


**AN ANALYSIS OF ORGANISATIONAL
COMMUNICATION:**

**A CASE STUDY OF A PUBLIC
FURTHER EDUCATION AND
TRAINING COLLEGE, EASTERN
CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA**

SAM EREVBENAGIE USADOLO

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**AN ANALYSIS OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF A
PUBLIC FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE, EASTERN CAPE,
SOUTH AFRICA**

by

SAM EREVBENAGIE USADOLO

210199970

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in the Faculty of Informatics and Design

AT THE

CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

SUPERVISOR: Mr Blessing Makwambeni

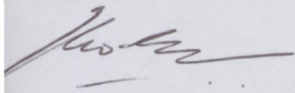
Cape Town

2011

DECLARATION

I, Sam Erevbenagie Usadolo, declare that the contents of this dissertation represent my own original unaided work, and that dissertation has not been previously submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signature



Date: 16/12/2011

ABSTRACT

Effective organisational communication engenders a good communicative environment for better management-employee's relationship, which will in turn translate into positive employees' productivity. Thus, organisational communication in the context it was considered in this study involves interaction among diverse internal public from management to employees or vice versa.

This dissertation has explored organisational communication in a college with the following main objective in mind: To evaluate the functionality of organisational communication.

To realise this objective, relevant literature review was conducted. The literature review focused, among others, on different types of organisational structures in terms of how the different structures influence communication flow and power dynamics in an organisation. Following this, different flows of communication such as downward communication, upward communication, horizontal communication, and diagonal communication were discussed.

Importantly, the review also looked at different communication models as a way to highlight communication which is either one-way or two-way and to also note the socio-cultural differences that may influence the way people communicate. Organisational theories such as bureaucratic theories, human relations theories, systems theory and cultural theories were discussed because they also serve as possible indicators of the type of interpersonal relationship in organisations. Related to organisation theories were some approaches such as functional perspective, interpretive perspective and cultural perspective. These were discussed as they help to situate and look at the way organisations that imbibe any of the perspectives may view communication.

The data analysed showed that communication is not regarded as one of the strategic management tools at the college hence communication is given low profile at the college. This also includes the fact that there is no concrete communication strategy at the college. Although, it is possible to communicate using downward,

upward, horizontal and diagonal channels at the college, the commonest channels are downward and upward channels. The fact that the employees have to pass through structures to use upward channel, according to the data analysed, is reported as a bottleneck to feedback and also why horizontal and diagonal channels are resorted to in order to fast-track the reception of feedback and collection of information.

Generally, the management and the employees in the different departments of the college do not have problems in their communicative relationship, that is, between the management and their subordinates but this is not the case with the lecturers who complained of unsatisfactory communication relationship with their superiors. The data revealed that there is disproportionate access to information and means of communication. For example, the management can communicate through the college's intranet among themselves and their subordinates but the lecturers cannot. In some campuses, Internet is available in all the offices but in others, it is only available in a 'central point' in the campus.

Regarding the nature of meetings at the college, some of the challenges identified by the lecturers were that though the meetings at intra-department levels are interactive, but it does not mean their views are taken into consideration. The analysis in this regard also showed that some of the meetings at inter-department level do take place to seek views for issues for which decisions have already been taken.

Furthermore, the analysis of the data revealed that there is no sufficient and appropriate information about what needs to be done, there is distorted information, no opportunity to seek clarification for unclear information by some employees at the college.

KEY WORDS: Organisational communication, upward communication, downward communication, horizontal communication, diagonal communication and internal communication.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY, RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

An organisation comprises of a collection of people whose sole purpose is to cooperate with one another to carry out activities that will result in the attainment of its strategic objectives. According to Neher (1997:17), "Organizations are created by people in order to achieve some human purpose". However, a cooperative effort is required to achieve the human purpose referred to by Neher, and this must go through a pattern of interaction which may be informal or formal. Many scholars, including Neher (1997:20), believe that all activities in organisations are only possible through communicative activities because typical work in an organisation requires "the coordination of sequential and interlocked behaviors of several people" [sic]. The coordination of people will not take place without communication.

This emphasises the importance of communication in organisations. As the success of an organisation is contingent on the employees' performance, it therefore means that organisations should view communication within their strategic management imperative. For Skinner, von Essen, Mersham and Motau (2009:93), "the better the employees are informed about products, policies and procedures, the better they will perform their task". This means that the better the employees are informed about the organisation, the better they are able to translate organisation's vision, values and culture into their own activities and thereby realise its overall strategic objectives.

The primary aim of this study is to analyse organisational communication at a Public Further Education and Training College (PFET College) in Eastern Cape, South Africa.

According to Kalla (2005:304), organisational communication refers to "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation". Taking a more comprehensive view, Welch and Jackson (2007:184) define organisational communication as "strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organisations across a

number of interrelated dimensions including, internal project peer communication and internal corporate communication". Kalla's (2005) and Welch and Jackson's (2007) focus their definitions on internal public within the organisation and regard external communication as a field outside organisation communication. However, scholars such as Barker and Angelopulo (2010:15) disagree and note that organisational communication "applies to any aspect of the organisation's existence, both internal and external". Barker and Angelopulo remark that organisation communication can be considered as an aspect that embraces communication in and around the organisation and another aspect that considers communication within the organisation (2010:15). There is no clear distinction between internal and external communication as both are integrated by organisations to sustain credibility and mutual understanding to their varied stakeholders inside and outside the organisation. This is the view taken in this study as communication directed to both internal and external audiences is an act that is planned and carried out within the organisation. However, the focus of the study deals generally with internal public of the organisation this study has investigated. However, findings about crisis communication were also stated.

Communication in an organisation takes place at various levels and among employees from diverse backgrounds, hence the design of message has to reflect the audience needs, and appropriate channels for the dissemination of the message from the source and a feedback from the receiver. In this study, consideration will be given to how effective the communication is between the relevant groups: the management, the students, the academic staff and other employees at the college.

Organisations have different structures and these structures are managed by different authorities in whom reside various powers and functions. As a system, different functions in an organisation complement each other in such a way that in absence of one, the other may not function optimally or not function at all. For instance, the human resources department assists in the recruitment of teachers for the college but it cannot recruit without being informed by the school head about the particular subject(s) where lecturer(s) is/are required. Thus, the functionality of an

organisation as a system requires a synergistic type of relationship and this is not possible without communication.

In addition, communication is required for coordinating activities at department or unit level. This involves the flow of communication at all levels and in all directions: from senior members of staff to their subordinates, along peer levels, from subordinate to direct superior, or, indeed, to any other category of employee in the department. Communication at this level may be about employee's provision of feedback about a particular task or the usual feedback about the performance of their jobs. It may also be suggestions from the employees about how issues pertinent to the department could be dealt with.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Since 1994, the post-apartheid government in South Africa has embarked on a number of reforms in order to redress the imbalance of the past. One of its reforms is a national socio-economic restructuring aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment and eradicating inequality (Akoojee & Mcgrath n.d.:201). In order to achieve these goals, the government has embarked upon a number of socio-economic strategies, some more successful than others.

The first of these attempts was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1994, which, according to Visser (2004:6), sought to respond to apartheid socio-economic legacy in the form of redistribution. The RDP was short-lived and was soon replaced with Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) in 1996. At this point, government emphasis took a marked shift and focussed "on the role of macro-economic stability in its pursuit for growth as a feature of development" (Akoojee and Mcgrath n.d.:201). Akojee and Mcgrath (2004) also note that GEAR had a dramatic influence on the government spending priorities and in consequence, large numbers of teaching personnel were retrenched.

RDP and GEAR were seen as fundamental instruments to promote socio-economic transformation in South Africa. It seems that given the socio-cultural and economic milieux in South Africa, both were unable to respond to the objectives they were set

up to address. In their place came the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative South Africa (AsgiSA). This initiative contained elements of both RDP and GEAR such as the redistributive focus of RDP and the macro-economic focus of GEAR (Akoojee & Mcgrath n.d.:201). AsgiSA emphasised an improved skill-based educational opportunity “which would help equip a portion of the population with skills, generate enough growth in a way that benefits those who *do not* get access to those skills” (Behar 2006:2). The emphasis thus shifted onto the importance of education and training in order to achieve the stated aims of AsgiSa.

AsgiSa’s plan (AsgiSA Annual Report 2008) detailed ways to eliminate the skills deficit in South Africa. In order to realise this goal, a unit known as Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) was set up within the AsgiSa initiative (see <http://www.info.gov.za/asgisa/asgisa.htm>). JIPSA, as envisaged by the government, is meant to give practical effect to address skills challenges in AsgiSA’s various priority areas, namely engineering, urban and regional planning, artisans in various fields, management and planning skills, mathematics, sciences, English and economic development.

FET colleges were identified as key role players in the realisation of JIPSA’s goals (Akojee & Mcgrath n.d.:203). Thus, the FET colleges received a cash injection of 1.9 billion rand in 2007 for curriculum development and incorporation of National Skills Development Strategies (NSDS) (DoL 2001:205). In a nutshell, the policy framework of AsgiSA, with its skill development instrument (JIPSA), focused on skills development and this, in turn, placed FET colleges at the forefront of South Africa’s development agenda.

The then Minister of the Department of Education (DoE), Naledi Pandor, underscored the importance of the FET colleges in 2006 when she stated that these colleges are central in the government plan for development of skills and therefore, the government planned to build more institutions around the country to offer programmes that will enable students to acquire desired critical skills (Pandor 2006).

Akojee and Mcgrath (n.d.:199), note that in addition to the DoE's vision that the FET colleges would alleviate the shortage of skills in South Africa, the Department of Labour (DoL) has also argued that FET colleges are central to its National Development Strategy. Indeed, Akojee and Mcgrath (n.d.:200) add that FET colleges serve to both develop the required skills as well as to redress the imbalanced educational and training opportunities of the past.

Every responsible government recognises that the national economy must be responsive to the needs of the citizenry. In the South African situation, it is believed that the FET colleges will provide the opportunity for young people to acquire appropriate skills that will make them suitable candidates for employment. As aptly noted by a teacher in one of the PFET colleges in Eastern Cape, "FET colleges prepare learners to be more suitably skilled in line with what the industries and other sectors want hence the teaching focus is largely simulated work environments" (Anon – personal communication). Thus, in view of the explanation regarding the possible role the PFET colleges could play in mitigating the debilitating effects of unskilled workforce in the national economy, the interest in FET colleges by government increased.

1.2.1 The formation of public FET colleges

After 1994's elections which formally marked the demise of apartheid, a number of new educational sector legislations were promulgated. Among these was the Further Education and Training Act of 1998, which provided for Technical Colleges to be declared Further Education and Training Colleges. This took effect on 20 February 2002 and one hundred and fifty two technical colleges were merged to form fifty two large FET Colleges (see <http://www.lovedalecollege.co.za/history-3/>). The merger resulted in eight FET Colleges, including the PFET College used as a case study in this research. These new FET colleges consist of multi-sited, equal status campuses, something which in and of itself is problematic to manage.

Despite FET Colleges being heralded as a way forward in skills acquisition, the euphoria which greeted the announcement did not immediately translate into significant enrolment in programmes run by the colleges. In fact, in 2002, the

enrolment at FET colleges grew by a mere 2 percent as opposed to the 9 percent increase in enrolment at South African universities in the same period (Akojee and Mcgrath n.d.:204). This may be partly attributed to the dearth of necessary information about FET colleges and their programmes. However, in more recent years this has changed, especially with regard to the college under examination. Student enrolment has risen to such an extent that more classrooms are being built to accommodate the swelling intake of students, according to the campus head. At the same time, the campus head indicated that the general perception of the student about the programme is that they are coming to learn practical skills, especially in engineering related subjects, and do not consider the theoretical components of their courses important. This misconception is often fostered by teachers at high schools, who suggest that students who are not achieving in the traditional academic subjects go to FET colleges to 'learn handwork' (trades). In an interview with some of the teachers at the college, it was reported that parents have been heard to complain that "I send my child to learn hand work not to write essays and notes".

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The challenge facing the PFET College this study investigating is the failure to communicate or articulate the programme of the college successfully in terms of its overall focus to both its internal and external audience. Therefore the students are not given appropriate and sufficient orientation regarding the courses at the college.

The information deficit at the college is also reflected by the different way in which the teachers and the management view the offerings of the college. Preliminary information collected shows that the management is well-versed with academic programmes as opposed to the teachers who complain that they are lost in the maze of unrelated and incoherent information about these programmes. A case in point is the National Certificate (Vocational), commonly referred to as NCV, which was introduced in 2007. The teachers complain that they have not been trained and that they need to be equipped with information regarding the fundamentals of the programme in order for them to be able to coherently explain the concept behind the NCV to the students. This clearly shows a gap in communication at the college between the college management and the teachers.

Against the situation described above, especially with regard to the central role FET colleges are expected to play in skill acquisition, it is vitally important that there is clear and effective communication and marketing of the offerings. At present, there is a huge information gap between the college management and the relevant stakeholders. Reasons for this, and how best the situation may be improved, constitute the main focus of this study. In addition, this study will examine the variables which influence the nature of communication at the college.

In the following section, the questions to be answered in this study will be indicated.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective for this research is to evaluate the functionality of organisational communication at the college.

The secondary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the channels of communication used and their information content at the college.
2. To uncover the perceptions of official communication channels at the college.
3. To find out if the information received by employees of the college is regular, adequate, accurate and equitable.
4. To investigate the communication behaviour of superiors at the college.
5. To find ways of improving organisational communication at the college.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is to investigate whether or not organisational communication as a whole is functional at the college.

Flowing from the above, certain specific questions also need to be posed:

1. What are the channels of communication used and their information contents at the college?

2. What are the perceptions of the staff pertaining to official communication channels?
3. Is the information received by employees of the college regular, adequate, accurate and appropriate?
4. What is the communication behaviour of superiors at the college?
5. How can organisational communication be improved to meet the college's strategic objectives?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a link between functional organisational communication and organisational effectiveness and efficiency (Quinn & Hargie, 2004:146). Thus, this study will contribute to more understanding of organisational communication practice, which may be useful to the college in its quest for organisational effectiveness and efficiency.

Secondly, it is hoped that the findings will provide a base for further research studies at FET colleges in particular and organisational communication in general.

1.7 ORGANISATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter two contains a detailed review of the relevant literature, with a discussion on internal communication, organisational structures, directional flow of communication, communication process and models and organisational theories and Chapter three focuses on methodology used in the study.

In Chapter four, analysis and the presentation of the data based on the result of the analysis is provided. In Chapter five, the conclusions drawn from this study are given. In addition, the summary of the findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research are given.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The diverse nature of organisations in South Africa and the uncertain economic environment in which these organisations operate, impact not only on productivity but also on the general relationship and the nature of communication between their management and employees. These issues require strategic organisational management. Every organisation relies on the positive relationship that exists between its employees to manage its activities, thus, the centrality of communication, which enables the relationship of the employees cannot be ignored. A good interactional pattern or communication among employees is required to keep the organisation going. Valentini (2005:1) states that communication among employees plays a vital role in the facilitation of activities and co-operation among different groups in an organisation. Valentini's assertion underscores the importance of communication in organisations and it reinforces a view shared earlier by Roberts and O'Reilly (1973 in Jain 1976:588) who believe that "If communication is good, an organisational performance and effectiveness will also be good". Effective communication is a necessity for the well-being of an organisation and this explains the volumes of scholarly work in organisation communication (Rho 2009:1; Baker 2002:1-2).

In this chapter, there will be a review of literature on organisational communication. This will involve a definition of organisation and communication in order to discuss the perspective informing the concept of *organisation communication*. Following this, there will be a review of literature of the definitions of organisational communication as well as related concepts such as internal communication, public relations, and corporate communication.

Different models which articulate the different perspectives from which scholars approach communication will be discussed. This will be followed by an examination of the different theories or approaches to organisational communication.

2.2 DEFINITION OF ORGANISATION

Organisations are established to provide services and products to fulfil the day-to-day needs of human beings. The provision of the services and products involves activities which are carried out by people. This means things have to be put together in the organisations by people to achieve an outcome which may be physical (for example, the production of a physical product such as bread) or non-physical (for example, an idea) to fulfil the day-to-day needs of their customers. In other words, in organisations things and people have to be organised to achieve the required outcomes. Neher (1997:15) states that an organisation is seen as a place of organising things, therefore "Individuals can be organised, groups of people can be organised, and tasks can be organised. When the result of such organising brings people together to achieve some joint outcome, we say there is now an organisation". According to DeVito (1994:323), an organisation may be defined as "a group of individuals organised for the achievement of specific goals".

Similarly, Robbins, Oddendaal and Roodt (2004:4) regard an organisation as a place where there is a "consciously coordinated social unit, composed of two or more people that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals". Robbins *et al.*'s definition of an organisation indicates an entity where services or products are given to people on a continuous basis. Thus, when a service or product is required, the organisation which provides such service or product is respected.

For Neher, DeVito and Robbins *et al.* the activities that take place in organisations are carried out by people. This underlines the importance of people and their interactions within an organisation. Indeed Valentini (2005:1) believes that "employees are the organisation's brain cells, and communication represents the nervous system that carries this information and shared meaning to vital parts of the organisational body". Valentini stresses the significance of communication in the organisation and shows that no employee can successfully work with other employees when carrying out his/her duty without some form of communication. From Valentini's statement, communication is seen as the conveyor of the necessary information required to carry out activities in the organisation.

Fielding (2006:34) identifies certain key characteristics of an organisation which will help in the explanation of the importance of communication in the organisation.

These characteristics are:

- People in an organisation fulfil different jobs and responsibilities;
- There will be one or more places where power is held in the organisation;
- Each post in an organisation may be filled by different people;
- Different sections of the organisation depend on each other;
- They meet on a regular basis to coordinate their activities.

From the above characteristics, it may be deduced that for the employees to carry out the various responsibilities assigned to them, communication has to take place. Communication is also vital where different sections in organisations relate interdependently to coordinate or manage the activities required to keep the organisation functioning optimally.

2.3 DEFINITION OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

When writing about organisational communication, scholars do not markedly differentiate between this form of communication and other similar terms such as corporate communication. Indeed, Byers (1997:4) defines organisational communication as a process that enables people to work together, manage and establish meanings through verbal and non-verbal signs within a particular context in the organisation.

In a study undertaken for the World Bank entitled *The World Bank Communication for Governance and Accountability Programme (CommGAP)*, the definition of organisational communication is explained using two concepts – container approach¹ and social construct approach¹. These two approaches reflect the way

¹ The container approach assumes that organisation exists independently of communication and serves as containers that influence communication behaviour. For example, hierarchical organisational structures are assumed to exist independently and influence the content and direction of flow of communication. The social construct approach assumes that communication creates the form and shape of organisation. For example, when organisational members consistently funnel their information through one person, they create a centralised network structure where one person maintains a high degree of power because he/she is at the hub and controls the flow of information (Footnote continues from previous page).

communication is defined by organisational communication scholars. For example, the CommGap (n.d.:1) says that scholars whose view of organisational communication are influenced by container approach would define it as “the transmission of message through a channel to a receiver”. This, given the explanation of container approach (see footnote), means communication takes place through the organisation’s established channels or structures. In other words, the channels, through which communication has to pass, are already there. On the other hand, scholars with a social constructionist approach define organisational communication “as the way language is used to create different kinds of social structures, such as relationship, teams and networks”. The social constructionist approach suggests that communication can be used based on the prevailing situation to bring about the social structures that work best in and around the organisation. In CommGAP (n.d.:1), this is referred to as a “potential of communication to construct new possibilities for organising” of activities or relationships necessary to keep the organisation functioning. This definition states that communication helps the organisation to function in order to meet its strategic objectives to all its stakeholders, internally and externally.

The container approach is constrained by the hierarchical structures in which communication has to flow through while the social constructionist approach is creative, according to CommGAP (n.d.:1) However, there is the possibility of combining the two approaches in the consideration of organisational communication. In CommGAP (n.d.:1) this is described as “balancing creativity and constraint” in organisational communication. It indicates “how individuals use communication to work out the tension between working within the constraints of pre-existing organisational structures and promoting change and creativity”. An example used to buttress this perspective in CommGap (n.d.:1) is:

[...] assume that an organisation was undergoing a major change initiative. An information transfer approach to organisational communication would require change messages to be sent clearly to all members in the organisation. A social constructionist approach would focus on creating patterns of language use that would generate the desired change (i.e. to create a team-based organisation, organisational members need to talk in the language of teamwork). An approach to

organisational communication that emphasizes balancing creativity and constraint would focus on achieving a balance between using communication that fosters the desired change and being sensitive to the existing constraints of the organisation.

The view of communication taken by Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw and Oosthuizen (2008:313), is a combination of the container and social constructionist approaches. For them, organisational communication "is the transfer and exchange of information and understanding from one person to another through meaningful symbols". They state that organisational communication provides a means for employees to exchange and share ideas, attitudes, values, opinions and facts. This is indicative of a container approach as they believe that communication means transfer of information. Although it is not explicitly stated in their definition that the transfer has to take place through specific channels, the reference to "one person to another" indicates that there is a hierarchy through which information must flow. Their definition also includes a social constructionist approach because they see communication as a means to share ideas, opinions and values in order to reach the mutual understanding necessary for social structures such as teams and networks to function optimally in and around the organisation.

2.3.1 Internal communication

As stated above in chapter, some scholars look at organisational communication as purely internal communicative act between the employees and the organisation. The definition of internal communication given by Welch and Jackson (2007:184) is constructed along that line of argument and it states that:

[...] the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organisations across a number of interrelated dimensions including, internal line manager communication, internal peer communication, internal project peer communication and internal corporate communication.

Similarly, Kalla (2005:304) defines it as "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation". The term "internal public" is used by some scholars to refer to the internal communication of an organisation. In

the two definitions above, emphasis is placed on internal publics as demonstrated in the use of the word "internal" to qualify the employees or stakeholders.

Another related term used by scholars is "corporate communication" but its use encompasses the internal and external public of an organisation. Steyn (2000:2-3) cites the work of Van Riel (1995) and defines corporate communication "as the integrated approach to all communication produced by an organisation, directed at relevant target groups, both internal and external". This definition stresses internal and external public of the organisation. This is also the view shared by Barker and Angelopulo (2010:15) of organisation communication. They remark that organisation communication embraces both internal and external aspects of communication in the organisation.

For this study, Barker and Angelopulo's view of organisation is taken but the emphasis here is on the internal communication aspect of organisation communication. Internal communication is principally concerned with building the organisation credibility and mutual understanding between the organisation and its internal public. This view is also reflected in Orsini's (2000) definition of internal communication, which states that internal communication in organisations sometimes takes "participatory dialogue" approach. From this perspective, Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:312-313) examine communication as the way in which managers plan, organise, lead and control in their quest to realise the organisational goals. The description of organisational communication given by Gardner, Paulsen, Gallois, Callan and Monaghan (2001:17) and Hellriegel *et al.* is based on the need to have a good interpersonal relationships among employees so that what must be done in the organisation can be done in cooperative and participative environment.

Other scholars also view organisational communication as an organising process within the organisation. For instance, Weick (1987:97-98), who looks at organisational communication from an interpersonal communication perspective, states that it is:

[...] the essence of organisation because it creates structures that then affect what else gets said and done by whom [...] the structures themselves create additional resources for communication such as

hierarchical levels, common tasks, exchangeable commodities, and negotiable dependencies.

In the same vein, Orlikowski and Yates (1994:541) opine that organisational communication from an internal communication perspective is a tool to bring about social cohesion among the employees. They state that organisational communication is “an essential element in the ongoing organising process through which social structures are produced, reproduced and changed”.

2.3.2 Internal and external communication

Organisation communication is a composite of internal and external communication (Barker & Angelopoulos 2010:15). Nevertheless, Svecz's (2010) discussion of internal and external communication shows that although they are different, these are vital and interlocking components of organisational communication. Internal communication, as defined and discussed above refers to communication used inside the organisation by employees.

In contrast, external communication takes place through media and communication with customers or the general public, and this is handled in organisations by marketing department, public relations, investors' relations department and corporate advertising (Svecz 2010). The forms of external communication in organisation are: letter, fax, direct mail, internet, video, telephone, advertising and website.

The three major functions of external communication, as stated by Miller (1999:258) are:

1. Coordination of inter-organisation relationships;
2. Creating and maintaining of organisational images; and
3. Provision of customer services.

Svecz's view on organisational communication as an all-embracing concept of internal and external communication is expressed in the following diagram:

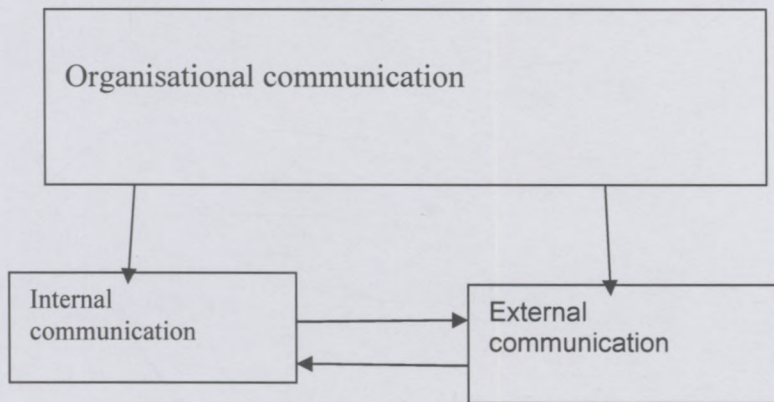


Figure 2.1: Organisational communication encompassing internal and external communication.

