual understanding	The needs of both parties that should be respected and understood are fulfilled by means of continual dialogue, shared meaning and mutual understanding.
Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution	A strategic discussion, guided by mutual respect that resolves conflict in a way that both parties find acceptable. The two parties may not agree on everything, but they are willing to work things out because both parties care for each other.
Collaboration and participation	Both parties should work together through mutual influence and shared involvement towards the same goal. They also play an active role in the relationship to meet each other's needs.
Transparency and ethical communication	Communication between both parties is based on the truth and openness, and takes place in an appropriate and ethical manner.
Balance in communication process	Both parties have the same level of control and influence over each other during the communication process.

Stakeholder relationship management theory	
Relationship-building strategies	Description
Positivity	Both parties invest in making the relationship pleasant for the other party.
Access	The stakeholders and organisation give access to the other with regard to the information they require in their decision-making processes.
Openness	Feelings and thoughts must be openly communicated between the organisation and its clients.
Assurance	Efforts from the parties involved to reassure each other that their concerns are justified and will be addressed.
Networking	The organisation builds networks with the same interest groups as the groups with whom its clients are building relationships.
Sharing of tasks	The organisation and its clients must work together to solve problems.
Dual concern	Balance is maintained between the interests of the clients and the organisation.
Outcomes of relationship	Description
Trust	Trust develops when one party believes in the other party's reliability, integrity and dependability.
Commitment	Commitment means that both parties invest time and energy in the relationship to maintain and promote the relationship.
Satisfaction	The extent to which each party views and approaches the other favourably, due to the fact that positive expectations about the relationship are strengthened.
Mutual control	When two parties agree on who has control or power to influence the other party.
Types of relationships	Description
Communal relationship	Both parties give each other benefits because they are concerned about the wellbeing of the other party, even though they receive nothing in return.
Exchange relationships	Benefits in the relationship are given with the expectation of receiving a benefit in the future or in return for a benefit already received.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 the focus of the literature study was outlined based on the two-way symmetrical communication model and the stakeholder relationship management theory that underpins the rest of the study.

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to set out the research approaches and methods applied to achieve research objectives as mentioned in Chapter 1 (see section 1.6).

First, this chapter discusses the qualitative research approach to the study. Thereafter, the research method used to collect data is explained, namely qualitative semi-structured interviews with the managers and claims administrators in the Motor Insurance Claims Department of Company X. A discussion on the reliability and validity of the data, and on ethical aspects concludes the chapter.

3.2 Qualitative Research Approach

Babbie and Mouton (2001:35) define *qualitative research* as a description and understanding, rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour. Qualitative research offers the researcher the opportunity to form a feeling or impression about a situation or topic (Bouma & Ling, 2004:167). The research is based on descriptions, experiences and interpretations of the participant(s). In contrast to the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach seeks to understand humankind within its social context (Marshall, 2005:132). In this study the qualitative approach was followed by using semi-structured interviews to collect data and draw findings, because the researcher wanted to obtain in-depth data and an understanding of the communication phenomenon at hand.

3.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative research approach

The qualitative research method presents certain strengths and weaknesses. For the purposes of this study, it is important to take a look at these strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative research approach that is utilised. This has a direct impact on the validity and reliability of the study, as well as the data analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of a qualitative research approach is set out (adapted from Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:20) here:

- The data from qualitative research are based on participants' own categories of meaning and mainly what their frame of reference is. With this strength in mind, it is also important to consider that the knowledge gained from qualitative research cannot be generalised to other people in other circumstances and is based on participants' own circumstances.
- The qualitative research method is more appropriate to investigating a limited number of cases in depth as the data are descriptive of nature. Because of this, it is difficult to make quantitative or numerical predictions in this regard.
- Qualitative research is useful for discussing specific singularities, but it is more difficult to make hypotheses and draft theories to test. The weakness is that the qualitative research method provides information for individual cases and has less credibility with some researchers.
- The researcher can compare and analyse different individual cases but it is clear that the data collection and analysis are an all-consuming process. However, with this in mind, it is essential to take note that the method mainly provides understanding of individuals' personal understanding of experiences and singularities. Owing to this, the data received can be described in rich detail in terms of singularities collected and analysed in a local context. However, the results are easily influenced by the researcher's personal prejudices.
- The researcher identifies contextual and location factors as they relate to the singularities of importance and can dynamically process the investigation. Data are usually stored in natural environments collected and are adaptable to participants' needs.

For this study, based on Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management with its clients, the main theme is descriptive, argumentative and honest answers from the internal staff about their communication and relationship with their clients, as well as their managers' perceptions. This provides the claims administrators and the managers with the opportunity to speak their mind and share their thoughts. It provides a rich context to their perceptions beliefs and thoughts. Therefore, the participants have their own frame of reference, which bore fruit in this study.

It is important to note that the study is limited to the claims administrators' and managers' frame of reference, and cannot be linked to other insurance companies. This being said, the data are adaptable to the participants' needs and themes presented and extracted from the data received. Although there are weaknesses present in this research approach, the perceptions and feelings presented benefited the present study as they directly linked to how the communication could be improved between the claims administrators and their managers, thus leading to mutually beneficial relationships.

3.3 Research Design

The *research design* is a plan that provides the overall framework for collecting data (Leedy, 1997:195). According to Durrheim (2004:29), a research design is a strategic framework that serves as a link between research questions and the implementation of the research strategy. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001:166) further define research design as a plan for data collection procedures to answer the research questions.

Table 3.1 indicates the research questions with the research method that was used to obtain data to answer the relevant research questions.

Table 3.1: Research methods used to answer the specific research questions

Specific research questions	Research methods
1. According to the literature, what guidelines have been established for two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients?	Literature study (see Chapter 2).
2. What is the management's perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?	Qualitative semi-structured interviews with three managers.
3. What are the claims administrators' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?	Qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven claims administrators.

3.4 Research Method

Two main research methods were used to answer the specific research questions: (1) a literature study and (2) qualitative semi-structured interviews with the management and the claims administrators of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department.

3.4.1 Literature study

According to Hocking *et al.* (2003:100), a literature study is beneficial to researchers because it provides them with new data of which they were not aware. A literature study can help deal with

problematic situations that are also addressed by other researchers; and to put the researcher's own study into perspective in relation to research already done. Research does not take place in a vacuum and therefore researchers must look at what is already known on the research topic (Frey *et al.*, 1991:92).

According to du Plooy (2009:64), the purpose of a literature study is to answer the following questions:

- What research was done in a specific field and from which theoretical perspectives was the research problem approached?
- Which research methods were used?
- What results were generated?
- What was done with the results or findings?

The literature study provides the opportunity to study research already conducted by other researchers. This provides a foundation of guidelines from which modern research can benefit and that it can follow. For the purposes of the present study, a search on several databases was conducted to find studies on the same theories as used in this study (see section 1.6.1):

- National Research Foundation (NRF)
- NEXUS
- Catalogue of books: Ferdinand Postma Library (North-West University)
- EBSCOHost
- Google scholar
- Emerald Online
- ScienceDirect
- Sabinet Online.

The studies mentioned in section 1.6.1 show that there is enough literature available to complete this research study. No study had previously been conducted in the South African motor insurance claims industry to see how two-way symmetrical communication is used to build relationships with clients on an interpersonal level during the claims process. This study is therefore unique and necessary in order to evaluate communication in the insurance industry and specifically in the claims department. This study can make a contribution to the South African motor insurance industry and is therefore distinctive.

In Chapter 2 of the present study, the literature was set out and explained to answer the first research question (see section 1.2.2). The themes identified in Chapter 2 were used to develop the measuring instruments and to analyse the data, in order to answer specific research questions 2 and 3 (see section 1.2.2).

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews can be explained as a series of open-ended questions based on a topic the researcher is investigating (Mathers *et al.*, 1998:2). The open-ended nature of these questions gives the researcher and the respondent the opportunity to discuss answers in more detail with the option of adapting the questions during the interview (Khoshnevisan, 2022:01). Semi-structured interviews are useful in the sense that they can measure attitudinal information on a broad scale and the researcher has full control of the interview session (Mathers *et al.*, 1998:2).

According to Ruslin *et al.* (2022:22), an *interview* can be described as an interaction between two individuals, one conducting the interview, called the *interviewer*, and the individual who answers the questions, better known as the *interviewee*. Through this type of interaction and conversation, interviewers get an in-depth look into the interviewee's feelings, perceptions, experiences and hopes (p. 22). It is further explained that the semi-structured interview is qualitative in nature and is an attempt on the part of the interviewer to understand the worldview of the interviewee. The semi-structured interview, which is used mainly in social sciences, is based on a guide of questions that measure certain constructs as part of the research. In comparison with the structured interview, which is based on a formal, limited set of questions, the semi-structured interview is flexible, allowing new questions to be incorporated during the interview.

For the present study, semi-structured interviews were suitable for identifying and understanding the managers' and claims administrators' opinions and viewpoints regarding their relationships with their clients. The semi-structured interviews gave both the managers and the claims administrators the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings and perceptions, which aids in taking the individuality of the participants into consideration when asking questions based on answers given by the manager or the claims administrator.

3.4.2.1 Sampling and process

It is essential to understand the inner workings of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department, and therefore a total of ten semi-structured interviews were held with three managers and seven claims administrators purposively selected for this study.

The aim of purposive sampling, also called a *known-group sampling method*, is to identify participants who have the knowledge and understanding needed to answer the research questions posed for a study (Ames *et al.*, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three managers in order to answer specific research question 2 (see section 1.2.2).

The three managers of the Motor Insurance Claims Department manage this department's claims processes and overall operations. These three managers were approached, namely the assistant manager, manager and senior manager of the department. The sampling of the three managers was based on their high leadership position in the Motor Insurance Claims Department, as well as their work experience within the department. These three managers oversee the Motor Insurance Claims Department, as well as direct client complaints and serious client issues, and are fully in charge of overall operations and the performance of the claims administrators. Therefore, their knowledge of these administrators, their clients and the internal operations is based on experience and knowledge. The semi-structured interviews gave them the opportunity to share their individual viewpoints based on their experience and knowledge. Interviews were conducted in a private setting and, as a result, there was no other interference that had an effect on the managers' respective answers.

An email invitation with the date and time of the interview was sent individually to the three managers on 25 May 2022. The three accepted and the interviews took place in a boardroom on Company X's premises.

Table 3.2: Management interview date

Date of interview
03 August 2023 (Manager A)
18 August 2023 (Manager B)
25 August 2023 (Manager C)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven claims administrators in order to answer specific research question 3 (see section 1.2.2).

The claims administrators are the staff members in the Motor Insurance Claims Department that communicate with clients from the start of the claim registration phase to the end of the claim finalisation phase. The claims administrators must register, process and manage the clients' claims. The semi-structured interview gave the claims administrators as individuals the opportunity to share ideas and perceptions, based on their individual perception and viewpoints. Therefore, the claims administrators were given the opportunity to share more information in a private setting without any other interference.

All the claims' administrators of the motor claims division (21 claim administrators) received an invitation via email to participate willingly in the semi-structured interview (whole population), of whom seven were willing and available to be interviewed. The interviews took place on Company X's premises in a private boardroom that was booked for the interviews.

Table 3.3: Claims administrators interview date

Date of interview
18 May 2022 (Claims Administrator A)
20 May 2022 (Claims Administrator B)
25 May 2022 (Claims Administrator C)
30 May 2022 (Claims Administrator D)
31 May 2022 (Claims Administrator E)
01 June 2022 (Claims Administrator F)
07 June 2022 (Claims Administrator G)

3.4.2.3 Measuring instruments

The interview schedules were compiled, based on the themes identified in the literature in Chapter 2 (see Table 2.1). Some of these questions were adapted from Hon and Grunig's (1999) qualitative questions for stakeholder relationship management which has been internationally tested several times, while other questions were developed by the researcher based on the identified theoretical themes (see Table 2.1).

See Table 3.4 on the next page for the interview schedule used to collect data from the managers.

Table 3.4: Interview schedule for managers

Grand opening questions	
What is your position in the claims department and how long have you been working for Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department?	
How would you describe the communication that takes place between administrators and clients during the claim stage?	
What are the first things that come into your mind when you hear Company X Motor Insurance Claims Department? Please explain why.	
The slogan is [slogan kept anonymous]. What is your opinion on this statement?	
The company states that 'we are client-obsessed'. What is your opinion on this statement?	
As a manager of the Motor Insurance Claims Department, what do you regard as the best aspect of the communication between administrators of the claims department and clients during the claim stage?	
What do you regard as the weakest aspect of the communication between administrators in the Motor Insurance Claims Department and clients during the claim stage?	
What do you as a manager do to enforce two-way symmetrical communication to build and maintain relationships between administrators in the claims department and clients during the claim stage?	
Two-way symmetrical model	
Dialogue and mutual understanding	<p>To what extent would you say that the needs of clients and administrators are respected and understood? Explain why?</p> <p>To what extent is the nature of the communication between administrators and clients based on dialogue? Please explain why.</p>
Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution	<p>Although administrators and clients may not always agree on everything, to what extent would you say administrators and clients are willing to work things through because there is a level of care for each other?</p> <p>Please explain the extent to which administrators have a strategic discussion with a client to resolve issues during the claims process that both the administrators and the clients find acceptable.</p>
Collaboration and participation	<p>In what way do administrators and clients work together to make sure the claim is finalised during the claims process?</p> <p>Please give an example where both the administrators and the clients participate actively in the communication process during the claim stage.</p>
Transparency and ethical communication	How do administrators ensure that they communicate transparently and ethically with clients during the claims process?

Balance in communication process	<p>To what extent would you say that both the administrator and the client convey the same level/amount of communication?</p> <p>Please explain who has more control in the communication process during the claim stage. Why?</p>
Stakeholder relationship management theory (Strategies)	
Positivity, openness, assurance, networking, sharing of tasks, dual concern	<p>How would you describe the strategies administrators use to develop and maintain relationships with clients during the claim stage?</p> <p>Please provide examples of different strategies/things administrators adopt to create and maintain relationships with clients during the claim stage.</p>
Stakeholder relationship management theory (Outcomes of relationship)	
Trust	<p>How would you describe actions that the claims administrators have taken to treat their clients fairly and justly?</p> <p>Also describe the actions that the claims administrators have taken that indicate that clients can rely on the department to keep its promises during the claim stage.</p>
Commitment	Can you provide any examples that suggest that administrators want to maintain long-term committed relationships with their clients?
Satisfaction	To what extent do you think that the clients are satisfied with the relationship they have with claims administrators? And with the claims department in general? Please explain why.
Mutual control	<p>To what extent do you believe that the claims department is attentive to what clients have to say?</p> <p>Can you provide any examples that show that the administrators have actually taken their clients' interests into account in their decisions and behaviours? Please explain.</p>
Types of relationships	
Communal relationship	To what extent do you feel that claims administrators are concerned about the welfare of their clients during the claim stage, even if they do not get anything in return? Please explain why. Give examples.
Exchange relationships	To what extent do you feel that claims administrators give or offer something to their clients during the claim stage because they expect something in return? Please explain why. Give examples.

