



**A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AT
A UNIVERSITY IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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ABSTRACT

The study's primary objective was to assess the efficacy of various communication channels and routes within the organisational framework of Walter Sisulu University, Ibika Campus. It aimed at gauging how employees perceived the efficiency of these communication channels, the frequency with which employees receive adequate information for their responsibilities, and the specific type of information required for internal communication at WSU. The study employed a qualitative approach, particularly utilising online focus group interviews and document analysis as research methodologies.

The study population comprised employees at various hierarchical levels within the WSU Ibika Campus, and purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their potential to provide valuable insights into communication dynamics within the institution. The study employed thematic analysis, identifying and exploring patterns and themes within the collected data. The chosen research methods were well justified and aligned with the study's objectives, and ethical considerations were prioritised to protect participants' rights and privacy.

The study discovered that managers and full-time union representatives receive more comprehensive information than academics and operational staff, highlighting information distribution disparities within the institution. Effective communication is crucial for aligning individuals with WSU's mission and objectives, ensuring organisational unity. The study reveals a top-down communication flow limiting lower-level employee engagement and input, which may hinder strategic adaptability.

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DEDICATION

To my mother, my number one supporter through it all.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Given the critical role of organisational communication, extensive research has been conducted over the years, starting from the era of the Industrial Revolution, albeit with a focus on the social sciences (Qerimi, 2019). As the organisational landscape evolves, new and dynamic approaches are required to address the challenges and meet the organisation's goals. One of the approaches necessary is effective communication.

Effective communication is not just a tool but a necessity in achieving organisational goals. For instance, in the case of an institution like Walter Sisulu University (WSU), Ibika Campus, when facing challenges, it might be due to inaccessible information, or information that is not readily available or an overreliance on downward communication. In such cases, the organisation may need to embrace upward communication, a process where employees are encouraged to share their ideas, concerns, and feedback with their superiors, fostering a more open and collaborative work environment. Lewar et al. (2023:79) define effective communication as communication that depends on selecting the best strategy to achieve some communication goals, and in this study, it is in the context of accessibility to information, its relevance, availability, timeliness, frequency, and dissemination on the campus.

Stacho et al. (2019:19) argue that an organisation's communications strategies significantly impact its effectiveness in interactions with internal and external stakeholders. This suggests that in the context of internal stakeholders, effective communication should be a robust flow of information within the organisation in the form of continuous and open exchange of ideas, feedback, and updates among all levels of the organisation (Nautiyal, 2018).

According to Qerimi (2019:74), organisational communication is initiated at various levels, leading to the customisation of messages according to the specific needs of the different audiences. This approach can yield positive effects not only on leaders but also on employees. Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that communication

channels play a pivotal role, serving as conduits for transmitting messages and feedback between senders and receivers (Prior, 2021:67).

Another critical factor to consider is the diverse employee levels within an organisation, encompassing management, supervisors, full-time union representatives, and operational staff. This diversity is not just a factor but an essential element for ensuring the effectiveness of internal communication (Zink, 2017).

Numerous functions that are carried out in organisations make communication fundamental in delivering these functions. Power and authority are often delegated based on seniority, reinforcing acceptable behaviour through established organisational structures. Consequently, organisations are viewed as systems where each function is interdependent.

Organisational communication primarily revolves around the flow of information within an organisation, be it downward, upward, or lateral. It encompasses the influence of management styles, motivation, and leadership on communication. This study aims to critically examine organisational communication at WSU, Ibika Campus, where organisational communication is defined as encompassing communication within various organisations, such as educational institutions, government departments, or businesses. The primary focus of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness and its flow of information via different communication channels at WSU, Ibika Campus.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Walter Sisulu University (WSU) was established as a comprehensive institution in 2005 through the merger of the University of Transkei, Eastern Cape, and Border Technikons. The merger of the three institutions took place legally using the Transformation of Higher Education Act in South Africa. The merged university, WSU, offers various qualifications, including certificates, diplomas, degrees, and postgraduate programs.

The university has campuses in Mthatha, East London, Butterworth, and Queenstown. This study specifically aims to critically examine organisational

communication at WSU Butterworth Ibika Campus, particularly assessing the effectiveness of various communication flows. The examination will address the strengths and weaknesses of these flows and identify challenges arising from the absence of well-established communication channels, if any.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In recent years, the Ibika Campus has witnessed a series of student and staff unrest stemming from various issues, including financial, academic, facilities and accommodation concerns (Uleanya, 2022). There was even a point when the campus was labelled as the institution's "black sheep," as there were calls for its closure and the students relocated to other campuses. These were conflictual situations at the campus, and conflict occurred in most cases due to a breakdown in communication among stakeholders. Thus, in the case of the campus, there was a communication breakdown among its stakeholders, and this could be a poor communication flow within the university. This situation at the campus represents an organisational communication problem that calls for studies. Such study is essential as organisational communication has increasingly become a pivotal determinant of success for any institution (Usadolo 2011; Errida and Lofti 2021; Gil-Garcia et al., 2019).

Given the circumstances at the Ibika campus, as described above, it is evident that there exists a substantial information gap between campus management and various university stakeholders. While a study, such as Usadolo (2011), has addressed similar issues, there needs to be more research focusing on the critical role of organisational communication in public higher education institutions such as WSU in the Eastern Cape. Thus, the study looked at various communication flows at the institution to ascertain their effectiveness and recommend, where necessary, what needs to be done to strengthen the weaknesses identified.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is significant because it provided much-needed information on solving some of the burning communication issues at WSU, particularly at its Ibika Butterworth Campus. It is anticipated that the information gained will assist the organisation in practising appropriate communication approaches that will ensure

effective communication for this campus and other university campuses. It is expected that several stakeholders will benefit, including, among others, the employees at WSU Ibika Campus. The findings of this study could assist and contribute to the body of knowledge to help other universities in this regard.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Main research Objective

To determine the effectiveness of communication channels at WSU Ibika Campus.

This study conceptualises the effectiveness of communication in relation to the timeliness, frequency, and accessibility of information dissemination on the campus that was the focus of this study.

1.5.2 Secondary Objectives

- (a) To determine if employees of WSU receive adequate information to carry out their responsibilities.
- (b) To establish the information types, they require to carry out their responsibilities successfully.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (a) How effective are the communication channels that are used at WSU Ibika Campus?
- (b) Do employees of WSU Ibika Campus receive adequate information to carry out their responsibilities?
- (c) What information do employees from WSU Ibika Campus require to carry out their responsibilities effectively?

1.7 DELIMITATION AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research will be limited to WSU Ibika campus Butterworth. Since WSU campuses are managed autonomously, it can be inferred that each communication experience may differ from employee to employee and from campus to campus. Since the study is not a full thesis and the time element is insufficient, we included only staff members, not students, as the focus is on staff communication. Another

significant factor is that the Butterworth campus has always been the challenging one, as stated in the research problem.

1.8 LAYOUT OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One focused on the introduction and background to the study, which included research objectives, questions, and the significance of the research.

Chapter Two contains a detailed review of the relevant literature, with a discussion on internal communication, and Chapter Three focuses on the methodology used in the study.

Analysis and the presentation of the data are done in Chapter Four. Chapter Five provides the conclusions drawn from this study and summarises the findings, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outlook on the available literature on organisational communication. The definition of organisational communication is provided. A literature review of definitions of organisational communication and related topics such as internal communication, external communication, and personal communication is provided. Different meanings are examined, demonstrating the various angles from which researchers approach communication, followed by a discussion of the theoretical approach used in this study.

2.2 Organisational Communication in Context

Organisations are entrusted with a multitude of responsibilities, as noted by Alabi (2022), Alyami (2022), and Arie and Aktif (2020). They require diverse financial, technological, and human resources to fulfil these responsibilities. Of these, human resources are particularly valuable, highlighting that an organisation's success is closely tied to the effectiveness and efficiency of its personnel. Belmejdoub (2017:11), Tanwar, (2024:42), and Nwokedi et al. (2025:148) further emphasise the importance of employees' awareness of their roles and responsibilities. In this context, organisational communication plays a crucial role in coordinating the numerous activities within the organisation, enabling it to achieve its objectives and goals.

In a global landscape, where organisations must compete on financial, cost-efficiency, and quality fronts, strategic communication becomes increasingly important, as highlighted by Widyanti (2020:17). In this regard, WSU needs as an organisation to translate the organisation's action plans into clearly articulated goals. Every organisation aspires to outperform its competitors while ensuring efficient resource utilisation, as observed by Gupta, Pandla, and Nautiyal (2022). Due to the intricacies of achieving these goals, strategic communication is crucial in effectively communicating organisational standards to personnel. This focus on clear goals should align the workforce with the organisational objectives and understand their role in achieving them.

Organisations must continually evolve to meet the demands of a society that values immediacy, quick responses, and just-in-time strategies. The increasing need for

flexible working conditions requires new structures, which necessitate more dynamic management processes. As organisational communication occurs within an organisation's context, defining and exploring its characteristics and responsibilities is imperative. The diverse perspectives considered here form the basis for a critical review of WSU's organisational communication.

2.2.1 Communication in organisations

Organisational communication is the exchange of information between two or more persons or groups that have developed a shared understanding and feelings (Widyanti, 2020; De Nobile and Bilgin, 2022). According to Al-Kurdi et al. (2020:217), Rwafa-Ponela et al. (2021:46), and Sadia (2020:37), organisational communication is the exchange of information and the transfer of meaning between a few persons or groups located inside an organisation. Al-Kurdi et al. (2020) continue to add that employee commitment is influenced by organisational communication, which has a significant impact on employee performance and leads to increased productivity since employees know what is expected of them.

Emwinromwankhoe and Ekhareafo (2022:67) also suggest that it is the process of sharing thoughts, ideas, emotions, and feelings and the centre around which the organisation revolves. Every successful organisation relies on efficient organisational communication. Emwinromwankhoe and Ekhareafo (2022) continue that every organisation is established to achieve goals and objectives, which are usually specified in the organisation's vision and mission statement. Such vision and mission statements are shared through communication to assist the smooth functioning of the relationship between employees and management on the one hand and to contribute to achieving organisational goals on the other.

Organisational communication refers to how employees in a company engage, relate, and collaborate (Verčič, 2021); Nandan, 2020). Organisational communication relates to how employees exchange their thoughts and views with management members and allows management to communicate defined policies to employees regularly. As a result, effective organisational communication leads to increased productivity, motivation, and trust among management and staff (Huettermann and Bruch, 2019; Kaya et al., 2020).

Burton et al. (2019:85) and Lehtinen and Aaltonen (2020:369) postulate that organisational communication is a critical component of effective teamwork in the workplace. It can be compared to blood flow in the human body; just as the human body requires blood to flow to various regions to function, so does an organisation; for it to work correctly, it involves communication among management and staff. According to Burton et al. (2019:85), communication is the glue that holds an organisation's management and employees together.

Organisational communication, according to Ogundipe et al. (2020:91), Saayeng (2020:35) as well as Mohammed (2022:7), is the transmission of both internal and formal information between top hierarchy members and employees inside a company.

Equally, Edewor (2023:24), Tamam et (2020:48) refers to organisation as the process by which employees in an organisation acquire information to form opinions, make decisions, and align themselves with the organisation's goals and objectives. These definitions point to the same thing: organisational communication transfers responsibilities, ideas, rules, and procedures to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives.