The arrows indicate the directions of communication and show that internal and external communication cannot take place independently. The inputs from the internal public in an organisation will result in either effective or ineffective external communication. The same applies to the consideration of inputs from external public to internal public. The arrows also mean that both can serve the same function in the organisation. For example, the organisation's website is a good source of information for both its internal and external publics.

According to Business Publication (2008), organisational communication is seen as combination of various concepts. It states that

Organisational communication includes marketing, public relations, investor relations, corporate advertising and environmental communication. In a broader sense, it encompasses the organisation's initiatives that demonstrate social responsibility and good citizenship.

2.3.3 Effective organisational communication

Organisational communication must be effective in order for the organisation to realise its stated goals. Efficient organisational communication results in appropriate and timely dissemination of information to the employees (Borade n.d.). Borade adds that this requires a continuous flow of communication and access to information within the organisational channels between the employees and the management for vital decision-making.

Every organisation has psychological, social, technological and economic needs that have to be met, for organisational communication to be considered as effective, according to Borade (n.d.). One way of meeting these needs is to make sure that communication facilitates dialogue between the employees in order to reach mutual understanding (Steinberg 1997:19; Borade n.d.).

Previously, organisations were considered effective based on the effectiveness of their finance, marketing and human resource departments (Borade n.d.) but this view has been challenged by scholars who argue that the effective and efficient operation of these departments depends on effective use of communication. In support of this view is Dutton (1998) cited by Valentini (2005:4) who argues that the functioning of an organisation should be looked at from communication viewpoint because of the increasing interdependency nature of the society in which the organisation operates. Valentini's argument can be analysed from two angles. Firstly, the reference to the interdependency of the society implies that the success of the organisation cannot be isolated from the way the organisation relates with its publics (both internal and external) and that the individuals in the society and organisation are interdependent. Secondly, the existence of interdependency is only sustainable through effective communication, hence Valentini notes that such interdependency also prevails among departments in organisations and the absence of communication will make them ineffective.

The benefit of effective organisational communication can be seen in the form of its contribution to teamwork, innovation and quality decision-making in organisations (Business Publication 2008). However, the Business Publication writer advises that organisational communication can be effective if the following tenets are adhered to:

1. Develop a formal communication programmes based on a documented strategy. The strategy should include regular opinion surveys, internal branding efforts and communication between all employee groups.
2. There should be a follow-up on employee suggestions by incorporating them in future strategy or explaining to all staff why they are not feasible at that time.

3. Use compensation and bonuses to create the company image. Ensure that employees understand the benefits programme and compensation packages.
4. Leverage technology through the use of blogs, podcasts and/or intranets.
5. Communicate openly to employees about matters that affect them by sharing financial information, business plans and strategic goals of the organisation (Business Publication 2008).

2.4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

It is important to consider the structure of an organisation because it determines or indicates where power resides in the organisation. It also indicates the direction of the flow of communication between the management and the employees. Organisational structure represents the form of chains of command and line of reporting in the organisation. Functionally, organisational structure reflects the organisation's "needs to gather, process, and disseminate information that is important for its operations and survival" (Neher 1997:154).

According to Erasmus-Kritzinger, Bowler and Goliath (2008:52) organisational structure shows the direction of information or communication in the organisation. Through this structure, an employee in an organisation "knows whom to report to, who will help to solve problems and whom to take orders from. The manager knows whom to give instruction to, whom to take instruction from and who should be held accountable for work done".

An organisational structure may be represented graphically in order to make it simpler to understand, and Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* (2008:53) refer to this graphic representation as organisational chart or organogram.

2.4.1 Types of organisational structure

There are many types of organisational structure. The two types of structures commonly mentioned in literature are the tall (vertical) and flat (horizontal) structures (Pace & Faules 1994:7; Neher 1997:155).

2.4.1.1 The tall structure

The tall structure, as described by Neher (1997:155), is a structure with a large number of steps between the employees at the top and the ones at the bottom of the hierarchy. For example, president, vice president, associate vice president, divisional manager, area manager, district supervisor, local manager, assistant local manager, etc., until the lowest ranking person in the organisation.

According to Fielding (2006:40), the tall structure is arranged in a way that enables the movement of messages up and down the levels in the structure. As a vertical arrangement of employees, it means horizontal movement is less likely to take place or, in other words, it supports vertical movement of information or communication between employees. In the observation of Neher (1997:156), the vertical movement of message may suffer some distortion because it passes through many intermediaries who may have to reformulate the message before it goes to their subordinates. A graphic representation of tall structure is shown in Figure 2.2.

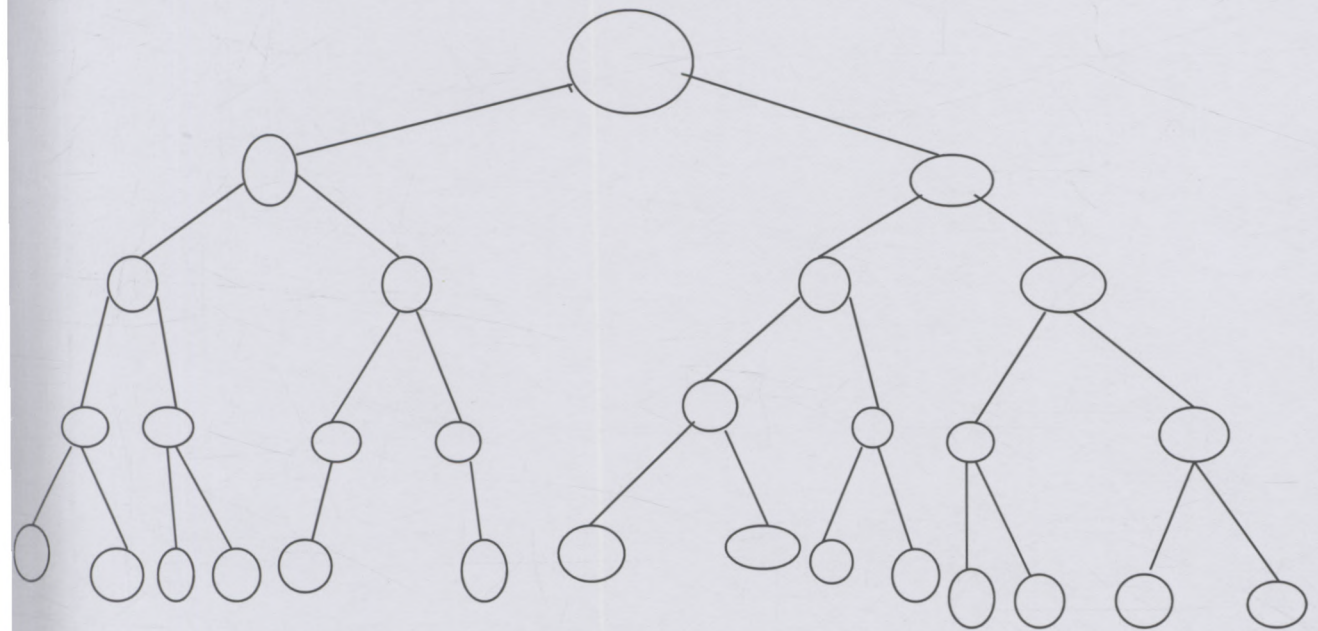


Figure 2.2: Tall organisation structure with many steps (adapted from Neher 1997:155).

2.4.1.2 The flat structure

In contrast to the tall structure, the flat structure has few layers between the employees (executive) at the top and other employees below (Borkar 2010). In the flat structure, the scope of control is far wider because there are many employees reporting to a staff member who is just one step above them (Neher 1997:156). Organisations that opt for the flat structure do so with the goal of enabling the employees to be active partnership in the decision-making process of the organisation. The premise is that this structure should result in the organisational goals being met more successfully than in the tall structure. This view is shared by Borkar (2010) who states:

Even though there are probably the heads or supervising managers or any other figure of authority between the employees and the managing director there are minimum layers in between and therefore the organisational leadership is minimum. Such that the employees feel equally responsible for the decision making process and the outcome.

Another advantage of the flat structure, according to Neher (1997:156), is that the likelihood of the message being distorted is less as there are very few intermediaries or "decision points" a message has to pass before it reaches the ultimate recipient within the organisation. Borkar (2010) cites the following advantages of the flat structure which have bearing on the communication in the organisation:

1. Since there are no middle layers in the form of authorities to answer to, there is less time spent on waiting for any decision to be made and communicated. This saves a lot of time and thereby proves profitable in the long run.
2. The employees are responsible for most of the decision making processes and therefore the productivity, efficiency and responsibility increases.
3. Since the organisation functions on a small scale, there are fewer communication barriers to deal with and, therefore, effective communication among employees is observable, contributing to a better and more productive working environment, building team spirit and eradicating red tape.

The communication disadvantages of flat structure cited by Neher (1997:156) and Borkar (2010) are:

1. The possibility of one employee being overloaded and unable to process the information being received is very high because he/she is responsible for many others who report to him/her (Neher 1997:156).
2. This structure can only be applied successfully in small companies. Larger organisations where work takes place on a bigger scale would find it ineffective to give the decision making power to only a few employees whose time and attention would inevitably be limited, causing bottlenecks and breaks in continuity, thus not functioning optimally (Borkar 2010).
3. Since the concept of immediate bosses does not exist, all employees might be reporting to 2-3 or more separate bosses thus making the process confusing and raising the potential of problems in communication (Borkar 2010).
4. The boundaries between the varied decision making and functioning powers become blurred, which can result in workplace tension and power struggles, and therefore, lead to losses (Borkar 2010).

Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* (2008:54) describe the flat structure organisation as being a *line organisation* and they add that it is normally the type of structure preferred by small business organisations or within a small department or unit in a large organisation.

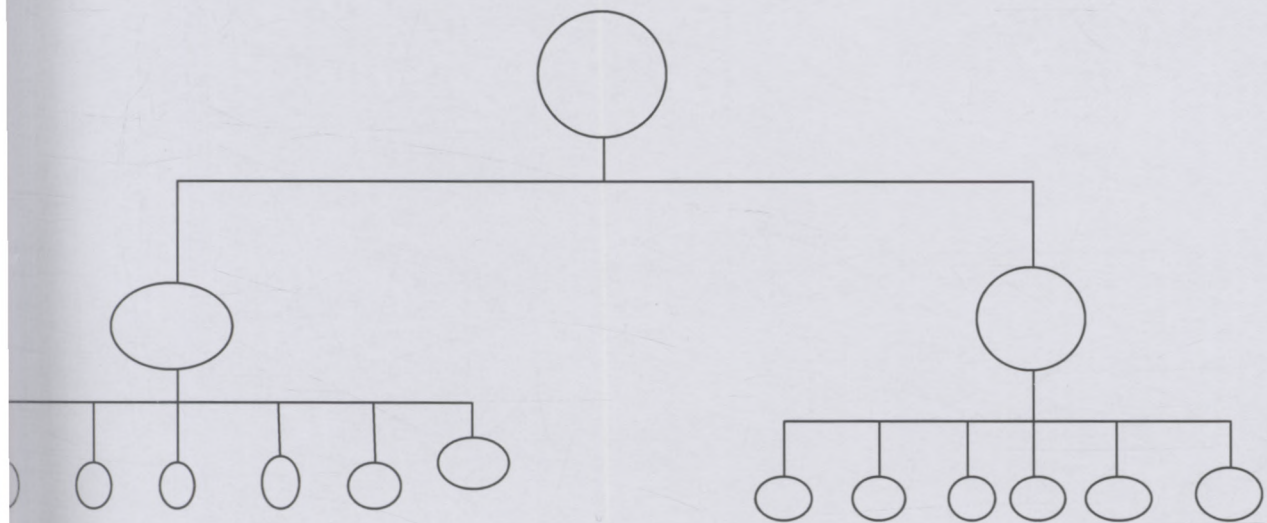


Figure 2.3: Flat organisational structure with few steps (adapted from Neher 1997:155).

2.4.1.3 Line and staff structure organisation

This is similar to the flat or line structure but it differs because it makes provision for the assistance of specialist employees. As explained by Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* (2008:54), these are staff assistants who specialise in certain designated fields and are attached to employees in the line structure, for example, the manager in an advisory capacity. Thus, the staff assistant can advise the manager as a specialist, and the manager will be able to deal with other employees on the basis of the advice given. Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:211) refer to such staff assistants as those with staff authority in support of those with line authority, such as the managers. Some the functions performed by those with staff authority, according to Hellriegel *et al.* (2008) and Wilcox and Cameron (2007:102), are in the form of recommendations, research, technical expertise and other specialised services.

Line and staff managers in any organisational structure have control over their subordinates, even the assistant staff member, who is a specialist. But the reverse is the case for the staff assistant because he/she has no control over the manager and his subordinates (Irani 2010).

The role of the public relations officer in an organisation is regarded as staff function and this is because the manager relies on him/her as an expert for advice on communication matters (Wilcox & Cameron 2007:102). One of the functions of a public relations officer, according to Wilcox and Cameron (2007:102-103), is to execute communication programme and may also be expected to undertake a community survey in order to advise the organisation about how to increase the positive perception of the organisation by the public.

One of the advantages of line and staff structure is the availability of specialist knowledge for sound decision making (Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* 2008:55). However, Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* suggest that a decided disadvantage would be when a staff assistant exceeds his/her mandate of advisor as he/she wants to control the subordinates and this may lead to conflict and confusion. It may also slow down the decision-making process if the staff assistant has to be constantly consulted for his/her expert advice before decision is taken (Irani 2010).

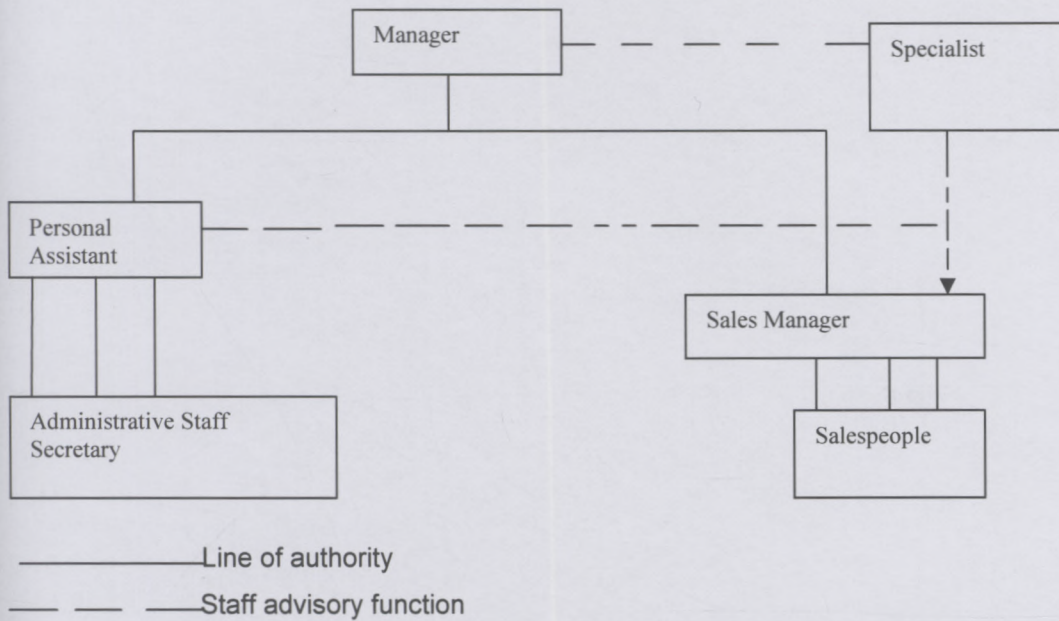


Figure 2.4: Line and staff structure organisation (adapted from Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* 2008:55).

Besides the tall and flat structures, there are many other ways organisations are structured. Some of the structures are discussed below.

2.4.1.4 The functional structure

In a functionally structured organisation, the employees are categorised according to the function they perform (Erasmus-Kritzinger 2008:54; Irani 2010). Based on these functions, employees make specific functional decisions and give instructions to other staff members in their departments or any other departments in the organisation. In other words, an employee who is, for example, the financial manager of an organisation has the sole authority to give instructions and make decisions related to financial matters in the organisation. Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* (2008:55) explain:

[...] the security personnel of a large organisation, who are responsible for the general security of the building and the employees, are specialists in the security field and may enforce security-related decisions. They may even order the managing directors to be searched.

The functional structure has its limitation and this, as noted by Erasmus-Kritzinger (2008:55), happens in a situation where the employees may be faced with several orders from more than one authority or person and this could result in conflict.

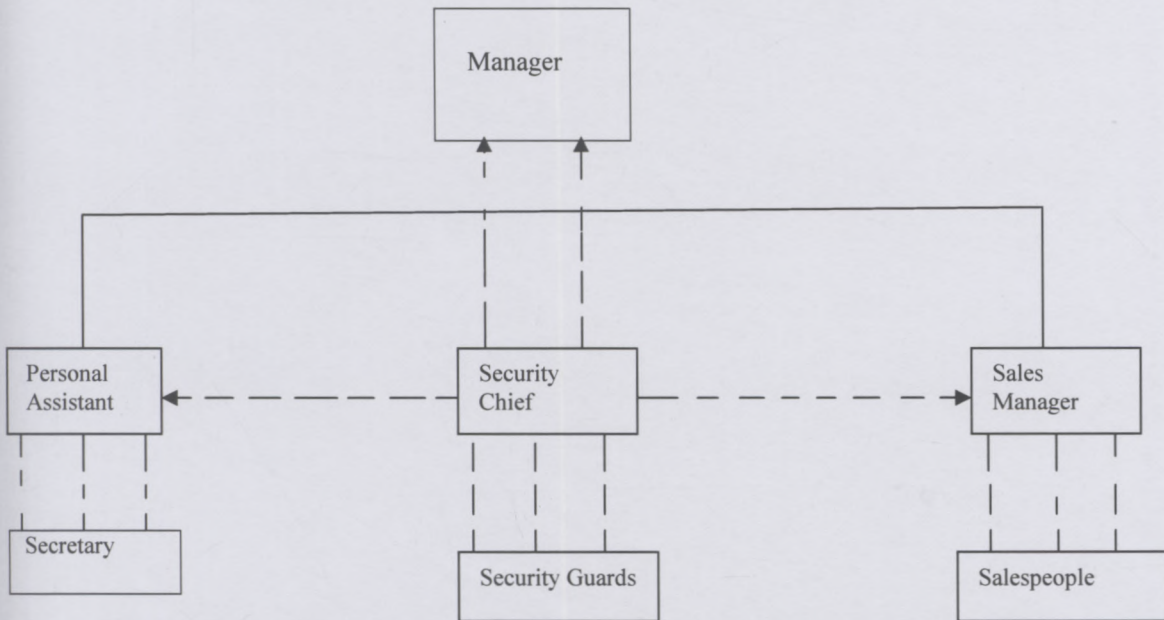


Figure 2.5: Functional structure organisation (adapted from Erasmus-Kritzinger 2008:55).

2.4.1.5 The product structure

The product structure organisation, as the name suggests, divides an organisation into sections or departments in accordance with the product produced in the department (Kulkarni 2010). The product structure is normally used by organisations where two or more products are produced (Irani 2010). Kulkarni gives an example of a car manufacturer divided into different sections such as small car section, sport utility vehicle (SUV) section, truck section, etc.

2.4.1.6 The matrix structure

The matrix structure is a mixture of both function and product structures, thus combining the advantages of both structures in the processing of information by the managers and their subordinates (Irani 2010; Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:226).

A matrix structure is usually found in organisations such as universities, advertising agencies, and research and development firms (Robbins *et al.* 2004:317).

In a matrix organisation, project managers are appointed to head the project and are provided with necessary skills from each functional area (e.g. engineering, manufacturing, and sales) and product managers (individual product lines) to complete the job. (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:226)

In light of this explanation, the role of managers in the matrix structure organisations is to coordinate the activities performed by functional and product managers and the functional and product managers have to report to the general matrix managers (see Figure 2.6). In addition to this, Robbins *et al.* (2004:317) point out that what makes matrix structure different from other structures is that the structure “breaks the unity-of-command concept” and that the workers “have two bosses: their functional department manager and their product managers”. This, according to Robbins *et al.*, is “a dual chain of command”.

2.4.1.6 (a) Advantage of matrix structure

In an organisation with a matrix structure, the facilitation and coordination for efficiency to meet customers' preference is easy. As explained by Robbins *et al.* (2004:317), this is seen when the organisation has several and mutually-independent activities. As there is a dual chain of command structure, there will be frequent contact between employees of different specialities and this makes it possible for better, more suitable communication and a rapid dissemination of information to the correct staff members.

2.4.1.6. (b) Disadvantage of matrix structure

A matrix structure can create confusion among the employees because it requires them to work for two authorities – the product and functional managers (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:227). According to Robbins *et al.* (2004:318) this may result in a power struggle between the authorities in the dual chain of command and they state: “When you dispense with the unity of command concept, ambiguity is significantly increased and ambiguity often leads to conflict”.

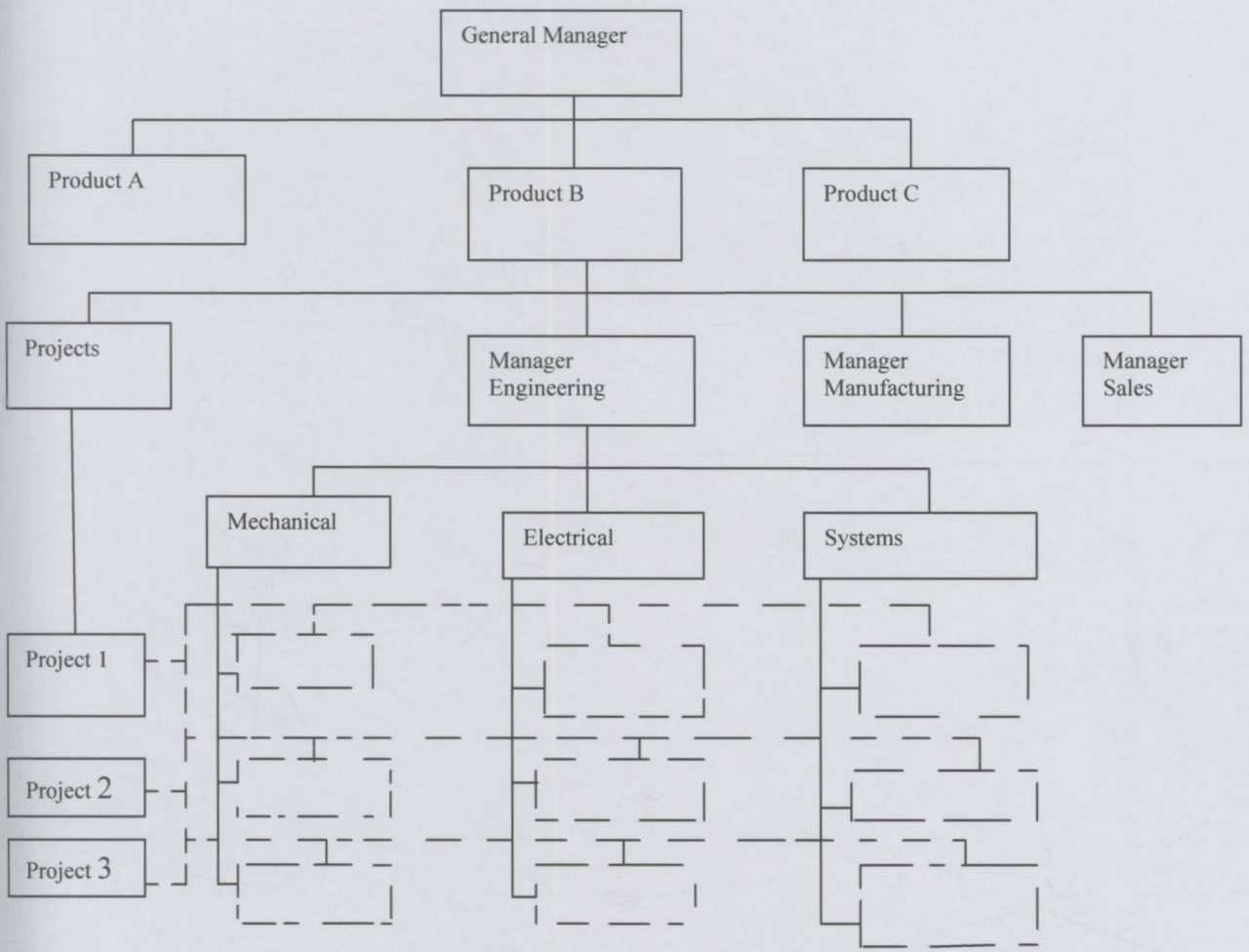


Figure 2.6: Matrix organisational structure (adapted from Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:226).

As indicated earlier, an organisational structure represents the chain of command of any organisation. With specific reference to communication, the position of communication personnel in the organisational structure will indicate how the organisation regards communication.

Referring to studies regarding the level where communication personnel are placed in organisations, Wilcox and Cameron (2009:99) point out those large organisations often involve public relations or communication officers in the policy-making process of the organisation. This is because large organisations are more mindful of their corporate identity than smaller organisations and thus place public relations among the “dominant coalition”.

In contrast, small-scale organisations feel “few public pressures and little governmental regulatory” demands, hence they have few public relations activities and public relations officers are usually relegated to technical responsibilities such as the production of newsletters and issuing of news releases, according to Wilcox and Cameron (2007:99). Despite being relegated to staff functions in certain organisations, public relations personnel are often located in the upper hierarchy of the organisation. This is to ensure that the management have easy access to public relations staff functions which are vital in decision-making (Wilcox & Cameron 2007:13).