See Table 3.5 below for the interview schedule used to collect data from the claims administrators.

Table 3.5: Interview schedule for claims administrators

Miscellaneous – Grand opening questions	
What is your position in the claims department and how long have you been working for Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department?	
How would you describe the communication that takes place between you and the client during the claim stage?	
What are the first things that come into your mind when you hear Company X Motor Insurance Claims Department? Please explain why.	
The slogan is [slogan kept anonymous]. What is your opinion on this statement?	
The company states that 'we are client obsessed'. What is your opinion on this statement?	
Two-way symmetrical model	
Dialogue and mutual understanding	<p>In your communication with the client, to what extent would you say that the client's needs and your needs are respected and understood? Explain why.</p> <p>To what extent is the nature of the communication between you and the client based on dialogue? Please explain why.</p>
Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution	<p>Please explain the extent to which you have a strategic discussion with a client to resolve issues during the claims process that both you and the client find acceptable?</p> <p>Although you and the client may not always agree on everything, to what extent would you say that you and the client are willing to work things through because there is a level of care for each other?</p>
Collaboration and participation	<p>In what way do you and the client work together to make sure the claim is finalised during the claims process?</p> <p>Please give an example where both you and the client participate actively in the communication process during the claim stage.</p>
Transparency and ethical communication	How do you ensure that you communicate transparently and ethically with the client during the claims process?
Balance in communication process	<p>To what extent would you say that both you and the client convey the same level/extent of communication?</p> <p>Please explain who has more control in the communication process during the claim stage. Why?</p>

Stakeholder relationship management theory (Strategies)	
Positivity, openness, assurance, networking, sharing of tasks, dual concern	<p>How would you describe the strategies that you use to develop and maintain relationships with clients during the claim stage?</p> <p>Please provide examples of different strategies/things that you adopt to create and maintain relationships with clients during the claim stage.</p>
Stakeholder relationship management theory (Outcomes of relationship)	
Trust	<p>Would you describe actions that you as a claims administrator have taken to treat the client fairly and justly?</p> <p>Also describe the actions that you as a claims administrator have taken that indicate that the client can rely on the department to keep its promises during the claim stage.</p>
Commitment	Can you provide any examples that suggest that you as a claims administrator want to maintain long-term committed relationships with your clients?
Satisfaction	To what extent do you think that the clients are satisfied with the relationship they have with you as a claims administrator? And with the Motor Insurance Claims Department in general? Please explain why.
Mutual control	<p>To what extent do you believe that the Motor Insurance Claims Department is attentive to what the client has to say?</p> <p>Can you provide any examples that show what you as a claims administrator have actually done to take the clients' interests into account in decisions and behaviours? Please explain.</p>
Types of relationships	
Communal relationship	To what extent do you feel that you as a claims administrator is concerned about the welfare of the client during the claim stage, even if you do not get anything in return? Please explain why. Give examples.
Exchange relationships	To what extent do you feel that you as a claims administrator gives or offers something to the client during the claim stage, because you expect something in return? Please explain why. Give examples.

3.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data received from the semi-structured interview were analysed by means of qualitative content analysis. According to Dawadi (2020:62), this can be described as a method of research whereby the data are analysed by means of themes and narratives. Therefore, the data received are organised systematically according to identified themes.

The ten semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed into a document. All the transcribed data were organised according to the themes indicated in the interview schedule, as identified in the literature (see Table 2.1). The information has been worked through and thoroughly analysed to present the main arguments from the data received with the link to the themes and the literature of the two-way symmetrical communication model and stakeholder relationship management theory as foundation.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

According to Leung (2015), the key to qualitative research is to find patterns in descriptive words received from the research that lead to rich data. Validity in qualitative research means the appropriateness of the tools used for the research, as well as the data received. The research conducted into Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department is valid due to the fact that the research questions were used to guide the research. Furthermore, themes identified in the literature study in Chapter 2 directly link to the measurement of the two-way symmetrical communication model and the stakeholder relationship management theory.

According to Leung (2015), *reliability* can be described as the consistency of the research conducted. In qualitative research, the key component of reliability is to be able to fit the methodology in similar situations. Similar semi-structured interviews with the same data collection instruments can be used to explore the communication and relationships in other claims departments in the insurance sector.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

All interviewees participated in the interviews of their own free will (voluntarily) and were not forced to do the interview. The interviewees could withdraw from the interview at any time if they did not want to answer questions during the interview. Informed consent forms were signed by these participants and due to the discretion exercised by Company X, all interviews took place during the participants' lunch- or tea times – the research therefore took place outside work hours. No

participant was negatively impacted during the interview and no one received an incentive for participating. The company and all participants' identity were kept anonymous. Throughout the reporting of the data, participants are only identified as Claims Administrator A, B, C and so on. Ethical clearance was received from BaSSREC before empirical data were collected (ethical number: NWU-01122-21-S7). Please see section 1.7 for more detail on ethical aspects of this study.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research methodology that was followed in the present study was explained in the form of the research approach and the research methods that were employed to collect data for this study. In the next two chapters (Chapters 4 and 5), the research findings are discussed which consist of the data obtained from the managers and the claims administrators respectively.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OBTAINED THROUGH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH MANAGEMENT

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the focus was on the qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews as the research method used to collect data.

In this chapter the themes identified in Chapter 2 guided the analysis of data received from the three managers in the Motor Insurance Claims Department at Company X, which operates in the South African insurance sector.

The aim of this chapter is to answer specific research question 2 (see section 1.2.2):

What is the managements' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?

4.2 Two-way Symmetrical Communication

In this section the principles of the two-way symmetrical communication model during the claim stage, as perceived by the management of the Motor Insurance Claim Department at Company X, are discussed. This is done according to the themes identified in Chapter 2, as well as the description and definitions of those themes as guided by theory (see Table 2.1).

4.2.1 Dialogue and mutual understanding

The needs of both parties that should be respected and understood are fulfilled by means of continual dialogue, shared meaning and mutual understanding.

With regard to the claims administrators' mutual understanding and dialogue with the client, Manager A mentioned that

at this moment it is definitely more something like: "Let me just get this process over [with] rather than focusing on dialogue."

Manager A further mentioned that

this is a situation of . . . I'm not really interested in what the client has to say.

Manager A explained that

sometimes I've seen that the administrators are too strict in the way they answer. Yes, the policy terms and conditions are what they are.

From these statements, it is clear that the dialogue with the client is, in the first instance, a rushed process, not giving the client a voice or opportunity for understanding. Manager A explained that the administrators should rather listen and say:

Sir/[Madam], I truly understand . . . What I would suggest is that we ask your personal portfolio consultant (PPC) to explain it [the policy terms and conditions] to you again, so that in future you are aware of everything.

This statement clearly indicates that the client is quickly sent to another party – in the sales department – for assistance with the policy wording. This is confusing, since claims administrators have the necessary knowledge to help clients. This indicates that the problem is taken somewhere else and is not communicated with the client. It is also evident that the claims administrators' dialogue is not based on clients' needs because they do not understand these needs.

Manager C explained that clients, in turn, are often laypeople when it comes to 'understanding the different aspects of insurance'. The manager further indicated that

the client wants to understand the claims process' and 'if the client understands the claims process, they will be more willing to participate [in conversation] from their side.

Manager C further argued that this lack of understanding during the claims process was due to the fact that clients wanted information immediately and they wanted an outcome to their claims as soon as possible. This statement yet again was that it was not understood why clients had an issue understanding the policy wording. If clients are not aware of what they signed up for, there will be uncertainty and unhappiness from the clients' side at the claim stage.

However, the literature states that it is all about people learning about, and from, one another and developing mutual understanding (Waddington 2008). From this it is clear that clients and claims administrators do not learn anything from one another due to the knowledge gap. It is therefore

crucial that focus must not only be placed on claims administrators' skills, but empowering and educating their clients. Even though they do receive their policy wording at the sales stage, there is clearly an education gap with the clients as well as in the dialogue between the parties that is not based on shared meaning or clients have a voice to give an opinion but their opinion is not of much importance.

4.2.1.1 Conclusion on the management's perception regarding dialogue and mutual understanding

From the aforementioned context and management's perception, based on the construct of dialogue and mutual understanding from a two-way symmetrical communication perspective, it is evident that the needs of clients are not identified nor understood.

The dialogue is one sided: clients have no voice and no right to give their opinion or become educated on policy wording. If clients do not understand the policy wording, they are sent to another party in another department (sales) to explain it to them. This indicates that the claims administrators do not want to educate clients or listen to their opinion and views. However, management believes that if clients are educated, they will have more confidence and an understanding of the claims process. However, no responsibility is taken to truly understand why clients do not understand the policy wording. Because of this, clients' confidence and what they are liable for are missed in their communication with claims administrators.

Based on two-way symmetrical communication to foster relationships with the clients, the dialogue is one sided with no input from the clients, and it is not based on shared meaning and therefore the overall needs of clients are not identified nor understood.

4.2.2 Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution

A strategic discussion, guided by mutual respect that resolves conflict in a way that both parties find acceptable. The two parties may not agree on everything, but they are willing to work things out because both parties care for each other.

It is important to understand that conflict is inevitable in the Motor Insurance Claims Department of Company X due to the nature of the industry. It is important to understand the insurance industry and that the focus is on financial loss to, and financial implications for, the client. Manager C explained that

insurance, I think, is a difficult and a very unique industry. People . . . need to have it but you don't want to assist kind of situation.

From this statement, it is clear that clients do not want insurance, but they feel that they must have it.

The claim stage occurs when there is a crisis, not when there is a gain or a benefit. It is a serious and traumatic event that results in a client registering a claim with the claims administrator. Managers highlighted this, as they indicated that this department was the 'key department to retain the client' (Manager A). The way the client experiences the claims process, from claim registration to the outcome of the claim – either the claim is declined due to the policy indicating that certain aspects of the motor accident cannot be paid out, or the claim is paid out in full – will ultimately indicate if the client will choose to remain with the insurance company or cancels his or her policy. The claims department comes into action right at the end of the insurance process where there is a loss experienced by the client. The Motor Insurance Claims Department is the 'make or break' (Manager A) department, and the effectiveness of the claims process indicates if the client will remain with the insurance company or cancel the policy. This indicates the pressure aspect from the one party, the claims administrator, as well as the pressured situation of the client – indicating stress, frustrations and other emotions between both parties. Both parties being present in difficult situations tends to heighten negative emotions which inevitably has a direct impact on the communication present between both parties, especially taking into consideration the fact that insurance is a financial institution, working with the client's financial loss.

The moment that the team is under pressure, we've seen that they somewhat ramble a bit . . . like that month with the Durban floods . . . the handlers need to go into what I would say a panic mode . . . so they sometimes lose the personal touch. (Manager B)

Together with this, Manager C mentioned that

if you look at claims as a whole, because it is an emotional position that you're in and you're going to have an upset client . . . you need a specific skill set.

This indicates that the communication is based on emotions. Owing to the pressure, it was stated that

the more under pressure a person becomes taking their age into consideration and taking their ability to deal with pressure, they tend to become very robotic almost . . . they want to get

through their work so that they don't have to carry anything over . . . and then what will happen . . . they'll start just ticking the boxes instead of building that relationship. (Manager C)

Manager C felt that this is due to the employment of young people who do not have the necessary work experience in dealing with clients. Manager C explained that many young individuals who had just matriculated were usually employed as claims administrators, which resulted in young administrators not knowing how to deal with difficult clients effectively:

I think especially our younger generation . . . who we are quite [keen] on and pro employing young people . . . a lot of them come directly from school, so they don't have the necessary skills and they haven't been exposed . . . they don't know how to deal with conflict.

The argument can be made that management perceives the employment of younger people in the Motor Insurance Claims Department as a barrier to effective communication between the insurer and clients during the claim stage. According to management, the inexperience of young employees in this department hampers efficient communication in the claims process, which could lead to a bad relationship and misunderstandings between the insurer and the client, and ultimately the loss of a client to another insurance company.

This age gap creates conflict as it was explained that the claims administrators struggle with conflict from the client, which leads to a 'robotic, rambling' conversation. Management stated that if the client was not happy with the outcome of the claim, the claims administrator was often also not happy – indicating that the client's mood affected the claims administrator's service. It is also important to take note that sometimes the client signed a policy that does not include a claim of certain essentials, which indirectly impacts the outcome of the claim. Therefore, if the claim cannot be paid in full, the client will experience anger and frustration. Manager A argues that the communication between the claims administrator and the client is 'not where we should be' and that when there is conflict from the client's side, the claims administrators tend to 'ramble'. This creates communication that is not based on shared meaning and understanding the client's needs.

Manager A emphasised the importance of conflict management:

[F]or me . . . conflict management . . . makes me uncomfortable if I think about it . . . they [claims administrators] get frustrated over the smallest thing because they don't know how to handle it.

Further to this, the manager enquired: 'is it soft skills? Soft skills in terms of dealing with a client'. Manager B also stated the same with regard to conflict management:

I believe we can definitely spend more time in terms of conflict management, I think we can teach them how to deal with stress. Again, they come from an environment, most of them . . . going to school is the most stress that they've seen. But suddenly you are in an environment, we are responsible for more . . . and you are responsible for retaining clients and you're responsible for following rules and processes. So, I think we have more work to do in terms of stress management in terms of conflict resolution.

Further to this, the importance of training is highlighted as stated:

[T]raining people how to be sympathetic and empathetic. It's not something that comes naturally to everybody, but it is something that can be trained. And that is something that you need, again, to put the client at ease and to show them that you're confident, but you need to build their confidence.

It is therefore argued that the insurance company should invest in training their claims administrators (irrespective of their age or experience) on how to deal with stressful situations and effective conflict strategies.

Manager A further advises that 'instead of saying (sigh) here is the client unhappy again . . . try to understand where the client is coming from . . . understanding and making notes.' Manager A added, interestingly, that

funny enough, it is in cases where we pay the claim in full, but we still lose the client due to the claims administrator not giving enough feedback to the client . . . so which way it may go, at the end of the day, it's how we treat the claims process that counts.

4.2.2.1 Conclusion on the management's perception regarding negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution

According to management, there are two parties who are stressed and under pressure. Therefore, the communication between them is emotionally driven. This puts claims administrators in a position where they have to handle their clients in such a way, considering their age and abilities, that they do not lose them in the process – which adds even more pressure. From this statement presented, it is important to have claims administrators who are skilled in handling conflict with clients. This is where claims administrators' skills in negotiating with clients are extremely

important. Adhering to the claims process is set in stone and is important. However, creating an environment where both claims administrators and clients work actively together through communication and negotiation in a mutually respectful manner to address any concerns or issues is imperative. Clients' voices must also be heard, irrespective of the claims process – clients must also have the opportunity to explain their feelings and issues, and have a say in the claims process.

4.2.3 Collaboration and participation

Both parties to work together through mutual influence and shared involvement towards the same goal. They also play an active role in the relationship to meet each other's needs.