Organisational communication aims to achieve a specific purpose or objective, whether informing the entire workforce about their jobs, the organisation's rules, and programmes or creating a community within the organisation (Basyir et al. 2020). Organisational communication is invariably the key to a company's success. Every organisation can develop or exist with regular and effective communication.

Organisational communication can also include gossip, a form of informal communication in the workplace (Shakaruddin et al., 2021:130). Gossip, in this context, is not about spreading rumours or harmful information but rather about sharing immediate knowledge about a person who is usually absent. It can bring about favourable outcomes when used correctly or positively. Gossip is an evaluative social conversation that occurs in social networks, and it can be seen as casual discussions about diverse topics, particularly during break periods, such as policy changes, employment vacancies, or customer feedback. Informal communication,

including gossip, is universally recognised as one of the mechanisms for disseminating information.

Safitri (2021:349), Stefania, and Spiridnova (2022:112) also added that organisational communication can also be employed in conflict resolution when people have opposing viewpoints on problems, resulting in conflict. Organisational communication can be understood as developing and exchanging messages in an interdependent relationship, where the messages from one party are dependent on the messages from the other party, to overcome an unpredictable environment in conflict management. When dealing with conflict, organisational communication must consider message interdependence, connections, processes, the environment, uncertainty, and how it addresses these issues. In this light, good organisational communication is critical, as organisations exist because of communication.

According to Li et al. (2022:254), De Nobile and Bilgin (2022:395), and Mmutle (2022:46), other tasks related to organisational communication include completing tasks related to employee roles and responsibilities, adjusting employees to changes through creativity strategies, completing tasks by maintaining policies and regulations that support continuous operational processes, and developing human relationships through messages that lead to attitude change, moral fulfilment, and job satisfaction.

Organisational communication can also influence organisational behaviour and motivate employees to work in a favourable atmosphere (Anggraini, 2022). Anggrani (2022) postulates that communication may be used to explain organisational tension, discontent, and joy and alleviate employees. Yue et al. (2021:169) also add that communication can channel information about each other's major tasks and functions. The importance of organisational communication in resolving challenges, especially conflict, is emphasised. With the correct techniques, communication can fix everything.

Paais and Pattiruhu (2020:577) also mention that organisational communication can be constructive when settling problems between different parties, such as management and employees. Organisational communication serves as informative, regulatory, persuasive, and integrative communication, and is always the most effective in resolving workplace conflict.

According to Zink (2017:7), Byrne et al. (2019:113), as well as Purcell and Purcell (2019:113), organisational interactions can sometimes be successful or frustrated by incompetence; these scholars maintain that ineffective organisational communication can result in organisations failing to reach their goals, hence the need for managers and employees to understand the significance of organisational communication. Therefore, managerial proficiency is seriously required for an effective and efficient communication system, which assists in eliminating communication barriers and helps managers take preventive steps before problems (Ting et al., 2017).

Shan and Shaid (2019), Aftab et al. (2022:367), and Komal et al. (2020:125) all argue that most businesses neglect organisational communication and focus on business operations such as costs, competition, customer service and neglect communication, and yet communication can make or break an organisation.

The lack of agreement in many definitions demonstrates the complexity of organisational communication. Although some theorists consider it to have a coordination function, some examine organisational communication from the standpoint of the receiver and sender (DeVito et al. 2019). In contrast, others focus on the content of the communication. None of the definitions mentions ethical considerations or the intricacies that should be considered when communication happens.

According to de Judge (2018:67) and Indiyati et al. (2021:10), organisational communication is a complex system of information flow, instructions, wishes, and references comprising two partially complementary systems: formal and informal communication networks. Managers of businesses worldwide have evolved several internal communication methods (Bahamdin, 2022). This could be upward (from staff to management), downward (from management to staff), or sideways (from management to management or staff to staff) (Samson, 2021). Some companies communicate via letters and emails, while others prefer internal memos. Some businesses use social media, while others employ a combination of strategies. Whatever type of communication is chosen will undoubtedly impact employee performance, a key area of interest for scholars, students, and professionals in organisational behaviour and communication.

According to Khan (2020:34) and Ekiabor (2018:12), communication is a complex process, and organisational communication is particularly complex. Fielding's (2014) perspective on organisational communication is used to critically review organisational communication. His perspective is particularly interested in the flow of information within an organisation, which can be upward (from staff to management), downward (from management to staff), or sideways (from management to management or staff to staff). This flow of information is influenced by managerial styles, leadership, and motivation and has implications for the overall communication process.

2.3 Importance of Organisational Communication

Communication is vital to any organisation (Salvatori et al. 2021:4482). Hence, organisations must have a comprehensive policy and strategy for communicating with employees and other stakeholders to ensure their success. This underscores the need for strategic planning and foresight in managing organisational communication.

In their seminal work, Vongvisitsin and Wong (2021:86) also add that communication must also be seen as organising, wherein organisations, through communication, change their structures and relationships inside the organisations by implementing communication strategies and implementing plans to change and influence economic pressures. These economic pressures can include market competition, financial constraints, and the need for innovation, which can significantly impact an organisation's communication strategies and structures.

Organisations are goal-oriented, meaning people work towards their organisation's goals (Mersham and Skinner, 2016; Clare et al., 2019). People in these roles are motivated by a variety of personal and organisational goals, which include, among other things, promotions, salaries, and teamwork, and roles are allocated according to various levels. Some of the goals influence the type of channels used in an organisation.

2.4 Channels of communication in organisations

In modern organisations, effective internal communication centres on selecting appropriate messages and utilising diverse communication channels that cater to employees' expectations (Verčič, and Špoljarić 2020). Over recent years,

technological advancements have significantly reshaped internal communication landscapes, expanding the selection of available channels from traditional face-to-face interactions to printed media, electronic platforms, and social networks. The effectiveness of these channels depends on their acceptance and suitability among employees, influencing how organisational messages are perceived (Wuersch, Neher, and Peter, 2023).

Choosing the proper communication methods for an organisation is complex and crucial. It involves weighing factors such as different channels' complexities, formalities, costs, and capacities. These factors include employee preferences, resource availability, data transmission speed, sender objectives, and message characteristics. According to Dévényi (2016:122), the choice of communication channels within an organisation is influenced by numerous factors, including organisational size, cultural dynamics, technological infrastructure, and the proficiency of employees.

Each communication medium offers distinct levels of engagement and dictates the speed and scale of information dissemination. Channels range from traditional printed publications like newsletters to more interactive platforms like internal social networks, reflecting a spectrum from one-way dissemination to interactive engagement.

Authors like Tkalac Verčič et al. (2021) categorise internal communication channels into two primary types: written channels encompassing various forms like emails, websites, blogs, and intranet systems and oral channels including face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, and video conferences. The effectiveness of these channels is crucially dependent on aligning organisational objectives with employees' communication needs and preferences. This alignment is the key to ensuring that messages are received and understood effectively, underscoring its significance in internal communication.

2.5 Flow of communication in organisations

Organisational tasks are sometimes allocated according to official positions (Stacho et al., 2019; Mersham and Skinner, 2016). This means employees will have roles to play according to their positions. Some structures guide relationships among

departments. For example, the engineering department is expected to carry out engineering-related duties, thus separating tasks.

Vongvisitsin and Wong (2021:1043) postulate that the flow of information in organisations is sometimes assisted by structures leading to effective communication and ensuring formal communication channels are followed. The same structures can also become a barrier to communication as they may complement the flow of communication. Thus, organisational structures must provide stability, regularity, and predictability (Mersham and Skinner 2016).

Those in authoritative positions help employees work together by giving instructions. These positions are stipulated in the organisation's organograms. The organograms ensure formal communication patterns, ensuring information flows downward and upward.

Organisational communication occurs upward, downward, and horizontally. According to Adanalwo and Rugbeer (2019), upward communication flows from employees to management and can be in the form of suggestions, complaints, or the sharing of ideas (Adanalwo and Rugbeer 2019:27-86). They add that a downward communication flow from management to lower-level employees can occur through policies, instructions, rules, and regulations. Horizontal communication is when employees at the same level meet and share ideas or discuss matters of mutual interest among themselves and share information.

Fielding and du Plooy-Cilliers (2014:57) state that organisational communication occurs in three directions: downward communication from management to lower levels of the organisation hierarchy, upward communication from lower levels to management, and horizontal communication among employees working on the same level. Shanafelt (2021:112) agrees with Fielding that communication flows down, up, and across from the boardroom to the shop floor and between departmental supervisors or sales assistants. It also travels diagonally across departments at various levels.

Shanafelt (2021) argues that vertical communication is the primary route for transmitting directives, instructions, and policies from top decision-makers down

through the organisation to the people who will put them into action at various levels. At the same time, vertical communication also refers to the pathways that ideas, proposals, criticism, and questions travel up from the shop floor or middle management.

2.6.1 Upward communication

Through upward communication, information can travel from a subordinate to a supervisor (Campion, 2017; Dobrescu, 2022). The subordinate will send queries and suggestions on accomplishing the organisation's goals through the upward communication channel.

Upward communication provides feedback on employee attitudes and feelings (Gräf et al., 2018). It offers suggestions for enhanced procedures and tactics, as well as fresh ideas and information about the effectiveness of the downward communication system. It also serves as a monitoring mechanism by providing information about the services and goal attainment. If they are not on track to meet the goal, the information about goal achievement will warn the personnel, allowing them to adjust. The channel can request help and support (Gräf et al. 2018).

Upward communication also encourages airing employee issues before they become severe and out of hand, allowing for high employee engagement with the company and their jobs. For example, at WSU, some departments encourage employees to share their thoughts and suggestions and speak out when they see concerns, such as wellness centres. As a result, there are fewer complications because problems can be identified before they become serious. As a result, leveraging upward communication aids managers in detecting early warning signs (Simamora et al., 2016; Iqbal et al., 2015; Ufuophu-Biri and Ayewuti, 2022).

Upward communication, as defined by Kurniawan (2018:14), is a process that provides relevant information for organisational leaders to make decisions. This process helps employees understand the messaging and plays a crucial role in encouraging open and honest communication. More importantly, it fosters a sense of loyalty among the employees, making them feel valued and integral to the company's success.

While upward communication has advantages, May (2023:23) and Fielding (2014:30-45) note its issues or hurdles. They argue that some managers view upward channels as time-consuming and assume they know better than junior employees; hence, they do not see the need to keep these channels open. Employees may also struggle to engage at this level since they are accustomed to being told what to do and receiving information rather than providing it.

According to Daniel (2020:19), there are three obstacles to upward communication:

Fear: Employees fear being victimised if they express an opinion that differs from their superiors, which has become one of the obstacles. As a result, people are scared to speak up or to be the voice of the oppressed.

Filters: Employees frequently fear that their ideas and concerns will be changed when they are passed up the chain of command from their immediate managers. In other circumstances, the supervisor may adjust the idea or suggestion because it does not speak the organisation's language or is different from what they want to hear.

Time: Many managers think they do not have enough time to listen to their personnel. Managers who always seem busy when approached by employees with ideas or suggestions, neglecting and irritating that employee, are a good illustration of this.