Organisations where the public relations function is seen as being a purely advisory role may find themselves being unable to successfully deal with a public relations crisis simply because they were unable to take the necessary proactive steps to avoid the crisis. Wilcox and Cameron (2007:103) remark that the public relations advisory role may not be effective enough to avoid a scandal such as the one that arose at Enron². They believe that the Enron scandal deepened because public relations staff were limited to low level functions, hence the organisation was unable to deal with the avalanche of media, and public criticisms that ensued after the news broke.

2.5 DIRECTIONAL FLOW OF COMMUNICATION

In the previous section, organisational structure was discussed to show how different structures of an organisation influence the flow of communication. This section will discuss the directions in which communication flows.

Rho (2009:7) believes that the direction of flow of communication in organisations is always in trichotomised forms, namely downward, upward and horizontal directions. However, Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* (2008:49) maintain that in some organisations, there is also a diagonal flow of communication. These directions of flow are explained below.

² Enron is an energy company in the United States of America.

2.5.1 Downward communication flow

Downward communication flow refers to communication sent from higher levels to lower levels of the hierarchy (DeVito 1994:336). According to Baker (2002:7), this type of communication is more common than upward communication in organisations. Neher (1997:160) points out that downward communication is preferred flow of communication in bureaucratic organisations, or in “formal communication networks” (Rho 2009:6).

Downward communication flow can be used effectively “if top managers communicate directly with immediate supervisors and immediate supervisors communicate with their staff” (Larkin and Larkin 1994 in Baker 2002:7). Downward communication flow is used for a number of purposes, namely to give instructions, provide information about procedures and policies, and communicate the goals and strategic objectives of the organisation to employees (Neher 1997:161 and DeVito 1994:336). In addition, Katz and Kahn (1996) and Garnett (1992) cited in Rho (2009:6), state that downward communication is used to convey the vision of the organisation, provide feedback on subordinates’ performance and job instructions. An example of downward communication is the issuing of instructions from the general manager of an organisation to departmental manager of the same organisation.

2.5.1.1 Challenges of downward communication flow

Downward communication may lead to information overload, according to Goldhaber (1993 in Rho 2009:6). In a study done by Goldhaber, Rho quotes him as follows: “in one organisation most of the employees, after eight months of receiving countless messages everyday, began to throw every message into wastebasket before reading” [sic].

Information overload from the top hierarchy to the lower echelons is one of the recurring responses from the participants in this study. They complained that they are overwhelmed with different information reaching them almost simultaneously from various sources in management. They feel that they do not have the time to give their full attention to these messages, they may inadvertently disregard

important communications and instructions, causing problems that should not have arisen and this leads to dissatisfaction (see Chapter Four for a detailed analysis of the data).

Information overload is often caused by an inexperienced manager who is unable to distinguish between the information his/her subordinates need or do not need (DeVito 1994:336). Thus, the workers could be inundated with information, some of which is irrelevant, and the time used to sort out the wheat from the chaff leaves less time for more meaningful activities.

Neher (1997:258) observed that middle managers and supervisors occupy communicative relationships with both their superiors and their subordinates. This often exposes them to information overload, as they receive numerous messages from both their superiors and subordinates. Due to the nature of their in-between relationship, supervisors spend a great deal of time to decide on message to take up or down in the organisation hierarchy.

The study carried out by O'Reilly (1980) reported in Rho (2009:6) heralds the negative effect of a message overload in organisation. The study states that information overload leads to lower job performance as some of the information passed down to employees is not used.

In addition to message overload, downward flow of communication can lead to message filtering or distortion. As noted by Rho (2009:6), information that passes through several levels or channels before it reaches the employees at the bottom of the hierarchy may get distorted. This can happen in the form of a change to the message and wrong interpretation of the message. DeVito (1994:336) notes that some of the messages managers take to their subordinates may be misunderstood. This happens most often when the managers use technical language or jargon which their subordinates may not be familiar.

Similarly, Barker and Angelopulo's (2010:124) state "[...] having been passed down through several layers of management, the instructions do not always make sense

as they have not been able to maintain their original meaning". Citing Lewis (1987) and Van der Walt (2002), Barker and Angelopulo further add that employees receive only 20 percent of the original message correctly after it has been passed down through four or five levels of hierarchy. For example where the message comes from the top hierarchy and it is addressed to all employees of the organisation.

In a study done about the effect of organisational downsizing on employees' commitment by Omoruyi (2010:3) it was found that most of the lower level employees such as cleaners, drivers and messengers complained that the process of the downsizing exercise was not well-explained to them. The same downward information flow was used to pass the information regarding the downsizing exercise to other employees such as the accountants, economists, quantity surveyors and managers who responded that they received adequate information about the downsizing exercise. The study reveals that there was message filtering and distortion (Omoruyi 2010:3). Most of the lower level of the employees depended on their immediate boss to explain the content of the messages that were circulated during the downsizing exercise and the interpretation of the messages by their bosses might have suffered some form of distortion, often because the message had to pass several hierarchical levels before it reached the lower level employees. The senior or higher level employees did not experience message distortion because, by virtue of their positions, they were close to the source of message in the organisation.

One of the ways in which information can flow in the organisation is through face-to-face contact but Neher (1997:162) argues that this may result in filtering and distortion. According to Neher, as the message goes through intermediate face-to-face contacts or through several employees before it finally reaches the intended recipient it might lose 'fidelity' or accuracy. The nature of filtering and distortion that takes place in this regard may be due to someone "[...] deciding what is the real or main message to be passed on. Details may be omitted, or the message may be softened in order to shield a subordinate from hurt feelings [...]" (Neher 1997:162).

In many organisations, management may rely on print or written channels such as memoranda, pay inserts, work rules, handbooks, etc, for their downward messages. The reliance on these channels can be a source of dissatisfaction among employees (Neher 1997:162). Basing his view on a survey of employees in 26 organisations, Neher concludes that “many organisation members would prefer to receive information about company policies, plans, or prospects through face-to-face channels”. When direct face-to-face or direct communication does not exist in an organisation, Neher remarks that employees often rely on the grapevine. It should be pointed out that while information through grapevine may sometimes be reliable, its unofficial nature affects its validity. In addition, it may have travelled through many informal channels which will make it susceptible to distortion and open to interpretation, thus becoming an unreliable variant of the original message.

The following are the suggested guidelines to manage the challenges of downward flow of communication by DeVito (1994:336):

- The vocabulary used by the management should be simple and easily understood by the employees. The usage of technical jargon, must be kept to a minimum.
- The employees should be provided with appropriate and sufficient information needed to function effectively.

2.5.2 Upward communication flow

Upward communication refers to messages that flow from lower levels to higher levels of management (Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* 2008:49) or from subordinates to superiors in the organisation.

Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2002:165) believe that by using this directional flow of communication properly, management is able to handle management-employee relationship successfully. By this, they mean that management not only speaks, but it also listens to employees. This gives communication presence to the employees and validates them as being of importance to the organisation.

Neher (1997:164) states that upward communication is to provide feedback from employees at lower level to management about their job performance and practices, allows wider participation of employees in decision-making, and provides an outlet for employees' concerns, grievances and complaints. By listening to the upward communication, managers will know how the employees feel about their jobs and the organisation (Garnett 1992:115).

If upward communication is used effectively, it allows the employees to have a say in matters about their jobs and this, in turn, gives them the feeling that they are important to the organisation (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:320). Hellriegel *et al.* add that organisations that have an open-door policy and are transparent in their approach to issues prefer upward communication, and that most of these organisations have flat management structure.

The success of any organisation depends on the harmonious relationship between the employees and the management. Upward communication offers an opportunity to build harmonious relationship in the organisation because the employees are able to convey their dissatisfactions and the management is able to get new information or ideas from them regarding how things could be improved (DeVito 1994:334).

2.5.2.1 Challenges of upward communication

Although upward communication is seen to have many benefits, it also has disadvantages to which the organisational communicators must pay attention.

It is human nature for employees to project themselves in positive manner to their superiors and any information that would cast a shadow on them will be screened out (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:320). This applies even more with respect to employees who have ambition to move up the ladder of hierarchy (Neher 1997:165). For Neher, these employees are often reluctant to pass up negative messages to the management or their superiors and it is common to hear from such employees saying "just give them good news if you want to be promoted". This may indicate that vital information, which is seen as "career limiting", will be withheld from management.

Indeed, DeVito (1994:334) states that "one problem is that messages that travel up the ladder are often messages that the top management wants to hear. Workers are often reluctant to send up a negative message for fear that they will be viewed as troublemakers". This reasoning applies when the negative message is about the conduct of the management. Some of the respondents in this study cited similar reasoning to explain why they do not bother to communicate with their superiors. They said they did not want to be viewed negatively and want to protect their jobs, especially those who are contract members of staff (See Chapter four for further detail of this discussion). In the same vein, Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:320) point out that quite regularly upward messages are coloured by employees' anxieties, aspirations and attitudes.

Furthermore, not all upward communicated messages get to their intended destination. This happens for a number of reasons. First, as noted by DeVito (1994:334) there might be gatekeepers who do not like the message being communicated and would decide to reroute it or stop it from reaching its destination. Usually, the gatekeepers are the immediate bosses of the employees, who wish to be seen as being in control of their subordinates. Hence they would stop certain types of message from reaching management. Secondly, even though it is important that the message has to be communicated upward for a solution to a particular problem, this may not happen "when the issues concern clarification of job assignment" because "many workers prefer to go to other workers rather than to management for fear that they will be thought incompetent" (DeVito 1994:334). This may also happen when the employees have a history of finding the management unhelpful or unavailable.

In some organisations, the nature of information flow is more of a downward than an upward type. Where this is the norm, quite often management begins to believe that information is simply one way, and thus loses the capacity to receive and encourage upward communication. For DeVito (1994:335) "managers are so used to serving as sources for messages that they become poor listeners. Workers easily sense this and, quite logically, don't waste their time on upward communication".

Physical distance is also a challenge to upward communication. This is a challenge when the employees do not have access to the management because they are physically separated (DeVito 1994:335). For example, some of the employees of the institution this study is investigating may have problem in upward communication. Some of them are in campuses away from the city in which the management of the institution is located. Physical separation of employees from management adds to the difficulties already discussed, as they cannot have meetings at short notice for work-related matters that require urgent attention.

The following are guidelines suggested by DeVito (1994:335) to mitigate the challenges identified in upward communication:

- Some forms of upward communication channels, such as suggestion boxes, should be established. This will give an opportunity for employees to state their opinions and complaints anonymously.
- The management should ensure that employee's comments and complaints are addressed. This will encourage the employees to engage in upward communication, knowing that their comments or complaints will be received, considered and consequently responded to.
- Management should have open-door policy where gatekeepers are discouraged, to ensure that messages reach their intended destinations.
- Besides suggestion boxes, other appropriate channels should be established to enable the worker to communicate upward with the management.

2.5.3 Horizontal communication flow

The term 'horizontal communication flow' is used to describe communication between employees who are at the same organisational level of authority (Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* 2008:49). Neher refers to this type of communication flow as 'peer communication' as it is a communication between employees at the same rank or level of authority (1997:166). For Fielding (2006:53) and DeVito (1994:336), horizontal communication is best described as 'sideways communication', which allows information sharing, problem solving, management of conflict and interdepartmental coordination. As this form of communication enables interdepartmental coordination, various divisions of the organisation are able to

harness their insight and experience for the good of the organisation. Horizontal communication flow is often resorted to by employees who are frustrated when trying to communicate with employees in levels different from theirs. For example, Neher (1997:166) notes that when people are "lacking the opportunity for vertical communication, people turn to talking with their peers to seek out information they need or desire".

The following channels, among others, are used for horizontal communication:

1. Interpersonal face-to-face channels, such as informal conversation, grapevine contacts, and conferences;
2. Group settings, such as committees, interdepartmental task forces and orientation and training groups;
3. Written channels, such as memoranda, reports and
4. Media channels, such as e-mail, telephone and videoconferences (DeVito 1994:166).

2.5.3.1 The challenges to horizontal communication

There are many reasons why the use of horizontal communication may pose some challenges. Neher (1997:167) believes that different departments represent different technical expertise, hence employees from these departments may not have anything in common. One of the effects on a department with different technical expertise to others in the organisation is the possibility of a specialised language specific to that department. DeVito (1994:337) states that such specialised language may be unintelligible to workers in a different department.

Another challenge to horizontal communication may be the perceived need to protect a section or department's domain and this may limit or prevent free and open communication. Related to this is the competitive nature of many organisations which does not encourage employees to share their insights and resources across departmental lines. Justifying this assertion, DeVito (1994:337) states that "if there is only one promotion available, and that one promotion is to be made on the basis of quality of work accomplished, it really does not benefit workers to share their best insights".

According to DeVito (1994:337), the following guidelines can be used to improve horizontal communication:

- Be conscious of the fact that your areas of specialisation have technical jargon that other employees outside your specialisation may not understand. Thus, when jargon and technical language are used, they should be clarified or explained.
- Balance the needs of an organisation that relies on cooperation and a system that reward competition. In most cases, it seems that cooperation can be increased without doing any individual damage.

2.5.4 Diagonal communication flow

Diagonal communication flow takes place across different levels of authority in the organisation (Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* 2008:49). Pace and Faules (1994:126) refer to diagonal communication as a cross-channel communication. An example of this type of communication is a communication between manager and workers. There is no line of authority for the manager's instruction to the workers regarding the work he may want them to do and in such a case, Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* (2008:49) remark that the relationship that exists between the parties "relies on goodwill and tact".

Baker (2002) believes that diagonal communication developed in a bid to address communication challenges common to the new organisational forms, such as matrix organisations.

Channels for diagonal communication include:

1. Interpersonal face-to-face channels such as informal conversation;
2. Written channels such as reports;
3. Group settings such as committee (where, for example a manager is serving in the same committee as the clerical officer);
4. Media channels such as e-mail, telephone, etc, (Ivie 2009:2).

2.5.4.1 Challenges of diagonal communication flow

According to Ivie (2009:2) the level of status difference between, for example, the manager and the clerical officer involved in diagonal communication may affect

honest and open communication from both or one of the parties. This may happen out of deference on the part of the clerical officer, not wanting to dispute or refute whatever he/she is told even where there is a clear need to do so. For example, communication between a manager and cleaners in organisation where the recurring responses or feedbacks from the cleaners were "Yes boss", "Okay boss" and shortly after the manager had left the cleaners complained vehemently about what the manager had told them.

Sometimes diagonal communication takes place as a result of the need to get the required information directly from the person concerned. However, from personal experience this researcher has noted that often the bypassed superior of the staff member addressed by the manager is resentful of this sidelining. This is often the case if the discussion is about work or issues in the department. In such cases, the superior would find a way of asserting his/her authority, for example by issuing different orders.

Ivie (2009:3) suggests that some of the challenges encountered in horizontal communication also apply in diagonal communication. She argues that where the manager and the subordinate are not from the same ethnolinguistic background, they will have to use an official language, such as English. In Nigeria, for example, this may be a problem as the so-called educated people in Nigeria are known to show-off by using words and terms which may not be mutually intelligible (Ivie 2009:3). This may be compounded by what can best be described as 'semantic noise', where the cleaners' understanding of what the manager has said is disrupted or affected by the jargon or vocabularies used.

Diagonal communication is one of the ways organisations emphasise their open-door policy. For a hierarchically structured organisation, this may not work (Ivie 2009:3). Employees at the bottom level of the hierarchy would feel more comfortable when passing information through their immediate superior, rather than going up to a more senior person in the management. Citing her study, Ivie remarked that participants in her study said they stopped trying to communicate with boss at the

top because he was always busy each time they tried. Thus, they end up passing information through their immediate boss to top management.

The guidelines to mitigate the challenges of diagonal communication, according to Ivie, are as follows:

- If the communication is between a manager and a very low ranking employee, the manager should use good interpersonal communication skills such as simple language in order to be understood and to avoid semantic noise.
- The manager should avoid displaying superior knowledge in conversation with junior employees in order to make them feel at ease, thus encouraging them to contribute. This does not mean that where there is need to stamp his/her authority as an expert on any issues being discussed he/she should not do so but it must not be overbearing.
- The mode of interaction, both in written and spoken mode should be friendly and reassuring so that the junior employees will feel at ease to give honest responses (Ivie 2009:4).

2.5.5 Informal communication: The grapevine

Unlike downward, upward, horizontal and diagonal communication, which follows the formal organisational structure, the grapevine is regarded as informal communication because these messages do not follow any formal communication channel (DeVito 1994:337; Neher 1997:173).

The term 'grapevine' originated during the American Civil War when the need to communicate by communication officers in the war resulted in the hanging of telegraph wires from tree to tree and the way these wires were strung together on trees was described as grapevine (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:320-321).

Grapevine is said to go side-by-side with formal communication, but it is always oral, largely accurate and through informal contacts (Neher 1997:173; DeVito 1994:338). Neher adds that employees resort to using grapevine when there is an uncertainty such as an unconfirmed report of an impending organisational downsizing or

reorganisation and when there is no concrete report about important matters in the organisation.

Drawing on Davis (1980), DeVito (1994:338) writes that employees use the grapevine when:

- There is a great upheaval within the organisation;
- The information is new; and
- Face-to-face communication is physically easy.

Grapevine information becomes the order of the day in organisations where there is no timely circulation of important information needed by the employees. In a situation such as this, Neher (1997:173) admonishes that the more there is lack of information about important issues, the more uncertainty about the issues and the more rumours will travel up and down the grapevine. He concludes that in this circumstance, it will not be surprising that a case of organisational takeover will result in frequency of rumours, especially when there is a controlled or deliberate withholding of information.

2.5.5.1 Challenges of grapevine communication

The following are challenges identified by DeVito (1994:338-339):

- It is difficult to verify the truth or falsity of grapevine information as the source of the original message cannot be traced easily.
- Grapevine information may be distorted or incomplete because it is known to have travelled through many sources.

Guidelines in dealing with grapevine communication, according to DeVito (1994:339) include the following:

- Although grapevine information may in most cases be accurate, because it can sometimes be incomplete, the information should be treated with circumspection.
- Grapevine should not be discouraged and employees of any calibre should seek grapevine information as it may, in the words of DeVito, "clue you into

events that will figure into your future with the organisation. And, of course, it will bond you and network you with others in the organisation”.

The direction of flow of communication in an organisation shows how the employees relate with themselves. The understanding of the direction of flow of communication will help in the understanding of the model of communication and process which show the different notions held about communication by scholars. As it will be shown in the discussion, the way different scholars view communication also reflects to a large extent how communication moves between employees in the organisation. In the next section, the model of communication and process will be discussed.

2.6 COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Many scholars such as Steinberg (1997:12-13) and Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:313) refer to communication as a process. Indeed, Steinberg (1997:12) argues that it means “a sequence of events, dynamic, never-ending and ever-changing”. She goes further to explain that the reference to the term ‘process’ implies that there is neither fixed beginning nor end to it, “nor fixed sequence of events in it”.

This communication process implies that it is made up of components. The components or elements will now be explained briefly, as these terms will be used in the discussion that follows in this section.

2.6.1. Sender

The sender is the source of information or the message source, according to Steinberg (1997:14).

2.6.2 Receiver

The receiver is the person in a communication process who receives the message from the sender (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:315). Steinberg dislikes the use of the terms ‘source’ and ‘receiver’ because she believes that they sound like technical terms. She prefers the alternative terms ‘communicator’ and ‘receiver’. In sending and receiving message, both sender and receiver are involved in processes of encoding and decoding.

2.6.3 Encoding and decoding

DeVito (1994:10) defines encoding as the act of producing a message in the form of writing or speaking. DeVito explains further that "By putting our ideas into sound waves we are putting these ideas into a code", hence the word 'encoding' is used to describe the process. To Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:214), encoding simply refers to the translation of "thoughts or feelings into a medium – written, visual, or spoken – that conveys the intended meaning".

Decoding on the other hand refers to a process of transforming verbal and nonverbal signs back into message (Steinberg 1994:15). Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:315) describe decoding as the translation of message into a form that has meaning for the intended receiver.

2.6.4 Interpretation

In any communicated message, there is a meaning to be interpreted and this depends, according to Steinberg (1997:15), on two types of meanings: social or shared meanings and individual (personal or subjective) meanings.

In order to have a shared meaning, the people in communication must share some basic understanding of verbal signs such as having the same language (Steinberg 1997:15). They also need to share an "understanding of what certain words mean in their culture, such as 'democracy' or 'justice'".

Individual or subjective meaning refers to the way a person interprets the message, or how he/she uses the verbal signs, and symbols that are indicative of "personal and individual character". This means that two people who listen to a speech made by a politician may interpret the speech differently or ascribe different meanings to the speech because of the differences between them, which may be religious, gender-based, emotions, past experience, etc, (Steinberg 1997:15).

2.6.5 Channel and medium

The channel indicates the path or route a message follows from the person who sends it to the receiver (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:318). Face-to-face communication

takes place through more than one channel and DeVito (1994:12) illustrates this by saying: “[...] you speak and listen (vocal channel), but you also gesture and receive these signals visually (visual channel)”.

The medium, as explained by Steinberg (1997:15), “is the physical means by which messages are transported or transmitted between people in communication”. Both channel and medium serve as the link between the communicator and the recipient (Steinberg 1997:15). Indeed, these terms are used interchangeably by scholars. For example, DeVito (1994:12) states that “The communication channel is the medium through which the message passes”. However, Steinberg clearly shows the difference between these terms:

Your voice and body movements, as well as technological and electronic means of communication such as the telephone, newspapers, a book or the television set, are the mediums of communication. The light waves that carry the television image or the airwaves that carry the sound of your voice are channels of communication, as are your five senses – hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell (1994:15).

2.6.6 Noise

Noise, as defined by Steinberg (1997:16), is anything that disturbs the sending and receiving of message. To DeVito (1994:14):

- Noise prevents the receiver from getting the message the source is sending, and
- Noise is present in a communication system to the extent that the message sent differs from the message received.

Both Steinberg’s and DeVito’s definitions of noise indicate that it does not only refer to sound made by an objects or people but any other thing which may be external or internal to both the sender and receiver can be considered as noise. For example, one’s state of mind or emotions at the time of communication may interfere or hinder the successful sending and reception of message, hence it can be considered as noise. When there is noise, the receiver may not get the message exactly as it is intended and this will also affect his/her feedback to the message received.

2.6.7 Feedback

Feedback is the answer the receiver gives to the message he/she has received from the sender (DeVito 1994:12). Neher (1997:45) adds that not only is feedback the message sent back to the source, but an indication to the extent that the receiver has understood the message. Through feedback, the sender will know if the receiver of his message has understood his/her message or not. This will give him/her an opportunity to rephrase the message, taking into consideration what might have prevented the message from being understood previously.

2.6.8 Context

The way communication takes place is influenced by many factors. Steinberg remarks (1997:16) that communication does not take place in a vacuum and indicates that communication takes place within a context. Here context means "the environment or circumstances in which the communication encounter takes place" (Steinberg 1997:16). In other words, communication is context-bound. Steinberg further states that at all times, communication will be influenced by "factors such as time, space, and physical properties of the meeting place, as well as roles, status and relationships of the participants". Therefore, the context of communication indicates why people's construction of meaning and the associated feedback differs from one group to another because the situation and place communication is taking place will differ from that of a similar communication.

Having explained these concepts or components that are integral to the understanding of communication process, the models used by different communication scholars to explain communication will be presented below.

2.7 COMMUNICATION MODELS

Communication models are diagrammatic representations of the elements or components of communication in the form of how they relate to each other in a communication process (Steinberg 1997:17). Different models used by different scholars to explain communication process are explained here.

2.7.1 The Shannon-Weaver linear model

One of the earliest models of communication process is the model referred to as Shannon-Weaver model. This model takes a transmissional perspective in that it states that communication is the transmission of message through channels (Neher 1997:43). Neher adds that the transmissional perspective is informed by how Shannon and Weaver imagined the channels of communication as conduits or conveyor belts through which communication passes to its destination.

The main preoccupation of Shannon and Weaver when they devised their model was how to ensure that a message leaves its source and gets to its destination "with the highest possible fidelity³ given the probability of noise or interference in the channel used for transmitting the message" (Neher 1997:44). In addition to their concerns regarding the fidelity of message, Steinberg (1997:17-18) believes that they were concerned with how the channels of communication used could result in effective transmission of a significant amount of message.

Using an example of how a telephone message is transmitted, Steinberg illustrates the transmissional or mechanistic nature of the model as follows:

An information source (communicator) encodes a message which is converted by the transmitter (telephone) into a signal which is sent through a channel (telephone line) to the receiver. The signal is received at the other end (telephone) and converted back into a message which is heard by the recipient (destination) (Steinberg 1997:18).

³ Fidelity refers to faithfulness of reproduction, that is, a message received with high fidelity reproduces the original message nearly exactly (Neher 1997:44).

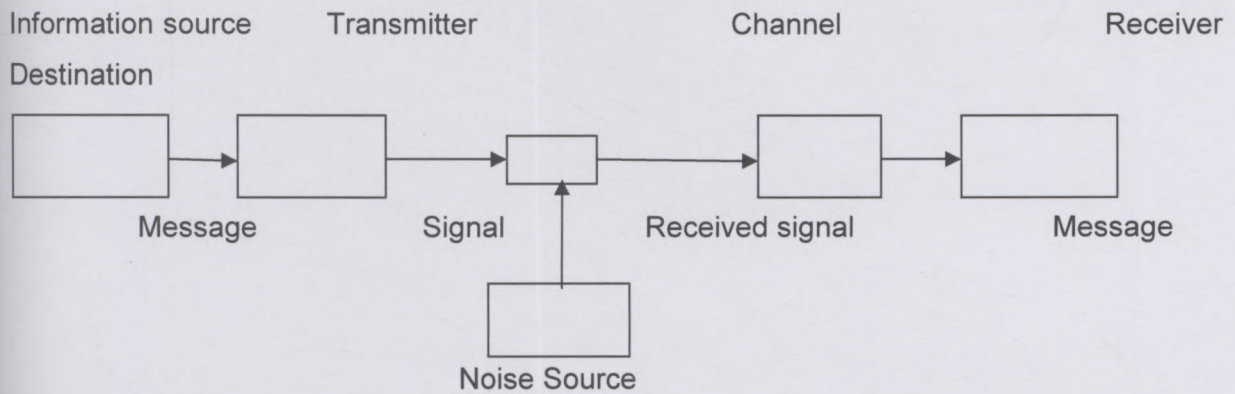


Figure 2.7 Shannon-Weaver model of communication process (source: Steinberg 1997:17).