In the interviews conducted with management regarding collaboration between claims administrators and their clients, Manager A explained that 'both parties need[ed] to work together' in order for the finalisation to take place. However, it is also important, through collaboration, that claims administrators clearly communicate with their clients which documents are needed, where to find these documents and, if they struggle, to be able to contact the claims administrators and ask for any assistance. Together with this, Manager B also explained that

we are still quite reliant on client information, accident reports, third party details, images, quotations . . . it can be that clients can find it a little bit cumbersome, but we are again at the claim stage actively investigating and researching how to make this a lot easier for our clients.

Because clients find the process cumbersome, collaboration must take place from both sides, and it is important for claims administrators to listen clearly and assist clients as much as possible and work together to submit these documents. However, it is still evident that this is the only role clients have relating to collaboration in the claims process. As mentioned earlier in this chapter with regard to dialogue towards mutual understanding, clients do not have a voice or a say (see section 2.4.4). This is an instruction given to clients for the claim to be finalised, due to the nature of the insurance industry. This again indicates the lack of voice and contribution clients have during the claims process.

It is still evident that the main goal for clients is to receive a financial payout for their vehicle. Claims administrators are only there to decide if a claim will be paid out or if the claim will be declined. Once this claim is declined, the claims administrators still retain their position and their responsibility, but the client loses the money needed to repair his or her vehicle. Therefore, even

if clients collaborate by means of supplying documentation, it still does not go without saying that their claim will be paid out.

The argument can be made that management perceives that claims administrators and clients collaborate by means of the clients supplying documentation to finalise their claims. However, when referring back to the definition of *collaboration* based on Scoular *et al.* (2020:02), this is not a balanced collaboration. Clients only supply documentation to the claims department. That is the only role clients play in the claims process and the only voice they have in the communication. Yet it is not certain that their claims will be paid out. Based on two-way symmetrical communication, collaboration involves both individuals working collaboratively together; communicating to reach the same goal. In this case, it is not a given that clients' claims will be paid out and this is where the conflict increases between claims administrators and the clients, as referred to earlier in this chapter on negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution (see section 2.4.4).

In section 2.4.4 participation is explained as both parties (claims administrators and clients) playing a role in the communication process to meet each other's needs. Further to this, Mubita *et al.* (2017:241) explain *participation* as a process whereby stakeholders have influence and shared involvement in the organisation that they have an effect on during the communication process. It is also explained that participation leads to stakeholder involvement in, and engagement with, the organisation which leads to long-term relationships.

As mentioned in the section on collaboration, it is not just the claims administrators who are responsible for finalising claims. Clients also play an integral role in finalising them – which is inevitably the need of both parties. Manager A mentioned that it was both the claims administrators' and clients' responsibility to finalise claim sand that it was a '50/50 hand-in-hand situation'. The manager further stated that

we advise the client . . . send the documents, the quicker your claim can be finalised. And this is something all clients want: a claim to be finalised quickly. So, it is a hand-in-hand thing for us and the clients for them to assist us as well, in regard to going to get a quotation . . . taking self-assessment pictures themselves . . . sending it through to us this way.

From this statement, it is still clear that the balance of the participation between both parties is imbalanced as claims administrators have the bigger responsibility in communication where the clients only need to send their documents during the communication – the clients' participation is far less than that of the claims administrators – and this again does not adhere to the two-way

symmetrical communication principles of balance, which will be discussed in the next section. Thus, the communication between both parties is not balanced, with the claims administrators being the key communicators.

4.2.3.1 Conclusion on managements' perception regarding collaboration and participation

The argument can be made that management perceives the participation between the claims administrators and clients as a 50/50 approach. However, this statement is not based on the guiding principles identified in theory, as the only participation clients have in the claims process is to supply documentation, as mentioned in the construct setting out collaboration. This must be a participatory process, as also stated by Mubita *et al.* (2017:241), that the stakeholders should have full participation and shared involvement in the process. From a two-way symmetrical communication point of view, participation is not a 50/50 approach as per management's perception. The only participation clients have is to supply documentation – and, again, this is part of the insurance landscape. This is the only part in the communication where clients have a responsibility. Clients are therefore not participating fully in the communication with the claims administrators during the claims process.

4.2.4 Transparency and ethical communication

Communication between both parties is based on the truth and openness, and takes place in an appropriate and ethical manner.

The insurance industry, and the rules and regulations on which the insurance industry operates are regulated by the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA) (see section 1.1). Manager C mentioned in the interview that

we have specific guidelines . . . parameters [within which] you need to operate . . . because it's so highly regulated . . . we've got specific regulations and rules that we need to abide by, we need to make sure that our consultants are well versed in what you can what you should say to a client . . . we need to at all times remain ethical in what we say to a client.

It is further stated that

we are bound by what we say . . . that's what makes it so important for any consultant to understand their responsibility within their company, and that they're at all times pretty much completing agreements.

Manager A stated the importance of honesty and ethics by stating that

honesty goes hand in hand with transparency and you [as a claims administrator] must be ready and prepared for the call with the client, especially if you have to give information to the client.

From an ethical and transparent communication view, the claims administrators' role is to communicate the claims process in detail to the clients, and the clients receive the factual information in the communication. Therefore, from the claims administrators' side, this is not reciprocal as the main ethical and transparent communication lies with the claims administrators due to the governed financial institution. The claims administrators' role is to help clients understand. In this case, there is a one-sided communication approach when it comes to ethical and transparent communication.

4.2.4.1 Conclusion on the managements' perception regarding transparency and ethical communication

The argument can be made that the management's perception is that the insurance sector is based on rules and regulations issued by the FSCA (2023). Therefore, the claims process is handled according to these rules and regulations. Management believes that communication from the claims administrators' side should be ethical and transparent due to the nature of the insurance industry and the guidelines provided by the regulatory authority. According to management, there is nothing that can be changed regarding the rules and regulations of the industry. Thus, this industry is regulated and communication with clients should be ethical and transparent. Based on two-way symmetrical communication, this is a one-sided approach, with the main communicator and expert regarding the rules and regulations being the claims administrator. This indicates the imbalanced communication between the claims administrators and clients, with the clients not having the necessary knowledge of the rules and regulations and, according to the dialogue and mutual understanding construct, nothing is done to identify the clients' needs during communication, and to involve them more in the process of having a voice and the confidence to understand the insurance rules and regulations (see section 4.2.6).

4.2.5 Balance in the communication process

Both parties have the same level of control and influence over each other during the communication process.

With this in mind, when the three managers were interviewed, all three agreed that in this industry it was claims administrators who must have the most control in communication with clients. Manager C stated that 'dominant communication needs to be kept with our administrators'. Manager A explained that

absolutely, the handler has the most control when it comes to the communication . . . and the handler is the one who needs to be in control of the communication . . . communication informs the client and keeps the client updated on the process.

Manager C focused on the fact that when it comes to insurance, the claims administrator must be in control, stating that

the claims department needs to have the most control . . . so we look at balance, I don't believe this is quite an organisation or a situation where you can have an equal communication system because, ultimately, your administrators are in control of the process. And they need to keep the client[s] updated.

4.2.5.1 Conclusion on the managements' perception regarding balance in the communication process

From the data presented and the insurance landscape as background to this, communication between claims administrators and clients is imbalanced, with the claims administrators being in control, leaving the clients dependent on the claims administrators' service. As per section 2.4.4 in Chapter 2, the core focus of the two-way symmetrical communication is a balanced effect. Both parties involved should have equal influence over each other in the communication process. The argument can be made that management perceives that according to the industry, it is the claims administrator who is the main communicator during the claims process, with little feedback or influence from the client. Because of this, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter (see section 2.4.4 Dialogue and mutual understanding), clients do not really have a voice or an impact on any decisions made during the claims process. Owing to this imbalance, the relationship between both parties is not based on care or mutual benefit, but based on the insurance industry and the little control that clients have.

4.3 Relationship-building Strategies

For the purposes of this study, openness, assurance and sharing of tasks are the strategies used to build relationships with clients. It was found that the nature of the insurance industry and the

motor claims process limited the strategies that could be used to build relationships and therefore did not include the other relationship-building strategies, as set out in the literature (see section 2.6.1).

Openness: *Feelings and thoughts must be openly communicated between the organisation and their clients.*

Assurance: *Efforts from the parties involved to reassure each other that their concerns are justified and will be addressed.*

Sharing of tasks: *The organisation and its clients must work together to solve problems.*

From the aforementioned strategies it was evident during the interviews that the managers focused more on one strategy to build relationships with their clients, namely openness. Manager B stated:

I would say one of the good aspects in regard to how we communicate is . . . open communication, creating trust and understanding.

Manager A stated that

I would say, honesty, being open and honest from the beginning, if the client [asks] you something you don't know, be honest.

With regard to the strategy of assurance, Manager A explained that 'we need to go all out [and] make the client part of the process . . . walk the road with the client. Manager A further explained that 'we are all for exceptional client service'.

Manager B mentioned that

overall it is clear from the managers that through exceptional client service, the client is [re]assured through[out] the communication process.

With regard to the sharing of tasks, it is clear (see section 4.2.5 Collaboration and participation) that both the claims administrators and the clients have the responsibility to share tasks in the communication process. This is mostly done by sharing information and documents, when needed for the claim to be processed.

4.3.1 Conclusion on the managements' perception regarding relationship-building strategies

The argument can be made that management perceives that the claims administrators make use of open communication to build relationships with their clients. Furthermore, they believe that the administrators provide clients with a good service during the claims process, and that they reassure clients that their claims will be processed and addressed. Lastly, the administrators and clients share tasks such as providing the necessary documentation for the claim either to be paid out or rejected. Thus, the interviewees believe that both parties work together to solve the claim.

It seems that the other strategies are not relevant or not perused in the specific context. Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship strategies are recommended to build long-term relationships with clients. Two-way symmetrical communication is used to create these relationships by making use of these strategies. Based on management's perception, only three of the strategies are present. However, the argument can be made that these three strategies are not implemented in a balanced manner between the claims administrators and their clients, as the clients do not have a voice and have no impact during the claims process.

It is also suggested that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department explore the other relationship strategies, which are built on two-way symmetrical communication, to improve their relationships with their clients. A strategy such as dual concern could be implemented in the administrators' way of communicating with clients, by truly reflecting on the ethic of care for the client, which could help to build relationships with clients.

4.4 Stakeholder Relationship Outcomes

In Chapter 2 (see section 2.6) the stakeholder relationship management theory was presented and outlined, providing outcomes of the relationship which are trust, mutual control, commitment and satisfaction (Hon & Grunig, 1999:18–20). These outcomes measure the effectiveness of the relationship.

4.4.1 Trust

Trust develops when one party believes in the other party's reliability, integrity and dependability.

Trust is when the client believes that the Motor Insurance Claims Department will act fairly (integrity), that the claims department's communication and behaviour are consistent (reliability), and, lastly, that the claims department will do what it says it will do (competence).

From the interviews conducted with management, it became clear that they believe that clients do not trust insurance companies and that they are wary when it comes to believing that the insurance industry has integrity, reliability or competence. Manager C stated:

[M]y general opinion is that the majority of South African insurance [companies are] . . . crooks, so when a client calls in, they are already somewhat on the backfoot . . . so for us in the claims department, clients initially don't have trust [in us].

Further to this statement, Manager C also mentioned that

so, [from] a recent conference that I attended . . . it's now known that people have [attached] this negative connotation [to insurers].

Manager B explained that

in the insurance industry as a whole, I think there has been some broken trust relationships . . . clients are wary . . . they might have the impression that, yes, I pay my insurance, but they might have had a bad experience previously . . . they feel that the insurance company is out to find a reason to reject their claims.

Further to this, emphasis was placed on claims administrators' positive attitude towards their work and their clients. The interviewees believe that trust is built when claims administrators reflect a positive attitude towards clients, as stated:

That is ultimately the kind of administrator you want, because the happier your consultant is in doing what they are doing, and having a passion and seeing the difference they make, the better the trust relationship is going to be with the client, because you can have a bit of narrative and then find a dialogue. And you are going to build a relationship that is going to make them trust us and stay. (Manager C)

4.4.1.1 Conclusion on the managements' perception regarding trust

The argument can be made from the aforementioned context that clients do not trust insurers and that insurance companies are there to reject their claim in general. Therefore, clients do not perceive the company as an organisation with integrity. Owing to the fact that clients feel that the

insurer is a crook, competence and dependability are also an issue in this context, as the clients cannot necessarily feel that they can rely on the Motor Insurance Claims Department to pay out their claims. Therefore, management believes that clients do not trust the insurance company.

4.4.2 Commitment

Commitment means that both parties invest time and energy in the relationship to maintain and promote the relationship.

During the interviews the question was asked if management believed that clients wanted to build a long-term relationship with the Motor Insurance Claims Department, and if time and energy were invested in maintaining the relationship. Manager C answered:

I would believe so. You want to remain with an insurance company that you become familiar with, and start to know how they operate, who they are.

However, from the conclusions drawn so far, it seems that, for example, very little is done to assist the client with becoming familiar with the claims process.

Manager C further explained that there were clients who had been with the company for over ten years,

[S]o I don't deal with retention . . . as you deal with clients, you go through the policy, and you can see inception dates . . . you can see that we did have clients [who had] been with us for ten years plus.

It is also further explained by the same manager that

we need to meet our client retention. We don't know when to go through onboarding a client, spending their money and then eventually losing them because of bad service. But I believe that people want to build a long-term relationship with their insurance company. And, ultimately, for business, you need them.

4.4.2.1 Conclusion on the managements' perception regarding commitment

In conclusion, management perceives that some clients are satisfied and they are therefore committed to the company for many years. This is so since some clients are retained for ten years and more. It is suggested that research be done on the specific clients who have been with the

company for over ten years, as to why they remain with the insurer. It could, for example, be that they have never claimed in the past ten years and therefore never went through the claims process. The commitment towards a relationship with the company would then not be based on a favourable claim experience, for example. It is also evident that there is no evidence as to what the factual satisfaction and retention rate is. This is information that must be investigated. At present, the statements made by the management is merely an overview of their perception, and are not based on researched facts that could provide more insight into the matter.

4.4.3 Satisfaction

The extent to which each party views and approaches the other favourably due to the fact that positive expectations about the relationship are strengthened.

From the interviews with management, Manager C explained that there were certain clients that experienced relationship satisfaction:

I believe for the most part, you know, we're doing our best. And you can see it [in] our client responses and client feedback; you will always have a percentage of individuals who are going to be unhappy. And that will be based on the process based on the outcome. But I believe that we, we do have quite a [high] client satisfaction rate.

From this statement, it is clear that some clients are satisfied with the relationship, but this is based on the outcome of the claim. However, many clients are not happy or satisfied with their relationship with Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department due to the claims process and unsuccessful claim payout.