Upward communication necessitates trust, especially when employees fear being punished or chastised for their contributions (Hee et al., 2019). Managers may encourage, reinforce, and reward upward communication by being alert and providing feedback when necessary. Managers who take the time to listen and detect the advanced indications supplied by upward communication can help their organisations avoid many difficulties.

2.6.2 Downward communication

According to Markos and Gossaye (2021:47), downward communication occurs when information moves from a position of higher authority to one of lesser authority. Fielding and du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) provide the following examples to demonstrate the function of downward communication:

Job Instruction: Communication supplies employees with the necessary information to execute their jobs. It specifies exactly what is expected of the individual. What is the person's power and responsibilities, and what marks an excellent job? A schedule is incorporated into this process, and penalties are applied for non-compliance.

Job rationale: Job rationale information allows employees to understand better their function in the organisation and how their job relates to that of other employees. Most employees would question the importance of numerous job instructions if they did not have this understanding, and they would become demotivated by the little chores they are assigned. When an employee is hired at WSU, the job rationale is given to them to meet the job's expectations.

Procedures, policies, and Practices are essential in orienting employees to the corporate culture. These processes start at the employee's orientation when the policies and procedures are introduced. The department's direct line manager and informal groups are the most common sources of information on on-the-job behaviours. WSU is governed by policies and procedures, which are conveyed to all employees by their line managers.

Performance feedback: The importance of performance feedback in an employee's career progression cannot be overstated. Quarterly assessments describe how the employee performs against the standards, the person's flaws, career potential, and what training the employee will require. Line supervisors receive feedback, which is subsequently communicated to the employee.

Mission and Goals: Many employees are unaware of the organisation's mission and how they might contribute meaningfully to attaining it. The organisation's mission, as well as how the organisation intends to achieve it, must be articulated. WSU's objective, for example, is to react to society's demands in ethical, scholarly, sustainable, and entrepreneurial ways while producing future-ready graduates. Staff must embrace this mission and endeavour to preserve it.

Methods of downward communication: Downward communication methods, according to Fielding and du Plooy-Cilliers (2014:30-45), Enwereji, and Uwizeyimana

(2019:195), Van der Walt (2016), are oral and written. Immediacy is a benefit of oral or face-to-face communication. Immediate inquiries can be made to establish if there is any ambiguity in the communication. Employees are more likely to believe the information and pay attention to any personal information they get.

According to Enwereji and Uwizeyimana (2019:195), the face-to-face medium, which includes group discussions, speeches, presentations, and videotapes, is said to transmit the executive's human side and the cues of personal interest, caring, and trust filtered out of a written document. The main issue is that the manager must schedule time to deliver all communications simultaneously.

Written downward communication has a higher formality and permanency, which formal communication frequently requires. Most communication is done in writing because it is based on instructions and policies.

Information on how to execute the job, the rationale for doing the task, organisational norms and procedures, employee performance, and information to establish a sense of mission are all common information sent from superiors to subordinates.

2.6.3 Lateral /Horizontal communication

According to Mersham and Skinner (2016), exchanging messages between equals is called lateral/horizontal communication. It could be manager-to-manager or employee-to-employee communication. According to Daniels et al. (2021:40), lateral communication is the most common and routine communication between people who function at the same or similar level.

Horizontal/Lateral communication happens at all levels of an organisation and is characterised by improved frankness and ease of communication among groups of comparable size. As indicated by Daniels et al. (2021), horizontal communication is more relevant at the lower levels of an organisation, where it is intended to focus on issue-solving and workflow coordination, as well as task coordination, information exchange, and dispute resolution.

Horizontal communication has several advantages, including developing the organisation's social support system and a sense of belonging. Jackson and Jackson

(2019:167) agree that good relationships are a prerequisite for successful communication in the workplace. Horizontal communication allows peers to share information regularly by skipping the time-consuming vertical channels. It makes problem-solving more accessible and will enable employees and units to share knowledge. It also saves time by not reinventing the wheel whenever new personnel encounter an old issue. Horizontal communication also includes interdependent conflict resolution caused by misunderstandings, communication distortions, and a lack of understanding.

2.6.4 Diagonal communication

According to Setiawati (2019:140), diagonal communication happens between workers at different levels of the organisational hierarchy and in separate departments. Suppose a member of the communication department requires a cheque from the finance department. In such cases, the communication department's personnel must establish relationships with the finance department's workers, regardless of employment level or grade.

Latuhu (2022:97) states that diagonal communication reinforces open communication and participatory management philosophy. It also enhances the concept of knowledge authority rather than positional authority. By avoiding sending messages up and down consecutive layers of the organisational hierarchy, diagonal communication in an organisation enhances the smooth operation of interdepartmental coordination and saves time and money.

Latuhu (2022:112) postulates that sometimes, a service is necessary, but there is no evident line of authority by which it should be provided. As a result, diagonal communication is primarily reliant on collaboration and goodwill, which the skilled communicator will have carefully nurtured through cordial greetings or brief conversations. For example, a person from the financial department speaks with someone from the customer service division to acquire first-hand information on client claims. In this case, there is no need to contact the supervisor or manager, and the two employees converse without regard for their rank. Cross-channel communication is the term used for this.

Diagonal communication occurs across levels of authority rather than along traditional lines of power (Daniels et al., 2014). Bypassing other layers of authority is one of the difficulties with diagonal communication. This indicates that a manager who is intended to be the department's head can be bypassed by an administrator. The bypassing of authority may anger managers who adhere to solid authority lines.

2.7 Categories of Organisational Communication

Internal communication, external communication, and personal communication are the three types of communication identified by Tkalac Verčič, Galić, and Žnidar (2021:232) and Kim (2017:10) as being specific to the organisational setting.

2.7.1 Internal communication.

Internal communication refers to structured communication within a company that is directly tied to the company's objectives (Jusilla, 2022). These communication structures imply that the communication process is integral to the organisation's operations (Ophelia and Hidayat, 2021; Awudi, 2021; Aklorbortu, 2020). Within these frameworks, communication flows to guarantee that organisational goals are realised.

Internal communication is critical in shaping strategic relationships and interactions within an organisation, influencing its effectiveness. It is about transmitting information and managing these relationships to align with organisational goals and values. According to Sutton et al. (2024:128), effective internal communication fosters collaboration across all levels, ensuring employees are well-informed, motivated, and aligned with the organisation's mission.

Sutton et al. (2022:95) and Araujo and Miranda (2021:107) assert that by facilitating clear and timely exchanges, internal communication helps create a culture of openness and transparency, essential for building organisational commitment and enhancing performance.

Moreover, well-executed internal communication can profoundly impact several critical areas of organisational success. It enhances corporate reputation by creating consistent messaging that reflects the organisation's internal and external values. It also facilitates knowledge sharing, empowering employees to make informed

decisions and contribute to problem-solving efforts (Aziz, 2021) and (Lee and Yue, 2020).

Employees who feel trusted and well-informed are likelier to develop a sense of belonging and loyalty to the organisation. Additionally, effective communication increases employee engagement, fostering a workplace environment where individuals feel connected to the company's goals and are motivated to contribute to its success (Mbhele and De Beer, 2021). In this way, internal communication is vital for driving organisational performance, shaping culture, and achieving superior business outcomes.

2.7.2 External communication

The communication that an organisation establishes with regulatory and governmental bodies and the public is called external communication (Tankosic et al., 2017; Heath, 2020). According to Leahy, Tech, and Arrigoni (2022:89), external communication is structured to attain the organisation's objectives. It is conducted with entities not part of the organisation. External communication refers to the interaction between an organisation and entities outside its immediate structure, including regulatory bodies, government agencies, the public, customers, and other stakeholders.

Mmutle (2022:46) states that this communication is crucial for maintaining compliance with legal and industry standards and fostering relationships that can influence the organisation's long-term success. Through effective communication with regulatory and governmental bodies, organisations can ensure that they adhere to regulations, gain necessary approvals, and stay informed about changes in laws and policies that may affect their operations. This helps mitigate risks and demonstrate the organisation's commitment to ethical practices and legal responsibilities.

Lee et al. (2021:1526) and Kim (2020:47) postulate that beyond regulatory communication, external communication is vital in shaping public perception and building a positive corporate image. Engaging with the public through marketing, public relations, and corporate social responsibility initiatives allows organisations to manage their reputation and establish trust.

Transparent and consistent communication with customers, investors, and the media helps convey the organisation's values, products, and services in a way that resonates with external audiences. This, in turn, enhances brand loyalty and creates a competitive advantage. In times of crisis, solid external communication becomes even more critical, as it enables organisations to provide clear, timely updates that can safeguard their reputation and manage public sentiment.

Furthermore, external communication fosters collaboration and partnerships with other businesses, non-governmental organisations, and industry leaders. Organisations can identify opportunities for innovation, growth, and shared goals by engaging in dialogue with external stakeholders (Kalitiainen et al., 2020) and (Dahlman and Heide, 2020). Strategic external communication helps build networks supporting an organisation's mission, enhancing its influence in the marketplace, and contributing to broader industry developments.

Anderson (2019:60) also adds that effective external communication allows organisations to expand their reach and strengthen their position within their industry and community through formal negotiations, public relations campaigns, or partnerships.

2.7.3 Personal communication

According to White, Vanc, and Stafford (2020:65-84), personal communication is the unintentional sharing of information and feelings that occurs whenever people meet. Conversations could be about work or an organisation, or they could be purely social.

White (2016) states that three kinds of communication in an organisation confirm the control and constraints of communication in an organisation. Personal communication is an accident, whereas organisational communication revolves around duties and objectives.

2.8. SYSTEMS THEORY IN ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The open system theory can be applied in this study as it is based on the view that an organisation is a system of behaviour composed of subsystems with definite limits.

Parsons (2017:210) maintains that a system is a set of units with some structure that is differentiated from the environment boundary. This theory holds that there is no best way to communicate within an organisation. Instead, the structure and communication depend on such similarities in positions, the people's needs and expectations, and the organisation's goals and tasks (Batool et al. 2022).

In this case, the communication flow can also be determined by the system boundary, within which the subsystem interacts with other subsystems, and individual behaviours depend on their relationships to various subsystems. Broom and Sha (2013) developed an open system diagram to highlight the importance of communication within an organisation.