The Shannon-Weaver model is still dominant in many organisations, especially in organisation where downward flow of communication is practised. In downward flow communication, the communication channels are relied upon to take the message from the management to the employees. However, it is notable that the Shannon-Weaver model features prominently in other models drawn up for communication. Steinberg (1997:18) notes that the Shannon-Weaver model is important because it provides a basis from which the other models were developed to explain the communication process.

However, it has some limitations, which according to Steinberg (1997:18) are:

- Firstly, in the model, there is only one channel or medium of transmission of message; hence it can be concluded that the nature of communication propounded by Shannon-Weaver model is a one-way process from the sender to the receiver. The model does not make provision for feedback channel and this means that the receiver is a passive participant while the sender is an active participant as there is a provision for him/her to send message to the receiver.
- Secondly, the model depicts noise as something that can only arise within the channels, and that noise can only be seen as physical or external noise. This, considered from the definitions of noise given above, does not reflect the fact that noise can also emanate from other sources such as the sender of the message or the receiver of message.

- Thirdly, if the source of noise is attributed to be in the channel, it then means that the model main concern is the clarity of the message. In other words, the noise that may arise in the course of the transmission of the message will result in the message not being clear to the receiver. The Shannon-Weaver model is mechanistic in nature and the question of construction of meaning by the receiver is ignored in this model. They also discount the possibility of the sender having internal noise in the form of stress and thus not transmitting a message in a way that it will be understood by the listener.

2.7.2 The Osgood and Schramm circular model

Given the limitations of Shannon-Weaver model, other communication scholars responded with models that emphasise feedback in the communication process loop. Noticeable among the models that came up in response to Shannon-Weaver model is the Osgood and Schramm model.

According to Steinberg (1997:18), Osgood and Schramm's model states that communication is a dynamic interaction in which messages are exchanged in a two-way process by the sender and the receiver, in other words, the question of feedback is addressed.

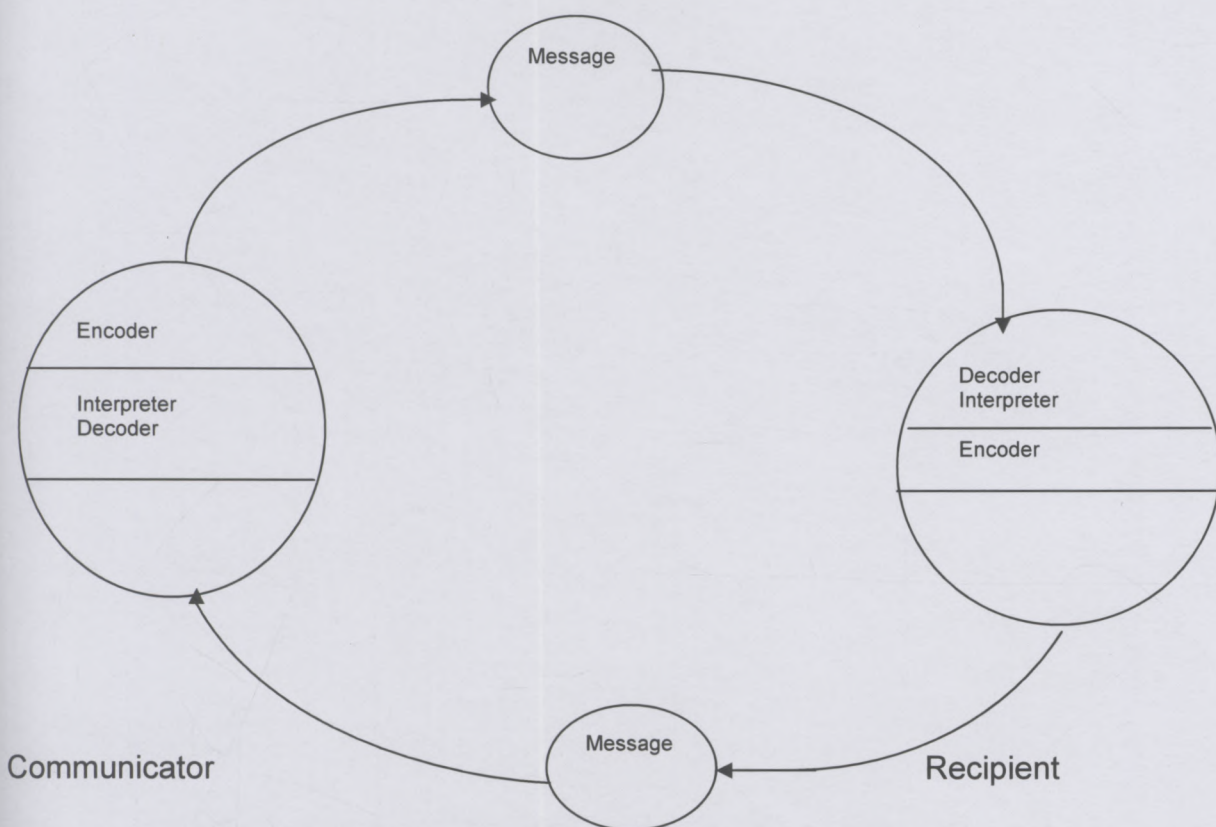


Figure 2.8: The Osgood and Schramm model (source: Steinberg 1997:18)

As shown here, the two participants (the communicator and the recipient) in communication both encode, transmit, receive, decode and interpret message messages. Hence the Osgood and Schramm model can be termed as a model that highlights the significance of feedback. The arrows, starting from the communicator or sender, show how the message is taken to the recipient and how the message leaves the recipient in the form of feedback to the communicator. This model is described as a two-way process as opposed to the linear form depicted in Shannon-Weaver model. The main emphasis in this model, as noted by Steinberg (1997:18), is that it “moves away from emphasising the channel through which messages are transmitted to the interpretation of meaning by the people in the process”. What Steinberg means here is that as opposed to Shannon-Weaver’s model where it is depicted that the source of noise is external or physical and could distort message, the Osgood and Schramm’s model shows that the nature of the message will depend on how it is interpreted by the two active participants in the communication process.

2.7.3 Hellriegel *et al.*'s model

Similar to the Osgood and Schramm model, is the model used by Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:314), to emphasise the importance of active involvement of both participants in the communication process. The Osgood and Schramm model and Hellriegel *et al.*'s model are very similar, but their diagrammatic representation of the discussion is different, as can be seen below:

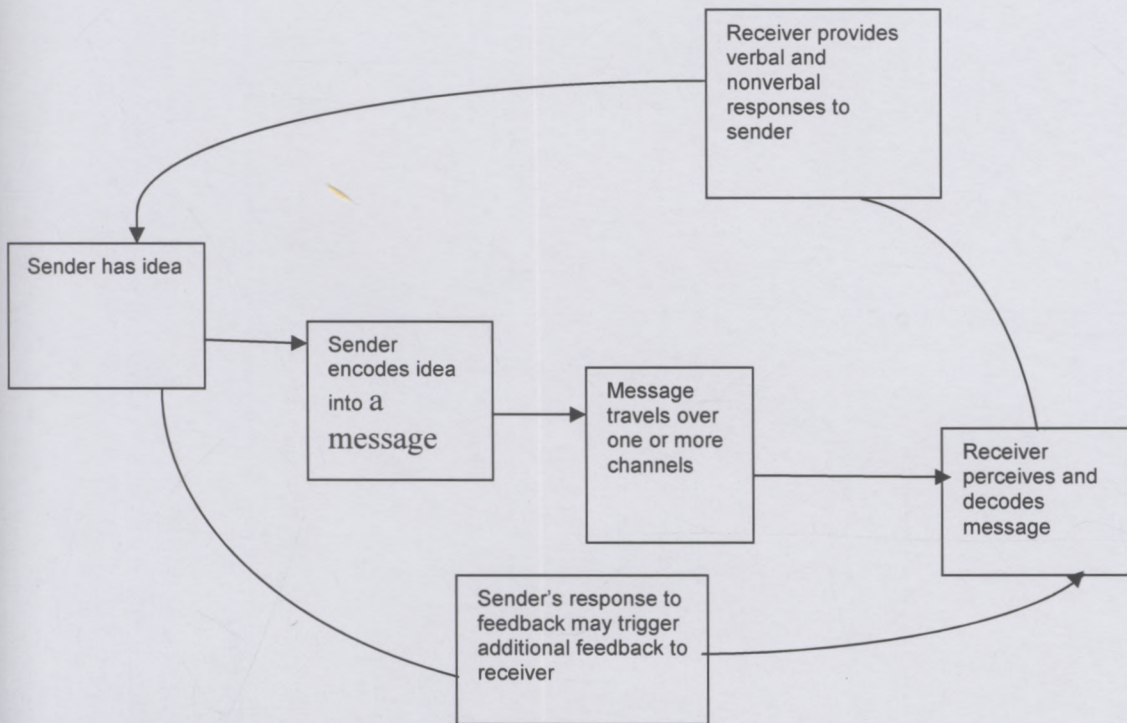


Figure 2.9: Model of communication by Hellriegel *et al.* (2008:31).

2.7.4 The transactional model

This model is a composite of the Shannon-Weaver model and the Osgood and Schramm model because it depicts channel of communication and feedback. It is referred to as transactional model because “each person is seen as both speaker and listener, as simultaneously communicating and receiving message” (DeVito 1994:32; Steinberg 1997:18).

This model portrays communication as an ever-changing process, which means that all elements of communication are in state of constant change (DeVito 1994:32). The main difference between transactional and the Osgood and Schramm model of dynamic process, is that the transactional model emphasises that “the creation of

meaning is negotiated between the participants” in communication. Explaining communication process from transactional perspective, Neher (1997:53) adds that the outcome of communication transcends the purpose and behaviours of either partner in communication. Additionally, Neher states that transactional model of communication is:

[...] what the people involved share between them. As a result of such communication, both participants come to an understanding of affairs that is different from the understanding that each had prior to the interaction. Neither person ‘owns’ the communication that they share.

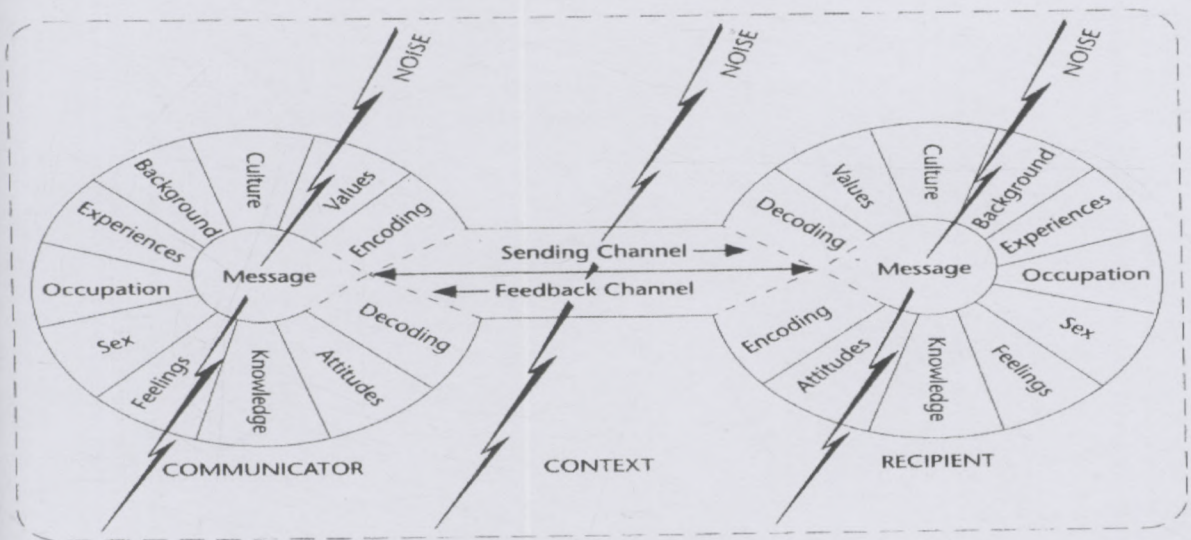


Figure 2.10: Transactional model communication

Steinberg (1997:19) explains that the two circles represent the communicator and the recipients and in the centre of each circle there is message, which embeds the thought, idea or feeling being communicated either through verbal or nonverbal signs. Around the message, there are the participants’ values, backgrounds, occupation, culture, feelings, attitudes, etc. These are elements or factors common to both the participants (the communicator and the recipient), which influence “the meaning that is expressed and the meaning that is interpreted” (Steinberg 1997:19).

Between the circles is a bar that indicates the medium of communication and the arrows in the bar point to both directions to indicate the transactional nature of the

model. According to Steinberg (1997:19), where Osgood and Schramm's model depicts "transmission and feedback as two separate processes [...] the transactional model indicates that the messages are continually passing between the participants". Conspicuous in the diagram are the different positions of noise. These may signify different types of noise such as external, internal or semantic noise taking place in various parts of the model (Steinberg 1977:19). The different positions of noise show that noise can take place at any stage of communication. In other words, noise can take place at the source of communication which it is being sent through the medium and while it is being received by the recipient. Noise, as depicted in the diagram, can also occur during the encoding and decoding process between the communicator and the recipient.

The underlining view of communication being portrayed by the transactional model in the view of DeVito (1994:32-33) is that:

Each person in communication transaction acts and reacts on the basis of the present situation, influenced in great part by his her history, past experience, attitudes, cultural beliefs, self-image, future expectation, and a host of related issues. One implication of this is that actions and reactions in communication are determined not by what is said, but also by the way the person interprets what is said.

The nature of the encounter that takes place influences the outcome of the communicative encounter and is determined by mutual agreement and involvement of both participants (communicator and recipient) in negotiating meaning of the message and this is what makes it a transactional perspective (Steinberg 1997:19).

The three models discussed so far clearly show communication that is either linear or dialogic in approach. Orsini (2000) believes communication in an organisation either takes a top-down approach or a participatory dialogic approach. The top-down approach is mechanical and linear in nature and it fits the Shannon-Weaver's mathematical model described as a *sender-channel-message-receiver model* by Mersham *et al.* (1995:35). Employee relations, according to Ni (2007), is sometimes reduced to top-down or one-way communication, which influences the employees to believe that their views do not count in their working relationship with their superiors

or management. This is not an ideal way of communication as it gives a sense of monologic communication instead of communication based on "mutual understanding". This is alluded to in transactional model above and in the discussion by Mersham *et al.* (1995:12) of the definition of public relations in which they say that communication should be a dialogic, "two-way flow of ideas [...] for mutual understanding".

2.7.5 Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations

The four types of public relations identified by Grunig and Hunt are relevant to the consideration of communication model in organisational communication. Although these are usually considered to be specific to public relations, they also address issues in organisational communication. The models portray different types of public relations practice and their applicable objectives (Mersham *et al.* 1995:37). The four models, as indicated by Mersham *et al.* (1995:37), are depicted in the table below.

Table 2.1: Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations

Models	Press Agency/ Publicity	Public Information	Two-way Asymmetric	Two-way Symmetric
Purpose	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Scientific persuasion	Mutual understanding
Nature of communica- tion	One-way, truth essential	One-way, truth not important	Two-way imbalanced	Two-way balanced
Research	Little, press clipping	Little- readability test, readership survey	Feedback, formative, evaluation of attitude	Formative evaluation of understanding
Historical figures	P.T. Barnum	Ivy Lee	Edward Bernays	Bernay educators
Where practised today	Sport, theatre, production promotion	Government, non-profit organisations, structured companies	Competitive business	Regulated business, modern flat structure companies
Estimated % of market	15%	50%	20%	12%

The press agency/publicity model, as noted by Watson and Hill (2006:119) and Mersham *et al.* (1995:38), shows that the main emphasis of public relations is not on feedback and the effectiveness of the message, but on how to gain publicity using one-way communication with its target audience through mass media and any other media

The public information model is based on the view of public relations advocated by Ivy Lee⁴, which seeks to inform the audience on issues about organisation by presenting facts, details and figures (Wilcox & Cameron 2007:52; Watson & Hill 2006:119). Regarding this model, Mersham *et al.* (1995:38) remark that public relations works through local journalists to disseminate favourable information about the organisation. Information disseminated in this manner is selective, one-way communication and it is the approach commonly used by government, NGOs and agencies (Watson and Hill, 2006:119).

The third model is the two-way asymmetric model, and, according to Wilcox and Cameron (2007:55), it is mainly used to persuade the members of the public to change their attitudes and behaviour. This model is associated with a prominent public relations practitioner known as Edward Bernays⁵. Wilcox and Cameron suggest that the purpose of feedback in the asymmetric model is to listen to the audience and get feedback that will enable the crafting of a better persuasive message. In this model, public relations seeks information from the public through research so that the public relations practitioner is able to formulate suitable persuasive programmes and campaigns (Watson & Hill 2006:119).

The final model identified by Grunig and Hunt is the two-way symmetrical model. According to Watson and Hill (2006:119) this model is associated with Edward Bernays and his contemporaries such as Scott Cutlip and Allen Centre. This is quite different from the other three models because an organisation that uses this model “uses research and dialogue to manage conflict, improve understanding and build

⁴ Ivy Lee was an early 20th century public relations practitioner in the United States of America (Wilcox & Cameron 2007:52).

⁵ Edward Bernays was also one of the early leading public relations practitioners in America and was regarded as the father of modern public relations (Wilcox & Cameron 2007:55).

relationships with publics” (Mersham *et al.* 1995:38). Watson and Hill (2006:116) note that the model emphasises “the need to engage with the audience in order to establish a harmonious relationship – for example, between an organisation and its publics”.

Watson and Hill further state that this model shows that the needs and goals of the public are of imperative concerns to the organisation, but these are considered in terms of the organisation’s policies and practices. This influences Grunig’s (1994 in Mersham *et al.* 1995:38) view that an effective “public relations department adopts the more realistic view that public relations is a symmetrical process of compromise and negotiation and not a war for power”. The process of compromise and negotiation emphasised in the two-way symmetric model is akin to the transactional model, discussed above, which also seeks the construction and interpretation of meaning based on mutual understanding.

Tench and Yeomans (2006:168) believe that the two-way symmetrical communication model may not be the ultimate answer in organisational communication because it ignores the role of power play in organisations. Tench and Yeomans point to a study of an upward feedback channel done by Tourish and Robson in 2003 in a healthcare organisation, where it was found that senior management personnel have a tendency to be overly-critical of negative feedback and be very friendly to positive feedback. This is another context to consider in organisational communication, especially as it applies to the direction of flow of communication.

In an economy with high unemployment and lack of democracy, upward feedback takes place in an atmosphere of fear. Osasebor’s (2009:3) study, based in Nigeria, is very illuminating regarding the nature of communication that takes place between management and employees in that country. Osasebor argues that because jobs are scarce in Nigeria and the few people who are employed usually secure their positions through nepotism or cronyism, feedback to messages received from the management do not reflect the actual state of things. He states that 75 percent of respondents in his study reported that they would only give feedback that would not

jeopardise their employment. These respondents cited lack of legal protection in the Nigerian labour landscape and the attitude of managers, who think they should consider themselves lucky to be employed. The employees, therefore, only tell their superiors what they want to hear. Osasebor's findings are similar to some of the challenges discussed above about upward communication (see section 2.5.2).

2.8 ORGANISATIONAL THEORIES

The nature of communication in organisations is also influenced by the ethos of the organisation that informs the way things are done in the organisation. For example, in a bureaucratic organisation, the nature of communication is usually top-down. In other words, the flow of information in organisations is influenced by the prevailing organisational theories. Some pertinent organisational theories are discussed below.

2.8.1 Bureaucratic theory

The word 'bureaucracy' used to describe organisational structure was formulated by Max Weber (Schultz 2005:380; Neher 1997:64). The theory is based on rational rules or guidelines that are used to regulate the activities that take place in the organisation. Weber's characteristics of a bureaucracy, as stated by Schultz (2005:380), include:

- Each position has fixed official duties;
- Conduct is governed by impersonal rules and regulations;
- Effort is coordinated through a hierarchy of levels of authority;
- Order and reliability are maintained through written communication and files;
- Appointment to office is made by superiors;
- Promotion is based on merit.

These characteristics show that a bureaucratic organisation is a regimented institution where areas of responsibility are clearly defined for employees in the organisation and there is little or no room for flexibility. The characteristics listed also show that subordinates have to depend on orders from their superior to be able to work and this clearly points to communication that is downward and upward. The upward part of the communication will be the typical feedback in the form of reports that are given to the superiors by their subordinates.

Commenting on the disadvantages of bureaucracy, Schultz (2005:380) maintains that in a bureaucracy there is no organisational flexibility and adaptability and the organisation may not be able to respond quickly to changes that arise within the organisation. Without flexibility, a communication practitioner may not be able to respond with a contextualised approach to communication required to deal with situations in both the internal and external environments of his/her organisation. Many organisations operate with rules and guidelines used at the different levels of hierarchy in which power resides. However, it is questionable whether there are still organisations that conform to Max Weber's view of a bureaucratic organisation, especially in South Africa with its democratic norms and values. For example, the organisation that is used as a case in this study can be considered a type of bureaucratic organisation, but the different levels of authority in the organisation have some measures of leeway to carry out certain types of decisions without first submitting the issue to their superiors.

In addition to the disadvantages pointed out by Schultz, Barker and Angelopulo (2010:123) note that there is limited feedback in bureaucratic organisations, and this is usually restricted to a 'speak and when you are spoken to' attitude. Indeed, Barker and Angelopulo (2010:123-124) report that the superiors dominate any discussion and, in most cases, the little the lower echelon employees contribute to the discussion is not taken into consideration

Downsizing and retrenchment exercises, so common in today's business world, fall under what Barker and Angelopulo refer to as instability in organisations (see subsection 2.5.1.1). It is noted by them that because of limited feedback in bureaucratic organisations, employees may face a situation where they

[...] do not know how change will affect the work place. Employees are often overwhelmed by the change process. However, management does not seem to be aware of the unstable environment's adverse impact. Employees are often poorly informed about their future in the organisation, any message from the management may be understood, especially when few or no feedback channels exist (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:124).

2.8.2 Human relations theory

DeVito (1994:327) refers to the human relations approach as being a behavioural or organic approach. The human relations theory arose in response to the classical judgement of organisational success based on physical factors. The proponents of human relations theory argue that the general well-being of the employees will manifest positively in the organisation's productivity (DeVito 1994:327; Neher 1997:83 and Dodd 1987:116). In other words, this theory is premised on the notion that when the organisation fulfils its employees' needs in a manner that results in job satisfaction, there will be increase in productivity. Scholars who share this view are Mersham and Skinner (2001:35) and DeVito (1994:327). Seeing employees' satisfaction as a corollary of a positive work environment which impacts on productivity, therefore, they advise that it is imperative for management to see that their employees are kept happy. DeVito (1994:327) echoes this when he says that: "a happy worker is a productive worker".

The human relations theory runs contrary to bureaucratic theory, which advocates the use of rules and guidelines in the governance of the relationship between the employees and management on the one hand and routes to follow in getting the work done on the other. While it is acknowledged that it is impossible for an organisation not to have principles that govern relationship and how the work should be done, the human relations theory stresses that these principles must not be contrary to the maintenance of human dignity and general social values.

The human relations theory is favoured by leaders who are democratic in their approach to management. As explained by DeVito (1994:327) and Barker and Angelopulo (2010:125), democratic leaders use a participatory approach to run the organisation they lead by ensuring that there will be feedback, suggestions, teamwork and sharing of information. Commenting on the nature of the participative management and the role of communication in this regard, Neher advises that "Communication between managers and subordinates should be more open and involve sharing points of view [...] rather than one-way, top-down directive communication from managers to subordinates".

The model of verbal communication process in human relation theory is a two-way message flow as depicted in the Osgood and Schramm model (see figure 2.8) and in transactional model (figure 2.10). Both models emphasise feedback and mutual participation in the communication process.

In 1938, Chester Barnard demonstrated that communication is central to the effective running of organisation, especially as it relates to the human relation theory (Neher 1997:84 and DeVito 1984:327). Barnard's argument is crystallised in his 'acceptance theory of authority' – a view which according to DeVito holds that "workers will perform effectively and accept management directives if they feel these are acceptable to their personal needs and goals". DeVito maintains that the main duty of management is to communicate the acceptability of the management directives to the employees and to convince them to see the organisation's goals as goals that would meet their personal goals.

In management discourse, Barnard's view reflects on the psychological contract between employees and management. A psychological contract between management and employees is when there is integration of the employees' personal goals with the organisation's goals (Van Dyk & Nel 2005:38). This calls for a balance between what the organisation expects from its employees and what the employees expect from the organisation in order to have the necessary psychological contract for the betterment of the organisation. The role of communication is to sufficiently and suitably communicate the expectations of both the organisation and the employees. This means that "the communicated expectations of the organisation make demands on the skills and energy of individuals, while the satisfaction of the individual needs depends on certain resources of the organisation" (Van Dyk & Nel 2005:41). In an organisational environment where there is a psychological contract between the employees and the management, such contracts results in:

- an individual's desire to maintain his/her membership in a particular organisation;
- an individual's desire to perform on the job and contribute to organisational goal attainment (Van Dyk & Nel 2005:44).