The claims process is often a long and stressful process, and this has a direct impact on the relationship at hand. One party is pressured to finalise claims and the other party experiences trauma or unforeseen circumstances. However, in the specific context of the present study, the clients are the ones who make the decision on whether or not they are satisfied with the relationship.

4.4.3.1 Conclusion on the management's perception regarding satisfaction

The argument can be made that management perceives that some clients are satisfied with the relationship and others are not. However, satisfaction with service, as implied by management, does not necessarily suggest that both parties are satisfied with the current relationship. In this

context it seems that the positivity of both parties towards each other in the relationship is determined by the service that the clients receive. Additionally, clients are satisfied if they eventually receive a payout after claiming.

Furthermore, to truly determine whether or not clients are satisfied with the relationship, research must be conducted to understand clients' needs and perceptions. It is also important for the claims department to do research on its clients to see why they are satisfied and why they are not. This will aid in understanding clients' needs and create mutual understanding for both parties.

It is also suggested that clients' relationship satisfaction could increase if the trauma and unforeseen circumstances are decreased by the administrators' way of communicating; by taking the principles of two-way symmetrical communication into account (such as communicating with empathy, transparently, balanced, respectfully and so on. See Table 2.1).

4.4.4 Mutual control

When two parties agree on who has control or power to influence the other party.

Management clearly states that in the insurance industry it is the claims administrators who are the main communicators. It is the claims administrators who are in control of the claims process and are the ones asking clients to supply certain documentation. Claims administrators have the knowledge to understand the claims process and the policy wording, which clients do not have. This indicates a communication gap and an imbalance in the communication and subsequent relationship. Furthermore, management stated that the claims administrators had 'the say' whether or not the claim would be paid out. This implies that clients do not have control over decision-making or situations pertaining to the claims process which can have a negative impact on the relationship as a whole.

4.4.4.1 Conclusion on the managements' perception regarding mutual control

The argument can be made that management perceives that claims administrators have the most control in the claims process. The only role clients play, is to log their claim and then supply supporting documentation. Mutual control should give clients the opportunity to voice their opinion, have a say in the claims process and, also, have the opportunity to influence the process and give their perspectives, in order to establish a long-term relationship between the parties. In the communication process, this is not the case as the claims administrators are in control, not the clients and therefore both parties do not have mutual control in the relationship.

4.5 Types of Relationships: Communal and Exchange Relationships

Communal relationship: *Both parties give benefits to each other because they are concerned about the wellbeing of the other party, even though they get nothing in return.*

Exchange relationship: *Benefits in the relationship are given with the expectation of receiving a benefit in the future or in return for a benefit already received.*

From the interviews conducted with management, manager A explained that some of the claims administrators portrayed a communal relationship and others portrayed an exchange relationship. This is due to the claims administrators' overall attitude towards their work and their clients. Manager B mentioned that

I think on the floor we have a bit of both . . . it's also personality type with some people go[ing] into a state of mind way: it's sort of robotic, which we don't want; something that [we] really wouldn't want because if you're robotic, you sometimes forget compassion.

These two statements indicate that the relationship with claims administrators is created based on their personality and overall attitude towards their clients. As manager C mentioned, it depends on claims administrators' personality and attitude towards clients:

So, you will have a group that are here to render a service because [of] their financial needs . . . they will give the service to a client and expectation for that client to give them the necessary information in order to perform their job, which means they could pay the salary at the end of the month.

With this statement in mind, it is mentioned that there are claims administrators who deliver an exchange relationship. As stated:

[W]e do have a group of individuals who are here because they are passionate about what they do. So, they come in and they are here to see how they can make a difference in a client's life. And they will give their time. And they will give their effort. And not for their clients to be seen as the pay check at the end of the month.

Manager B is of the opinion that 'the exchange relationship comes in when the client expects us to fix their car because they pay a premium.' This means that the client also sees the relationship

as an exchange relationship, since that client is paying for a service and expects the service to be rendered.

4.5.1 Conclusion on the management's perception regarding the types of relationships

The argument can be made that management perceives that the type of relationships claims administrators build with their clients is either communal or exchange, depending on their personality and attitude towards clients. Therefore, if the claims administrator has a negative attitude, an exchange relationship with the client is usually the outcome.

This is not rectified because the dialogue often lacks in-depth knowledge of the clients' needs. Therefore, this relationship cannot be based solely on the claims administrators' personality. Irrespective of the claims administrators' personality, it seems that the client also sees the relationship as a type of exchange, because a monthly premium is paid for the insurance policy. This relationship tends to be one-sided and focused on an exchange basis – one party wants a salary and needs to finalise as many claims as possible (depending on their personality), and the other wants to get financial payout from loss experienced, after the monthly premiums have been paid. The nature of the industry is a determining factor in the type of relationship that is pursued – in this case, an exchange relationship between claims administrators and clients is inevitable.

4.6 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, the research question to be answered was stated as: *What is the managements' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three managers in the department and the findings were presented, based on the theoretical themes identified in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2) the symmetrical worldview was set out, and Grunig and White (1992:43–44), and Naudé (2001:71) explained that this worldview focused on the fact that the stakeholders and the organisation must influence each other and adapt to those needs. It is also evident that the organisation and its stakeholders must be on the same level with regard to communication, and that stakeholders should be given equal opportunity to make valuable input in the organisation's decision-making. Conflict resolution is resolved through proper negotiation

without manipulation, and transparent ethical communication is needed between parties, based on dialogue and mutual understanding between claims administrators and clients.

It is evident from the findings that management believes that the dialogue from the claims administrators to their clients is not based on an understanding of clients' needs, but rather insurance industry policy wording. The knowledge gap between both parties is imbalanced, as clients do not have knowledge of the insurance industry, the process or the policy wording. This leaves them without confidence or balance in the communication process.

Further to this, management perceives conflict in the claims process to be inevitable. The claims administrator does not have the maturity to handle clients who have just undergone a traumatic experience. This is an industry based on risk and the loss of money. Furthermore, the only role clients play in the claims process is supplying documents. Claims administrators are the main communicators, leaving the clients with only one responsibility and no collaboration or a voice to have an influence in the claims process. Based on the themes mentioned in this chapter on two-way symmetrical communication, the communication is only from the claims administrators' side. As stated in section 2.4.4, the two-way symmetrical communication model focuses on exchanging information that is ethical and based on dialogue, understanding needs and shared meaning. This results in positive changes, perceptions and behaviours from stakeholders.

From the interviews with management, it became clear that the communication between administrators and clients is imbalanced, with the claims administrators having the most control over communication. Overall, the administrators do not understand their clients' needs during the claim stage. It is also important to take note that the claims administrators are young individuals who have just left school. Again, this has an influence on the overall dialogue and communication with the client and on conflict resolution.

Furthermore, it became evident that most relationship-building strategies are not used to build a relationship with clients. According to management, openness as a strategy is utilised. However, it is not purposively employed as a strategy to build relationships, but rather as part of the insurance industry's regulatory rules and regulations. It was also stated that reassurance and sharing of tasks form part of the strategies used to build relationships, but it seems that these strategies are mostly employed in an imbalanced manner. The researcher suggests that other strategies be investigated that could possibly also fit the insurance context, for the purpose of building a relationship with clients from the claims administrators' side.

From the understanding of the clients' relationship with the claims administrators, it became evident that client satisfaction is solely based on whether or not the clients' claims are paid out and not on relational satisfaction. It is also made clear by management that clients do not trust the insurer, as, according to them, insurance companies are crooks in general and want to reject all claims. Based on the outcome of commitment, management perceives some clients to commit to the insurer, but others do not. This finding links with dialogue and mutual understanding, as no research has been done to understand the clients' needs, opinions and views, as well as the fact that they do not have any involvement in the claims process decisions and guidelines. The type of relationship between the claims administrators and clients is, according to management, based on the claims administrators' personality. However, an exchange relationship is unavoidable in the context of the Motor Insurance Claims Department, since the clients believe that they have paid a monthly premium for their insurance policy and service during the claims stage. If the claim is not paid out, it usually creates conflict between the claims administrator and the client.

In conclusion, the argument is made that little two-way symmetrical communication is applied when it comes to clients during the claim stage and, therefore, there is no relationship between these parties, since it is two-way symmetrical communication that is used to build and foster relationships with clients (see section 2.4.4). Management explained that clients were often left with no control, no say and no input in the claims process. Owing to the nature of the industry, the communication and relationship are purely based on the expectations of the insurance landscape, rules and regulations. However, the present study argues that improvements and adaptations in the communication could be made, which should lead to stronger relationships between administrators and clients, and, eventually, have a positive impact on the sustainability and survival of Company X in the long term.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS OBTAINED THROUGH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH CLAIMS ADMINISTRATORS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 the focus was on the data analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with three management members from Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department. In this chapter the data received from the 7 claims administrators of the Motor Insurance Claims Department at Company X who are currently working in the South African insurance sector are analysed according to the same themes identified in the literature and used in the analysis in Chapter 4.

The aim of this chapter is to answer specific research question 3 (see section 1.2.1): *What are the claims administrators' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?*

5.2 Two-way Symmetrical Communication

In this section the principles of the two-way symmetrical communication model during the claim stage, as perceived by claims administrators of the Motor Insurance Claim Department at Company X, are discussed. The theoretical background of each theme is not given again, as it was already explained in Table 2.1 and in Chapter 4 before the management's perception of each theme was discussed. The same theoretical explanation for each theme is applicable in this chapter.

5.2.1 Dialogue and mutual understanding

In the interviews conducted with the claims administrators, the administrators explained that their dialogue with clients created a 'safe space' for the clients, mentioning that 'we all need a safe space that we can go to . . . You need to be in touch, you need to be in communication . . . this person probably needs help' (Claims Administrator C). Claims Administrator C further explained:

It is the small things that make a difference . . . and what am I going to do to solve this problem? So, if the client calls, or the client is unhappy, listen to what the client is saying. Be honest with the client . . . listening skills are extremely important.

Further to this, Claims Administrator F explained that

I try my best to . . . involve them in the conversation . . . I can't do the whole robotic thing.

It is clear from this that the claims administrators explained that their dialogue with clients was one of support and assistance.

From this information presented, the theory states that dialogue is when both parties' needs are understood. This could include research to communicate and understand these needs (see section 2.4.4). This also has a direct impact on the mutual understanding between clients and claims administrators. With regard to clients, claims administrators feel that clients do not understand the policy wording nor the claims process, as Claims Administrator F explained:

[T]he clients go through so much information . . . It is a lot to take in, especially if you don't have any sort of idea of what's going on.

Based on mutual understanding, Claims Administrator B explained that the policy

wording is difficult, they [the clients] don't understand what's going on . . . they don't necessarily know what they're agreeing to.

Claims Administrator C explains that the insurance policy

gets very technical. One does not really understand and sometimes something happens [to the client and the client] is in so much shock.

Further to this statement, Claims Administrator A mentioned that

besides the actual accident, when we are talking about the policies, some clients don't understand policies correctly.

Claims Administrator E stated that

it's a mess . . . then again, clients . . . do not read their schedules.

Claims Administrator F also added to this that

clearly, the clients are either unaware, either don't understand or [do] not speak up.

These statements indicate that the administrators perceive that it is the clients' responsibility to ask for help, not the claims administrator trying to assist clients. Claims Administrator A mentioned that clients who did not understand their policy was a big issue as it

affect[ed] their pocket . . . [I]f the client is incorrectly covered, there is a big chance that they are paying a premium higher than it actually should be or can afford.

Interestingly enough, Claims Administrators D and G mentioned the lack of confidence clients had relating to the policy wording. Claims Administrator D explained that

the client does not have the confidence to understand how the process works.

Claims Administrator B mentioned that the claims administrator must make the client

understand the reason as to why it's [the claim] being declined. We're not working with . . . [a] random policy or we bring up these . . . terms and conditions randomly . . . I need to ask them what is it that you don't understand.

Claims Administrator E mentioned

we don't update them enough, honestly . . . because it sounds to me that they're not very knowledgeable when it comes to the policy . . . and they don't know which documents you must provide . . . and how long it will take, which email address to use, which cell phone number to even call.

5.2.1.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding dialogue and mutual understanding

The argument can be made that claims administrators perceive that from their side their dialogue with clients is based on assistance and support. However, the communication is not based on shared meaning and understanding of their needs. The claims administrators also perceive that the clients do not understand their policy wording or the claims process. According to the claims administrators, clients do not speak up and ask for help to understand the wording. The claims administrators expect their clients to understand the wording of their policy and merely read

through the policy, and if the clients do not understand the wording, the claims administrators were not available nor had the time to assist these clients and to empower them. This leaves the clients' needs unmet and the clients themselves left not being understood.

From the latter, it is clear that the claims administrators understand the policy wording. However, the clients do not. Therefore, there is no mutual understanding present between the client and the claims administrators. The dialogue is only based on the claims administrators' needs, and that is to finalise the claim or to get the claim off their name. The clients are left without confidence, knowledge of the claims process or a voice to express their needs. Based on two-way symmetrical communication theory, this is a situation of clients' needs not being identified nor understood. Therefore, one-sided communication from the claims administrators' side is evident. It seems that understanding clients' needs is not a priority nor a factor that is incorporated in the claims process. Research could also be conducted to understand clients' needs and communicate effectively from there. Furthermore, maybe part of the problem lies in how the policy wording is presented. Sometimes the documents and wording are simply too long and complicated to be assimilated by the client. The argument can be made that this might be a business communication (language and layout) problem.

5.2.2 Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution

With regard to negotiation and mutual respect, the claims administrators explained the importance of listening to the client during the claim stage, which also links directly to dialogue (see section 5.2.1). Claims Administrator A explained that

it's about the quality of the communication because it depends on the personality of the client . . . So, you need to recognise their personality . . . you are giving the client the opportunity to vent . . . to talk.

Further to this, it was stated that

you just have to listen to what the client is saying. And then . . . you need to respond accordingly.

Claims Administrator B stated that ‘

you also look a lot at the human element of listening . . . when you speak to a client.

Claims Administrator D mentioned the importance of letting clients vent and listening to them. Claims Administrators E, F and G had a different approach when it came to negotiating as there was still a job that needed to be completed and they had to be stern with clients as well. It was stated that 'you build relationships but at the same time you need to be stern with the client.' Claims Administrator F explained in the interview that

my objective here, to my understanding, is to get them to agree or to cancel the claim and . . . either that or it isn't beneficial if we can't retain the client.

Claims Administrator E mentioned that

so the client . . . most definitely must make money more than anything when it comes to communication.

Claims Administrator C mentioned that they created a platform for clients and that

it needs to be a wonderful experience to be part of the family and not just about the money.

Claims Administrator A explained that the relationship with clients was

not about speaking and listening 50/50, it's about understanding the dynamic of the relationship between you and the client.

Claims Administrator D explained that when the client was called,

I want to create someone that I know [is] a friend . . . so, you need to put your mind to it . . . that one thing of making promises and keeping them.

Claims Administrator D emphasised the fact that the conversation with the client was based on

one tone . . . I've never raised a voice because you need to keep . . . your tone [at the s]ame level for all of them.