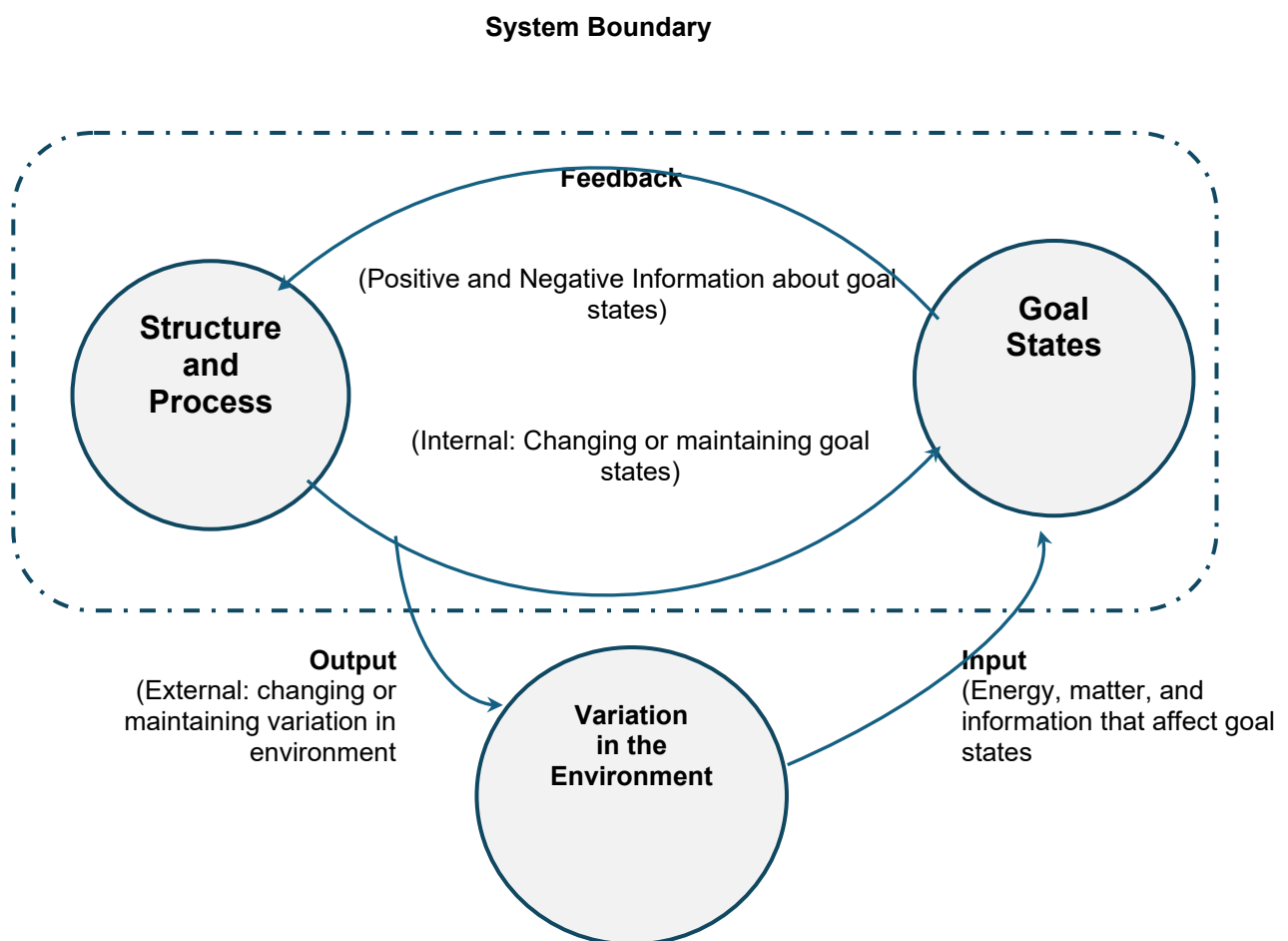


Figure 1: Systems Theory in Organisations

Source: Broom and Sha in Cutlip and Center (2013:193)

This system continually adjusts to maintain the state of equilibrium or balance. As shown in Figure 1, this is the open system's cyclical nature, interchanging/

interacting, modifying, and adapting to its environment essential for maintenance and change, of which the goal is the system's survival. This system continually adjusts to maintain the state of equilibrium or balance. The system adjusts its structures and processes by feeding information (output) to the environment; this information is returned in the form of Input (information) to assist in achieving the organisation's goal. This information is fed (feedback) back to the structure for adjustments so the organisation can adapt to the changing environment.

In line with the above illustration, Batool et al. (2022:210) note that when managers communicate, information flows downwards as they issue commands, and upward communication typically forms employee suggestions.

An open system has input and output flows, representing exchanges of matter, energy, or information with their surroundings, and their borders are permeable to energy and mass (Montouri, 2011). These interactions take the form of information energy into and out of the system boundary. An open system can also be called a constant volume or flow system. Open systems theory postulates that the environment strongly influences the organisation. This results from other organisations that exert various economic, political, or social forces in the environment.

The systems theory advises that managers must constantly monitor the environment to make the necessary changes to reach their intended goals and actions within the environment and maintain a state of equilibrium for their stakeholders and the public.

The systems theory is also a helpful way for managers to understand the relationship between an organisation and its public and the role of communication within an organisation. The open system's ability to adapt to environmental changes is its most distinguishing characteristic, and it is responsive and sensitive to environmental inputs.

Systems theory provides a framework for reconciling an organisation's goal with the expectations of society and its public (Booth et al. 2021). Leveson (2020:2021) adds that systems theory is based on two-way communication and mutual understanding

in an organisation. He argues that this theory underpins organisational communication and reflects the commonality of the flow of communication.

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter encompasses a comprehensive literature review, shedding light on various scholars' perspectives regarding organisational communication. To underscore the paramount significance of communication within an organisation and to gain a clear understanding of the presented definition of organisational communication, the study started by first defining an organisation. Furthermore, it delved into the definitions of internal, external, and personal communication within organisational communication. Throughout the discussion, it became evident that the organisational structure significantly influences the communication dynamics between management and employees.

The chapter delved into various forms of organisational structures, followed by an exploration of communication flow directions and methods. These encompass formal channels, including downward, upward, horizontal, and diagonal flows, and informal communication channels like the grapevine.

Additionally, the chapter explored organisational theory and its implications for communication practices. The chapter highlighted theories like systems theory, elucidating how they impact information flow within organisations.

The subsequent chapter will provide a detailed account of the methods employed for this investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section offers a comprehensive discussion of the study's proposed research strategy, and the methods and techniques used to gather data for subsequent analysis. The section begins with a discussion of the research paradigm, research design and qualitative research approach, followed by an in-depth explanation and justification of using focus group discussions and document analysis as research methods.

The last section outlines how the data is analysed and discusses the ethical considerations.

3.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM: INTERPRETIVISM

According to the interpretive paradigm, the researchers' values are present throughout the research process.

Sanchez et al. (2022:155) postulate that the interpretivist view is based on the idea that reality is socially constituted and constantly changing. As a result, our knowledge is constantly negotiated within cultures, social contexts, and interpersonal relationships. From an interpretive point of view, considering the research question carefully and conducting the inquiry respectfully, being aware of the decisions and interpretations the researcher makes throughout the inquiry process, and demonstrating that they are taking responsibility for those decisions are important.

Interpretivism is frequently connected to qualitative research. The interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to learn more about a given social situation by looking for experiences and perceptions of it (Cresswell, 2013).

Given the assumptions and ideas of the interpretive researcher, the interpretative paradigm, as mentioned above, would allow researchers to consider various things, such as behavioural aspects, based on participants' experiences (Pulla and Carter, 2018).

The interpretive viewpoint invites the researcher to investigate the significance of how people behave, interact, and live in organisations. In doing so, the researcher aims to create a comprehensive subjective insight of employees at the WSU Ibika campus.

3.3 METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE APPROACH

According to Busetto et al. (2020:2), the study of the nature of phenomena" is the definition of qualitative research. It includes "their quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear, or the perspectives from which they can be perceived. Still, it does not include "their range, frequency, and place in an objectively determined chain of cause and effect. The researcher chose this method because it is suitable for this study, as we will be using qualitative interviews, and it is not complex and deals with subjects in their natural context.

Qualitative research, known for its ability to delve into meaning, is a better fit for critical or interpretive thinking concerned with the social construction of reality (Hamilton and Finley, 2019; Bolin et al., 2023; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Qualitative methodologies such as focus group interviews and document analysis investigate communication as individuals experience it, not as something linear and logical but as something typically open, complex, and human (Gerring, 2017).

Informants supply data and understand it in qualitative investigations, such as in interviews, where researchers probe and encourage informants to talk about what something means to them.

Most of the qualitative research is conducted in people's natural contexts, such as where they socialise, their offices, public gatherings, events, or even their homes. This allows researchers to monitor how people conduct daily communication and interaction activities and examines how communication works in society (Lefèvre et al., 2019; Hitchings and Latham, 2020). This is precisely the goal of this study, in which we interviewed individuals at their workplaces or private spaces. This made it possible to analyse the findings from an interpretive standpoint. People differ in many ways, impacting how they produce and perceive meaning in communication (Torelli et al., 2020).

On the other hand, quantitative research applies statistical, computational, and mathematical approaches to collect observable data to answer a research question (Rahman, 2020; Perry, 2023). Quantitative research focuses on measurable numerical relationships, and qualitative research focuses on opinions, concepts, qualities, and descriptions.

Gray et al. (2020:1292) note that because the research looks at people's opinions, their focus on numbers could be a limiting issue. As a result, the researcher chose qualitative research in this study as a quantitative approach would have resulted in missing more prominent themes and connections in the context of this study. In addition, to overlook crucial information that would aid the investigation by focusing entirely on numbers, a qualitative research approach was chosen for this study.

O'Neil (2020), Jyotsna and Prakash Sai (2023), Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Oktaviani and Mandasari (2020) agree that there are more technical hurdles in setting up quantitative research because it takes more complex tools for data processing and thus adds bias to your findings. According to Vromen (2018:237), most researchers believe the quantitative approach is more credible than the qualitative approach. However, this can lead to bias because the quantitative approach is more deductive and relies on a hypothesis identified before the research begins.

3.3.1 Target population

Making up this study's population are the 408 WSU Ibika Campus employees from the different faculties, such as the library, the directorate of learning and teaching, facilities, and student affairs. From this population of employees, sampling was done as explained below.

3.3.2. Sampling

The study's sample technique was purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on their potential to elucidate a given subject, concept, or phenomenon (Douglas, 2022; Maestriperi et al., 2019; Zainal et al., 2023.). It is a qualitative research technique for identifying and selecting information-rich cases relevant to the phenomenon of interest to efficiently use limited resources (Staller, 2021; Luciani et al., 2019). Purposive sampling, according to Sukmawati et

al. (2023:140), Adella and Ilyas (2022:97), and Putri (2020:12), is the method of picking a sample by taking a subject that is not based on the level or region but rather on the specific objective.

The primary purpose of purposive sampling is to focus on specific population characteristics that are of interest to answer your research questions effectively. This study chose the purposive sampling approach; it offers the most reachable information. The researcher chose the sample depending on what he believed was relevant to the study.

Sukmawati (2023:124) states that it is a non-probability sample, and researchers that use this type of sampling method rely on their experience, ingenuity, and previous research findings to purposefully obtain units of analysis in such a way that the sample will be regarded as representative of the relevant population.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 Focus group discussions

Krueger and Casey (2014:16), Nyumba et al. (2018:32), and Plummer (2017:32) state that a focus group is a particular type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures. It comprised seven to ten participants selected because they have specific characteristics related to the topic. A focus group was selected from employees of WSU who share the same environment, rules, and procedures. They all, in one way or another, experience some form of communication relating to the organisation and their jobs.

The focus group discussion approach was used for this study because it is cost-effective, and participants perceive the group as a social unit which shares the same experiences (Santos et al., 2020). The groups were made up of employees from both non-academic and academic staff. Mishra (2016:5), Krueger and Casey (2014:16) and Creswell and Creswell (2018:179) also add that focus group discussions work because they tap into human tendencies.