This is shown in the employees' commitment to the realisation of goals of the organisation. It also results in organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). OCB, according to Omoruyi (2010:8) is a state where employees in organisation are committed to the organisation and are willing to perform extra roles beyond their job descriptions in order to make sure the organisation succeeds.

To achieve employees' satisfaction, commitment or OCB, the communication strategy must be used appropriately. Barker and Angelopulo (2010:75) believe that this should be in the form of informal communication where employees can informally exchange information which might be work related, or meant to meet social or personal needs. Similarly, DeVito (1994:328) declares that the human relations theory recognises "the importance of social, informal groups within the organisation and gives special consideration to the interpersonal communication within the subgroups of these organisations". Thus, communication will usually be less formal and include more face-to-face meetings between the management and the employees. Where such meetings are not possible, the use of the internet can facilitate informal communicative relationships with their employees.

In view of the communication flows or channels discussed above, the human relations theory will favour horizontal and bottom-up communication flow as they are necessary to maintain participatory and mutual decision-making espoused in the theory.

2.8.3 Systems theory

Van Dyk (2005:11) states that "a system is simply a number of interdependent components that form a whole and work together with a view to attaining a common goal". Based on Van Dyk's definition, it can be inferred that the systems theory is based on the view that an organisation is a system of many parts which are fundamental to the existence of an organisation. Barker and Angelopulo (2010:118) believe that a system can be seen only in the form of a totality, because "it requires interrelationships among parts to constitute a whole". The importance of the systems within a system is described by Neher (1997:105) as "interrelationship and interlocking behaviours covering all members and units". According to DeVito

(1994:328), the system approach or theory “views an organisation as a system in which all parts interact and in which each part influences every other part”. DeVito concludes that an organisation can be considered as an open system which should be responsive to the environment in which it operates, receptive to information and must be dynamic. This is also reflected in the organisational communication model depicted by Osgood and Schramm and the transactional model discussed above (Figures 2.8 and 2.10).

For the organisation as a system to survive, the subsystems have to interact with other subsystems and this calls for two vital ingredients of communication: information and feedback. There has to be appropriate information between the subsystems and information sharing between the subsystems will be ineffective if there are no feedback channels between the systems. As the system and subsystems are interdependent or “the primary functions of the system and subsystems are to maintain themselves” (Mersham *et al.* 1995:47), the role of communication in this instance cannot be overemphasised. Mersham *et al.* (1995:47) also declare that communication plays an integrating role in regulating the systems and subsystems and this includes for instance “if changes are introduced that endanger the system’s survival, feedback (communication) becomes the means used to restore equilibrium”. Thus, organisational communication, as seen from systems approach, relies heavily on appropriate information that needs to be communicated to and from the systems for survival. Indeed, DeVito (1994:328) states that communication is needed for the coordination of the organisational system and for the synchronisation of the organisational activities.

The systems approach emphasises a systemic view of the organisation where everything about the organisation is considered integral to its realisation of its strategic objectives. In an organisation where things are seen based on a systems approach, the role of communication is acknowledged in all the subsystems of the organisation. For example, in such organisation, it is common to see communication personnel being represented at the upper stratum of the organisation and every other aspect of the organisation in order to give communication a proactive focus within the organisation. When communication personnel are represented in every

facet of decision-making in the organisation, these staff members will have a clear picture of the situation across the organisation as a system and the subsystems making up the organisation.

2.8.4 Cultural approach

In this section, the review will be limited to how the cultural approach to communication influences the way communication is perceived and used in an organisation. Although the understanding of organisational culture in its entirety is another facet in a discussion of organisational communication, here it will be limited to how culture informs the way communication is used.

An organisation comprises of individuals who interact either on a one-on-one basis or in groups. The interaction that takes place between two or more people is strictly based on the rules and norms to which they subscribe. According to Mnemonic (n.d:114), the rules and norms can be referred to as regulative practices which are “based on assumptions about the order of things, values, ethical beliefs, and attitudes towards status and authority – all characteristics of the misleadingly transparent concept ‘culture’”. Mnemonic (n.d:114) defines culture as “a system of activities and discourses, which have been codified and crystallized by usage, and which reflect the conventional practices of a group”. In summary, culture refers to the way people live and in terms of organisational culture, this refers to the particular way things are done in the organisation and how they view what they do (Dodd 1987:114).

Pilotta, Widman and Jasko (1988 in DeVito 1994:328) state that the use of the cultural approach in organisations means that an organisation should be seen as a society or a culture. They contend that just as a social group or culture has rules of behaviour, values or belief, so has the organisation. On this note, the organisation is looked at in order to know the prevailing culture and how it could influence everything about the organisation (DeVito 1994:328).

Organisational culture reflects the national or ethnic culture of the society the organisation is located (Neher 1997:130) and an organisation in a society that is

diverse, will also have the question of diversity to deal with within the organisation. Culture influences what one can do and cannot do and in a diverse organisational environment, this must be noted as different backgrounds influence the decision-making process.

Communication and culture have a reciprocal relationship. Culture informs the manner in which people communicate and culture influences the types of communication carried out by people (Neher 1997:144). In other social situations, Neher points out that culture has an overbearing influence on how discourse is conducted in an organisation. He asserts that “[...] the culture [...] encourages certain topics for communication and discounts others” and adds that “culture determines who talks to whom, on what occasion and concerning what matters” (Neher 1997:144).

The type of culture prevalent in an organisation is a reflection of the collective attitudes, values, belief and norms exhibited by the employees in the organisation. Employees contribute to the nature of things, be it growth or lack thereof, or any endemic practices across the organisation and this finds expression in the manner the employees communicate. DeVito explains that:

[...] communication is not simply messages that are sent from one member to another through one or more channels [...]. Rather, communication is seen as integral to the very definition of an organisation. Communication, in fact, defines and constructs the organisation, its divisions, and its functions. The organisation is not something apart from its workers and its communication. Rather, the organisation is created and takes its form from its workers and their communication interactions (1994:329).

In the cultural approach to organisational communication, the following aspects should be noted by communication scholars, according to Neher (1997:145-146):

2.8.4.1 Context

Communication occurs in the context of the prevailing culture of the organisation, which is made up of values and practices which have emerged over time in the organisational history. Thus, messages and the resulting actions are in terms of

whether they are suitable to the cultural values and practices of the organisation. The cultural values and practices which form the context of the organisation largely provide a basis for the evaluation of what occurs in the organisation.

2.8.4.2 Message behaviour

The cultural approach to communication in this case emphasises the role of symbols and images in messages in the organisation. For example, Neher refers to the fact that in organisations, “*symbolic managers* who can work with and through the *cultural network* are to be emulated” (1994:146). In the functionalist perspective, the managers and other leaders in the organisation are encouraged to give emphasis to ritual and symbolic meanings in the messages they send out, in order to use the messages to create and maintain particular cultural values favoured by the leadership of the organisation.

In the interpretive perspective, the messages are studied for insights of how employees in the organisation “use interaction to interpret and give meaning to their experiences” (Neher 1994:146). Materials that could provide insights into the corporate culture include slogans, organisational publications, internal training manuals and memos. The background to the organisation, such as stories about the founding figure(s) of the organisation and people – past and present – who are regarded as heroes and heroines because of what they did or are doing in the organisation, is also an important aspect.

2.8.4.3 Modes and methods of communication

The way communication is conducted, either formally or informally or a mixture of both, reflect the endemic cultural values of the organisation or the people communicating. If it is an organisation with high-tech culture, the organisation would prefer electronic and computer-based media to written or face-to-face communication. For an organisation with a culture of building consensus and open door policy, meetings and horizontal communication will be preferred.

2.9 FURTHER APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

In the previous section, the focus of the discussion was on the organisational theories propounded by scholars on the nature of organisational management and the relationship between management and employees. In this section, the discussion will focus on some pertinent philosophical approaches used to explain how human beings deal with issues and how they affect the nature and consideration of communication in the organisation.

Reference to other approaches helps in understanding a communicative action. This theoretical approach is very important as it provides a base with which to relate issues to an existing knowledge borne out of critically tested ideas or theoretical models. The theoretical approach, as explained by Barlow and Mills (2009:10) helps in “offering ways of thinking [...] and proposing methods and approaches which might gain new insights”. Similarly, Neher (1997:25) adds that “[t]he approach to a particular field of study that scholars and researchers take depends in large part upon certain assumption that they make regarding the nature of the phenomenon to be studied and the nature of reality”. These approaches do not only influence scholars and researchers, they also influence the way technocrats and others who wield influence in the organisation view both the organisations and themselves.

Theoretical approaches such as the functional perspective, the critical perspective and the interpretive perspective, which have bearing on communication in general and underpin the analysis of organisational communication, will be discussed.

2.9.1 Functional perspective

The functional perspective is the prevalent perspective in the study of organisational communication as it studies communication activities and how they lead to intended and unintended results (Neher 1997:25). Functionalism, McQuail (2005:63) reports, is attributed to the work of Lasswell, who in 1948 published a document regarding the ‘functions’ of communication in society. McQuail (2005:63) argues that the general premise emphasised by functionalism “is that communication works towards the integration, continuity and order of society [...]”.

From an organisational communication perspective, Neher (1997:25) asserts that the main focus of functionalism is on the functions of the various kinds of messages and the resulting communication behaviours. Messages in an organisation considered from functionalist's perspective, are seen in relation to the functions they will fulfil. The message may be intended to fulfil maintenance functions, which as explained by Neher (1997:27) will "help to maintain the existing structures and procedures of an organisation". In other words, communication is used to achieve specific functions in the organisation.

On a broader level, functionalism theory seeks to ensure continuity and improve communication in the organisation. "Functionalists seek variables that will explain how an organisation works, in the hope that by manipulating those variables, they can make the organisation work better" (Neher 1997:132). Welch and Jackson (2007:187) point out that there is a link between the functional perspective and one-way communication model especially in terms of the need for managers to discuss the practicality of a task that needs to be carried out with their subordinates. This in a sense gives a dominating role to the manager with little or no response from the employees.

Many organisations are influenced by the functionalist perspective, hence they resort to communication audits in order to assess whether communication is achieving their desired objectives. This, as remarked by Barker and Angelopulo (2010:336) is usually the case in the examination of the efficacy of organisations' internal communication systems where an investigation is carried out to determine the following:

- who is talking to whom (sender-receiver relationship);
- about what (message);
- through which channel (media); and
- with what degree of success (sharing of meaning).

Barker and Angelopulo add that an audit of this nature is used to assess communicative relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders such as customers, investors and the community within which it is situated.

In order to reflect humanistic values, organisations resort to other perspective such as interpretive perspective in the consideration of their communication audit (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:336) and this is explained in the following section.

2.9.2 Interpretive perspective

The interpretive perspective is diametrically opposed to the functional perspective in that the proponents of the interpretive approach do not believe that human beings react to actions in the same way. Putnam (1983) cited in Neher (1997:27) uses the contrasting meaning of functionalism to explain the interpretive approach and declares that “functionalists view social reality as objective and orderly, interpretivists reflect a concern for social order, but they treat society as constructed through the subjective experiences of its members”. Scholars with an interpretive frame of mind believe that owing to a numbers of reasons, such as cultural backgrounds, people do not react to communication message identically.

Interpretive communication scholars believe that people are influenced in different ways in the manner they choose to react to a communication message. Neher (1997:27) suggests that communicators should be interested in understanding the applicable variables influencing human communication within the organisation. The PFET college, studied here, is a mix of internal publics from diverse ethnolinguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, the researcher must be mindful of the interpretive theory when evaluating the organisational communication of the college.

When using an interpretive perspective in a communication audit or assessment, the focus is on the understanding of the experiences of employees and management of the organisation “and how they interpret these experiences” (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:337). Interpretive researchers undertake communication assessment through participative observation, narratives, ethnography and reflexive accounts (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:337) and these tools enable the researchers to interpret their findings based on the socio-cultural contexts specific to the employees and the organisation.

2.9.3 Critical perspective

The critical perspective is located within the critical theory school of thought. These scholars believe that organisational communication is concerned with the question of power and control in organisations. Like the functional perspective, critical theory is also concerned with communication that promotes the efficient administration of the organisation but, as noted by Neher (1997:28), it questions “for what ends and for what benefits”. Consequently, Neher (1997:28) advises that organisational communication should be approached “in terms of hidden or implicit exercises of power and domination”. Citing Habermas’ (1979) concept of ‘distorted communication’, Neher argues that people are generally oblivious to the fact that the context available for them to take part in communication has been stage-managed in such a manner that they are actually prevented from discussing the issues openly. The critical perspective, in other words, criticises communication that leaves the participants with no ideological choices to engage with the issues at hand. In light of the view propounded by Tench and Yeomans above (section 2.6.2.5) with regard to how power play can affect the intended purpose of upward feedback, the critical perspective should be taken into consideration in the analysis of organisational communication.

2.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, there was a review of literature to provide different scholars’ views on organisational communication. The review started with the definition of organisation in order to stress the importance of communication in an organisation and to understand the definition of organisational communication provided. In the discussion of organisational communication, related terms such as internal communication, corporate communication and public relations were defined.

It was noted that the way in which organisations are structured, influences the flow of communication between the management and the employees. Thus, several types of organisational structures were described and this was followed by a discussion of the directions of flow and types of communication, namely formal downward, upward, horizontal and diagonal flow and informal communication such as the grapevine.

The communication process was also discussed and this led to a detailed description of different communication models such as the Shannon-Weaver linear model, Osgood and Schramm's circular model, the transactional model and Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations.

The chapter closed with a discussion of organisational theories and some approaches to the consideration of communication. It was pointed out that organisational theories such as the bureaucratic theory, the human relations theory, the systems theory and the cultural approach impact on flow of the messages in the organisations. Approaches such as the functionalist perspective were also reviewed to mirror how communication is seen in the organisation.

In the next chapter, the methodology used for this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter a review of literature relevant to this study was given. Through the literature review, some of the perspectives informing the nature of communication in organisations were examined. In this chapter, the methodology used in the study as well as the justification for the selection of the methods used will be discussed. This chapter also provides a detailed description of the data collection methods and the methods used in the analysis of the data. Ethical considerations are of critical concern in any study that uses human subjects, and the ethical issues which apply to this study are addressed here.

Wimmer & Dominick (2011:117) state that methodology in research spells out to the reader how the research was conducted, as well as giving the justification for the manner in which the research is undertaken. Research methodology provides detail about the method(s) used in research. In this study, a qualitative approach was used.

3.2 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Qualitative approach encompasses an eclectic collection of methods and approaches, hence there is no clear agreement among scholars regarding what it constitutes. The lack of agreement can be seen in the way qualitative approach is referred to by other terms such as ethnographic approach, postpositivist and naturalistic approach. For example, Borg and Gall (1989 in Savenye & Robinson n.d.:1046) describe this approach by using a combination of these terms.

The definition of qualitative approach given by Savenye and Robinson (n.d.:1046) accurately describes the approach used in this study. They believe that the qualitative approach refers to a study dedicated to

[...] developing an understanding of human systems, be they small, such as technology-using teacher and his or her students and classroom, or large, such as a cultural system.

They argue that the qualitative approach typically includes ethnographies, case studies and general descriptive studies. Berg (2001:134) prefers the term ethnography and describes it as a research approach which places the researcher in the middle of whatever he is studying in order to perceive the situation not only from his perspective but also from that of the participants. A qualitative approach was used in this study because it allows the findings to be considered from an interpretive perspective.

People are different in a number of ways and these differences influence the way they create and interpret meanings in communication. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:116) observe that "the interpretive investigator believes that human beings are fundamentally different and cannot be pigeonholed". Various scholars have pointed out that this is usually the case when a qualitative approach is used, especially in terms of its effects on the design of the study. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:116) believe that, as opposed to the quantitative approach which has a fixed design even before the study begins, the design of qualitative approach changes as the study progresses and can be adjusted to suit the condition necessitating its design. Corbin and Strauss (2008:13) refer to this as the "fluid, evolving and dynamic nature" of the qualitative approach. This was the case in this study. For example, a post-survey interview was not one of the interview methods planned to collect data but it was later deemed necessary in the study in order to seek more clarifications from some of the respondents who participated in this study.

In Chapter Two, there was a discussion of critical perspective regarding how communication in the organisation should be approached. Here, critical paradigm deals with how power in the society influences the nature of communication (see the discussion of critical perspective in Chapter Two, subsection 2.9.3). Power is one contextual variable that can influence communication and this is well documented by critical researchers.

This study falls into the field of social science and humanities. As observed by Wimmer and Dominick (2011:117), a reflection of the essence of critical perspective in communication is better considered using methodologies such as qualitative

approach that is commonly used in humanities. The findings presented in this study reflect the participants' views about communication at the college. This is one of the reasons that the qualitative approach should be used. A qualitative approach, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008:14), "allows the researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture and to discover rather than to test variables".

Indeed, Babbie (2007:23) asserts that the qualitative approach provides richness of meaning because it allows the researcher to explain his findings beyond surface meaning usually ascribed to situations. In other words, the researcher will be able to indicate how and why things happen which is not possible in case of statistical or quantitative representation and analysis of data. The qualitative approach involves a "description and analysis rather than, for example, the counting of features", according to Wray, Trott, Bloomer, Reay and Butler (1998:95). Additionally, in the application of the qualitative approach, data are usually stated in words and cannot be precisely measured or quantified in numbers (Walliman 2006:55).

The essence of the qualitative approach in a study such as this, according to Rorty (1991:187), is that "there are many possibilities for how any given experience may be interpreted but no interpretation is 'really' true. The same 'facts' can be retold from different points of view and they can have very different meanings". It was stated in Chapter Two that both the sender and receiver bring their experiences to bear according to the prevailing socio-cultural milieu which exert influence on the nature of communication between them (see section 2.6). Data in the qualitative approach can only be properly analysed by a researcher with an interpretative frame of mind in order to reflect the point of view of those whose communicative encounters are being analysed. To sum up, qualitative researchers believe that there are several ways of approaching a phenomenon and that the truth is not absolute but rather the findings are based on perspectives and open to interpretation.

The fact that this is a case study is another justification for the qualitative research method used in this study.

3.3 CASE STUDY

Wimmer and Dominick (2000:124) state that a case study is a common approach in a qualitative research method because it allows a systematic study of individuals, groups or organisations. A case study, according to Yin (1994:13), is an enquiry that uses several sources of data to study a phenomenon in its real-life situation, "in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident". The use of case study is important here because it allowed the researcher to focus on a specific phenomenon. Wimmer and Dominick (2000:124) explain that a case study allows researchers to focus "on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon making it" an ideal method in terms of studying the real situation on the ground. This is one of the main reasons why a case study was preferred here, as it allowed focused attention to be given to a particular situation that defines the pattern of communication at the college under review.

The "real-life situation or context" emphasised in Yin's definition of a case study is supportive of the transactional model of communication discussed in Chapter Two (see section 2.6). The transactional model stresses that communication is context-bound, hence it can be stated that a case study will allow for the determination of the real situation, which may in turn impact on the nature of communication being studied.

The transactional perspective of communication expressly states that many contextual variables affect the way people communicate. This resonates with the way Gray (2005:124) describes the case study as an approach used by researchers who want to study the relationship between a phenomenon and the contexts mediating its occurrence. Thus, using an experimental approach based on a causal association may not help because there might be several contextual variables capable of influencing the nature of the findings (Gray 2005:124). A case study helps the researcher to "describe in sufficient descriptive narrative so that the reader could vicariously experience happenings and draw conclusion" (Stake 2000:439).

3.4 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

This research is about organisational communication at a PFET college, hence the target population for this study were the employees and the students of the college across the various campuses, from which a sample group was drawn. Wimmer and Dominick (2011:87) point out that for reasons such as time constraints or financial resources, it may not be possible to cover the entire potential personnel or population of a case study, hence the need for sampling. According to them “a sample is a subset of the population that is representative of the entire population”. The sample has to be representative of the population of the study in order for the finding to be generalisable (Wimmer & Dominick 2011:87) and this depends on using a sampling method that is appropriate to the nature of the study being undertaken.

3.4.1 Sampling method used in this study

There are many methods of sampling but for the purpose of this study, a stratified sampling technique was used. A stratified sampling is an approach used to ensure “adequate representation of a subsample” (Wimmer & Dominick 2011:98). In this method of selection, the sample is divided into smaller groups called strata and each is selected based on specific variables which make it to be different from others.

According to Babbie (2007:205), stratified sampling is the “grouping of the units composing a population into homogeneous groups (or strata) before sampling” and this “improves the representativeness of a sample in terms of the stratification variables”. One of the ways to control or minimise research error is to use an appropriate sampling method. Stratified sampling was used as it can obtain “a greater degree of representativeness by decreasing the probable sampling error” Babbie (2007:205). Stratified sampling is based on a homogeneous population and this, in Babbie’s view, means that where the population is homogeneous, the likelihood of sampling error is less.

Du Plooy (2006:108) states that

A stratified random sample is drawn when we not only want to draw a representative sample, but also include subgroups in sample in the same proportion as they in the population. Such subgroups are called strata or

known quotas. A population can be divided into different strata based on almost any characteristics or variables, such as different age groups, income groups, gender groups, religious groups and/or political groups.

For this study, the sample was taken from various categories of employees at the different levels of the college. The different categories of the population sampled at the college include the management, lecturers, and junior employees (such as the cleaners, drivers, and maintenance workers) and the students. This sampled population was divided into different strata based on the following variables using proportionate sampling:

1. Gender: The total population of the lecturers in the college is 98 and proportionate stratified sampling was used to sample 80 percent of the population making sure that the same proportion of women and men were sampled. The same applies to the sampling method used on the management.
2. Number of years in the organisation: The junior employees in the context of this study are frontline members of staff, clerical staff members, maintenance workers and cleaners. These categories of population were sampled based on the numbers of years they have worked at the college and because being employees with low level of education. It was decided that only their years of experience would put them in a position to be able to know much of what to say about the issues contained in the interview. Another reason was that it was not possible to classify them by gender as the front line members of staff are mostly women (more than 90%) and the maintenance members of staff who are all male (100%).

It is important to note here that certain members of the management team were not sampled, as they were considered core employees from whom vital information about this study would be sought. For example, the Director of Research and Marketing and the Public Relations Officers were not included in the sample because of their functions regarding communication at the college. Moreover, the students' representatives were not sampled as their views were obtained through a focus group interview.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection refers to how data regarding a particular study is collected. In a case study, there are at least four sources of data and they are, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2000:126), the following:

- Documents
- Interviews
- Observation and
- Artefacts.

For the purpose of this study, survey, interviews and documents or records were used as sources of data besides the use of literature which was referred to from time to time in the study.

3.5.1 Research survey

For this study, a research survey was used to collect data. For a number of reasons, research survey was chosen as an appropriate data gathering tool from the teachers for the following reasons:

Firstly, the lecturers number more than any other categories of staff at the college and, secondly, the constraints of time and cost. It was simply not possible to be able to visit the number of teachers sampled for this study in person.

A research survey was also used based on the fact that emerged from the pilot study done of the situation regarding data collection from the respondents. Having set the questions which I intended to use, I gave them to two teachers at the college and five teachers at secondary to read in order to find out if they understood the questions. I noticed that the teachers at the FET College were very busy and found it difficult to set aside time for the pilot interview. Consequently, a decision was taken to collect the data from the teachers through a research survey which they would complete in their own time, as it was clear that scheduling interviews would not be feasible.

3.5.2 Interviews

It requires a certain level of literacy for respondents to confidently respond to questions in an interview. In an interview situation, however, the researcher and interviewee have the opportunity to seek clarification to any question or response that is not confusing or that requires further elucidation (Babbie 2007:265).

In the context of this study, some of the respondents such as maintenance staff and the cleaners do not have the adequate literacy level to be able to answer questions independently, and it was decided to use interviews to elicit their responses to the questions. These interviews were unstructured and semi-structured. Here, questions were used as an *aide-mémoire* to keep the interview focussed on the main research areas (Gray 2005:213).

Gray (2005:214-215) also cites various reasons to use interviews and the following apply to this study:

- The need to obtain personalised data. This was necessary to get the personalised insights of the respondents especially as they worked in different departments at the college.
- The need to ensure a high response rate. Interviews ensure a high response rate because it is certain that responses will be obtained from those who have agreed to be interviewed.

Interviews were also used to collect data from respondents other than the lower level staff members because, according to Gray (2005:213), the “interview is a powerful tool for eliciting rich data on people’s views, attitudes and the meanings that underpin their lives and behaviours”. The following interview approaches were used:

3.5.2.1 The unstructured interview

An unstructured interview is also referred to as an ‘informal conversational interview’, according to Patton (1990:280) or ‘informal interview’, according to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2009:166). Wimmer and Dominick (2000:181) point out that the unstructured interview allows the researcher to ask broad questions, which allows him “freedom in determining what further questions to ask to obtain the required

information". It also allows the respondents to comment freely on issues raised in the questions (Wimmer & Dominick 2000:163). The unstructured interview is by nature flexible in format and it is not possible for the questions that will be asked to be closed questions (Walliman 2006:92) because the interviewee has the freedom to say whatever he/she wants on the basis of the subject being discussed (Welman *et al.* 2009:166).

Unstructured interviews were used to interview three lecturers who did not return answers to the questions given to them. These lecturers cited lack of time to respond to the questions given to them, but from my discussion with them it became obvious that they were afraid of responding even when it was made clear to them that their response would be treated anonymously.