Claims Administrator D further explained that respect for the client was important:

respect . . . Let them vent . . . you vent . . . I understand that they are frustrated . . . I just want to treat them all equally.

Claims Administrator G mentioned the importance of respect: 'you must always have respect for the client – it's very important'.

From the aforementioned data received and analysed it is clear that the respect in this case between claims administrators and their clients mainly rests on the claims administrators due to their work position.

5.2.2.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution

Against the background of negotiation and mutual respect, it is important to note that the industry is stressful and high pressured for both parties involved, as discussed below, which creates conflict for both clients and the claims administrators:

- *Claims administrator stress*

It is important to take note that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department is, as Claims Administrator A explained,

tough . . . tough . . . It's strenuous. Not because the work itself is complicated, but because it is high pressure.

Claims Administrator D explained that the claims environment was

stressful and stressful . . . It's stressful . . . In an environment like this, you need like a space or a room whereby someone will . . . check up . . . like a therapy for the claims department, or what we deal with . . . even though you don't want to take it personal[ly], it comes to you immediately, you get another call, you get a client . . . and then they . . . attack you. And then you [are] also going through your own personal emotions.

Claims Administrator G further explained that the claims environment was

not like regular stress . . . it gets rough. You don't have a lot of time and many deadlines. You don't only have existing tasks but things coming in-between like client calls.

This already explains the fact that the claims environment in which the claims administrators operate is a stressful and high-pressured environment. Claims Administrator F also added to this by stating:

[an] example is that as much as I have tasks and email to do, I will be receiving . . . daily, five different lists of things to attend to.

Claims Administrator E explains the claims environment as 'tiring'. Claims Administrator D explained that

at the end of the day, the department is under extreme pressure because there are so many clients, there [is] so [much] stuff that needs to happen.

Claims Administrator E said that the claims environment was 'lots of admin . . . it's a lot . . . [a] fast-paced environment . . . stressful.'

The importance of

the finalisation rate and the turnaround time [was stressed] . . . the claim must . . . not be processed [later] than five days . . . it is a target that you have to go through. And also . . . your own finalisation rate and turnaround time impact [on] the monthly one, the team, the team performance, because even the team has its own turnaround time, and finalisation.

Claims Administrator F said that 'there's also a fine line between speed and . . . rushing through something'. Claims Administrator G stated that 'the claims administrators are not enough for all the claims to be finalised'. Interestingly enough, Claims Administrator G further explained that 'twenty to thirty claims are received in one day'. Further to this, 'there was one month where I had ninety-six claims. Then there are other consultants who have seventy or fifty claims.' The mental health and wellbeing of claims administrators come into play when one considers the stressful and pressured environment perceived by the administrators, which have a direct impact on the effectiveness of their communication.

- *Client stress*

Once an accident happens, the client is emotional, frustrated, anxious and sometimes angry. Claims Administrator D explained that clients are 'very stressed . . . a lot of emotions, a lot of anger.' Claims Administrator E mentioned that the clients

are very emotional . . . And . . . in their mind, they're like, fix my vehicle, fix my vehicle, when are you going to fix my vehicle? Everything needs to happen now . . . they don't want to wait for two days, three days, four days, they want everything to happen now.

This statement focuses on further pressure from the clients' side. Claims Administrator E explains that

they are in motor car accidents. And it's . . . one of those things when your vehicle is damaged, or even just your tyre or something. It's irritating. It's frustrating, because many people live far from home, you know, they work, and they need to drive and it's kind of the only way . . . It's not like these people are happy on the other side of the phone.

Further to this statement, Claims Administrator E emphasised the fact that

most of the clients actually get into those kinds of scenarios . . . clients think that they are your only client, which is not the case, there're so many.

As far as the pressured environment in which claims administrators operate is concerned, it is important to also note that, as per the aforementioned statement, clients are seeking to get fast and efficient service from claims administrators and that it must take place as soon as possible. This indicates work-related pressure and clients pressure the claims administrators. The urgency of the matter links to the stressful environment of the claims administrators.

The argument can be made that claims administrators perceive their negotiations with and mutual respect for their clients in the form of listening to them and letting them share their opinions or viewpoints. From this information presented, it should be noted that the claims administrators perceive that they negotiate in the form of listening to their clients and that the mutual respect was with them and not the client. However, with regard to conflict resolution, it is important to understand that both the claims administrators and the clients are under severe stress. This directly creates conflict between both parties. In terms of the two-way symmetrical communication model, negotiation is when both parties work together to solve issues or conflict and with mutual respect; both parties work together, irrespective of the issue at hand. Therefore, this is a two-way approach. In this case, it is only the claims administrators who listen to the clients and let them vent. However, it is not mentioned that information is noted down when the client is venting. As revealed in the section on dialogue (see section 5.2.1), clients' needs are often not understood. Therefore, as per the claims administrators, the only negotiation that is present, is one-way listening to clients. This is not communication because both sides are needed to solve a problem or the conflict at hand.

5.2.3 Collaboration and participation

Claims administrator A explained the importance of collaboration as

I can't finalise without their assistance . . . if they can't get me the documents I need, I can't process their claim. So, I definitely need their assistance if I, for example, am instructing them to go to the police station . . . if I am asking them to get the detective's number if it's a stolen vehicle . . . if they can't or won't do that, I can't process the claim.

Claims Administrator B, in addition to this, explains that

it's like a collaboration between you and the client to make sure that you eventually finalise this claim . . . if you want me to finalise this . . . claim for you as soon as possible . . . you [the client] need to send me all these documents.

Claims Administrator G explained that

I need this from the client. The client must send me photos . . . the client must send me a police report. If the client wants to take their car to the panel beater, the client needs to know where it is and where to take the car to. I still need the client to get the police report.

From this information presented, it is clear that the claim cannot be finalised without the client, and the client has a responsibility during the claims process, and that is to supply certain documents in order for the claim to be finalised. Therefore, collaboration in tasks and responsibilities from both parties is needed. However, it is also important to focus on what Claims Administrator D explained and that is that the clients are 'extremely' impatient:

They want everything to be done immediately . . . So now how do you want me to proceed with a claim? If you did not send me an accident report . . . and then you want the claim to be finalised . . . And then now the claim is going to be cancelled because you're not sending the documentation.

Claims Administrator C mentioned that

we can't register a claim without a client. For example, like the accident report, the client must supply photos of the accident . . . you and the client must work together . . . Because the client has the policy, they also have responsibility.

Claims Administrator E explained that the clients 'need to give you documents.' Claims Administrator A mentioned in the interview that

it is actually in our hands . . . giving them feedback is you [the claims administrator] taking responsibility for the process.

It is therefore evident that the claims administrator and the client both participate in the claims process. However, it is still the claims administrator that is in charge of the claims process and the clients' only participation is sending documents needed for the claims process.

5.2.3.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding collaboration and participation

The argument that can be made is that the claims administrators perceive that collaboration exists between the claims administrators and their clients. The claims administrators finalise or reject claims, and the clients' responsibility during the claims process is to assist by obtaining information in the form of an accident report, accident photographs and quotations, among other things. From the aforementioned, it is clear that both parties in this claims process have a role to play in the finalisation and payout of the claims. The claims administrators administrate the claims process, but this cannot happen without the client supplying them with the necessary documentation. However, as claims administrator D explained, the client wants the claim to be paid out as fast as possible, without sending the important documentation and then the claims process cannot be finalised. Communication becomes crucial in the collaboration and participation process. With regard to communication, it is clear that the claims administrators are the main communicators and role players in the claims process, the clients' only responsibility during the claims process is to supply documentation – not to communicate in a participatory fashion. Therefore, it seems that one-way communication is utilised during the claim stage, and it is an instruction given to clients, with clients not having a voice or opinion to deliver in the claims process. The nature of the specific context (motor insurance industry) has a direct impact on the way communication is perceived and the direction it takes.

5.2.4 Transparency and ethical communication

The insurance sector and the claims process are based on regulatory obligations as well as policy wording, and terms and conditions, as also explained by management (in Chapter 4). Therefore, transparency and ethical behaviour lie mainly with the claims administrators. From the interviews

conducted with the claims administrators on ethical and transparent communication, Claims Administrator C explained that

you [the claims administrator] must set a platform for honesty. However, many clients are not transparent nor ethical as they do lie about alcohol abuse during the vehicle accident.

This, in turn creates a longer claims process and conflict may arise between both parties, as referred to in section 5.2.2 on negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution. Claims Administrator B explained:

Last year I had a client that . . . used alcohol. We did assist her because she was honest . . . I determined if she [the client] was in the wrong or if she was in the right. She was shocked . . . however . . . I need[ed] to determine if she was lying or [if she was] telling the truth . . . because it's part of the claims process, because remember, she could be lying, [she] could be saying that she was sober. But she was heavily intoxicated.

Further to this, Claims Administrator F stated that

the fact that the client is not being made aware from the get-go . . . it should be the clearest form of communication there is . . . how is it in any way benefiting my client? Their questions are not met or answered . . . But yeah, we're not even trying.

5.2.4.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding transparency and ethical communication

The argument can be made that the claims administrators perceive the fact that the industry is based on regulatory rules and guidelines, therefore, ethical and transparent communication forms part of the claims administrators' communication with their clients. However, the claims administrators mentioned that it was the clients who were dishonest during the claims process, for example, being under the influence of alcohol when the accident took place. Owing to the fact that clients want their claim to be paid out, they will be dishonest during the claims process. This links back to negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution (see section 5.2.2) as the dishonesty leads to conflict between claims administrators and clients.

5.2.5 Balance in the communication process

With regard to the interviews conducted with the claims administrators based on balance in the communication process, Claims Administrator C stated that 'we are the experts, and the client

must supply us with information'. In addition to this statement Claims Administrator D said that 'I have more control because I need to keep in touch with the client' and Claims Administrator E emphasised the fact that

because you [the claims administrators] make the decisions . . . because in the end, how the claims are played out how the claim is finalised.

Claims Administrator F mentioned that the control

will automatically be from my side, we are providing the service, and we are there to attend to whichever query in the insurance related industry.

In terms of the aforementioned facts that the claims administrators are in control of the communication with their clients, Claims Administrator G mentioned the reality of the clients that

at the end of the day there is a big gap when it comes to claims. It's hard for clients because . . . everything is not going to be paid out in full.

This is an important statement, as it is the claims administrator who is in charge of the communication, makes the decisions and manages the claims process. The client, in turn, has no control over the communication. Therefore, the client does not have a voice nor any input in the claims process.

5.2.5.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding balance in the communication process

The argument can be made that the claims administrators perceive that they are in control of the communication process and that it is their responsibility when it comes to the claims process. The clients have little input or control over the claims process and opinion to give during this process. Again, as per the two-way symmetrical communication model, this is one-sided communication. Therefore, the communication is imbalanced.

5.3 Relationship-building Strategies

From the administrators' perspective, the strategies involved to manage the relationship with the client is positivity, assurance, dual concern and sharing of tasks. As explained by managers in

Chapter 4, due to the nature of the insurance landscape and claim operations, most of the strategies are not employable.

According to the administrators, positivity, assurance and dual concern are sometimes utilised, as Claims Administrator A explained:

[B]ecause I make people feel safe and I like to make them feel comfortable . . . I love to make them feel like their claim is safe in my hands . . . it's about serving them . . . it's about helping them out of a difficult situation.

Claims Administrator D explained further that

you're trying to understand the client, you're trying to help the client. And you also have a positive tone when you speak to the client.

Further to this, the client and the claims administrators share tasks to complete the claims process, as previously explained in section 5.2.3.

5.3.1. Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding relationship-building strategies

Out of the interviews conducted with the claims administrators, the following strategies are used by the claims administrators to build relationships with clients:

Positivity: Both parties invest in making the relationship pleasant for each other.

Assurance: Efforts from the parties involved to reassure each other that their concerns are justified and will be addressed.

Dual concern: Balance is maintained between the interests of the clients and the organisation.

Sharing of tasks: Claims administrators and clients share tasks to complete the claims process. Clients need to supply documentation necessary to finalise their claims.

It is clear that from the claims administrators' side, they create a positive environment for clients during the claim stage and assure them during the communication process that the claims administrators were in control of the claim. The claims administrators perceive that they care for

their clients and provide a safe space for them during the claims process. Further to this, clients need to supply documentation to finalise their claims.

It is, however, important for claims administrators to use open communication with clients, as well as access – give clients some control over the claims process and create an open environment where they can provide input in the communication and claims process.

5.4 Stakeholder Relationship Outcomes

The stakeholder relationship outcomes are discussed based on the qualitative interviews with claims administrators.

5.4.1 Trust

From the interviews conducted with claims administrators, it is clear that clients' integrity, reliability and competence are lacking in the insurance industry. In the interviews conducted with the claims administrators based on trust, Claims Administrator C explained that

clients don't trust insurance, because they don't see what they are supposed to see. They are scared of how the claim will affect them.

Further to this, it was stated that

many clients are not honest because they are scared of the outcome. This leads to clients being dishonest which has an effect on their claim.

Claims Administrator G said that the 'client does trust the process'.

This theme directly links to the construct of ethical and transparent communication (see section 5.2.4), as the industry is ethical and transparent due to regulatory guidelines. However, claims administrators feel that it is the clients who are dishonest during the claims process as they are scared of the claims outcome. According to the construct transparent and ethical communication, it is clear that clients can be dishonest during the claims process.

This is a double-edged sword situation: The client does not trust insurers and the claims process and, at the same time, clients can be dishonest about how the accident that led to the claim

happened as this can affect their payout. The situation is based on money which is a determining factor in creating dishonesty.

5.4.1.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding trust

The argument can be made that the claims administrators perceive that it is the clients who tend to be dishonest as what they say might affect their claim payout. Furthermore, because clients are not well versed in policy wording and the process, they may become dishonest.

5.4.2 Commitment

When asked about clients' commitment towards Company X, Claims Administrators A and D explained the importance of 'legacy' and 'creating a long-term bond' with clients. In this regard, Claims Administrator D explained that

I feel like when you build something . . . people must stick with you through thick and thin . . . to create a long-term bond.

From this perspective, Claims Administrators F gave a more realistic answer:

Because at the end of the day, your retention rate is one of those things that's extremely important, especially when it comes to clients . . . So, it's more a question of . . . will we be able to retain this client at any time from the point of purchase? And people are feeling the pressure because people have to give feedback to their . . . leadership

Claims Administrator E also explained in this regard that

maybe it's an error on our side or the clients, because in the end, it is an agreement between us and the clients. It will be the terms and conditions when it comes to the policy itself, for instance.

5.4.2.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding commitment

The argument can be made that some claims administrators mention the importance of building a long-term relationship with clients and believe in 'legacy'. However, other claims administrators focused on the fact that the commitment was directly linked to the outcome of the claim, and that the policy wording and schedule were set in stone. It is important to take the retention rate of clients into account. This is something that needs to be investigated to try and understand what the retention rate of clients is, and why do client stay and why do some clients cancel their policies.