As a product of an environment, people are influenced by others around them Harvey et al. (2023). Other people's opinions can be listened to and shared in a focus group rather than individually. The format allows the facilitator to probe for more information

and seek clarity (Kim, 2022). The focus group was conducted online due to issues with participants' availability and time constraints. Through the MS Teams platform, the participants joined the focus group remotely from the comfort of their homes or offices. The popularity of online focus groups has grown in recent years because of technological advancements and rising internet usage (Dayan and Yuksel-Kaptanoglu, 2021; Gill and Baillie, 2018; Maes and Weldy, 2018).

According to Lobe and Morgan (2021:301) and Jones et al. (2022:160), online focus groups are used by researchers and organisations to examine a range of subjects, including customer behaviour, product feedback, societal issues, and user experience. Online focus group participants can participate in conversations, respond to questions, and express their thoughts, offering insightful qualitative data for analysis.

Conducting focus groups online has many potential benefits, such as less travel for participants and the ability to include geographically dispersed participants (Gordon et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022). However, some researchers have concerns about using online methods, such as data security, logistics, and the depth and quality of the collected data (Richard et al., 2020).

3.4.2 Document analysis

The data analysed in this study was from documents that were sourced from the communication strategy, annual reports, organisational structure, news releases, official documents, implementation documents, legal documents, scholarly documents, media communication, memos, posters, brochures, and any other documents containing the strategies used in organisational communication at WSU Ibika campus.

Documents are an incredibly significant source of data when conducting qualitative research. Documents are physical or virtual artefacts designed by creators for users to function within a particular setting (Davie and Wyatt, 2021; Warshaw and Upton, 2018; Karppinen and Moe, 2019). These authors agree that documents can be used in several ways throughout the research process, including the research background and refining of the research questions.

According to Dalglish et al. (2020:1424) and Andrade et al. (2018:535), formal written documents are critical characteristics of the bureaucracies by which society functions. Document analysis is one of the most powerful and commonly used research methods (Dalglish et al., 2020). Morgan (2022:27) defines document analysis as a systematic procedure of reviewing and evaluating documents to provide context, generate questions, supplement other types of research data, track changes over time and corroborate other sources.

Documents as a source of data collection involves skimming documents to get overviews and then reading to identify relevant information for analysing and finally interpreting the body of documents. Armstrong (2020:33) adds that qualitative research offers support and direction for conducting document analysis. Rigorous document analysis assisted in understanding content processes and discourse around communication. This enhanced other research methods, such as online focus group interviews, supporting the information acquired during the interviews (Wood et al., 2020).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data was kept confidential, anonymity was guaranteed, and all participants were referred to as speaker/participant 1,2 or 3. Data analysis is meant to draw logical references from the text or image data collected. Creswell (2018:179) and (Lochmiller, (2021:230) believe that various generic steps involve data analysis, which involves organising and preparing the data for analysis, reading all the data, and coding the information into categories. The coding process generates a description of the setting or themes/ categories of people for analysis (Mihás, 2019; Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis (TA) was used as the data analysis for this study as it is frequently used in qualitative research designs. The focus group interviews were conducted on an Online platform (Teams). The online platform allowed the researcher to record the session and transcribe the data simultaneously to be ready for reading and listening to the recording. All participants consented to the recording and were informed that the session was recorded. This recorded data made it easy to organise as it was already recorded and transcribed, and all the researcher did was read the transcript and listen to the recording repeatedly to form themes. These themes were merged with all the data and ready for translation and interpretation

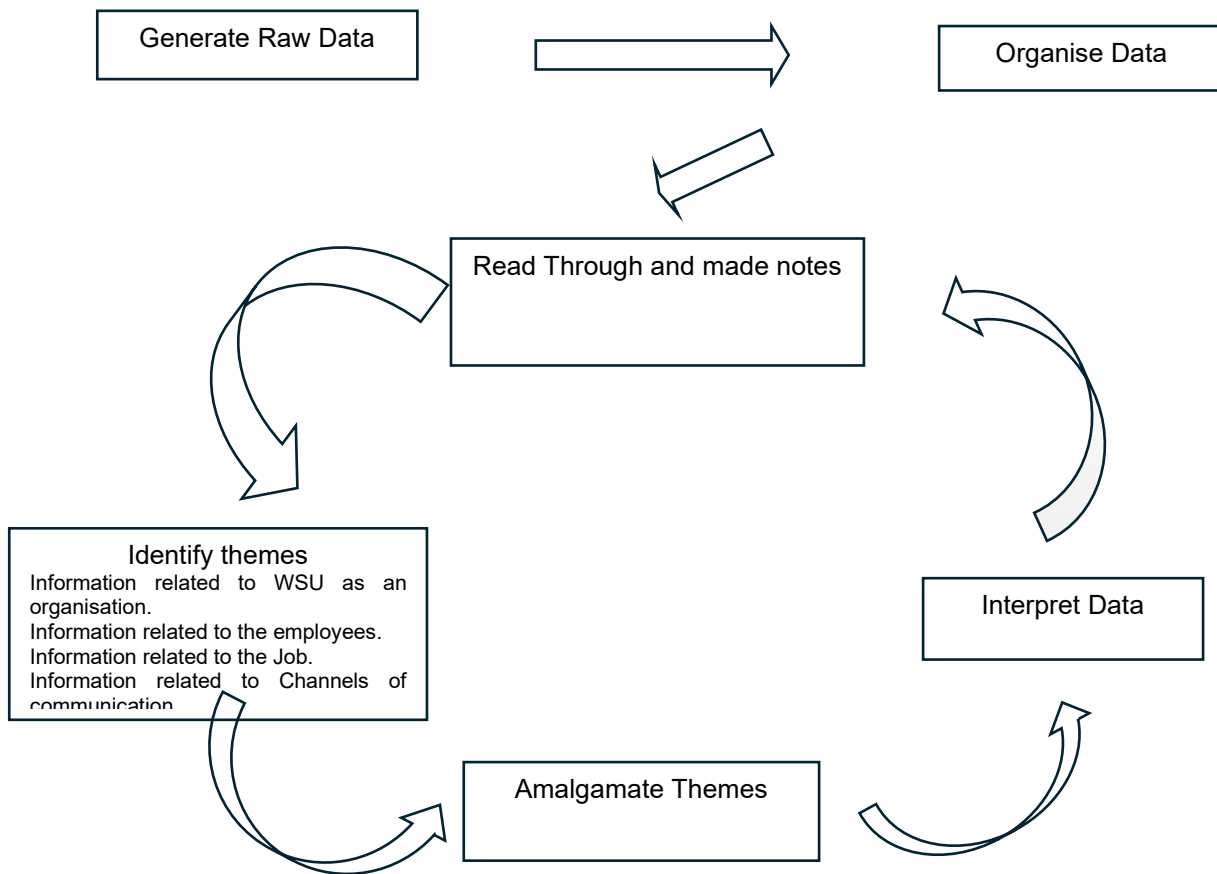


Figure 2: Thematic Map -Source: (Cresswell 2018)

Terry et al. (2017:17) and Kiger and Varpio (2020:850) postulate that researchers build trustworthiness and credibility with their readers using sound and respected data collection and analysis techniques. Thematic analysis was chosen because it helps the researcher discover unexpected insights that the participants mentioned, and that the researcher overlooked. With thematic analysis, the researcher can apply his own experiences and knowledge of the analysis, and having created themes, the researcher can organise substantial portions of data and summarise them into smaller data sets. Having chosen thematic analysis, the researcher could work on the data manually and not entirely rely on technology. In doing this, the researcher could identify and highlight similar responses and make summaries. The researcher can clearly say that he chose the thematic analysis because it is flexible and easily adapted to suit the researcher's needs. It is accessible and does not require statistical knowledge, especially for a new researcher.

According to Willemsen et al. (2022:1420), thematic analysis of qualitative data comprises the following steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding the gathered data. Compiling the data into a usable form is the first

step to finding meaningful answers to your research questions (Lawless and Chen, 2019). Compiling meant transcribing so that the researcher could easily see the data. The last step involved drawing inferences or interpretation of data where it captures the lessons learnt. The steps above were used to analyse the data. The data analysed was derived from online focus groups and document analysis, as well as considering the literature and theoretical framework used in the study. This analysis entailed looking for relationships and coherent themes throughout the gathered data.

3.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Kavolainen and Eriksson (2015:376) state that reliability is a worry with the research findings. If you or anybody else repeated the study/research and got comparable results, the findings may be regarded as reputable (Aung, Razak, and Nazry, 2021). While validity concerns how the study findings reflect the circumstance, the data gathered can also be seen as a valid, accurate image of the subject being examined (Coleman, 2022.). The problem with the positivist viewpoint is that the data may not show what the positivists meant to show for various reasons, including confusing questions and bored participants. The questions were simple and understandable. Discussions and debates kept the participants engaged. The facilitator guided and helped participants during the session and created a free atmosphere.

According to Montonen, Eriksson, and Aromaa (2021:178) and Ikram and Kenayathulla (2022:231), the degree to which the research findings accurately reflect what is happening in the context is the measure of validity. A test or effect is legitimate if it neither proves nor quantifies the researcher's beliefs. Aromaa, Eriksson, and Mills (2022:549) also argue that study flaws, including flawed research methodology, subpar sampling, and erroneous or deceptive measures, can jeopardize validity. According to Cresswell (2018:179), one method for ensuring the study's accuracy is to have an external auditor assess the entire project.

The validity of the critical review of organisational communication at WSU was ensured by correctly answering the questions and following the processes. The most popular method for addressing the validity issue, according to Kavolainen and Eriksson (2015), is face validity, which is making sure that the tests and measurements the researcher uses truly measure or reflect what they are intended to measure or represent. An item's quality affects an item's face validity, also known as content validity Boyle and Schmierbach (2019); Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2014).

3.7 RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY

I am an academic staff member at Walter Sisulu University, Ibika Campus, Butterworth. I acknowledge that my positionality as an employee of the institution may have influenced the research process, particularly in shaping how participants responded to the study. It is therefore essential for researchers to recognise and critically reflect on their positionality and the ways in which it may affect data generation, interpretation, and overall research outcomes.

Reflexivity was a central component of this study. I remained continuously aware of the need to critically examine how my professional role, personal experiences, and perspectives shaped the research approach and engagement with participants. As both a researcher and an academic staff member, I reflected on how past experiences within the university, whether positive or negative, could have influenced my interaction with the data. This ongoing reflexive practice strengthened the study's confirmability by ensuring that the findings were not unduly shaped by personal assumptions or prior experiences (Finlay, 2002; Berger, 2015).

To minimise potential bias, I engaged in regular journaling and self-reflection throughout the research process, which allowed me to remain attentive to my assumptions and manage their possible influence on the study (Gergen et al., 2015; Pillow, 2017). I was also particularly mindful of power relations, especially when engaging with staff members as participants. To address this, I clearly explained the nature and purpose of the study and emphasised that participation was entirely voluntary and free from any form of institutional or personal influence.

My positionality was further shaped by my dual identity as both an insider and a researcher. While familiarity with institutional practices provided valuable contextual understanding and facilitated access, reflexivity enabled me to avoid over-identification with participants. I consciously foregrounded participants' voices during focus group discussions to reduce the imposition of my own perspectives. Acknowledging and reflecting on this positionality enhanced transparency in the interpretation of data and demonstrates the reflexive orientation that underpinned this study.