These lecturers agreed to speak to me in a general conversational manner and as the discussion progressed, we (I and the lecturers) were able to shift to discuss matters relevant to this study. Sensing that they were interested in taking the issues further, they were informed that these were some of the issues I had wanted to deal with in my previous encounters with them. I then used the opportunity to seek their consent to discuss the matters further.

In this manner the unstructured interview was used with open-ended questions, it allowed me as a researcher to maintain an informal conversational mood in such a way that most of them were at ease. They thus narrated their experiences and professional challenges in the context of the main issues I explored with them.

3.5.2.2 Semi-structured interview

A semi-structure interview, also referred to as partially structured interview by Du Plooy (2006:177), is a common interview approach in a qualitative study (Gray 2005:215). It is a type of interview where a list of issues and questions are prepared in advance but the issues and questions may take different shape as the interview progresses (Gray 2005:215-216). Du Plooy (2006:177) remarks that the interviewer may deviate from the list of questions or the nature of the interview in order to "ask

follow-up or probing questions based on the respondents response – if the responses are unclear or incomplete”.

Thus, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to diverge from the main focus of the interview to handle other issues that come up in the interview process and are important to the understanding of the issues under discussion. For Gray (2005:217) this refers to responses from the respondents that are subjective in meaning or issues that are important to the overall objective of the study.

The data collected from other categories of staff, except the lecturers, was by means of the semi-structured interviews. Using the semi-structured interview technique was particularly helpful with the directors, managers, public relations officers and heads of departments, as it allowed the use of open-ended questions to seek necessary explanations regarding policies that have a bearing on communication in their departments.

3.5.3 Documents

Documents are another source of data in a case study. In this study, the documents sourced were annual reports, internal memos, brochures and the online Quality Management Systems (QMS) of the college. These documents contain information about the college and they were used in the analysis and other aspects of the study to corroborate participant responses in the interviews conducted. They were also helpful in contextualising some communicative issues at the college. Documents as source of data are important because according to Gray (2005:135), they can be reviewed repeatedly and are stable as the information in them does not change.

3.5.4 Literature as source of data

Throughout the research, literature was consulted on an ongoing basis to remain abreast of established knowledge on each aspect of the analysis. The literature review done in this study formed the basis of the analysis made in terms of applicable theories in the field of organisation communication.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is described by Rapmund (1996:118) as a “process whereby order, structure and meaning are imposed on the mass of data that is collected [...]”. To stamp order, structure and meaning on the data collected in this study, data analysis was an ongoing process and this involved constant revision of the preliminary deductions and conceptual development. This is important because it enables one to record important insights gained during data collection before losing them (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:157). In this study, the researcher updated the data gathered after each interview and, in so doing, fine-tuned the deductions in a consistent manner.

Data analysis involves the breaking of the data into smaller parts in order to know their defining characteristics (Gray 2005:327), which will be used in coding them. These characteristics determine where and how to assign the different parts or units to different categories of data. The actual data analysis of the data begins with coding the data and filing the information electronically. The coding system used entails collecting and analysing all data in relation to the identified conceptual framework. Through the coding process, according to Taylor and Bogdan (1984:136), “what were initially vague ideas and hunches are refined, expanded, discarded, or fully developed during the stage”.

In this study, the analysis of the data was based on the different themes of the data derived. In Chapter Four, the data were analysed based on themes and subthemes. These themes reflect the categories in which the data were placed during the analysis. Some data cut across different themes and they were interpreted as such in Chapter Four.

The data analysed came from interviews and survey done. The data was analysed in relation to applicable information found in the literature review. Interview data was in the form of transcripts and this was the reason why the researcher should interpret the meaning of the data and indicate the most important part of it in an explicable and coherent manner. At this stage, the researcher has to search “for relationships and common patterns across categories of data with a view to establishing

explanations which will help to shed light on phenomenon being studied” (Wimmer & Dominick 2000:108).

Data from documents was used to corroborate the data collected from the survey and interviews done.

In the final step of the analysis, an explanation with the necessary detail was presented. This was done by means of drawing inferences or interpretation from the data, where the outcomes of the analyses done are put together in a logical explanation of the phenomenon studied.

The findings of some of the data were presented in a simple descriptive statistics in the form of tabular representation of the number of respondents and the applicable percentage of respondents who have responded to the issues investigated. This constitutes of triangulation – although to a limited extent – in terms of the analysis of the data. However, it makes the analysis clearer and coherent (Hansen 2005).

3.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

It is very important to state how validity and reliability of a research are addressed in order to give credence to the findings presented in the study. The following steps were taken to ensure that the findings were valid and reliable.

3.7.1 Validity

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some respondents (lecturers) refused to respond to the questions given to them. They were later interviewed through unstructured interviews. This is a method in which the validity of the research can be ensured, according to Gray (2005:207). Commenting further on this, Gray writes that:

For a non-response [...] follow-up interviews can be used for those who did not reply and their responses compared with those who did answer the questionnaire to see if the two sets of responses are similar (Gray 2005:207).

In this study, there was no marked difference between the data collected from the lecturers through survey and the data collected from them through unstructured interviews. The differences that could be noticed in the data collected through survey and unstructured interview from the lecturer was in the elaborated responses given by those interviewed.

A research procedure known as member-checking was done (Weinberg 2001, in MacLiam 2006:140). What I had written in the field notes would be read back to the respondents and they would be asked to confirm whether their statements were correctly recorded. Corrections and amendments were immediately recorded to the satisfaction of the respondents.

3.7.2 Reliability

Reliability is a measure of consistency and this includes inter-judge reliability, and when different measuring instruments are used on the same sample, there must be equivalent findings (Gray 2005:208). In other words, the need for reliability in research is to ensure that when a particular research technique is repeatedly applied to the same object, it will result in the same findings.

One of the ways the question of reliability of this study was addressed was to use a digital voice recorder during the semi-structured interviews. This greatly reduced the chance of error in the recall of the information collected, according to Gray (2005:257). In addition to this, the method of corroboration of findings was used by speaking to respondents who were able to confirm or disagree with the information provided. For example, the Department of Education officer was asked to confirm some of the information provided by the lecturers and this was to ensure that a second opinion was sought about the information.

For the sake of reliability, a post-survey interview was done. This became necessary, because during the analysis phase of the study, discrepancies in the information given about human resources department of the college were noted. A post-survey interview was done with some staff in the human resources department and other

core departments at college where a confirmation was sought about certain information (see Chapter Four).

3.8 ETHICAL ISSUES

This study was done with the full knowledge of the authorities of the PFET college where this study investigated, as permission had been sought from the appropriate authority (see authority letter in Appendix B).

This study involved human subjects, hence the researcher had to observe the principle of ethical propriety and respect for the integrity of the participants in the study.

Ethical issues in the research were addressed as follows:

- The study was done in accordance with CPUT's applicable ethics rules and regulations.
- The respondents received a document clearly communicating information about the research. In this document it was emphasised that the respondents could decline to participate in the study and could withdraw from the study at any time. It was made known to the respondents that they would be treated anonymously and that there would be strict confidentiality regarding the information they would divulge.
- The respondents only participated in the study after their informed consent had been obtained.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the research methodology used in this study was discussed. The preferred research approach used in this study is the qualitative approach and the reasons for this choice were given. Other research tool, such as sampling methods, data collection methods and methods used in the analysis, were explained together with the reasons why these methods were preferred in this study.

Lastly, there was an explanation of how ethical issues applicable to the nature of this study were handled.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

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

The principal data analysed here was collected from the academic staff members (lecturers) of the college. The data collected from other members were analysed as well but this information was used to corroborate the data obtained from academic staff members. This does not suggest that data from other categories of staff at the college were not important but the fact that the lecturers were the most numerous respondents, informed the focus on the data received from them. Secondly, the lecturers are the major internal publics of the college, hence the focus was more on them than on the other categories of staff. Thirdly, the central reason for the existence of the college is academic studies, hence everything else at the college should be considered as auxiliary to academic matters.

The data analysed and discussed in this chapter were collected from a total number of 105 employees. In the table below, a breakdown of the number of different categories of respondents is provided.

Table 4.1: A breakdown of number of category respondents

Staff category	Number of respondents
Management	20
Lecturers	55
Maintenance workers, cleaners, etc	20
Frontline staff	7
Core employees ⁶	3

⁶ Core employees referred to here are employees considered very important to this study and they, therefore, were not sampled. See explanation in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1.

4.2 THE POSITION OF COMMUNICATION PERSONNEL AT THE COLLEGE

The position of communication in an organisational structure is a good indicator of how the senior management views communication and its role in the organisation. In fact, Rensburg and Cant (2010:43), state that it suggests “the importance and value ascribed to the function” of communication. Put differently, does the management view communication as an essential tool to achieving strategic organisational goals or does it see it as a fifth wheel of a car remembered only when there is a punctured tyre to attend to? This is evidenced by the level of post communication specialists occupy in the organisation. In the following figure, the level communication specialists occupy at the college is shown.

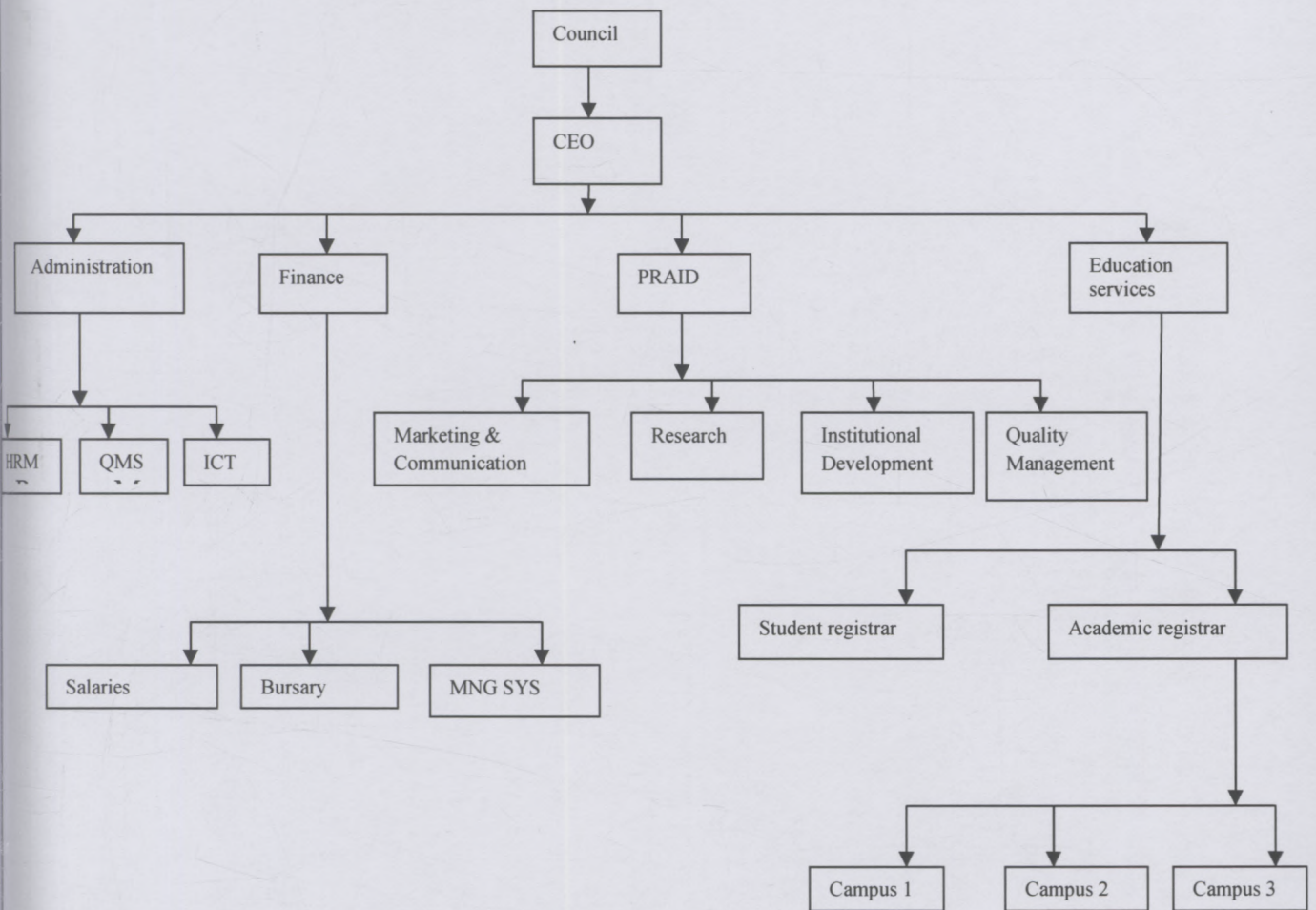


Figure 4.1: The college’s organisational structure

Based on the data collected, the findings showed that communication is not one of the key strategic management functions at the college. Although there is a communication unit at the college, it is subsumed under the marketing unit, hence it generally does more marketing work than communication.

At the college under review, communication is seen as a subsidiary function to other management functions. As depicted in the organisational structure of the college in Figure 4.1 above, the communication department is a sub-department in the Department of Planning, Research and Institutional Development (PRAID). As a sub-department, the staff report to the manager who oversees not only communication affairs but also planning, research and marketing. Therefore, in the organisational structure of the college the function of communication is seen at staff assistance level, which indicates that a communication specialist advises his/her superior (manager) about communication issues.

Staff assistants, according to Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* (2008:54) function at an advisory capacity and this means their advice may be rejected, even though they are specialists. The level at which the communication specialists are placed in the college is similar to that discussed in the line and structure organisation in Chapter 2, subsection 2.4.1.3. In this type of structure, communication specialists are used as advisors, but their influence in the management of the organisation is limited. As can be seen in Figure 4.1 above, the communication specialists at the college are at the junior employee level and they are several steps removed from top management indicating that they do not have any influence on decision-making.

When these communication specialists were asked to describe their role at the college, they pointed out that they were also doubling as the public relations officers and marketing officers of the college. Although, existing literature agrees that there is a blur line between public relations and marketing (Rensburg and Cant 2010:35), this makes sense when it is seen in the form of how both fields can complement each other to improve the organisation's relationships with its stakeholders. As both disciplines interact with the organisation's stakeholders, there is a need for public

relations to work closely with marketing to ensure that their marketing practices are used as public relations opportunity for the good of the organisation.

As management functions, both disciplines can be used interchangeably, as they have related techniques. Rensburg and Cant (2010:36) state that both functions draw on each other's techniques and explain that:

[...] the techniques of public relations (such as publicity and interpersonal communication) are often used in support of marketing theory while the techniques of marketing (such as advertising and controlled communication) are often used in support of public relations theory.

Pointing out the differences, they note that public relations functions are distinctly about creating and sustaining good relationships between an organisation and its external and internal stakeholders. On the other hand, marketing is concerned about attracting customers, ensuring that they are satisfied for continuous business relationship aimed at realising an organisation's economic objectives.

Thus, both marketing and public relations can complement each other but Skinner *et al.* (2009) argue that public relations functions are indispensable in marketing practices in an organisation. According to them, in any marketing campaign it is necessary to seek the input of a public relations person

at all stages, whether it be of an advisory nature regarding public attitudes [...] or expert recommendations and action relating to publicity back-up, literature production techniques, audiovisual possibilities, or related skills which professional public relations people should possess (2009:46).

Skinner *et al.* clearly articulate the relationship between public relations and marketing and show that the college's assumption that public relations and marketing can be done by the same person reflects a lack of clarity as to what communication and marketing actually are. Though they regard themselves as the communication specialists at the college, these staff members are usually referred to as marketing officers. In my interview with the senior manager of the department in which these two officers are located, they were only referred to as marketing officers,

as was clearly demonstrated by the reference made to them in the college's magazine⁷ published in May 2011.

4.3 COMMUNICATION POLICIES

The centrality of communication in organisations means that there should be policies in place to guide the way decisions are taken and executed. Policies, considered from communication perspective, will also indicate how organisations respond to different communicative situations in terms of strategies to draw on to address issues as they arise. One of the policies which cannot be ignored in a diverse workforce such as in organisations in South Africa, is policy about language.

In South Africa, there are eleven official languages (see South African Constitution chapter 1, section 6 (1). It is expressly stated in the Constitution, chapter 2, section 29 (2) that:

The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.

However, the language policy of the college prescribes English as its official language and medium of instruction. This reflects the constitutional provision about official language taking into consideration the practicability and the needs of the population, which in this case are the students. The students are in training for the world of work in South Africa in which English holds sway over all other languages. Reflecting the college's policy, all its official documents such as memoranda, annual reports, prospectuses and any other official documents are written in English. The same applies regarding language use in meetings at management level.

⁷ This is an anonymous study hence the name of the magazine cannot be mentioned in the text.

The policy also means that English will be used as a language of instruction, during staff meetings and any other communicative encounter. This was acknowledged by all the respondents in this study, but some of the academic staff and students remarked that the policy is not followed to the letter. The majority of the lecturers and students are isiXhosa speaking and this has been used as an excuse by some academic staff to justify why isiXhosa is sometimes used in staff meetings and even by some lecturers as a medium of instruction.

In addition to the two instances above where English is sometimes not used, English is not used in conversation with maintenance workers and cleaners at the college. A top ranking secretary in the office of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the college noted that "though English is the medium of the college based on its language policy, the need to be understood well means that the people at this level will be communicated with in their mother tongue".

The non-use of English during some academic staff meetings where there are non-isiXhosa speaking academic staff members present was labelled as the ethnocentric attitude of the isiXhosa members of staff by certain respondents. Two academic staff members, who agreed to a post-survey interview about this said the issue had been raised directly and indirectly in meetings by non-isiXhosa speaking members of staff but they have largely been ignored leading them to believe it is an expression of ethnocentrism.

The non-use of English as a medium of instruction by some lecturers has not gone without challenge. Though the challenge has not caused significant alteration in practice as most lecturers still use isiXhosa according to students who was affected negatively, and this is corroborated by some lecturers. The students (White and Coloured students) have protested the use of isiXhosa as a medium of instruction and this prompted the Head of Campus (the main campus) to address the issue with the lecturers and to issue a memorandum explaining the policy of the college regarding its medium of instruction.

Despite this, the information collected from students revealed that many Coloured and White students had to deregister and have left the college as the use of isiXhosa during lectures continues. This was also the reason cited to explain why there are few White and Coloured students at the college.

It is important that people are allowed to communicate in a language they are comfortable with or to speak their mother tongue but not at the expense of a policy designed to promote equal education. In practice, even isiXhosa speaking students who were taught in that language may well find it difficult to successfully sit their national examination which is set in English.

The marketing officers of the college were asked the extent to which they are promoting the college to potential White and Coloured students and they stated that there is an on-going community outreach with different communities. They noted that their efforts have not resulted in more White and Coloured registration at the college because of the use of isiXhosa as a language of instruction by some lecturers.

In an organisation where there are concrete communication policies in place, communication strategy usually follows to deal with some critical communication issues such as campaign and crisis. This is explained in the next sub-section.

4.3.1 Communication strategy

A communication strategy is a proactive tool used by an organisation to respond to issues that need to be communicated or responded to in a coordinated and systematic way. It is an approach, design, scheme or system that directs the course of action in specific situations (Steyn & Puth 2000 in Barker & Angelopulo 2010:36). Usually communication strategy is a derivative of a communication policy, thus the decision to develop a communication strategy indicates the seriousness of an organisation about communication. Communication strategy is usually used during an organisational crisis and this is the focus of the data that will be analysed and discussed in this section.

Organisational crisis communication is regarded as an external communication because it involves communication with external stakeholders such as the media and customers of the organisation. The plan and execution of organisational crisis communication takes place within the organisation and its effect of its existence or lack thereof is felt in the organisation. This is the reason data specific to organisational crisis communication will be discussed in this section. Also the view of organisational communication taken in this study is that it applies to all aspects of the organisational – both internal and external (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:15).

The data in this study show that the college has a policy regarding communication, but this has not resulted in a communication strategy that will serve as a blueprint or reference to address thorny issues when they arise. A communication strategy should also include a plan to handle the general communication in an organisation.

The analysis of the data collected from the department tasked with communication at the college revealed that there is no blueprint indicating the direction to follow in a crisis.

By its very nature, a crisis will take management by surprise and it is usually an occurrence that will dent the image of the organisation if not handled well. It can also be used to demonstrate the positive and caring nature of the organisation depending on how it is managed internally. Skinner *et al.* (2009:287-288) refer to an organisational crisis as a critical hostile situation which may be antithetical to the reputation of the organisation. A comprehensive definition of a crisis given by Clawson-Freeo (2000:1) says that a “crisis is any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of a company, usually brought on by adverse media attention”. During crises, there is often an unusual media focus on the organisation, hence the need for a communication specialist to manage the situation in line with communication strategy in place.

The data provided by the senior manager of the department in charge of communication at the college revealed that there is no strategy for crisis communication or, indeed, even a general communication strategy at the college.

the communication department or the CEO. The other categories of employees, such as the lecturers (lecturers here also include the programme manager⁸), frontline staff, officers at clerical levels and maintenance workers, etc, said they have not been told anything about communication during a crisis.

The employees' responses confirmed the information given by the head of the department responsible for communication at the college that there is no communication strategy at the college. However, it is evident from their responses that even the *ad hoc* communication strategy mooted for use during a crisis or media attention is both inappropriate and ineffective. Had they considered the strategy appropriate, the employees would have cited instance(s) where they were told how to deal with the media.

The inappropriateness of the *ad hoc* communication strategy referred to by the senior manager, is evident when reviewing the incident⁹ in November 2009. Although this cannot be considered a crisis at the college, it drew attention across different media outfits for several weeks, hence it was important that communication specialists should be in the lead regarding how to handle media enquiries and enquiries from the public about the incident. While, the CEO was largely responsible for dealing with the media, other members of staff such as the campus head, also had to answer questions from the media. The reactions from various staff members varied greatly and there was no single, official stance on the matter. It was possible for the researcher to speak to different staff members about the incident and was given different information, often informed and coloured by their political perspectives.

If the college was an organisational environment with a communication strategy, the management would have been able to select an appropriate strategy to use in dealing with the media. It would have been equally easy for the employees to know

⁸ Programme managers, as used at this college, are the equivalent of heads of department at universities.

⁹ The incident could not be mentioned in order to protect the identity of the college, as this study guaranteed anonymity.

what the status quo is since they would have been informed as a matter of policy about how to respond to media enquiries.

4.4 FLOW OF INFORMATION AT THE COLLEGE

The college can be described as a bureaucratic organisation where employees' activities or efforts are coordinated through hierarchy (Schultz 2005:380). The flow of communication between the employees can be described as vertical flow, which may be more of downward than upward or a combination of both in a balanced form.

4.4.1 Downward communication

Citing the responses from the lecturers and other junior employees at the college about their source of information, 100 percent (N=55) of them replied that their superiors were their sources of information about their work. They also stated that they got information through internal memoranda that are circulated through their superiors, who put them up on the notice board.

Further evidence of downward communication can be found in the responses to the following question put to employees at management level who participated in this study. They were asked: *"Do you sometimes see the need to communicate with junior employees (at a level lower than your rank) in other departments in order to do the work in your department"*? Of the twenty employees at this level, 70 percent (N=14) said they would communicate through the employees with similar rank with them to get the information to the junior employees in other departments. In other words, if a manager wants to pass information to a clerical officer in another department, he/she will pass the information through the clerical officer's manager. Twenty percent (N=4) of these respondents said that they would communicate through employees at the same level in their department to junior employees in other department. This also means that if a manager wants to pass information to a clerical officer in another department, he/she will pass the information through the clerical officer in his/her department. It is only 10 percent (N=2) who said they communicate directly with junior employees in other departments. However, they all remarked that where there is a problem going through the employees' boss, nothing stops them from communicating with the junior employees directly. To use their own

words, "we must first all pass through structure" before going to the junior employees. This is characteristic of downward communication and usually occurs in organisations that subscribe to bureaucratic principles where rules and regulations must be followed (Jablin 1980 in Baker 2002:8; Neher 1997:66).

Downward flow of communication is obviously a top-down approach and the nature of communication makes the employees' superior dominant in the interaction. This is characterised by little or no contribution by the juniors to the decision-making process and where their input is sought, it is not always taken into consideration when making the final decision (Barker & Angelopulo 2010: 123-124).

It may be necessary to state here that some scholars acknowledge downward communication as the preferred channel of communication flow. Larkin and Larkin (1994 in Baker 2002) suggest that "downward communication is most effective if top managers communicate directly with immediate supervisors and immediate supervisors communicate with their staff". Supporting this assertion, Baker (2002:7) refers to what is known as *Pelz effect* and then suggests that evidence abounds that increasing the authority of immediate supervisors increases employees' satisfaction and performance. The Pelz effect is based on a study done by Donald Pelz, who attempted to find out the types of leadership styles that would lead to employees' satisfaction. In his findings, Pelz remarks that "what matters most is not the supervisor's leadership style but whether the supervisor has power". For Baker (2002:8) downward communication would be ideal if supervisors are given power to communicate directly to his subordinates and also allow them to participate in decision-making.

Explaining this further by using the argument of Roberts and O'Reilly (1974), Baker states that by ensuring that supervisors are informed about organisational issues or changes first before their subordinates and then allowing them to communicate these issues or changes to their subordinates helps reinforce their position of power. When supervisors in organisation are perceived as having power, employees have greater trust in them. They are more willing to communicate with them and are more likely to believe that the information coming from them is accurate.