This construct is directly linked back to the outcome of satisfaction: The client will be satisfied and committed to the company, only if the claim is paid out in full. It seems that the relationship between the parties does not solely rely on communication, but other factors also play a role in the context of the motor insurance industry.

5.4.3 Satisfaction

Claims Administrator E mentioned in the interview that the client is satisfied once

the claim . . . is being processed . . . until we get to the finalisation stage of a claim and that we accept the claim, approve it and pay it, and the client is happy.

Further to this, Claims Administrator E explained that when the claim was declined, clients 'don't take that well.' Claims Administrator D also mentioned that clients' needs were only met when 'the claim is approved very quickly'. With this statement made, it is important to note that the clients' needs have not been identified through understanding their needs. Claims Administrator G also mentioned that the claims process was about 'finalising the claim and the correct payment to be paid out to the client.'

5.4.3.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding satisfaction

From the aforementioned findings it is clear that clients are only satisfied once the claim is approved and they receive their payment. If this is not the case, clients will be unhappy. Therefore, satisfaction with the relationship is only present when payment is made to clients. When claims are declined, client are unhappy, which negatively impacts on the relationship. It is important to highlight that clients need their claims to be paid out in order to cover the damages to, or loss of, their vehicles. If clients' claims are not paid out, they are left with a damaged or written-off vehicle that they cannot repair. This creates frustration for them. It is also important to note that this places clients in a position of no control over the claims process. It is therefore clear that if the clients' claims are declined, they feel even more left out and dissatisfied with the relationship between them and Company X.

5.4.4 Mutual control

During the semi-structured interviews, Claims Administrator D mentioned that 'I have more control because I need to keep in touch with the client, so you have more control.' Further to this, claims administrator F explained that the claims administrators

believe it will automatically be from my side; we are providing the service and we are there to attend to whichever query in the insurance-related industry.

Claims Administrator G also stated that

we are more in control. The client pays us, we need to make sure the job is done. Clients are uncertain because they don't know what to do when an accident happens.

Claims Administrator E also stated that they make

the decisions . . . how the claims are played out, how the claim is finalised, regardless of the client . . . the [policy] schedule says this, and then that's what you tell the client. If you're going to decline it, you just tell them . . . that's just the work that we do and we are the ones who'll be doing all the practices.

From the aforementioned it is clear that there is little mutual control present, as it is the claims administrators who are in control of the claims process and who are the main communicators as well as the experts in the insurance field. The claims administrators are the ones who exert control over the clients and the clients' money, which has an influence on the mutual relationship.

5.4.4.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding mutual control

The argument can be made that the claims administrators perceive that they are mainly responsible for the claims process and what happens with the claim. Therefore, based on the context of the insurance industry, it is the claims administrators who provide the input, and have the most responsibility and control over the clients, leaving the clients with only one input: the supply of documentation. Therefore, the outcome of clients' claims rests with the claims administrators and the clients. It seems that the clients have little control in the relationship.

5.5 Types of relationships: communal and exchange relationships

Claims Administrators A and B mentioned that from their perspective and their role in the claims department, they had a communal relationship with their clients:

I give the client what he needs without expecting anything in return' (Claims Administrator A).

Claims Administrator B also explained the importance of a communal relationship as

it is important because we care for them . . . you go above and beyond their expectations for them.

However, Claims Administrator C explains that it all depends on

the principles one has . . . If you were taught to always expect something in return, you will try everything to get that back. But if you were taught that you must give without taking, you will provide without expecting anything in return.

Claims Administrators E and F explained that the relationship with the clients was on of exchange in nature.

Claims Administrator E explained that

now it's a bit of an exchange in a sense . . . It's like we getting more than what they give . . . They [the client] give and give and give and we [are] just taking.

5.5.1 Conclusion on the claims administrators' perception regarding the type of relationship

From the aforementioned it is evident that some claims administrators feel that they provide a communal relationship with the client. However, this all depends on the claims administrators' personality and the overall service they provide clients. Most claims administrators do not expect anything in return from the clients and want to assist them during their financial loss. In contrast, it is the clients who experience an exchange relationship from the claims administrators as the clients pay a monthly premium and it is not a given that the clients' claims will be paid out in full. The argument can be made that the claims administrators perceive that from their side they mostly provide a communal relationship.

5.6 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter is the communication perception the claims administrator have regarding their clients. The research question that needed to be answered was: *What are the claims administrators' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?*

In Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2) Grunig and White (1992:43-44), and Naudé 2001:71) explain that the symmetrical worldview focused on the fact that the stakeholder and the organisation must influence each other and adapt to both parties involved in the relationship. In this chapter, the two parties involved are the claims administrators and the clients.

First, it is important to note that both parties in the communication process experience stress: the clients who experienced a financial loss, and the claims administrators who work in a high-pressured environment to finalise the claims as soon as possible. This has a direct negative impact on the communication between both parties as emotions are heightened. Further to this, the claims administrators do not understand the clients' needs and therefore dialogue is not based on the those needs.

With this being said, it is clear that the claims administrators create a safe space for the clients to vent, based on dialogue. However, mutual understanding is not present – no knowledge of the clients' needs, and the clients do not understand their policy wording nor what they are liable for. The client is left in the dark, with no voice and no influence in the communication process. The claims administrators have the most control in the communication process and all the knowledge the clients do not have.

The only participation clients have in the communication process is to supply documentation to finalise their claims. However, they do not have any control in the communication process.

It is also important to note that ethical and transparency lies with the claims administrators and not the clients as the clients can be dishonest during the claims process. This explains why conflict is inevitable between the claims administrators and clients. The relationship is imbalanced, and the clients have no influence in the communication process. The communication between the two parties involved is one way in nature, thus giving rise to an asymmetrical worldview and not a symmetrical worldview.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 the background of the study was presented, focusing on the South African insurance landscape and providing context to Company X, and the problem statement was set out. The general and specific research questions that guided the study were also posed. In Chapter 2 the foundation of the literature was presented, with the focus on the symmetrical and asymmetrical worldviews, ending with the two main theories that served as the theoretical framework for the present study, namely (1) the two-way symmetrical communication model and (3) the stakeholder relationship management theory. These two theories form the basis of the study and themes were identified from the literature for empirical data collection. In Chapter 3, the research approach and method were outlined, with the main focus being on qualitative semi-structured interviews with the management and claims administrators of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department. Chapter 4 detailed the data analyses and findings received from the managers' perspective and Chapter 5 unpacked the findings of the claims administrators' perspective.

In this final chapter, conclusions are drawn regarding the three specific research questions (see section 1.2.2), which provide direction for answering the general research question of this study: *To what extent does Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department manage its communication with clients two-way symmetrically at the claim stage to foster relationships?*

Thereafter, suggestions are made to Company X, the shortcomings of the study are identified and recommendations for future research are outlined.

6.2 Specific Research Question 1 Answered

According to the literature, what guidelines have been established for two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients?

Chapter 2 briefly explained the cybernetics tradition in which the meta-theoretical perspective of the systems theory falls, and acts as the umbrella from which the two-way symmetrical communication model and the stakeholder relationship management theory were approached for the purposes of this study. In short, a system consists of sub-systems that have a direct impact on the system as a whole (interdependent on each other). Therefore, the system or organisation consists of interacting units needed for the system to be in equilibrium. If one of the sub-systems

does not function as an open system, it will have an impact on the rest of the systems and synergy will not be achieved between them (see section 2.2).

From the two-way symmetrical communication model and the stakeholder relationship management theory, themes were identified, which were summarised in Table 2.1. The table is duplicated below for ease of reference, as answer to specific research question 1.

Table 6.1: Summary of theoretical themes from the two-way symmetrical communication model and the stakeholder relationship management theory

Two-way symmetrical model	
Themes	Description
Dialogue and mutual understanding	The needs of both parties, which should be respected and understood, are fulfilled by means of continual dialogue and shared meaning and mutual understanding.
Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution	A strategic discussion, guided by mutual respect, that resolves conflict in a way that both parties find acceptable. The two parties may not agree on everything, but they are willing to work things out because both parties care for each other.
Collaboration and participation	Both parties must work together through mutual influence and shared involvement towards the same goal. They also play an active role in the relationship to meet each other's needs.
Transparency and ethical communication	Communication between both parties is based on truth and openness and takes place in an appropriate and ethical manner.
Balance in communication process	Both parties have the same level of control and influence over each other during the communication process.
Stakeholder relationship management theory	
Relationship-building strategies	Description
Positivity	Both parties invest in making the relationship pleasant for each other.
Access	The stakeholders and organisation give access to the other with regard to the information they require in their decision-making processes.
Openness	Feelings and thoughts are openly communicated between the organisation and its clients.
Assurance	The parties involved give each other the assurance that their concerns are justified and will be addressed.
Networking	The organisation builds networks with the same interest groups as the groups its clients are building relationship with.
Sharing of tasks	The organisation and its clients work together to solve problems.
Dual concern	Balance is maintained between the interests of the clients and the organisation.

Outcomes of relationship	Description
Trust	Develops when one party believes in the other party's reliability, integrity and dependability.
Commitment	Means that both parties invest time and energy in the relationship to maintain and promote the relationship.
Satisfaction	The extent to which each party views and approaches the other favourably, due to the fact that positive expectations about the relationship are strengthened.
Mutual control	When two parties agree on who has control or power to influence the other party.
Types of relationships	Description
Communal relationship	Both parties give each other benefits because they are concerned about the wellbeing of the other party, even though they receive nothing in return.
Exchange relationships	Benefits in the relationship are given with the expectation of receiving a benefit in the future or in return for a benefit already received.

6.3 Specific Research Question 2 Answered

What is the managements' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?

In this section the feedback and findings from the management's perspective are discussed to answer specific research question 2.

6.3.1 Two-way symmetrical communication

6.3.1.1 Dialogue and mutual understanding

From management's perspective, it is evident that clients do not have an environment in which to express their feelings and concerns openly as the communication is mainly based on policy wording and insurance-related rules and regulations that are, in turn, based on the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA) rules and regulations. Therefore, dialogue is solely based on clients' policy wording, schedule, and terms and conditions. It is based on rules by which the company must abide. Therefore, the communication is based on insurance terms and conditions, which indicates a one-way flow of communication, rather than dialogue.

The Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department is under pressure and there is stress involved from both the claims administrators' side and the clients' side. This indicates the pressure aspect from the one party, the claims administrators, as well as the pressured situation of the client – indicating stress, frustrations and other emotions between both parties that are involved in the claims process. This pressure directly impacts on the communication between both parties, which can lead to conflict.

6.3.1.2 Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution

Management explained that when it came to respect during the claims process, it was the claims administrators who had to be the ones in control of respect. Therefore, when it came to mutual respect, it was the administrators who needed to treat the client with respect. This again shows the imbalance between the claims administrators and the clients. From the interviews that were conducted with management, based on negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution, one thing is persistent: a pattern indicating that conflict is inevitable in the claims process.

The claims administrators are the ones who are in charge of the claims process and are the experts in the insurance field. This imbalance in control creates conflict since, as explained, claims administrators struggle with conflict from their clients. This leads to them adopting a robotic tone and rambling words. The clients' confidence and what they are liable for are missed in the communication with claims administrators who have a clear understanding of insurance rules and regulations. Management believes that if the clients are educated, they will have more confidence and an understanding of the claims process.

6.3.1.3 Collaboration and participation

With regard to collaboration, it is not just the claims administrators who are responsible for finalising the claim as clients also have a minor role to play in the finalisation. However, the only role clients have is to supply the necessary documentation to the claims administrator for the claim to be finalised. Therefore, clients do not have any input in the claims process except for the supply of documentation. There is a lack of collaboration between clients and the claims administrators, which amounts to a one-way flow of communication.

Based on participation, the claims administrators cannot finalise claims without clients' documentation. However, again (refer back to collaboration), this is not a participatory role on the part of the clients. It is the clients' only voice and only input in the claims process, namely to supply documentation. Once this is submitted, clients are again left in the dark as to what the

outcomes of their claims will be. It is important for the claims administrators to realise that if the clients are unhappy, they must try to address the problem and listen to the clients.

From management's perspective, the clients do not have much control in the claims process, except for supplying documentation. The clients do not have a voice or any input in the claims process. This again indicates the one-way flow of communication.

Participation is when both the claims administrators and the clients work together to meet each other's needs. As per dialogue and mutual understanding, claims administrators do not know what their clients' needs are, and there is therefore no participation on the part of the clients. Clients have little input or effect on the claims process and the outcome.

6.3.1.4 Transparency and ethical communication

First, management acknowledges that the insurance industry is viewed as unethical and most people distrust the industry as a whole. Therefore, management believes that clients perceive Company X as being unethical. The South African insurance industry is regulated and governed by the FSCA. Therefore, management argues that the claims process is solely based on the clients' policy wording, schedule, and terms and conditions. The claims administrators must also communicate with clients based on adherence to these rules and regulations. Therefore, the claims administrators must act according to these specific guidelines and parameters. Based on ethical and transparent communication, the claims administrators' role is to communicate this to the clients, and the clients receive this factual information. However, it is only the claims administrators who are experts in the rules and guidelines, not the clients. This is not reciprocal as the main ethical and transparent communication lies with the claims administrators and not the clients. This again indicates the imbalance between both parties.

6.3.1.5 Balance in the communication process

According to management, it is solely the claims administrators who are in control of the communication, not the clients. The claims administrators are the dominant communicators and the clients are left in the dark – with no input or impact on decisions made during the claims process. Therefore, the clients do not have a voice (refer to dialogue and mutual understanding). This shows an imbalance in the communication process.

6.3.2 Relationship-building strategies

It is evident that one strategy to build relationships with the clients from the claims administrators' side was highlighted, and that is open and honest communication (openness). Communication from the claims administrators' side is based on facts, rules and regulations, as well as the clients' policy schedule and terms and conditions. Management's main argument is that the claims administrators must be honest at all times with the clients and to make sure that they communicate with the clients what is happening in the claims process. Other than this, the clients are misunderstood as they are not experts in the field of insurance.

However, from the findings it is clear that the client must participate in the claims process by means of supplying documentation, which can therefore be seen as sharing of tasks. Other than this, it is important to make the argument that the strategies of assurance and dual concern must be focused on from the claims administrators' side to the client. Therefore, once the claims administrators have understood their clients and their needs, it is important for them to care for these clients and their circumstances, as well as to reassure them during the traumatic event that took place. This can aid in building a relationship with clients during the claims process.

6.3.3 Relationship outcomes

6.3.3.1 Trust

As per the research findings, it is clear that clients do not trust the insurance sector due to their needs not being identified and understood, it leaves them wary. Therefore, trust in this case is dependent on clients' experience of the claims process. Because the industry is based on financial payout, clients tend to not trust the insurance process. Once the financial payout does not take place, the communication between both parties turns into conflict. It is thus important to comprehend that clients do not trust the insurance industry and they tend to be dishonest in order to receive a financial payout. This directly impacts on the trust the claims administrators have in clients. Trust is hindered during the claims process. This creates an imbalanced relationship between both parties who do not trust each other.