3.8 ETHICAL ISSUES

Goodwin et al. (2020) assert that ethics define excellent research and outline the factors that competent qualitative researchers must consider while planning, conducting, and publishing their research. This study involved human objects, so the

researcher observed the principle of ethical propriety and respected the participants' integrity. The study was conducted using the applicable ethics rules and regulations of the CPUT and WSU.

A document clearly articulating the information about the research was given to the participants. In this document, participants were informed that they are entitled to decline to participate in the study and can withdraw their participation at any time.

Participants were made aware that they would be treated anonymously and that the process would follow strict confidentiality regarding the information they shared.

According to Ahmad et al. (2022:739-753), informed consent is the ethical principle for researchers working with human subjects. Glantz (2021:1452) adds that this is also a legal requirement and that it is crucial for researchers to comprehend this principle's intent to improve their ability to obtain informed consent that is both morally and legally acceptable. With the use of online tools, the participants were fully informed about the platform being used and the risks involved. Consent included information about the recordings, data storage, and confidentiality. In cases of accidental exposure where participants included potentially identifiable information, e.g., Surname, the facilitator would contact the participant aside and request that they edit the post or seek the participant's permission to modify the post on their behalf. The session was not video-recorded to guarantee anonymity, and participants may leave the session at any time without being penalised. Participants were informed of what would happen to their information upon withdrawal. Participants only participated in the study after their informed consent was received.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the methodology of the research, focusing on the research paradigm, qualitative research approach, the study population, sampling techniques, and data collection method as they were applied to this study. These were discussed in terms of their suitability for this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4. 1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the methodology for this study was provided. In this chapter, the data collected is analysed and discussed.

The data analysed here was primarily collected from 15 participants who are the university's staff members (lecturers and operational staff members) through an online focus group. In addition to the focus group, five participants were interviewed to clarify certain things that were not captured clearly on the group discussion. Both online focus group and individual interviews allowed the researcher to delve into issues particularly important for this study. Another data source analysed in this study came from documentary sources as the university policy documents.

The table below shows the number of participants in distinct categories.

Table 1: Participant categories

Staff Category	Number of Participants
Management (M)	4
Lecturers (L)	7
Facilities (F)	1
Union (U)	2
Technician (T)	1

4.2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.2.1. Information related to WSU as an organisation

Sources of information within organisations play a critical role in shaping the flow of information and indicate the significance attached to information essential for employees to accomplish their work activities. In this context, participants' responses regarding the sources of information at the university reveal that the university makes information accessible through various common platforms or channels, including the

university website, email communication, and internal message sources such as memoranda and notice boards.

Information on the university website caters to both external and internal stakeholders. Regarding internal stakeholders, all participants concurred that relevant information that is accessible exclusively to staff members is provided on the university website. Nonetheless, a few participants disagreed, indicating that information can sometimes be delayed or, in some cases, lacking in relevance on the university website.

Scholars have emphasised the benefits of a website as a source of information. For example, Vanhala et al. (2020) have noted that a website offers rapid access to information, providing first-hand and reliable information to the organisation's stakeholders, as the information it presents originates from the organisation itself.

In addition to the website, participants (L1Lecturer), M2(Manager) highlighted email as a primary source of information at the university. There was a consensus that email is widely used as a source of information for staff at the university. As Participant (L1) put it:

“The reception of information typically commences with email. Email remains the primary mode of communication when clarification is needed. Staff rely on email and turn to other communication platforms, such as face-to-face interactions, for additional information, often seeking colleagues who are likely to possess more information or reaching out to the source of information”.

Usadolo (2011), whose study investigated information flow at Further Education Training (FET) colleges, now referred to as Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) colleges, reported findings consistent with the present study. Lecturers in the college primarily identified email as their primary source of information from the college and their line managers.

Organisational email addresses form part of the intranet used by organisations to disseminate pertinent information to employees. Usadolo (2011:116) describes this process:

Employees can receive internal information and other relevant updates from the organisation through email addresses. In return, employees can provide feedback on the information received or share information through the same medium for the benefit of other employees at the college.

Besides email, most participants identified their line managers as significant sources of information at the university. One participant's(M3) response mirrors the consensus: "There are instances where line managers provide information, especially regarding discussions related to specific issues".

Upon further probing during the focus group interview, participants identified various work-related issues that their line managers addressed. While it is common practice for employees to maintain direct relationships with their line managers, especially concerning information necessary for their work, the data analysed illustrates the influence of system theory.

According to system theory, the system's boundary determines how subsystems interact. In the context of the university examined line managers are part of the organisational communication flow system of the subordinates interviewed in this study. This aligns with the concept that the structure and communication within a system depend on similarities in positions, individual needs and expectations, and the organisation's goals and tasks, as discussed by Batool et al. (2022).

The participants' responses align with system theory as they highlighted that their line managers provide information primarily to address their work-related needs, which Batool et al. (2022) refer to as "personal needs and expectations" in the context of the organisation's goals and tasks. System theory underscores how various elements within an organisation interact and contribute to the flow of information. It is evident in this study that line managers play a pivotal role in this system.

The participants indicated that they possess an understanding of WSU's strategic objectives. In this regard, participants expressed that they are aware that WSU aims to become a technologically advanced African university but noted that access to

such information is limited. They further expressed that it is only when the institution initiates a new project that it emphasises its mission, vision, and goals.

This contrasts with the institution's internal communication policy of March 2017 (Policy ID. MCD 05), which is intended to provide a framework to guide communication between Walter Sisulu University, its staff, and students to create a harmonious relationship between the parties.

As stated in the policy, the participants agreed that underlying values guide their operations within the institution. However, they also observed that WSU does not consistently prioritise keeping this information at the forefront of employee's minds, resulting in limited accessibility when needed. The institution was failing in its mandate. As stated by Ndlovu et al. (2021), Mersham and Skinner (2016), and Samson (2019), organisational structures can help access communication or information flow to be more effective by ensuring that formal routes of communication are followed anytime there is information exchange.

Participant (T1) elaborated and said:

“Access to this information is limited, with the organisation only providing it during specific events or roadshows that discuss their vision and mission. However, it is not regularly available.”

In probing further, participants agreed that the organisation tends to emphasise its mission and vision only on specific occasions. A prime example is the new university strategy that was adopted, where the university conducted roadshows focusing on stakeholder engagement to explain the 2025-2030 vision. Additionally, individuals at various campuses who missed the workshops explaining the new strategy accessed the information on the institution's website.

On platforms such as the university website, you might occasionally come across the mission and vision displayed during specific events, according to Participant (L2). To mitigate this lack of access, they were provided with posters to display in their offices, and every office needed to have the mission and vision poster prominently displayed on the wall. Shan and Shaid (2019) and Nautiyal (2018) emphasise the importance of access to communication in an organisation, stating that websites are sources of information and assist employees and managers in making decisions.

Regarding the frequency of information, participants expressed that they typically do not receive them regularly from their line managers but mentioned that it is consistently available on the website. Participant (T1) postulated that he rarely reads the information unless he is actively working on a document or a specific task; that is when he refers to it.

Participant (T1) added that *"Uhlaziyo Lweveki" is sent out every Monday, containing information about the institution; however, many individuals tend not to read it*".

This is one of the approaches through which the organisation disseminates information. The frequency of accessing information depends on an individual's specific needs at a given time, day, or month. The information is readily available; however, the issue lies in the reluctance of the employees to read it. Participants added that there is a Helpdesk with all the necessary information. However, many individuals do not regularly check their emails from the institution's help desk.

Managers of businesses all around the world have evolved several methods of internal communication (Bednárík, 2019), and this could be upward (from staff to management), downward (from management to staff), or sideways (from management to management or staff to staff) (Samson, 2021). All these authors agree that companies communicate via letters and emails, while others prefer internal memos. Some businesses use social media, while others employ a combination of strategies. They continue to add that whatever type of communication is chosen will certainly impact employee performance.

Participant (M4) gave an example: *"A prime illustration of this is our recent pop-up sale, where people continued to inquire about the sale even though it had been announced on the help desk"*.

4.2.2 Information related to employees

Policies play a critical role in the running of organisations, and they become the backbone of an organisation. These policies and procedures are essential in orienting employees to the corporate culture. These processes start at the employee's orientation when the policies and procedures are introduced. The department's direct line manager and informal groups are the most common sources of information on on-the-job behaviours. WSU is governed by policies and

procedures, which are conveyed to all employees by their line managers. The participants unanimously expressed that they were excluded from the policy consultation process.

They mentioned that they become aware of new policies only when they are already in effect. An example was the HR and promotions policy, and the general view of the participants was that their input was disregarded. It seemed like a "take it or leave it" approach was adopted, thus leading to limited consultation.

Participants added that while trade unions inform them about policies at the university, policy formulation by nature that does not have input from the staff members in the organisation is likely to be poorly implemented. Organisational members who do not understand the policy will either be hesitant to implement it as needed or implement it wrongly because of a lack of consultation.

The systems theory advises that managers must constantly monitor the environment to make the necessary changes to reach their intended goals and actions within the environment and maintain a state of equilibrium for their stakeholders and the public. The statement above relates to manager vigilance regarding environmental changes in the form of new policies introduced.

Most participants shared similar sentiments, stating that managers typically inform them about policies only when these policies significantly impact their roles and responsibilities.

Participant (L5) added: *"Consultation is primarily conducted through organised labour representatives who advocate for the interests of their constituents. Shop stewards play a crucial role in communicating this information to their members, ensuring a degree of consultation, given the impracticality of consulting everyone simultaneously. Nevertheless, there are instances where consultation is limited, as exemplified by the promotions policy."*

Faculty Heads and Heads of Departments (HODs) are expected to relay information from top management to their respective staff members in alignment with their roles. However, it is noted that there is not much active effort from staff members to seek out this information from them. This creates an assumption on their part that the staff is well-informed. There is a heightened expectation for greater engagement and information-sharing in an institution of higher learning.

The lack of staff policy involvement is an issue specific to many categories of staff members. For example, participants added that line managers are not well consulted about university policies and are only informed about policies already approved for distribution during meetings.

Participant (L3) elaborated on the matter and said, *“Employees are supposed to receive policies for discussion before they are officially approved. This lack of discussion often leads to employee uncertainty and confusion regarding policies.”*

He added that labour union representatives are traditionally aware of these policies, but individuals are not actively consulted at the employee level in the policy-making process. This means the university expects the union to sell the policies to their members. The university may claim they are consultative because the union representing staff members are aware and participates in policy formulation. While this may be a logical argument, the fact that union members only meet their union representatives during the meeting means they would not have enough time to sell the policies to their members, as other issues will be discussed during the meeting.

Another concern they shared was that this information is not effectively communicated to new staff members without a formal induction process.

Participant (U2) added that *“critical information should be readily available and visible to all staff members daily, ensuring everyone is well-informed”*.

Anani-Bossman (2021) agrees with this sentiment that good relationships are a prerequisite for communication to succeed in the workplace and that horizontal communication allows peers to share information regularly by skipping the time-consuming vertical channels. It makes problem-solving more accessible and allows employees and units to share knowledge. He adds that it saves time by not reinventing the wheel whenever new personnel encounter an old issue.

However, Participant (U1) differed from the general view and maintained that *the information is indeed available, but the challenge lies in our reluctance to read it. We have a helpdesk where everything is accessible, yet people often inquire about things that have already been communicated via the help desk emails, she added.*

“This suggests many individuals do not regularly check their institution help desk emails.”