With regard to nature and quality of information they get from their superiors, the front line staff and the maintenance staff agreed that the information is useful and timely. However, 78 percent (N=43) of the lecturers who responded disagreed while 22 percent (N=12) agreed. The 78 percent of lecturers who disagreed complained that they are inundated with information from their superiors and they are expected to respond immediately even though the information needs to be studied carefully before responding. DeVito (1994:336) refers to this as information overload and he puts the blame on inexperienced superiors who do not know how to give the relevant information to their subordinates in time. The lecturers who complained of information overload believed it is not a case of inexperienced superiors but a case of 'careless superiors' who do not have any regard for their subordinates. They said they regularly had to abandon some of the information given to them in order to attend to other memoranda, which in their judgement required more urgent attention. They, for example, cited the need to complete portfolios of assessment (POA) for the lecturers and portfolios of evidence (POE) for the students. The information to do this would often come late together with other information and the lecturers said they would disregard all other information in order to attend to the completion of POA and POE.

The following table shows the percentage of responses about the lecturers (the 78 percent) who qualified the nature of communication as information overload:

Table 4.2: Nature of downward communication to lecturers

Nature of communication from superiors	Number of respondents (N=43)	Percentage
Sometimes inaccurate	23	54%
Not clearly communicated	15	34%
Always accompanied with threat	28	65%
Not willing to confirm information even when it is already doing the round at the college	22	50%

The data in the Table 4.2 indicates that there is a problem regarding the nature of communication the lecturers receive from their superiors. Communication comes

through several layers before it reaches the final recipient. This excludes written forms of communication. The written form of communication that is passed downward to the lecturers reaches them in its original form because their immediate superior will print it and circulate it, however oral communication is problematic.

The 54 percent (N=23) and 34 percent (N=15) of lecturers who responded said that they sometimes found out later that the information that had been given to them was as inaccurate and unclear. This is not surprising given that the information must have passed through several other channels before it reached the lecturers, hence the likelihood of filtering or distortion. Rho (2009:6) remarks that message distortion or filtering may take place when it is not received directly from its original source. The distortion can be in the form of change or addition to the message or may be as a result of an incorrect interpretation of the message. Similarly, Neher (1997:162) argues that communication passed downward in an organisation in a face-to-face format may lose fidelity because the superior passing the information may decide "[...] what is the real or main message to be passed on. Details may be omitted, or the message may be softened in order to shield a subordinate from hurt feelings [...]" (Neher 1997:162).

As for the written downward information, the lecturers said that though there is no distortion, the information often arrives late. This is acknowledged by the various respondents at management. Admitting that written communication is often tardy at the college, a senior manager, who heads the department in which public relations is located, said that getting feedback in time is a problem or to use her own words, "[...] response from other units is a problem, ignorance about what needs to be done early and people, especially the lecturers, complain of lack of time". This corroborates the lecturers' view that sometimes they could not respond to communiqués because they had arrived too late. As mentioned, there is general low response to information sent top-down by management as the data in the table below have shown.

Table 4.3 Management's view of how early feedback is given to the messages they communicate downward

Agreeing that there is quick feedback to information sent top-down	Number of respondents (N=20)	Percentages of respondents
No, feedback to information comes late	16	80%
Yes, information comes early	3	15%
Not sure	1	5%

The data in Table 4.3 indicate the type of communication flow from the employees at lower categories at the college to the upper management. This, in other words, indicates the type of upward communication at the college which is discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.5.2 and analysed below in terms of the data collected.

4.4.2 Upward communication flow

Upward communication flow is used to respond or give feedback on issues communicated to employees through top-down communication structure. Essentially, upward communication is meant to create a situation where the nature of communication in an organisation is not only top-down but also bottom-up. In an organisation where this exists, communication can be described as a two-way process where feedback is accentuated between the sender and receiver.

There is upward communication between the lower categories of employees, their immediate superiors and the management at the college. Again, as noted in the discussion of the downward communication above, communication at the college must go through structures at the college. In the case of upward communication, 100 percent (N=105) of the employees (both management and all other categories of employees) remarked that their communication with their superiors must go through structures. This means that they (the employees) must direct their communication upward through their immediate bosses or superiors. This resonates with the discussion of Pelz effect discussed above, but the data collected in this study do not totally corroborate the perceived advantages of the Pelz effect.

Apart from the front line staff who said they were satisfied about their communication with their immediate superiors, the majority of other categories of employees said they were not satisfied about their communication with their immediate superiors. As shown in the table below, majority (65%, [N=36]) of the lecturers said they were not satisfied about how their complaints and queries were being dealt with.

Table 4.4: The lecturers' satisfaction quotient re: the way their complaints are handled by their immediate superiors

Whether lecturers are satisfied with the way their immediate bosses handle their complaints and queries	Number of respondents	Percentages of respondents
Not satisfied	36	65%
Satisfied	11	20%
Sometimes satisfied, sometimes not satisfied	8	15%

The data in Table 4.4 show that majority of the lecturers are not satisfied with the way their immediate superiors handle their complaints and queries. Some of the reasons given by them were that their superiors may not take their complaints and queries through the available organisational structure(s) to the appropriate authorities, especially when the complaints or queries were about issues that would expose their superiors' poor leadership. They also said that they had also noticed some situations where their superior would 'hoard' information about their complaints and queries. That is, where there was a response to their queries and complaints, their immediate superiors simply would not tell them.

Another reason they cited was the perceived ineptitude of their immediate superiors. It was reported that the superiors did not have the ability to deal with their queries, especially when they were issues that were supposed to be dealt with by them before taking such matters to higher authority.

These responses point to a limitation of the Pelz effect. Although, the Pelz effect does say that the supervisors should be given the necessary information and be exposed to the decision-making structure in order to make them effective as a conduit for downward communication, it neglects to consider the fact that interpersonal dynamics may influence employee-superior relationship.

Other categories of employees such as maintenance workers said they were satisfied with the way their complaints and queries were dealt with, but they said that the complaints were not usually responded to in good time.

Some of the managers acknowledged that there was a problem with the flow of communication upward at the college and they said this was one of the reasons they would sometimes prefer to communicate directly with the employees by by-passing their superiors. Several respondents at management level (70%, [N=14]) gave this as the reason why they would communicate diagonally with employees without passing through their superiors. This was also cited by some lecturers (52%, [N=28]) as the reason they had always by-passed their superiors to go to the person who would be able to handle their problems. When I asked if this was allowed at the college, one senior manager said:

I have not had any reason to send back junior employees who came to me for one reason or the other because they believed I could help them. Though, the official policy is for employees to use the structure to get words up and down but we know this may not be possible all the time.

The lecturers said the official policy is that they should pass through the official structures to communicate upward. They noted if this policy is strictly adhered to, it would mean that they would not be getting information in time to do their work properly. They added that they would prefer to go to the top person in the management that is responsible for academic matters because the person is receptive and welcoming.

The data discussed so far about upward communication has revealed that although there is an official policy for upward communication to go through the employees' immediate superior, this is not cast in stone. In other words, the situation is flexible enough to allow an unofficial situation where the employees can by-pass structures to get things done. In fact some respondents at management level (40%, [N=8]) said they would prefer this to become an official policy as they complained that the information they do get from employees' superiors does not put them in a situation to respond to the junior employees' needs suitably.

The lecturers were cited as an example of employees who do not have adequate information to be able to do their work because their inputs to academic matters are not suitably communicated to management by their immediate superiors. Thus, in the argument of the 40 percent respondents at management level, it means the ideal route is to by-pass the lecturers' superiors in order to serve them based on their needs. Generally, the lecturers stated that their views matter less to the management. One of the lecturers said "there is no implementation of lecturers' voice by the management". For example, based on the lecturers' suggestions, management supported the idea of having 80 percent class attendance by the students as a requirement to be able to write examination but this has not been implemented by the college. The lecturers further stated that when the students do not do well in their examinations, the academics will be blamed by management, totally disregarding the fact that their suggestion for the improvement of students' performance has been ignored.

Many factors may give rise to reasons why the lecturers' feedback is not adequately communicated to management. According to DeVito (1994:334) this might be because there is a gatekeeper who does not like the message being communicated and decide to alter the message, reroute it or stop it from getting to management at all. Another possible reason can be the physical location of the management and the employees in the organisational structure. In some organisational structure, the management's position is reflected physically at the top of the organisational building. In other words, they are at the top by occupying the top floor(s) of the organisation. This is a barrier to upward communication. DeVito (1994:335) remarks that "usually management offices are on separate floors of the building; not infrequently, they are in other cities. It becomes difficult in such situations to go to management with a work-related problem that needs immediate attention".

4.4.3 Horizontal communication flow

Horizontal communication flow at the college reflects in a way, the college policy which emphasises the need for communication flow to go through structures. As horizontal communication flow is a type of communication between employees of the

same rank (Erasmus-Kritzinger *et al.* 2008:49), the data collected in this regard shows that this type of communication is a common occurrence at the college.

When the respondents at management level were asked the following question: "*Do you sometimes see the need to communicate with junior employees in other departments in order to do the work in your department?*" The answers from the respondents suggest that they communicate with employees on the same rank to get their messages to the junior employees in other departments. According to one of the respondents: "I work with similar rank, but if not available I work with the people available". This statement is characteristic of all the respondents at management level and it reinforces data already analysed under downward communication, which shows that the information flow must pass through established structures of the college. This means that instead of communicating directly with the affected employees, the management will rather communicate horizontally with officers of the same rank to get their messages across to their intended recipients. This is a kind of interdepartmental coordination, according to DeVito (1994:336).

All the respondents in this study said they rely on horizontal communication flow to do their work. One of the lecturers has this to say about the way horizontal communication flow takes place among the lecturers: "right from the day you start work at this college, you rely on communication with colleagues to get things done. Your colleagues will give you perfect induction, all academic work besides teaching in the class will be shown to you by your colleagues. You continue to be confused and you continue to ask your colleagues what to do to get rid of the confusion".

When the lecturers were asked who they turn to when they need information that will enable them to their work, all refer to colleagues and 65 percent (N=38) added that they would meet their immediate superiors to get the information. They pointed out that this is done only after it becomes apparent that their colleagues do not have the information they need.

According to one of the lecturers:

Getting human resources-related information in this college through your superiors is not easy; I do not know whether to characterise this as mere lack of interest on the part of the superiors or they simply do not know what to do. As for me and many others (my colleagues), the best way to mitigate this is to speak directly to HR officers to get the information. To answer your question, I suppose that these HR officers may be at my rank level in the HR department.

This response further reveals the problematic nature of information flow at the college. In the response, the lecturer revealed that rather than speak to her superior, she would communicate with staff members who are possibly the same level in another department. Here, the way staff members communicate with colleagues in other department at the college is akin to line and staff structure. In an organisation with line and staff structure, specialists play an advisory role (Kritzinger *et al.* 2008:54). As explained by the lecturers, they would resort to communicating with a staff at the college horizontally and one of the staff members referred to in this case is a HR practitioner in the HR Department. Instead of going through their immediate superior to get the information, they go straight to the specialist attached in the structure to have their queries addressed.

As stated above, in order to comply with bureaucratic culture at the college, the employees at management level said they would always communicate through employees at similar rank level when they want to get information from junior employees from other departments. This is another example of horizontal communication at the college.

Horizontal communication is an entrenched communication flow at the college as reflected in the data collected from the maintenance workers. An instance of horizontal communication between the maintenance workers was described by a cleaner:

If I want things done for me at HR, I will ask my colleagues if the officer who is handling the matters is around before I go there. Sometimes, I will be escorted by my colleagues to the officer's office.

This applies to all other categories of maintenance workers as well. One carpenter said, "we will fix things up through our colleagues in that office".

4.4.4 Diagonal communication

Like horizontal communication flow, employees generally resort to diagonal communication flow when the established structure of communication flow has failed. According to the senior manager of the Public Relations department, “I sometimes have to pick up the phone to communicate with junior employees if the information I want from them is not forthcoming through the relevant structure”.

Although, the college can be regarded as a tall structure (see section 2.4.1.1), it has the element of line and staff structure (see section 2.4.1.3). From the data, one of the reasons diagonal communication takes place is to consult employees, who though junior in rank, have expert advice to give.

The lecturers (66% [N=36]) said they would engage in diagonal communication with junior employees such as Public Relations and Marketing Officers¹⁰ when they need something to be done professionally or regarding something that has to be done in PRO's office. The lecturers maintained that they would do this when there is no time to go through the established structure. They cited the orientation organised for new students in 2009 as an example of something that came up suddenly and they had to communicate diagonally with the PRO and marketing officers regarding the way forward. This is another example of an element of line and staff structure where a specialist is attached to another employee such as manager because of their expertise (Hellriegel *et al.* 2008:211). In this case, the PRO and Marketing Officers are attached in the PRAID because of their expertise and as explained above, the lecturers had to communicate with them diagonally to fast track decision-making.

This information was corroborated by the PRO and Marketing Officers but they added that they do deal with employees who are senior and junior to them in rank, sometimes in an impromptu manner. However, they stressed that this would have to receive approval from their superiors before rendering such professional assistance. For example, they mentioned their regular meetings with junior employees such as front line staff to position them to give suitable and correct information about the college to external stakeholders. They said the frontline members of staff are far

¹⁰ The lecturers maintained that the PRO and marketing officers are junior in rank to them hence they regarded their communication with them as diagonal communication.

junior to them in rank but because they are usually the people who would be met first by visitors to the college, they had to train and equip them with the necessary information visitors to the college would need. The PRO and Marketing Officers said they did not go through their superiors to get approval to discuss and assess the need for training of the frontline staff. However, when their superiors became aware of what they were doing they gave their blessing.

Diagonal communication was also cited as a frequent occurrence between the CEO of the college and other junior employees. The CEO was described as a “hands-on” person who would want to go to the spot the action is taking place rather than going through established structures. Instances supporting this can be found in the numerous meetings held with more junior employees, such as the academic staff. Instances also abound about his interaction with other junior employees such as the maintenance workers, in their mother tongue – isiXhosa. When this was discussed with the lecturers, they disagreed. They said they were of the view that the meetings the CEO had had with them were always through established structure because he would always pass the information about impending meetings through their immediate superiors. The lecturers’ argument can be considered in terms of the emphasis that communication at the college goes through hierarchical structure. However, the fact that the CEO has always come down to talk to them instead of passing established structure can be regarded as an example of diagonal communication.

The maintenance workers, such as the cleaners, handy men and drivers, said they did encounter instances of diagonal communication with top management and other employees who are senior in rank. In other words, the senior employees do have diagonal communication with them. The lecturers cited this as a daily occurrence because they often see the need to seek their services for one reason or the other. Four respondents at top management level at the college also do communicate diagonally with the maintenance officers. In most cases they said they would prefer to communicate through the maintenance officer’s superiors. Moreover, as these workers (especially the cleaners) are easily seen around in the morning, informal discussion with them is common according to all the management employees

spoken to in this regard. One of the managers pointed out that such an informal discussion often leads to more formal discussions where the junior employees would open up about their problems at work. This would then give rise to the senior employees at management level either helping to resolve the problems or recommend the appropriate office at the college for such a resolution.

4.4.5 Grapevine

Employees resort to grapevine when there is an uncertainty such as an unconfirmed report or a feeling that the true state of things is not being stated about important matters in an organisation (Neher 1997:173).

Regarding unconfirmed reports or lack of adequate information about the work the employees are doing at the college, the following data in the table below will help to shed information about the employees' feelings. The respondents in this case are lecturers and other junior employees. The table below represents the data supplied by the lecturers.

4.5: Lecturers' comments about whether the information they get is adequate and appropriate for their jobs and other issues about them

Nature of communication – whether adequate or appropriate for the job and other issues about them at the college	Number of responses (N=55)	Percentages
Adequate and appropriate for the job I do	19	35%
Not adequate and appropriate for the job I do	36	65%
Not adequate and appropriate for other matters such as employment conditions, rights, labour-related issues, etc	47	85%
Adequate and appropriate for other matters such as employment conditions, rights, labour-related issues, etc.	8	15%

4.6: The maintenance workers' comments about whether the information they receive is adequate or appropriate for their jobs and other issues about them

Nature of information	Number of responses (N=20)	Percentages
Adequate and appropriate for the job I do	19	95%
Not adequate and appropriate for the job I do	1	5%
Adequate and appropriate for other matters such as employment conditions, rights, labour related issues, etc.	6	30%
Not adequate and appropriate for other matters such as employment conditions, rights, labour-related issues, etc.	14	70%

The data in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 above show that the lecturers (65%, [N=36]) did not

feel that they were receiving adequate and appropriate information that would enable them to do their work well. Regarding employment and labour-related matters, 85 percent (N=47) of the lecturers said the information they do get is inadequate and or inappropriate. Maintenance workers (95%, [N=19]) were satisfied that the nature of information they receive is adequate and appropriate for them to do their job well, but this is not the same in terms of their employment conditions and labour-related matters.

The data collected from the lecturers and maintenance workers show there is lack of appropriate and adequate information about employment conditions and labour-related matters. This lack of information was cited by lecturers as the main reason why there was grapevine communication and it is what commonly acknowledged in literature regarding why there is grapevine (See Watson & Hill 2006:252; DeVito 1994:338). Of all the departments at the college, the HR department was regarded as an exceptionally unfriendly department, hence the possibility of getting important

information about employment conditions and other labour-related issues is very limited. The lecturers mentioned that there have been incidents at the college and other matters which, under normal circumstances would have been explained to staff by the HR department, but as this is not the case, speculation and rumours are rife.

When the maintenance workers were asked to explain why they thought issues about their employment conditions and other HR-related issues that were not sufficiently communicated to them could cause rumours, a handyman responded as follows:

This is a general problem at this college [...] no information about salary, no information about employment conditions and it is discussed by even our colleagues (lecturers) and when we hear what they are saying, we can at least guess what issues are. We also discuss this among ourselves, with them and we just know that this is the information even though they (HR) is refusing to tell us.

The maintenance worker's statement above points to the fact that generally there is a lack of information (as indicated in Tables 4.5 and 4.6) and in an attempt to gain clarity, rumours and counter-rumours spread. The maintenance worker also revealed that they relied on the lecturers to explain what was happening on campus.

The problem of lack of information was not a problem to other categories of employees I spoke to but they also admitted they do rely on the grapevine regarding certain issues at the college. An example cited by one of the top management for which she had to rely on grapevine communication, was the takeover of the FET College sector by the Department of High Education and Training (DOHET). Berating the slow progress and lack of clear direction about the takeover, this respondent said she had to rely on grapevine information from others, especially outsiders for information about the takeover. She said the information collected in this manner has always been fairly reliable or credible. This, to some extent is typical of grapevine or rumours and it spreads easily "because it has the momentum of credibility" (Watson & Hill 2006:252).

4.5 STUDENTS' COMMENTS ABOUT COMMUNICATION AT THE COLLEGE

Students were interviewed about how they get information. The Students' Representative Council (SRC) members and a few other students (15 students) were interviewed. The data collected from the SRC also pointed to the fact information circulates through formal structures to them. They confirmed that they usually deal with the students' affairs officer for information. Other information that has some bearing on the students is communicated to them through the established structures at the college. Regarding their view whether they have the necessary information about their studies or other pertinent information at the college, they answered in the negative.

They bemoaned the fact that they do not have access to sufficient information about issues that are relevant to them at the college. They pointed out that they had heard through the grapevine that they would be starting examinations the first day in second semester but they were surprised they had not been officially informed. They argued that while it is not only unreasonable they would be made to write an examination on the very day they would return from holiday, they believed that they should be informed in time so that they could inform their fellow students to come back from holiday prepared for the examination.

This was another case of grapevine information that lecturers claimed they had also heard and which was accurate but they did not tell the students because there was no confirmation from the relevant authority.

The students pointed out that they were confused about NCV (Vocational) programme, how it operates and not being put in the picture about the challenges emanating in the implementation of the programme. One of the examples they cited to buttress their complaint was the lack of availability of textbooks and sometimes even the lack of lecturers. They said this has always led to late resumption of classroom activities and, in most cases, resulting in a situation they were not able to properly inform other students about the situation. To corroborate this, ordinary students' views were sought and they agreed this was the state of affairs regarding students at the college.

Unlike the lecturers and the management who emphasised that they would normally prefer to communicate through established structures to get their messages to their intended audience, the SRC said they would go straight to the person who has the information they want. This is understandable in light of the fact that they are students who may not know the ways things are done at the college. Besides, SRC as a union or association usually adopts a militant approach in handling issues, and therefore do not care about following procedures to achieve their goals. This means that information gets to the SRC through established structures but they (SRC) do not give feedback through established structures. They also do not communicate with the authorities at the college through established structures. Information collected by the SRC in this manner may not be relevant or accurate as other party to the communication may be left out and the meaning negotiated may not reflect the situation on the ground (Steinberg 1997:19). As stated by the secretary of the SRC:

With us, it is open door policy as we have not had instance where we have been sent back for not passing through established structures. However, we sometimes have to book appointment to see important people like the CEO or directors of departments – may be this what you refer to as structure.

This was corroborated by all categories of employees who were respondents in this study. They agreed that they had all dealt with SRC and even other students directly. According to one of respondents at management level, “the primary reason the college exists is to serve the students and get the best out of them. This is the reason I, for one, am happy if a student comes to my office to seek information or help. I will gladly help to the extent I can”. While this respondent statement may seem logical, when considered in line with Grunig and Hunt’s model (see discussion section 2.7.5) the students’ approach to communication may be characterised as two-way asymmetric model. Although, the nature of communication may be two-way, it may be imbalanced because some of the information needed may require the input of other stakeholders pertinent to the matters in order for it to be balanced. This is where the issues in question is explored in detail in a manner that all other structures involved will be brought on board in order for mutual understanding to exist as stated in the Grunith and Hunt’s fourth model. The students on their part admitted in this

case that sometimes, it had happened that though the collected information was from the source of origin but they could not do anything with it because of the influence of other relevant structures at the college.

The purpose of feedback, given how the asymmetric model is explained, is to listen to the students and get a feedback that will enable a smooth dealing with them in terms of getting a better persuasive message to address their queries (Wilcox & Cameron 2007:55). However, this may not be a balanced message as meaning created is not based on the mutual understanding of other important stakeholders to the matter in question.

4.6 INTERNET AS A CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION AT THE COLLEGE

There are many channels of communication at the college. Members of staff at the college can communicate through e-mail in the form of intranet. There are also telephone calls, meetings, and written modes of communication, such as memoranda. However, there is disproportionate access to these channels of communication by the members of staff and the students at the college in this technological age.

At the moment, only the administrative staff or non-academic staff (excluding the maintenance staff) has access to the college intranet. This means they have e-mail addresses at the college and they are able to send and receive e-mail while at work. The academic members of staff, however, do have access to Internet facilities through which they can communicate via e-mails but they do not have a college-based e-mail address. On other campuses, employees, especially the lecturers, do not have access to Internet in their offices or staff room. The only access they have is what they referred to as the centralised Internet, which means there is a particular place in the campus where the members of that campus can access the Internet.

The manner in which information is accessed through Internet at the college reflects its bureaucratic and tall structure-like organisation. The lecturers said messages are passed to them in the form of e-mail through their superiors, such as heads of programmes, head of schools or campus head who then print the e-mail and circulate it. This reflects a downward communication pattern at the college. In some

cases, the superiors simply conveyed these messages by word of mouth. Depending on the nature of the messages, sometimes they would be required to sign to acknowledge the receipt of the message which has been printed and handed to them individually.

Regarding whether the messages from management through e-mail to lecturers is in time, the responses from the lecturers revealed a pattern similar to the data analysed in section 4.6.1 about downward communication. Significant percentages of the lecturers (78%, [N=43]) disagreed that the message is timely while 22 percent (N=12) agreed. In this case, they were not sure if the delay of the messages is caused by the original sender or the person who has received it on their behalf. According to a senior manager, feedback from the lecturers does not come as early as expected, forcing her to communicate diagonally with the appropriate academic staff members. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that the delay may have been caused by intermediate recipients such as the heads of programmes, the head of school or campus head. This view is supported by one of the head of programmes who said that:

The lecturers may be right to say they do get information from us late, especially information communicated through Internet you referred to. Remember, as a head of programme I still teach and honestly things are so uncoordinated that I may not have time to respond to e-mail either by printing them out for circulation to lecturers in my programme or pass the message by word of mouth. For example, today I have been busy doing activities that I suddenly learnt of and I had to get them done today, so you can imagine where I will get time to read e-mail and act accordingly.

Though the head of programme response has provided valid reasons why information circulation may be delayed, it is clear in her response that the bureaucratic structure of the college causes delays in the flow of communication. This negates the acclaimed benefit of ICTs of which Internet is one. For example, Flemming (2002:4) says it reduces processing time.

When the lecturers were asked whether they communicate via e-mail to the management, 11 percent (N=6) said they had done so and this was because they had been specifically requested to do so by the manager. The other lecturers (89%,

[N=49]) said they had not done so. However, all the lecturers said they use e-mail to communicate with each other, usually about personal matters or to strengthening social relationship (Morales-Gomez and Meles 1998:5).

Other employees such as the maintenance staff and the cleaners do not have access to e-mail or Internet at the college. The same applies to the farm workers and those employed in various workshops at the college. In other words, the Internet and e-mail are the exclusive preserve of the management and their junior staff members. This certainly gives indication of how the question of information is regarded at the college. It also shows that the management and the administrative staff receive priority over other members of staff. This is typical of Internet use, especially with poor and uneducated workforce and it resonates with observation made by Southwood (2001 in Fleming 2002:1). Southwood observes that Internet access is linked with socio-economic privilege and this means Internet is accessed by few well-educated individuals.

The discussion of Internet resonates with the view espoused in critical perspective about how power is a factor in the consideration of issues. The fact that junior employees do not have access to Internet and it is not being addressed demonstrates power play at the college. Internet will offer the junior employees more choices regarding the way they communicate but considered from critical perspective, it seems the management is not considering Internet as a tool to for junior employees to engage with issues at the college.