6.3.3.2 Commitment

From the data analysis between the claims administrator and the client it is important to note that the communication between the claims administrators and clients is mainly based on the clients' policy wording. Clients do not have a voice or a say during the claims process due to the technical

and complex nature of the policy wording. The clients' need is to receive a financial payout. If they do not receive a payout, even if the claims process was satisfactory, they will cancel their policy and move to another insurer in order to meet their needs. Clients who experience a loss are in a crisis. If their needs are not met, they will become despondent and move to the competition. The commitment therefore lies in whether or not the clients' need are met.

6.3.3.3 *Satisfaction*

According to management's perspective, the insurance industry is not a positive one and there are no positive relationships. There are few positive expectations in the relationship between the claims administrators and their clients, as stressful events lead to clients claiming. Therefore, emotions are involved from the start. The claims process is stressful and lengthy, and has a direct impact on the relationship involved. One party is pressured to finalise claims and the other party experienced trauma or unforeseen circumstances. What makes the situation worse is that there is no guarantee that the claim will be accepted. It seems that successful claims result in satisfaction with the relationship, but the contrary is also true.

6.3.3.4 *Mutual control*

Both the client and the claims administrator must have the right to equally exert influence over the other. However, from the findings from the management interviews it is clear that the relationship between claims administrators and their clients is not balanced. According to them, it is the claims administrators who must have control over the communication with clients. The claims administrators have the knowledge to understand the claims process and the policy wording, which the clients do not have. Again, an imbalance is created in the communication. The claims administrators are the ones who are in control of the process, as well as the dominant communicators. Therefore, there is no mutual control involved; it only comes from the claims administrators' side.

6.3.4 *Types of relationships: exchange versus communal*

Management felt that it was mostly the claims administrators who built a communal relationship with their clients. However, owing to the nature of the industry, the relationship present is that of an exchange relationship. Clients pay a premium every month and what they expect in return is for their claim to be paid out in full. Overall, from both parties, it is evident that the exchange relationship is the dominant relationship. There is an imbalance between what clients want and what the claims administrators want due to the financial loss the client suffers. Therefore, the

relationship tends to be one-sided and focused on exchange relationships – one party wants a salary and needs to finalise as many claims as possible, the other wants a financial payout from loss experienced after paying monthly premiums.

With regard to management’s perception of Company X’s Motor Insurance Claims Department’s two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients, and to answer specific research question 2, the following summary of the arguments is presented in Table 6.2.

6.3.5 Summary of management’s perception

The table below summarises management’s perception to answer the second specific research question.

Table 6.2: Summary of management’s perception

Miscellaneous
<p>Overall communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client emotions affect claims administrators’ client service. • Young individuals out of school employed as claims administrators do not have the necessary skills to handle clients. • Communication is not where it should be. • Claims administrators ramble. • Claims administrators’ role is to keep the client.
<p>Company X’s Motor Insurance Claims Department description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key department to retain the client. • Department is growing and changing constantly. • ‘Everybody can sell something to a person but to keep a client in a difficult situation when they claim is something completely different’ (Manager C).
<p>Opinion on company statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims administrators’ responsibilities start when the clients have suffered a financial loss. • Claims administrators must have different skills throughout the department and are moved often. • Claims administrators must be able to keep their clients even if clients are presented with outcomes that they do not want to hear.
<p>Client understanding of insurance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many clients are laypeople: Clients do not understand how insurance works – do not understand insurance policy wording or terms and conditions
<p>Opinion on ‘client obsessed’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims administrators to be customer obsessed and should always be willing to assist clients, no matter the outcome.

Two-way symmetrical model	
Dialogue and mutual understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge gap – clients do not understand insurance. • Depending on the claims administrator, the client is treated with respect. • Listening skills are of exceptional importance. • Robotic/Rambling conversation from claims administrators. • No research is done to identify the clients' needs. • No research is done to understand the clients' needs and create dialogue based on that.
Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-pressured environment – stress from the claims • Clients experience stress – financial loss. • Claims administrators experience stress – sound robotic over the telephone. • Conflict between both parties is inevitable. • Disconnect between clients and claims administrators. • Claims administrators struggle with conflict with clients.
Collaboration and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients must supply information to the claims administrators to finalise their claim. • Without the clients, the claim cannot be finalised. • Clients to supply documentation – only input from clients.
Transparency and ethical communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department is authorised and registered with the Financial Sector Conduct Authority. • Information from the claims administrators is based on factual policy wording, schedules, and terms and conditions. • Ethical communication in the insurance sector is key – Company X is governed.
Balance in communication process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant communication comes from the claims administrators. • Imbalanced communication as the claims administrators must be in control.
Stakeholder relationship management theory (strategies)	
Positivity, openness, assurance, networking, sharing of tasks, dual concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness in communication from the claims administrators with their clients. • Sharing of tasks between the claims administrators and the clients. • Honesty is key in insurance. • Evident that reassurance must also form part of the strategy to build relationships with clients.
Stakeholder relationship management theory (outcomes of relationship)	
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients do not trust insurance. • Some clients are dishonest due to the money involved.

Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on the claims process service and the claim outcome – the client can still cancel if the service rendered was negative and the claim is declined – loss of money.
Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All depends on the claim outcome. • Claim payout – client satisfaction. • Claim declined – client conflict/cancellation of policy.
Mutual control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims administrators have the most control in their relationship with their clients. • Claims administrators are in control of the claims process.
Types of relationships	
Communal relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not present between clients and claims administrators.
Exchange relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client exchange relationship with claims administrators

6.4 Specific Research Question 3 Answered

What are the claims administrators' perception of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department's two-way symmetrical communication management during the claims process to foster relationships with clients?

In this section the findings based on the claims administrators' perspective from the interviews conducted will be summarised to answer the third specific research question.

6.4.1 Two-way symmetrical communication

6.4.1.1 Dialogue and mutual understanding

Based on the administrators' perspective on dialogue and mutual understanding, the following arguments are made:

- Listening to clients, understanding their personality and giving them the opportunity to vent and share their problems and concerns.
- In addition, clients' needs are not understood and dialogue is not based on these needs and shared meaning.
- The fact of the matter is that the claims process is based on the policy wording and schedule, and terms and conditions. This is a business relationship and sometimes the claims administrators must be stern with the clients. It is still about the claims process. If clients are not supported, the claims process will be strenuous and conflict will arise.

Dialogue is of exceptional importance, as it should be used to identify clients' needs and understand those needs that must be met. The policy wording, schedule and terms and conditions are too technical for clients, and they do not know what they are agreeing to. Here it is clear that the dialogue with clients is not based on research and that there is no mutual understanding present. If clients are not aware of what they are covered for, and they pay a monthly premium and their claim is declined, emotions increase, which leads to conflict.

6.4.1.2 Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution

Negotiation and mutual respect should be used to manage conflict with clients. Negotiation is communication where both the individuals work together to solve the issues at hand, and with mutual respect. This is done no matter the challenges present. Unfortunately, owing to the high-pressured environment from the claims administrators' side and the clients' needs not being understood and identified, clients become frustrated and angry, and want to cancel their policies. Again, conflict must be resolved by both the claims administrator and the client working together to find a mutually beneficial outcome. At present, the flow of communication is one way and conflict is still part of the claims process.

6.4.1.3 Collaboration and participation

Based on collaboration between the claims administrators and their clients, the claims administrators' arguments were based on the following:

- Claims cannot be finalised without the clients, and clients have a responsibility during the claims process, which is to supply certain documents in order for their claim to be finalised.
- However, clients need to take responsibility and read through their policy schedule.

Given this information, it is evident that clients have a small role to play in the claims process, which is to provide documentation. However, this is due to the nature of the insurance landscape. This is the only input clients have and this cannot be seen as collaboration as it is not a working-together approach, it is the clients' responsibility. It is also evident that the policy wording is not the claims administrators' responsibility, but directly that of clients who need to understand it.

6.4.1.4 Transparency and ethical communication

Claims administrators must set a platform for honesty as the communication between claims administrators and their clients is based on factual rules and regulations. Therefore, the claims administrators must adhere to these rules. However, it is explained that some clients are dishonest. Transparency and ethical behaviour lie mainly with the claims administrators. However, many clients are not transparent nor ethical as they do lie about, for example, alcohol abuse during vehicle accidents in order to receive a financial payout.

6.4.1.5 Balance in communication process

Claims administrators are the main communicators with their clients, and the main control lies with the claims administrators. Therefore, this communication is completely imbalanced as clients have no control over the communication. It is the claims administrators who are in charge of the claims process and communicate any information relating to the process to the clients. Claims administrators also decide if the claim is declined or rejected. Therefore, clients do not have a say nor a voice during decision making or any claims process-related issues. Therefore, this situation is industry-related and clients are not regarded as being important during the communication.

6.4.2 Relationship-building strategies

Out of the interviews conducted with the claims administrators, three strategies are used by the claims administrators to build relationships with their clients from the claims administrators' perspective, namely (1) openness, (2) sharing of tasks and (3) assurance.

Openness: Claims administrators provide a service based on insurance regulatory standards, policy wording, and terms and conditions. Communication is therefore open and ethical.

Sharing of tasks: As mentioned before, clients and claims administrators share tasks to complete the claims process. Clients need to supply documentation necessary to finalise their claims.

Assurance: Claims administrators feel that they create a platform of safety for their clients during the claims process.

It is, however, the responsibility of claims administrators to create a positive claims process for their clients, especially during the circumstances clients find themselves in. Further to this, it is

important for claims administrators to have a dual concern for their clients. Therefore, both clients and claims administrators require a balanced approach to maintain each other's needs. Again, this links back to dialogue as the clients' needs must be identified and understood.

6.4.3 Relationship outcomes

6.4.3.1 Trust

As mentioned with regard to transparency and ethical communication, clients are not always honest, for example, some clients deny being under the influence of alcohol when an accident happens. Clients, therefore, are dishonest as this can affect their payout. It is also evident that clients do not trust insurance companies as they pay a monthly premium, but there is no guarantee that the claim will be approved and paid out. Trust between parties are of crucial importance to build a strong, long-term relationship. Without trust, the relationship can be damaged.

6.4.3.2 Commitment

With regard to commitment between claims administrators and their clients, the claims administrators follow two approaches:

Some of the claims administrators focus on creating a 'legacy' and 'long-term bond' with their clients. The other approach is that it all depends on the payout of the claim. If a client's claim is declined, the client will cancel the policy and there will be conflict involved. Therefore, commitment is based on the financial payout. For example, in one case a client had been insured with the same insurance company for 13 years. However, when she claimed for the first time, her claim was declined and she cancelled her policy.

Therefore, commitment is based on the financial payout of the client. If the claim is paid out in full, the client will remain with the company. The issue is that not all claims are paid out in full and some are declined.

6.4.3.3 Satisfaction

With regard to satisfaction between claims administrators and their clients, the claims administrators felt that if claims were paid out in full, clients were satisfied with the relationship and would stay with the company. However, if their claims were declined, they would lose their

temper and would cancel their policy. Claims administrators still have a responsibility to finalise claims, and the correct payment must be made to the clients involved as there are rules and regulations to be followed.

Therefore, clients are only satisfied once their claim is approved and they receive their payment. The relationship is built on financial terms and not on communication.

6.4.3.4 Mutual control

Claims administrators are the ones who are in control of the claims process and are the main communicators and the ones making the decisions. Therefore, no mutual control is present between claims administrators and their clients. Claims administrators are the ones who are in control of the claims process and are the main communicating experts in the field. The claims administrators are the ones who exert control over clients and the clients' financial loss, which negatively impacts on the resultant relationship.

6.4.4 Types of relationships: exchange and communal

From the two types of relationships presented, it is clear that some of the claims administrators feel that a communal relationship is based on the claims administrators' principles and attitude as some claims administrators will give without expecting anything in return.

However, other claims administrators mentioned clearly that it was an exchange relationship as clients were the ones who paid a monthly premium to cover a potential financial loss. However, it is not accurate to believe that the clients' claims will always be paid out. Therefore, clients pay a monthly premium for when they need to claim, yet the claim is not necessarily approved and paid out. Claims administrators want to finalise their claims and receive payment for the loss suffered at the end of the month. It is therefore clear that this is an exchange relationship.

6.4.5 Summary of claims administrators' perception

The following table on the next page summarises the claims administrators' perception to answer the third specific research question.

Table 6.3: Summary of claims administrators' perception

Miscellaneous	
<p>Overall communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the severity of the clients' situation at hand. • From registration, communication with clients must be established right at the start. • Clients are very emotional – claims administrators to adapt communication with clients. • Communication is emotional in nature. 	
<p>Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tough, strenuous, stressful, high pressure. 	
<p>Opinion on company statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a long-term bond with clients. • Making clients feel comfortable and that they can trust the claims administrators. • It is a future approach – seeing the human in the client. 	
<p>Client understanding of insurance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients do not understand how insurance works – do not understand insurance policy wording or terms and conditions. • Clients are not informed on what they are paying for and covered for. 	
<p>Opinion on 'client-obsessed'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the clients' benefit. • Honesty with clients and keeping them informed. • 'We make money through them; they need money from us.' • It is all about communication and keeping the client informed. • Not always client-obsessed. 	
Two-way symmetrical model	
<p>Dialogue and mutual understanding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robotic/Rambling conversation from claims administrators' side • Knowledge gap – clients do not understand insurance • Clients do not understand their policy wording, schedule, and terms and conditions. Therefore, clients lack confidence. • Disconnect between clients and claims administrators. • Claims administrators' dialogue is perceived to be based on listening and letting clients vent.