Furthermore, she added that the information-sharing method depends on the platform used.

“For individuals like me, who are frequently on the phone and on the go, social media is a preferred platform because it makes accessing information more convenient and efficient.”

This participant (U2) response indicates that the university should use many platforms to convey information to its staff members. In the internet age, the university should consider using social media and other online platforms to communicate with its employees.

According to the institution's media policy of August 2019, Walter Sisulu University embraces the evolution, wide adoption, and use of social media as a communication tool. The policy, therefore, is an institutional effort to ensure the effectiveness of their communication and supports the participant's need to use social media when communicating.

Grawe (2022:588) shares this sentiment that some companies communicate via letters and emails, while others prefer internal memos, and some businesses use social media, while others employ a combination of strategies. Whatever type of communication is chosen, it will undoubtedly impact employee performance.

Social media usage offers several benefits to organisations, as noted by Madsen (2021) and Verčič and Špoljarić (2020). In their article, Ewing et al. (2020:132) assert that social networks are crucial in the workplace, catering to employee preferences and communication needs, fostering innovation, and maintaining a competitive edge. Furthermore, social networking introduces innovative solutions to various challenges, such as enhancing employee engagement, fostering a sense of corporate culture, sustaining coworker connections, and facilitating talent acquisition (Ewing et al., 2020). Additionally, Men et al. (2020:101) underscore the significance of social media within the workplace by enabling employees to share ideas, collaborate in steering the organisation, and collectively work toward achieving its goals.

Regarding openness of communication, participants unanimously agreed on one aspect – they expressed satisfaction with their ability to approach their line managers for information. They mentioned that if their line managers do not respond or encounter difficulties, they turn to the trade unions or escalate the matter to the next management level for assistance. Moyo (2019) asserts that managers are expected to build effective channels of organisational communication that are open and non-discriminatory to accommodate employees in organisational communication.

He adds that managers are better positioned to implement the most effective leadership styles that promote employee happiness, dedication, and engagement. Participants noted that communication plays a vital role in organisational communication by supporting openness and inclusivity through the communication style used in that organisation.

4.2.3 Information related to the job

Participants shared the same sentiment that their line managers, who are their Heads of Departments (HODs), are the ones who have the responsibility to ensure that, as employees, they are fully aware of their job descriptions as well as the University vision.

Löfgren and Eklund (2021:87) state that the efficiency of systematic organisations is related to the hierarchical pattern of authority. He adds that a person's position authorises them to carry out their responsibilities. Employees are expected to carry out their responsibilities as outlined in their job description and delegated authority. The fact is systems theory provides a framework for reconciling an organisation's goal with the expectations of society and its public refers to this aspect. The person's power in the organisation is restricted to the position he or she holds. The person at the top of the organisational structure has visual authority.

Fielding and du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) provide the following examples to demonstrate the function of downward communication, job instruction, which supplies employees with the information they need to execute their jobs. It specifies exactly what is expected of the individual. What is the person's power and responsibilities, and what marks an excellent job? A schedule is incorporated into this process, and penalties are applied for non-compliance.

These authors then support the employees' sentiments and link this type of communication to the systematic management style.

Most participants agreed regarding their utilisation of various resources. They commonly reported relying on the organisation's website, policies, procedures, and labour unions to access information.

The participants had mixed feelings about the impact of the physical work setting and its effect on their communication. The views varied among participants. Some individuals stated that it had no significant effect, with responses such as "Not much" and "None."

However, others highlighted challenges related to the office layout, which made it difficult to connect and communicate with colleagues in different buildings.

Despite these challenges, the general views of the participants indicated that it does not negatively affect their communication.

Participant (M2) mentioned that it affects communication positively, attributing this to the diversity in the workplace, emphasising that it is more African-dominant than white-dominated. Additionally, some participants expressed concerns about students not adhering to consultation times.

4.2.4 Information related to channels of communication

The type of information individuals receive at WSU varies, and it typically comes from different communication channels. These channels assist employees in getting a better understanding of the organisation as well as the environment around them and, in the process, become better people (Adiguzel et al. 2020). Some participants mentioned that they do not receive much information, while others specified the sources they use.

These sources include receiving updates from the Vice Chancellor via email, essential emails from the WSU helpdesk, information that affects workers in general through the helpdesk, updates on university events and happenings available on the helpdesk and the official website and according to Martinus et al. (2016), downward communication occurs when information moves from a position of higher authority to those of lesser authority. This then means that, at times, the institution uses downward communication.

Participant (U1) was unsure about the specific type of information but mentioned receiving all relevant updates through emails, which also can be categorised as downward communication because of the email the participant received from a higher-up position at the university.

Participant (L5) indicated receiving weekly helpdesk emails covering various developments within the University community. Additionally, there were mentions of receiving updates about WSU as an institution and its Vision 2030 through the University website.

Most participants had mixed feelings about engaging with management in communication. Their responses were influenced by their earlier answers regarding the accessibility of information and their relationships with line managers.

For instance, some participants agreed, noting that they could easily approach their line manager with work-related problems, and if not satisfied, they had the option to escalate the issue to the HR manager.

Conversely, others may have disagreed or remained neutral, based on their differing experiences or perceptions of how accessible and responsive their line managers and HR managers are in addressing their concerns. These varied responses reflect the diversity of experiences and viewpoints among the participants.

The participants (T1 and L5) expressed they often receive information that may not always be directly relevant to their jobs, and occasional sources like the Uhlaziyo Lweveki news desk contain information about institution projects. However, they desired more information regarding rationalisation and felt that specific critical issues were not adequately addressed.

“Uhlaziyo Lweveki is sent every Monday containing information about the institution, but most people do not read it. That is one way the organisation disseminates information.”

Despite implementing a new institutional strategy, they noted a lack of communication about the specific plans and objectives associated with it. These mixed feelings among participants on this topic were shaped by their previous responses regarding information accessibility and their interactions with line managers.

Participants had the following input on this item: To enhance communication and information flow, several suggestions were put forward by the participants. These included altering the office layout to facilitate better communication, cultivating an office culture that values open and honest communication, and conducting workshops on effective communication.

Encouraging workers to follow the helpdesk, establishing a dedicated email for academic matters at the university, and increasing the utilisation of social media were also recommended.

Furthermore, the idea of holding a monthly Imbizo where the Vice Chancellor could directly address employees and engage with them physically was proposed.

Participant (L1) emphasised, “the use of VC imbizo to communicate with staff would work very well, bridging the gap between management and staff”.

Participants emphasised the need for consistent communication across the institution and revising current communication models or strategies to ensure ground-level workers are included in decision-making processes.

Lastly, there was a preference for sharing information on notice boards and billboards at the main gate and other channels. These suggestions demonstrate a range of ideas for improving communication within the institution.

The participants share similar sentiments and concerns about trust and the lack of information. They consistently raised critical challenges, focusing on the institution's promotions policy and the new university strategy.

Their concerns span a wide range of topics, including their understanding of the institution's vision, mission, and goals, their primary sources of information, and the frequency of information they receive.

Additionally, participants expressed apprehensions about the level of consultation regarding policies and their roles within the institution. They also touched upon the openness of communication channels and the impact of their work/office settings on communication.

Despite these challenges, participants provided some positive recommendations and suggestions for improving communication and information flow within the institution. These insights collectively highlight the importance of effective communication and

information dissemination in addressing staff concerns and enhancing the overall work environment.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents raw data gathered from focus group discussions representing various levels within the WSU organisational structure. The data analysed from focus was complimented with data from documentary sources. Following each group discussion, a summary of the key points was provided.

Participants shared diverse experiences regarding communication, but there were significant similarities in their views. While the primary challenges varied among the groups, the issue of promotion policies stood out as a significant concern. The lack of access to information and trust in management's communication practices at WSU create obstacles to effective upward communication.

Horizontal communication flow emerged as the most prevalent, with many groups expressing that they primarily rely on their peers for assistance and information.

One common thread among the participants is their dissatisfaction with the current communication state. They perceive communication as not being their responsibility and often see it as a low priority.

Management lacks proactive communication initiatives, as feedback indicates that information is not regularly updated. Trade unions were recognised as having considerable influence and power in communication.

The next chapter will conclude with findings and recommendations for improving organisational communication at WSU.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves the crucial purpose of conducting a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the research findings in the context of the literature reviewed. It will show the study's insight by providing a summary of the study and delve into the findings by also providing a summary of the study's findings. Additionally, the chapter looks at the problems and limitations of the study. It offers recommendations for enhancing organisational communication within WSU and suggestions for further research into organisational communication. This approach will allow for a comprehensive understanding of how communication functions within WSU, particularly in the context of its operational aspects and the impact on organisational effectiveness.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Chapter One discusses the study's introduction and background to provide a better understanding of the critical review. The essential role of organisational communication was emphasised.

The significance of organisational communication in an evolving organisation landscape and various approaches required for effective communication are described. Definitions of organisational communication in the context of internal stakeholders are discussed to better understand organisational communication.

It is important to understand the scope of the study, the statement of the research problem, the study's objectives, the study's background, and the research questions, which are discussed in Chapter One. These were followed by an overview of the study's significance and the study's organisation, the rest of the chapters, and their contents.

In Chapter Two, there is a review of the relevant literature, this chapter provides an overview of the available literature on organisational communication. The definition of organisational communication is provided. A literature review of definitions of organisational communication and related topics such as internal communication, external communication, and personal communication is provided. Different meanings of communication are examined, demonstrating the various angles from which researchers approach communication, followed by an analysis of the theoretical approach to organisational communication.

In Chapter Three, the methodology utilised for the study is discussed. This section offers a comprehensive overview and discussion of the study's proposed research strategy, as well as the methods and techniques used to gather data for subsequent analysis. The section begins with a discussion of the research paradigm, an interpretive research design, and a qualitative research approach, followed by an in-depth explanation and justification of focus group interviews and document analysis as research methods. The target population and purposive sampling are also discussed in the chapter to select the participants from the population. This chapter also discusses how the data was collected and analysed and why thematic analysis was chosen and used to create themes for analysis.

The last section outlines how the data is analysed and discusses the ethical considerations.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The research findings show that all participants in the focus group acknowledged being informed about WSU's strategy through various communication channels. However, managers and full-time union representatives received more extensive information compared to academics and operational staff. This highlights the importance of providing employees with information about the organisation to empower them to make informed decisions and foster a sense of connection.

Despite employees being aware of WSU's strategy, the organisation lacks the commitment to provide regular feedback or updates, leading to a one-way transmission of information. This lack of involvement in the strategy development stage can lead to challenges in aligning implementation with organisational goals and hinder effective execution.

The top-down nature of WSU's strategy development process may limit opportunities for active input from certain stakeholders. Information related to WSU tends to get lost or diluted as it passes through multiple hierarchical levels, potentially leading to misunderstandings or reduced engagement among employees.

The organisation's hierarchical structure influences communication within WSU, with employees often seeking clearance from their superiors before communicating with other employees. This emphasis on employee satisfaction through effective communication aligns with the principle that the timing and quality of information flow

play a crucial role in shaping the overall experience of how information flows within an organisation.

WSU's management places high importance on its policies and takes responsibility for their implementation, as they are essential for regulating employee behaviour and fostering consistency among the workforce. This approach aligns with the views of scholars like Van der Voet (2016), who emphasise the establishment of rules and regulations in the workplace. Employees within WSU perceive themselves as part of a collective group, and discipline is often fostered through communication interactions. Supervisors consistently apply the same policies and rules to all employees, emphasising uniformity in expectations and behaviours across the organisation.

Line managers play a crucial role in monitoring workers' activities and ensuring compliance with the organisation's policies and procedures. Full-time union representatives at WSU assert that they possess a strong understanding of organisational policies, as they view their role as protecting their members and job security. However, they face difficulties in effectively communicating policies to lower levels of staff, highlighting the need for more robust and inclusive communication practices. Managers should focus on motivating job performance rather than merely demanding it and perceiving employees as initiative-taking, committed, responsible, and creative members of the organisation. Fostering an open and inclusive communication environment that encourages employee input is crucial for promoting innovation and organisational adaptability.

The focus group at WSU feels more comfortable seeking peer assistance than managers, with trade union representatives often serving as a secondary source of information. This task-oriented communication aligns with the systems theory, where service delivery and operational priorities prioritise employees' personal lives. Some employees expressed concerns about the physical work environment, feeling disconnected from information flow. Email and telephonic communication are considered more effective, but the physical work environment remains a significant factor in facilitating or hindering effective communication within the organisation.

The study reveals that facilities staff lack access to all communication channels, relying on word of mouth and notice boards. Line managers and academic staff have laptops and access to intranets, while operational staff lack access. Line managers

and union representatives attend monthly EXEC sessions, but academic staff struggle due to work commitments. Social media and online communication at WSU are emphasised for accessibility and convenience. The global health pandemic and social distancing measures prompted the shift to online communication. Although some participants acknowledged physical and mental exhaustion, technology has transformed communication practices and made remote work and online communication essential in higher education.

The study reveals that downward communication within WSU is effective but with limited effectiveness. Various communication structures characterise it and employees' awareness of channels and willingness to align with WSU's strategies. However, weaknesses in downward communication include lack of motivation, inconsistent frequency of messages, limited feedback, trust issues, selective dissemination of information, and inadequate access to information.

Upward communication flow is sparingly used within WSU, often initiated when complaints or grievances occur. It is hindered by a lack of trust, fear of intimidation, perceptions that superiors may not have the time or willingness to listen, and a general perception that less feedback is sought from staff. The most successful users of upward communication are often unions, which have established channels for addressing employee concerns.

Diagonal communication has strengths and weaknesses, such as open channels and established relationships. However, it has limitations, such as limited time for nurturing relationships and perceived bypassing of traditional authority structures.

Horizontal communication is effective, with line managers often preferring to communicate with their peers rather than superiors. It serves various purposes, such as problem-solving, task coordination, and conflict resolution. Horizontal communication flow is highly prevalent and routine at various levels within WSU, aligning with the perspective of Daniels et al. (2021).

5.4 PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation is that employees are busy with work, and it may be difficult to release them from work. An alternative in time management had to be made, and a time suitable for all participants was chosen. Since organisational communication practices are determined at an organisational level, making conclusions at a campus

level may be challenging as the study was done on only one campus, Butterworth. This means that campus agency to change organisational practices may be limited to one campus given the structure of the University. The other notable limitation was the network connectivity challenges, given that the interviews were done online. The last limitation is that certain practices may be invisible since they are embedded in cultural practices at the University. Thus, the extent to which certain practices are invisible may be difficult to fathom in a study of this nature as that may require more time in the field, which may be difficult given the study deadlines.

The study used a qualitative approach. This is a limitation, as a mixed-methods approach would have allowed the data to be analysed from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The findings from both approaches would have provided richer nuances to enhance the understanding of the study.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be implemented to address the identified challenges. The university should make information accessible through various common platforms or channels, including the university website, email, and internal message sources such as memoranda and notice boards, as highlighted by participants, who state that email is a primary source of information at the university. Also, improve the accuracy and relevance and update the information on the website.

Staff rely on email and turn to other communication platforms, such as face-to-face interactions, for additional information. Greater interaction and open communication channels between university staff and their line managers should be encouraged as line managers are significant sources of information.

The university wishes to become a technologically infused African university, but participants noted limited access to such information. Hence, the university should ensure that staff align with this vision by accessing information that speaks to this vision. Participants expressed that it is only when the institution initiates a new project that it emphasises its mission, vision, and goals.

"Uhlaziyo Lweveki", an online weekly newsletter containing information about the institution should be promoted as an information-sharing tool, thus promoting access to relevant, accurate information.

Make use of the Helpdesk platform as a source of information to promote policy consultation, and in this way, staff will see the need to read the news on the Helpdesk as it will be relevant to them. In this way, you will also solve the exclusion problem in the policy consultation process.

Another recommendation would be that critical information should be readily available and visible to all staff at the induction level and be available to staff daily, ensuring everyone is well-informed and thus promoting the flow of communication on the campus. This should also include consultation with organised labour representatives who advocate for the interests of their constituents.

Social media and online communication technologies like teams have become preferred platforms for staff members. Tools are increasingly used to promote rapid and efficient communication, making accessing information more convenient and efficient.

5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study has provided details about communication at the WSU. The study focused on one campus, the Ibika Campus and researchers can extend the scope and focus on all 4 WSU sites for further studies. Furthermore, the study focused on one of the three communication categories recognised by Tkalac Verčič, Galić, and Žnidar (2021:232) and Kim (2017:10), which is internal communication and for further studies, other researchers can include the external communication exerted by other organisations that directly contribute to achieving the organisation's objectives and goals.

Given the advent of COVID-19, further studies should be conducted to ascertain the benefits of using technology and new media, such as social media, to enhance communication at the institution. This is essential as it will assist other institutions with similar challenges in adopting new technological communication challenges and thus improve communication.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to critically review organisational communication at WSU, Ibika Campus, and provide recommendations for improving various organisational communication flows. The literature review contributed to a deeper understanding of

organisational communication, its importance, and the theoretical perspectives that inform organisational communication practices. It also emphasised the vital role of communication in organisational functioning. Exploring communication theories, such as systems theory, sheds light on how communication influences organisational dynamics. Additionally, it discussed systems theory, which provided insights into how communication can impact employee motivation and engagement.

The study highlighted that different communication flows are managed at various levels of authority within the organisation, with managers playing a pivotal role in facilitating downward communication. Effective management communication can help identify and address communication gaps, improving organisational communication at WSU, Ibika Campus.

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APPENDIX A: Consent Form

FID/REC/ICv0.1

FACULTY OF INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

Individual Consent for Research Participation

Title of the study: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AT WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY, IBIKA CAMPUS.

Name of researcher: Landile Mbikahlobo

Contact details: email: ladzmbiks@gmail.com phone: 0762124850

Name of supervisor: Thabisa Nondzube

Contact details: email: NondzubeT@cput.ac.za phone: 071 890 0099.

- **Purpose of the Study:** To determine the efficacy of communication channels as rated by the employees at the Ibika Campus.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of Interviewee.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential unless noted below. I understand that the contents will be used only for Masters Thesis and that my confidentiality will be protected in that I will be treated anonymously and that the process will follow strict confidentiality regarding to the information I share.

Anonymity will be protected in the following manner (unless noted below) anonymity will be guaranteed and that all participants will be referred to as speaker 1,2 or 3 etc. We won't be using photos for the research nor referring to the participants with their names.

Conservation of data: The data collected will be kept securely; digitally recorded interviews will be encrypted and kept in a password-controlled environment.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate, and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the withdrawal time will be destroyed.

Additional consent: I make the following stipulations (please tick as appropriate):

	In thesis	In research publications	Both	Neither
My image may be used:				
My name may be used:				

My exact words may be used:				
Any other (stipulate):				

Acceptance: _____ I, _____ (print _____ name)

agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Landile Mbikahlobo of the Faculty of Informatics and Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, which research is under the supervision of Ms Thabisa Nondzube.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the secretary of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at 021 469 1012, or email naidoo@cput.ac.za.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: Discussion document for focus groups.

Information related to WSU as an organisation.

1. What information do you have access to about WSU as an organisation?
 - (Vision, Mission, Goals)
2. Who or what is your source of information?
 - Internal messages
 - Line Manager/HOD
 - Website/Intranet
 - Grapevine
3. How frequently do you receive the information?
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Daily

Information related to the employees.

4. Are all personnel in the organisation consulted regarding organisational policy related to their positions?
5. Is information distributed at all levels?
6. If you have not understood the instruction/ directive, is the openness of communication available for all personnel to consult with management levels in the organisation?

Information related to the Job.

7. If you have not received any information regarding your job and the company vision, who do you turn to for advice and information?
8. How does your physical work setting affect your communication at WSU?

Information related to Channels of communication.

9. What kind of information do you tend to receive.
10. Are employees afforded an opportunity to engage with management when communicating?
11. How often do you receive information applicable to your job? Give examples.
12. If you were to improve the communication/ information flow, what would you do?

APPENDIX C: Ethical Clearance Certificate



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Office of the Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Informatics and Design
Room 2.09
80 Roeland Street
Cape Town
Tel: 021-469 1012
Email: ndedem@cput.ac.za
Secretary: Mziyanda Ndede

29 August 2023

Mr Landile Mbikahlobo
c/o Department of Media
CPUT

Reference no: 222688289/2023/17

Project title: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AT
WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY, IBIKA CAMPUS.

Approval period: 29 August 2023 – 31 December 2024

This is to certify that the Faculty of Informatics and Design Research Ethics Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology approved the methodology and ethics of Mr Landile Mbikahlobo (222688289) for Master of Public Relation and Communication Mngt.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for approval.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

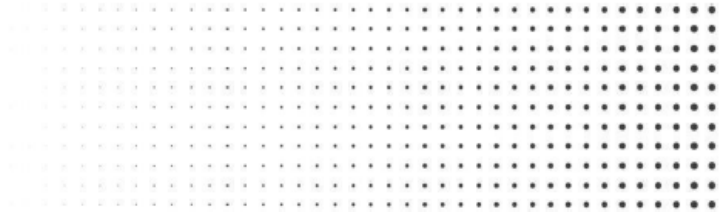
Blessing Makwambeni

Dr Blessing Makwambeni
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Informatics and Design
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

APPENDIX D: Gatekeeper Letter



Directorate of Research & Innovation



Office of the Acting Senior Director: Research & Innovation
Private Bag X1 • Mthatha • 5117
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05 September 2023

Landile Mbikahlobo
Walter Sisulu University
Department Research and Innovation
MTHATHA
5100

Dear Mr L. Mbikahlobo

Gatekeepers Permission Letter to conduct research at Walter Sisulu University
Ethical Clearance Number: 222688289/2023/17
Institution: Cape Peninsula University

A Gatekeeper Letter is hereby granted for the study **“A Critical Review Of Organisational Communication At Walter Sisulu University, Ibika Campus.”** Provided that copies of your completed study will be submitted to the Campus Rector of the campus in which the study will be conducted and the Directorate of Research & Innovation.

All data pertaining to Walter Sisulu University will be treated confidentially and you are required to always abide by ethical principles. It is your responsibility to seek consent from Participants.

Kind regards

.....
Prof T Npanywa
Acting Senior Director: Research & Innovation