<p>Negotiation, mutual respect and conflict resolution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-pressured environment – stress from the claims administrators’ side – come across as robotic over the telephone. • Clients experience stress – financial loss. • Conflict between clients and claims administrators is inevitable. • Claims administrators want to get their claims finalised as soon as possible. • Claims administrators do not know how to handle conflict. • Claims process – lengthy process. • If claim not paid in full – clients furious. • Claims administrators must be stern with their clients but at the same time finalise their claims. • Claims administrators are the individuals who need to create respect in the relationship.
<p>Collaboration and participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between claims administrators and their clients is imbalanced as the only role clients play is to supply documentation. • Clients must supply information to the claims administrators to finalise their claims. • Without the client, the claim cannot be finalised. • The claims administrators’ responsibility is to finalise claims. • Participation mostly from the claims administrators and the clients are only responsible for supplying documentation. • Clients must supply information to the claims administrators to finalise the claim – only input. • Without the client, the claim cannot be finalised.
<p>Transparency and ethical communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company X’s Motor Insurance Claims Department is authorised and registered with the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA). • Information from the claims administrators’ side is based on factual policy wording, schedules, and terms and conditions. • Ethical communication in the insurance sector is key – Company X is governed by FSCA rules and regulations.
<p>Balance in communication process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant communication comes from claims administrators. • Imbalanced communication as the claims administrators must be in control. • The relationship is completely imbalanced

Stakeholder relationship management theory (strategies)	
Positivity, openness, assurance, networking, sharing of tasks, dual concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness in communication from claims administrators with their clients. • Sharing of tasks between claims administrators and their clients. • Honesty is key in insurance. • The relationship is completely imbalanced.
Stakeholder relationship management theory (outcomes of relationship)	
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South African insurance landscape – negative connotation. • Clients do not trust insurance companies – especially if their claims are not paid out in full. • ‘Insurance companies are crooks.’ • Clients can also be dishonest in order to receive a payout. • Claims administrators are the ones who are open and honest towards their clients. • The relationship is completely imbalanced.
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients only commit when their claims outcome is satisfactory. • However, depending on the claims process service, clients can still cancel if the service rendered was negative. • The relationship is completely imbalanced
Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients are only satisfied once their claim is paid out in full. • The relationship is completely imbalanced.
Mutual control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims administrators have the most control in the relationship with their clients. • Claims administrators are in control of the claims process. • The relationship is completely imbalanced
Types of relationships	
Communal relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims administrators build communal relationship with clients (positive, passionate attitude) – depending on personality.
Exchange relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients have exchange relationship with insurers as they must pay premiums, submit documentation and due to no policy knowledge, their claims are declined – however, clients still pay their premium.

6.5 Answering the General Research Question

The specific research questions have been outlined in this chapter, with the focus on literature guidelines, and the managers’ and claims administrator’s perceptions, with the focus on two-way symmetrical communication to foster and maintain relationships with clients during the claim stage.

The general research question that launched the study was:

To what extent does Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department manage its communication with clients two-way symmetrically at the claim stage to foster relationships?

To answer the general research question, it is evident that two-way symmetrical communication is not being managed nor implemented in Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department.

When referring back to the two-way symmetrical communication model, a mutually beneficial relationship should be built, based on dialogue. This dialogue is created based on identifying the clients' needs and creating dialogue based on those needs. With this theory, it is also important to note that both parties involved in the relationship should be balanced in the process. Both should have the same responsibility, communication and control in the relationship, and both should have an input and responsibility in the claims process. The relationship must be based on mutually understanding the stakeholders and building a relationship that benefits both parties (organisation and stakeholders), with both parties being on an equal footing to handle conflict and issues at hand in a respectful manner. The current relationship from the clients' side is an exchange relationship: the clients support the company financially, however, their claim payment is not necessarily going to take place. The communication should, furthermore, be ethical and transparent. The stakeholder relationship management theory posits that two-way symmetrical strategies should be imposed to build and maintain a relationship, which does not feature solidly in Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department at this stage. Lastly, a strong relationship will be based on trust, commitment, relational satisfaction and mutual control, which is not evident in the findings.

Based on the findings, it was evident that four core issues negatively influence the communication and subsequent relationship between Company X and their clients during the claim stage:

6.5.1 The insurance sector

The insurance sector is based on rules and regulations, stipulated in clients' policies. Clients need financial payouts and claims administrators have targets to reach. Therefore, these are one-sided needs and not needs that benefit both parties. It will only benefit one individual, depending on the outcome of the claims. Claims administrators might meet their targets, but that does not mean that clients' financial payouts will take place. This is a business-based situation and is financial in nature. There is no care for each other in the relationship; it is about financial loss and gain. Furthermore, no research is done to fully understand the clients' needs, frustrations and

perceptions. It is also important to note that clients have no understanding of the insurance industry.

6.5.2 The situation

The situation during the claims process involves pressure from the claims administrators' side to finalise claims as much as possible, as they receive many claims. In contrast, clients are agitated, frustrated and traumatised due to the circumstances that led to the claim. This creates conflict between both parties and once claims are not approved, clients become furious and then usually cancel their policies. Therefore, in this communication, emotions run high. What is important to note here is that young individuals who have just matriculated are appointed as claims administrators. Therefore, these individuals do not have the skills nor the maturity to handle a difficult client. It is again necessary to understand that this communication is one-way flow of communication from the claims administrators' side, and the clients' needs are still not identified nor understood.

6.5.3 Imbalanced relationship

This relationship between the claims administrators and their clients is imbalanced as it is only the claims administrator who has the expertise and knowledge related to the claims process, insurance rules and guidelines, and policy wording, schedule, and terms and conditions. The claims administrators are the main communicators and are the ones who set the tone during the claims process. Clients generally do not have any insurance-related knowledge, and it is unfortunately a fact that they pay a monthly premium, and there is no guarantee that their claims will be approved and paid out. Therefore, in this relationship clients are at the negative receiving end. It is the clients who were in a motor vehicle accident, and it is the clients who need the financial payout. The claims administrators are the ones in full control and the one who make the decisions.

6.5.4 Exchange relationship

This is not a relationship based on care for each other, it is based on a financial transaction. This is a give-and-take relationship. The client pays the premium and wants financial payout, the claims administrator wants to reach monthly targets. These needs do not benefit both parties mutually; they are based on the individual.

Finally, the identified issue is that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department does not manage nor implement the two-way symmetrical communication successfully and therefore long-term relationships cannot be built or maintained. This is purely about financial payout and targets being reached, which is not a sustainable relationship. The argument is that the current communication and subsequent relationship is imbalanced – based on knowledge only one party understands, leaving the other party (the client) in the dark. This therefore leads to Company X losing clients. It is also important to note that this is an industry where emotions and stress are involved. It is also important to take note that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department has not done any research on their clients to fully understand what they need and where their concerns lie. Therefore, clients struggle and, ultimately, are at the negative receiving end. However, it is clear that Company X should focus on its communication to build long-term relationships with its clients, in order to be sustainable and, ultimately, to survive. Therefore, the following section provides some suggestions in this regard:

6.6 Suggestions for Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department

From the guidelines mentioned in theory, together with the findings from the general research questions answered, the following recommendations are made to improve Company X's interpersonal two-way symmetrical communication in order to foster relationships with clients in the motor claims department:

First, research is of the essence. Research and an investigation must be undertaken to understand and identify clients' needs, perceptions and feelings. Once research has been incorporated to fully understand clients' needs, these findings must be used to create dialogue and mutual respect for clients. Once both needs are understood after research and investigation, dialogue must be created based on these needs, which decreases conflict between claims administrators and their clients. Two-way symmetrical communication is a balanced approach. Once the relationship is imbalanced, the Motor Insurance Claims Department will expect its clients to change, with no internal changes to take place. Therefore, both parties must be balanced – with both understanding each other's needs and communication must be created based on these needs. Participation and collaboration are essential in empowering both parties to both have an equal voice and impact during the claims process. Therefore, both parties are mutually on the same level, control lies with both parties and both can be empowered, especially the client who is uncertain when it comes to the insurance landscape. This, in turn, creates confidence from the client's side. With collaboration, it is important, again, that both the claims department's and its clients' needs must be met, and both parties need to work together – it must be a balanced approach with both parties having equal communication and equal input. With regard to ethical

and transparent communication, this leads directly to commitment from the clients' side, as well as a positive outcome for both parties. However, this is due to the nature of the industry, and the rules and guidelines that govern it.

Two-way symmetrical communication focuses on balance – therefore both parties understand each other's needs and want to meet those needs. Both parties want to be able to communicate any concerns or issues openly. Both parties need to care for each other and be willing to work out any conflict or issues due to the care that they have for each other. Once the relationship is imbalanced, this will inevitably create conflict, as well as relationship destruction. Therefore, clients will cancel their policy and go to the Ombudsman for Short-term Insurance. From this perspective, the main guidelines are implementing research to understand clients' needs, building dialogue and communication based on those needs, and creating two parties who are both confident in the relationship, both are continually aware of what is going on in the relationship but, most importantly, both parties are equally balanced.

Based on the relationship management strategies, it is evident that the claims administrators must communicate openly with clients and give them access to claims-related information, as well as clarity in the communication process. Clients must have a voice and an influence in the communication process, equal to the claims administrators'. It is also critical that the clients have confidence in the communication process to give their voice and this voice must be heard and understood.

Furthermore, it is recommended that Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department should focus on (1) stakeholder analysis, (2) stakeholder empowerment, and (3) training, development and monitoring of employee's performance.

6.6.1 Stakeholder analysis

It is important for Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department to launch a proper investigation into, and analysis of, its motor insurance clients. This analysis must specifically be based on the policy wording, schedule, and terms and conditions, and on what clients need during the claims process and what areas to improve on. According to Allen and Kilvington (2009:250), stakeholder analysis is mainly used to understand stakeholders' needs and interests, and to use the analysis to formulate communication based on the analysis results. It is also mentioned that stakeholder analysis is important because it is a critical tool in managing relationships and creating long-term bonds with the stakeholders.

Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must do an analysis on their clients based on the following:

- Complaints received
- Recorded telephonic conversations between clients and claims administrators
- Surveys sent to clients to understand their needs and issues with the policy wording.

Once analysis has been done, the data must be used to form the dialogue with clients and also empower the client on policy wording, which will be discussed next.

6.6.2 Stakeholder empowerment

Once the research has been completed based on the clients' needs and their issues regarding policy wording, schedule, and terms and conditions, it is important to empower and train these clients on the policy wording at the policy inception stage. According to Jeffery (2009:8), client empowerment must be based on interactiveness, encouragement, inclusiveness and preparation to change to the clients' needs. Jeffery (2009:9) further explains that the process must be followed by using the research, analysing the data, and creating a plan to engage and empower the client on the policy wording and schedule. Together with this, the main focus of empowerment is understanding the clients, building trust, regularly consulting clients and checking in with them and then, in turn, the company will respond favourably and implement decisions in the claims process based on the research and engagement from its clients. Once that is done, clients must be monitored, and the claims process must be evaluated once the clients have been empowered on the policy wording and schedule. This is therefore an ongoing process as the main need is for the dialogue to be based on the clients' needs and also giving them the opportunity to have a right to understand what they are liable for. In the process they will learn about the policy wording, have more confidence and receive the necessary attention to build a long-term relationship.

6.6.3 Training, development and monitoring of employees' performance

Once research and a proper investigation have been conducted on the clients, it is extremely important for the claims administrators to be trained on these needs. It is also vital for the claims administrators to be fully and continually involved in training, development and, continual monitoring and performance reviews based on communication with clients. Just as the clients need attention and empowerment, so do the claims administrators as they also work in an extremely high-pressured environment which, inevitably, impacts on their performance. These

claims administrators must receive continual training, monitoring and performance reviews on the following:

According to Amoah-Mensah and Darkwa (2016:35), employee training focuses on modifying an individual's behaviour through learning. Development further increases the employee's work performance and skills set.

The claims administrators of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must receive training and development based on the following:

- Understanding their clients' needs.
- Communication skills with clients.
- Crisis communication skills with clients.
- Emotional intelligence – supporting clients who are angry, frustrated and traumatised.
- Communication with clients about legal and financial information that is simple, in layman's terms and language, so that they understand – without compromising the company or exposing themselves to jeopardy.

6.6.4 Monthly monitoring

The claims administrators of Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department must go through monthly monitoring performance reviews once training has been completed.

According to Yamoah (2014:109), it is explained that the continual training and monitoring of employee performance create effective individuals and teams that focus on meeting organisational goals. The monitoring of employees' performance is an integral aspect to individual growth and development. The most important aspect is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the employees, not only based on work-related objectives, but taking into account the personal characteristics and delivery of skills (Yamoah, 2014:109).

The aforementioned recommendations show that it is extremely important to do research on clients and to do a proper analysis to understand their needs. This will form the basis of the communication and will also empower them to understand the insurance landscape. Therefore, clients will have enough confidence in the claims process. In contrast, once the claims administrators base their dialogue on the clients' needs, and receive proper training and

development, both parties will be equally in control and both parties can form a balanced relationship.

6.7 Limitations of this Study

The main shortcomings presented in this study is, first, the fact that the study was only based on one insurance company used for the case study and therefore findings cannot be generalised to other insurance companies in South Africa as part of the insurance landscape. Second, the study was also conducted only with a focus on the Motor Insurance Claims Department and no other departments in the claims division of Company X. Therefore, it only includes motor insurance clients and not clients with other insurance products, such as household or business insurance. However, the qualitative research focus of this study was to not generalise, but rather to gain in-depth insights into the interpersonal communication and relationships at Company X's Motor Insurance Claims Department.

The initial plan was to conduct quantitative questionnaire surveys with the clients, but due to the POPI Act, this was not possible and therefore no information from the clients' perspective could be included in this study. The study was only based on the perceptions of management and the claims administrators (see section 1.8).

6.8 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the shortcomings mentioned above, the following recommendations for future research are made:

First, future studies can focus on more than one insurance company, which includes all the departments in the claims department, for example, motor, household contents, VIP cover and third-party liability. This will give a broader perspective on the claims divisions of different insurance companies in South Africa and where the main communication issues lie as this is a competitive landscape in South Africa. Future studies can include both qualitative interviews with the internal staff and managers, and quantitative questionnaires sent to clients. This will create a wide set of data that can include the clients' perspective to gain insight into their perceptions, needs and thoughts. This study can then be duplicated in other insurance contexts, moving away from the claims environment and focusing on other areas such as underwriting and the inception sale stage of clients' policies.

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Annexure A: Declaration Language and Copyediting

DECLARATION: COPYEDITING

301 Princess Place
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18 March 2024

To whom it may concern
North-West University

Dear Sir/Madam,

Declaration of copyediting of MA dissertation: 'Two-way symmetrical communication management to foster relationships with clients in the South African motor insurance sector during the claim stage' by Lise-Mari Smit, orcid.org 0000-0002-5127-2837

I hereby declare that I, as a professional copyeditor with 35 years' experience in the publishing industry, primarily as a copyeditor, copyedited the above-mentioned work.

Copyediting

My copyediting included checking for completeness, spelling, grammar, syntax, style, logic, clarity, flow and register/target audience, punctuation (including the use of quotation marks), and other matters of style. I edited the citations according to the prescribed style guide and cross-checked the intext references. I also formatted the document, except for the Annexures.

Method

I used the Microsoft Word Track Changes function and submitted the electronic file to the student for her to accept the tracked changes.

Affiliation and accreditation

I am a professional copyeditor with 35 years' experience and specialised training. Among other positions, I was the Senior Editor at UNISA Press and the South African Reserve Bank, Technical Editor at Kentron, and the Acting Director: Publications Division of the Africa Institute. I have been affiliated to the following professional organisations:

Professional Editors' Guild (PEG) (South Africa): Former National Deputy Chair, Meetings Convener and Gauteng Branch Chair.

Society for Editors and Proofreaders (SfEP) (United Kingdom): Former Associate Member.

Academic and Non-Fiction Authors' Association of South Africa (ANFASA): Former Member.

English Academy of South Africa: Former Member.

I trust that the above-mentioned meets with your approval.

Yours faithfully,



(Ms) Diana Coetzee
(Copy-editor, Proofreader and Publishing Consultant)