The critical perspective, in other words, criticises communication that leaves the participants with no ideological choices to engage with the issues at hand. In light of the view propounded by Tench and Yeomans above (section 2.6.2.5) with regard to how power play can affect the intended purpose of upward feedback, the critical perspective should be taken into consideration in the analysis of organisational communication.

Other benefits of Internet are its suitability for online applications that will allow, in the case of the college under investigation its dispersed campuses to tackle issues as a team or use communication in a synchronic manner across the campus. Communication is synchronic when people are able to talk face-to-face and can respond straightaway (Leeuwis 2006:119). Apart from the fact that this is already happening through communication technology such as telephone, Internet-enabled application such as Skype can also provide a synchronic type of communication.

Today, many organisations use the opportunity provided by an intranet to bridge the gap in communication between the management and the employees. The intranet allows these organisations to circulate relevant information quickly and efficiently to staff members. This is possible because the organisations have website with capability to create e-mail addresses for their employees. Email is regarded as an asynchronous type of communication because it is a form of communication where responses are delayed and the parties communicate at different times (Leeuwis 2006:119). Through the e-mail addresses, the employees are then able to receive internal information and any other information from the organisation. The employees, in turn, can communicate either in the form of feedback to the information received or pass information through the same medium for the benefit of other employees at the college.

At present, the college is not maximising the use of intranet as a means of internal communication. Intranet is cost-effective and time-saving as memoranda, newsletters, guideline documents and other necessary information can be uploaded onto it for access to all the employees (Skinner *et al.* 2009:104-105).

A website is a useful tool to communicate to an organisation's internal and external audiences. A website is referred to as a multi-channel because it has textual, auditive and visual contents that can be opened (Leeuwis 2006:203). Through this, the organisation is able to make vital information available to its publics, and may include contact numbers and addresses for key officers of the organisation. In the case of a college with different academic offerings, one would expect to see information about the courses being offered at the college, the contact numbers of the campus heads, head of school, and heads of programmes on the website. The

college this study has investigated has a website on which information about the college can be obtained but this does not include information about its course offerings and contact numbers of principal members of staff at the college.

4.7 OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Apart from its website, information about the college can be obtained in its Quality Management System (QMS). The QMS, according to the college's 2008 annual report, allows the college "a single way of controlling the systems (system/process approach) as the main monitoring/governance tool"¹¹. The college QMS is meant to ensure quality management of all the functions undertaken by the college. The college has been recognised in this regard by quality regulatory body and it was awarded an International Standard Organisation's (ISO) certificate on 21 October 2009. This was in the category of ISO 900:2008 SANS-SAB Certificate. In management literature, this is referred to as Total Quality Management (TQM) and it is said to be "a means of addressing organisation-related issues to improve quality in the planning and evaluation of work processes" (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:92).

Thus, to maintain the tradition of quality which has been recognised by the award of the ISO certificate, the QMS of the college contains information about every aspect of the college. It has rich information about the organisational structure of the college and the different duties of all the personnel from the CEO to the least members of staff of the college. This helps to indicate the level of productivity and the need for continuous improvement on what has been achieved (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:92) The QMS list objectives or the expected outcomes that different functions of the personnel have to meet.

The QMS list is a storehouse of information about the college or the "internal website of the college with sufficient information to make one's life easy, though some of the information in it does not address the reality on the ground". Thus, it was not surprising that 100 percent (N=55) of the lecturers responded that the QMS was their primary source of information about the college. The same applies to the

¹¹ It will not possible to indicate full reference relating to this information in the end-text reference because this is an anonymous study about the college – hence no reference to the college name will appear in this study.

management staff who said that the QMS provides information they use to plan for what needs to be done in their departments or units.

The only members of staff who reported that they had not used the QMS as a source of information about the college are the maintenance staff and the cleaners. This can be understood as these categories of personnel have little or no education to equip them to confidently access information using a computer. However, one of the maintenance staff said it was not a problem for him to use a computer but the college does not consider them important enough to give them access to information through computer at the college. Thus, the maintenance staff, cleaners and such categories of staff do not have access to computers or the information system of the college.

Access to information in the form of QMS is not free of challenges according to the lecturers. Some of the lecturers, especially these on the other campus, said the QMS is not frequently updated hence most of the information in it is stale or invalid.

The second challenge they face is the fact that to access information in the QMS independently, they need to be trained. Some of the lecturers (40%, [N=22]) said such training has not been given to them hence they had to rely on their colleagues whenever they need to access information in the QMS.

These challenges mentioned by the lecturers were acknowledged by the manager responsible for the QMS. He responded as follows: "I don't have the liberty of communicating with people who have problems with QMS ... I have to tell my superior about everything I need to do here and she may not see things professionally". He added that the job functions listed in the QMS were compiled by the heads of departments and this has been a problem.

An organisation cannot be effective if its parts do not work together and the synergy required to do this is always found in the QMS system (Schultz 2005:226-227). The QMS manager's response, which is an honest confirmation of the challenges the lecturers had alluded to, shows the question of synergy as referred to by Schultz is

not adequately addressed. The manager also concurred with the lecturer who complained that the QMS is not reflective of what really occurs on campus, and further reported that

I said people brought unrealistic things to be included as things that happen in their department but they do not do most of what they have brought hence I will support the lecturer who said the QMS is not addressing the reality on the ground, especially in terms of how it enables interdepartmental cooperation in getting things done.

Other sources of information about the college besides the website and the QMS are annual report, newsletter and brochures. The annual report of the college is released in the year following the one reported on, and thus, at the time the data for this study were collected, the annual year report for 2010 was not available.

An annual report contains information about what has happened in an organisation in the year under review. With regard to the college this study has investigated, the annual reports of 2007, 2008 and 2009 contain information about different departments at the college, such as human resources, education services, planning and research development as well as their units or sub-departments.

Although an annual report is prepared for the attention of the organisation's stakeholders such as shareholders, media, customers and suppliers, it is also a medium through which information can be made available to its internal public such as its staff members. Through an annual report, the employees can access information about the growth or progress made, as well as the financial status of the company. All employees at the college refer to the college's annual report as a medium that provides them information they would ordinary not have received from the relevant departments.

The college has brochures that give information about the different subjects offered at the college. These brochures speak to both internal and external publics of the college. The lecturers indicated that the different brochures made them more aware of the subjects being offered at the college and reported that they would always refer to these brochures to help potential students.

Another source of information at the college is their newsletter, a recent innovation. This is in the form of a magazine which contains news and information about activities at the college. Referring to the definition of newsletter provided by British Association of Industrial Editors, Skinner *et al.* (2009:100-101) state that newsletters are:

[...] publications issued periodically, and not primarily for profit, by an industrial undertaking, a business house, or public service. The term covers not only all types of internal magazines, newspapers, bulletins and news sheets for employees but also external periodical which are published primarily for shareholders, agents, dealers, distributors, retailers, or customers, in the interest of prestige, public relations, and sales promotion purposes.

The newsletter at the college falls within the above-mentioned definition. The department responsible for marketing and public relations at the college refer to it as an in-house magazine and it is used to disseminate information for both the college's internal and external publics.

The first edition of this newsletter contains articles about the college's community outreach programme, efforts that are being made by the marketing and public relations officers to market the college and other news about internal activities of the college.

The newsletter has been widely circulated within the internal publics of the college. The management, the lecturers, the students, the maintenance staff, cleaners and other categories of workers such as the farm workers and workshop workers across the three campuses of the college were given copies of the newsletter. However, no attempt was made to find out whether the newsletter is being read by the external public of the college, although the marketing and public relations department said the newsletter, being the first issue were limited in number, and therefore the external public may not have access to it. She said, however, that the magazine is available at most frontline offices at the college where external visitors can read the magazine.

4.8 COMMUNICATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MANAGERS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES

In any type of relationship, especially in a professional relationship, communication is needed to keep it viable (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:4). This can only occur successfully when the communication is based on trust and respect.

Recognising a staff member for who and what he or she is, especially in line with his or her official duties and respecting the manner in which he/she discharges his or her duties, will result in a positive manager-subordinate relationship. The same applies when making employees feel integral to a department. The manager has to take the lead in creating a communicative space where the employees can freely interact with their superiors for optimal information flow and, stemming from this, efficient discharge of their duties. This is an aspect which is humanistic in approach (Werner 2005:335; Barker & Angelopulo 2010:116) and it should define the relationship that exists between the manager and his/her subordinate in any organisation.

Several questions were asked to find out the communicative relationship between the employees and their managers. The managers generally felt that they have sound communicative relationships with their staff, but this was not the case in certain departments.

Several employees in departments such as educational services, campus head office, planning, research and institutional development answered in the affirmative to the following question: *"Do you believe that your boss offers appropriate guidance for solving job-related problems?"* The same response was also given to the following question: *"Do you believe your supervisor is open to ideas"?*

The general response to these questions was decidedly different when posed to the academic members of staff. The lecturers reported that they have three immediate superiors, namely the Head of Campus, the Head of School and the Heads of Programmes. They explained that though the Head of Campus is senior in rank to the Head of School and Heads of Programmes, they have operational dealings with all of them on a daily basis. They wished to qualify their responses by indicating to which of their superiors they were discussing.

To the following question: “Do you believe your boss offers appropriate guidance for solving job-related problems”?, the following table gives a simple descriptive statistics of the lecturers’ responses:

Table 4.7: Lecturers’ responses indicating whether they believe their bosses give appropriate guidance for job-related problems

Do you believe your boss (Head of Campus/Head of School) offers appropriate guidance for solving job-related problems	Number of respondents (N=55)	Percentages
Yes	22	40%
No	33	60%

The same responses in terms of percentages of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses were given to this following question: “Do you believe your supervisor is open to ideas”? It is instructive to point out that these responses indicated in Table 4.7 apply only to the campus heads and heads of school as the lecturers’ immediate superiors.

Responding to the questions above as they apply to the lecturers’ heads of programmes, the following table gives descriptive statistics of the lecturers’ responses:

Table 4.8: Lecturers’ responses indicating whether they believe their programme leaders give appropriate guidance for job-related problems

Do you believe your boss (programmes leaders) offers appropriate guidance for solving job-related problems	Number of respondents (N=55)	Percentages
Yes	52	94%
No	3	6%

The data in Tables 4.7 and 4.8 clearly show the lecturers’ relationships with their three immediate superiors in terms of information they need to do their work and also

in terms of whether their inputs are sought in matters that affect their work. These data speak about the lecturers' relationship with two of their immediate superiors on the main campus of the college. In terms of the lecturers' relationship with their Head of Campus and Head of School on other campuses, the data showed general satisfaction in the nature of the relationship that exists. The lecturers said they were satisfied with the communicative relationship in terms of information to do their work and their contributions to discussion of issues about their work.

A post-survey was done with some selected lecturers¹² (half of the lecturers whose response was no) revealed further information about the type of communicative relationship they have with their superiors – the Head of Campus and the Head of School. One of the lecturers said both of them treat the lecturers unprofessionally and added “they don't ask you to do something but would tell you to do something and this is usually in an impolite manner”. Another lecturer said the head of school “would always intimidate you by saying ‘if you don't do work, I will not renew your contract’, even though the information and the space to do the work do not exist”. Generally, the lecturers who are on different terms of contract do not view their communicative relationship with the head of school as positive because they all feel insecure in the jobs as this threat of non-renewal of contracts is pervasive. The Head of School's management style can be characterised as coercive power or authority and there is a likelihood that it will result in “vicious circle of negativity” and poor working environment (Werner 2005:334).

In an atmosphere of lack of mutual respect such as the one painted by the lecturers above, information flow from managers or superiors to their subordinates will be seriously hampered. In other words, open communication that would have helped to develop better employee-management relations is non-existent (Barker & Angelopoulos 2010:122) and this resonates in the response given by one of the lecturers who said: “I go to the Head of Campus as a last resort, usually I collect the information I need from my colleagues or the programme head or I go straight to education services department”. This lecturer's comment reflects and inherent

¹² The selection of lecturers was based on availability and willingness to participate in further discussion about their responses.

breakdown of communication: when the appropriate person, such as the Head of Campus, is not approached for information and reliance is placed on a secondary source, the information may be distorted, leading to incorrect actions with problematic results for all concerned. His response is an evidence of a horizontal communication and diagonal communication earlier discussed in sections 4.6.3 and 4.6.4.

The amount of information subordinates get to do their job depends on their manager or superior. A manager in the Planning, Research and Institutional Development department said it is better to give adequate information to one's subordinates – even if the information becomes too much – as too little information may hamper their efficient discharge of their duties.

The data about the head of school and the lecturers, analysed above, exemplifies a lack of professional decorum by the head of school when dealing with his subordinates. However, objectivity requires that the Head of Campus and the Head of School should also be interviewed regarding the communicative relationship with their subordinates. Unfortunately, the Head of School declined a request for interview and the Head of Campus was on an extended holiday abroad at the time the data were collected. However, the data analysed are a true reflection as they were corroborated by other sources, including the heads of programmes.

A good communication environment is one where a two-way communication is valued and this means that parties in communication interact in a space where the principle of openness and feedback are encouraged in order to have a shared or mutual understanding of meaning between the organisation and its publics (Barker and Angelopulo 2010:200).

4.9 FEEDBACK

The data analysed in the section above indicated poor communicative relationships between the lecturers and two of their immediate superiors on the main campus of the college. This type of failure in communication takes place in a top-down communicative relationship. In other words, managers who are inherently disposed

to top-down communication will go all length to sustain the practice by threatening his subordinates as indicated above. The opposite of top-down communication is a communicative relationship that thrives on feedback. This was articulated in the Osgood and Schramm circular model (see Chapter 2, section 2.7.2), where feedback was emphasised in the communication process loop and in the transactional model (see also section 2.6.2.3), which emphasised that the creation of meaning is based on the perspectives of both parties in communication.

As with other data analysed thus far, the employees in the non-academic departments and their managers said they were satisfied regarding feedback from their departments. The employees said they always received feedback to enquiries and their managers hold the same view. This also applies to administrative departments on the other campuses of the college.

The data collected from the programme leaders on the other campuses showed different views. According to the programme leaders interviewed (six programme responded to the request for interview), feedback from the lecturers is usually given before the deadline, however in certain cases this was not possible.

One of the programme leaders said certain lecturers are unable to give timely feedback and the reason can be found in her response to the following question: "*Do you think there is sufficient information available for you to do your work*"? and she responded "Yes, there is, but there are many changes taking place at the college and these affect information flow and the giving of feedback before deadline".

As for feedback to their enquiries from their immediate superiors, they all reported that they were satisfied. However, they remarked that sometimes there is problem because the information needed may not be available readily because of the slow response from the main campus, which is the main source of information for their campuses.

The lecturers who responded to questions about feedback to their queries, also reported a general satisfaction because they feel that their programme leaders do their best to find answers and/or solutions. One of the lecturers commented:

When you said feedback, I would want to approach it from the perspective of information flow. There is no way this can be said without recognising the fact that we work in a campus that depends on a main campus for information because that is where the management of the college is situated. Most of our queries or enquiries demand answers from the main campus and our programme leaders have to follow structures to get the answers from the main campus – I can tell you this can take time sometimes. When the answers do not come, my programme leaders do tell me where the problem lies.

This is the sentiment shared by other lecturers in the campuses because all of them said responses to queries are satisfactory, except that there is of a lack of response from the main campus. They also reported being unhappy with lack of clarity regarding the continuous changes taking place in their programmes. Feedback is supposed to be an opportunity to seek clarity for unclear message and if this is not the case, the purpose for which feedback is required in an interpersonal communication is defeated (Watson and Hill 2006:100).

The data from the satellite campuses showed good communicative relationships. The academic staff spoke of frequent meetings where views are shared about what needs to be done, and cordial relationships with the Campus Heads and the Head of School.

This appeared not be the situation with the lecturers in the main campus, though they reported satisfactory communicative relationships with their programme managers, citing constant feedback in an interactive environment. One of the lecturers said:

Please I would want to understand the lecturers' relationship with their programme leaders from the fact that we regard the programme leaders as our 'good colleagues'. You know when you refer to fellow workers as 'good colleagues' it means there is no problem of communication. We understand ourselves, we are in it together – in fact we give each other our ears.

Although, this lecturer's response seems emotional, it corroborates other lecturers' views about their cordial communicative relationship with their programme leaders.

Unfortunately, this does not apply when the question of feedback is looked at regarding the lecturers' enquiries, queries and inputs in meetings.

One lecturer said that the academic's opinions and views are not reflected in the decision-making process, even when the decision is about what is central to them as lecturers. The management can be said to be less participative as they have no concern for the lecturers' needs and desires in terms of their job requirements (Werner 2005:334).

When the lecturers were asked the following question: "*Is your suggestion sought about your work or about any change to your work?*", 95 percent (N=52) of the lecturers said "Yes". Whether their suggestions count in the final decision taken, the responses given support the assertion made by the lecturer about employees' voice and this is reflected in the data analysed in the table below.

Table 4.9: Lecturers' views about their suggestions

Do you think your suggestions counts?	Number of responses (N=55)	Percentages
Yes	14	25%
No	36	65%
Not sure	5	10%

The data analysed in Table 4.9 show that significant percentage (65%, [N=14]) of the lecturers feel that their views are not reflected in decisions that have bearing on them.

An example commonly cited to by the lecturers to justify their view was the college's year plan. The year plan contains schedules of meetings to be held throughout the year, together with details such as the dates, times, venues and a basic agenda. The lecturers claimed that the year plan was compiled with little or no input from them. They said most of the issues emphasised in the year plan are about academic matters which require their input but that they were omitted from the preparation of the year plan.

Another example commonly cited by the lecturers is the parent–lecturer meeting in the year plan. It is scheduled but not implemented. The lecturers felt that the parent-lecturer meeting is pure window dressing. They stated that if the lecturers do not talk about it, the management will not talk about it and when the lecturers do raise this issue, it is simply an opportunity for the management to show disdain towards the lecturers. This should not be the case in an organisation with humanistic values but rather, it should be an environment where there is management briefings, accuracy of information, desire for interaction and communication satisfaction (Neher 1997:95). One lecturer narrated the experience the academics had when they called for a parent-lecturer meeting as indicated in the year plan, as follows: “even when it is held, it will be a case of saying ‘lecturers go to the hall, the parents will meet you in the hall’, no agenda and they would expect the lecturers to start arranging chairs for the parents to sit on. There is no agenda for such meeting”.

When decisions are taken in a participatory manner, all participants in the process ‘own’ the decision. Whatever needs to be done as a result of the decision will not be strange to the employees because they were part of the decision-making team. Consultation by the managers makes the staff members feel valued and part of the team, thus motivating such employees will be easy. This is referred as to participative communication process (Skinner *et al.* 2009:98). They advise that it is important that employees’ inputs are put to use in the organisation, otherwise credibility will be lost and the employees may not be interested in future participation.

4.9.1 Challenges affecting feedback

As indicated above, memorandum is a commonly used method of downward communication. While this has the advantage of being placed on the notice boards in different strategic positions at the college for the employees to read, significant percentages of the employees of different categories at the college pointed out some of the problems caused by this method. Some of these are reflected the table below:

Table 4:10: The challenges about communicating through memorandum

Challenges affecting the use of memorandum	Number of respondents (N=55)	Percentages
No opportunity to seek clarification	39	70%
Memorandum comes very late	28	50%
Message filtered or distorted	17	30%

From the data stated in the Table 4.10 above, 70 percent (N=39) of the lecturers pointed out that they do not have opportunity to seek clarification to information they receive through memoranda. Although, no single reason was given by them as to why there is lack of opportunity to seek clarification in such cases, it is clear from the previous data analysed (see section 4.9) that they avoid doing this because of the unapproachable nature of their superiors, especially the Head of School and the Head of Campus. This represents a situation where information is taken as the exclusive preserve of the management, in this case symbolised by the Head of School and Head of Campus. This is not tenable in a sound organisational communication environment as there is need to have “cooperative balance between manager and *his/her* employees” in order to have team building and the coordination necessary to get work done (Barker & Angelopulo 2010:333-334) (Italics my emphasis).

When asked “*How satisfied are you about the information passed to you by your Head of Campus?*”, a certain lecturer replied that he was not satisfied “because he only gives order, no chance to respond and discussion”. Another lecturer commented that she is not satisfied because “we seldom see or talk to him”. The responses to this question show that generally 65 percent [N=36] of the lecturers are not satisfied with the information from their Head of School, citing his unapproachable manner, as noted above.

This is a challenge to communication because when the need for feedback is considered, it should be based on information that is clearly understood. One of the advantages of feedback is that it gives room to seek clarification of a message

(Watson & Hill 2006:100) and this is what 70 percent (N=39) of the lecturers said they do not have. In a situation where feedback is valued, the sender of a message will know whether or not his interlocutor understands him/her based on the feedback he has received.

Another problem that occurs when memoranda are routed through the structure is the timely receipt of the message. A total of 50 percent (N=28) of the lecturers reported that "they sometimes fail to pass information in time". Another lecturer said "at times information is disseminated late, yet feedback is needed immediately". The second lecturer's comment reflects a paradoxical situation about the use of memoranda. The comment highlights the need for information to be disseminated early in order to have time to study it and respond or give feedback. This response corroborates data analysed earlier about the lecturers' complaints that information requiring a response is often late and in most cases, they will fail to give feedback. The third reason given by 30 percent of the lecturers is that there is message filtering and distortion when a memorandum is used. Although, the percentage of lecturers who gave this as challenge is statistically insignificant, it nevertheless needs to be taken into consideration. According to the lecturers, who were asked to expound on this in a post-survey interview, sometimes memoranda are not placed on the notice boards because they are either sent to Heads of Campus or Heads of School or programme leaders to pass on to their subordinates. They do this either in the form of word-of-mouth in meetings or in a one-on-one communication with individual lecturers. They said when the message in the memorandum is conveyed in this manner, there is often distortion of meaning or information filtering. One of the lecturers said it becomes clear when events contradict what their superior has told them. Thus, they do not trust verbal information in all cases.

They remarked that where they suspect distortion of the message during a verbal communication, it results in an acrimonious situation where some of the lecturers will contest the information given because they have other sources regarding the specific information. Information filtering or distortion is a hallmark of downward communication in tall structures and bureaucratic organisations because of the layer

of hierarchies the information has to pass through before it gets to its final destination.

The challenge of getting feedback to messages communicated in the form of memoranda is summed as follow by one senior manager as follows: “response from other units is a problem, is a challenge, ignorance about what needs to be done and lack of time”. This response encapsulates the general communication situation at the college and it is accentuated by a response given by one lecturer who said:

There is general ineptitude regarding what to do because some of the information which demands feedback is so complex that your boss will not know how to explain it to you. Equally, you who may have received the incorrect information will not be able to respond to it. I am sure you can understand why there is foot dragging as far as feedback goes.

4.10 NATURE OF MEETINGS

A meeting is participatory process of communication if used appropriately. It gives the attendees the opportunity to contribute their views to matters under discussion. As noted by Skinner *et al.* (2009:98), who use the term ‘forum’, it enables and empowers “participants to have better comprehension of issues and to feel they are authentically part of the change process”.

As indicated in the section 4.9 above, the year plan of the college contains a schedule of all meetings planned for the year. Meetings are therefore held regularly and obviously during these meetings information is shared. This, according to the data collected, happens at both inter-departmental and intra-departmental level.

The data analysed in this section were provided by the lecturers, and they gave detailed information regarding meetings and procedures used. Apart from the meetings appearing in the year plan, other meetings are also called to deal with matters as they arise. These meetings usually do not have a formal agenda.

All the lecturers concurred that the meetings held at intra-department level are interactive, as everybody is allowed to air his/her view in the meeting. The attendees at these meetings include the lecturers, programme managers and/or the Head of

Campus, as well as the Head of School. However, the academics stressed that the interactive nature of the meeting does not imply that their views are considered worthy of note, as indicated earlier.

At inter-departmental level, the lecturers said meetings are not always interactive and one of the departments cited in this regard was Human Resources Department. They said each time meetings are held with Human Resources Department, the person representing it simply gives them information, usually when it has become apparent that the information should have been communicated earlier. The lecturers generally have a low opinion about the Human Resources Department. Indeed, when the lecturers were asked the following question: *"How satisfied are you about the information passed to you by Human Resources Department"?*, a significant percentage (80%, [N=44]) of the lecturers said "not satisfied" and that unfortunately their grievance is not taken note of. This can be considered in terms of power and control in organisations which forms the central view regarding how scholars view communication based on critical perspective. Neher (1997:28) states that organisational communication seen from critical perspective approaches issues in terms of hidden or implicit exercises of power and domination. The lecturers' remarks about the human resources practitioner and the way he/she disregards them speaks to the issues raised by critical perspective scholars (See section 2.9.3).

Lecturers reported that they often have meetings with the Educational Services Department, but the lecturers reported that these meetings are usually held at short notice when the matters under discussion have to be resolved rapidly, as the deadline is looming. This department is the primary source of information for the lecturers because it is responsible for academic matters at the college. However, meetings with this department are seen as instructive rather than interactive because although the academics can give input, this is usually not taken into consideration. One of the lecturers commented that "it is so clear that decision has been taken about the issues that will be tabled for discussion as in most cases we will just be told the decision taken no matter the fact that the matters require that we should have been consulted". This shows open disregard for the lecturers because they are often not consulted or allowed to participate in matters that affect them. It also

bothers on the question of power on the educational services. As revealed in a post-survey interview by some of the lecturers, the educational services department is primarily responsible for teaching affairs at the college hence they are hamstrung in being able to flex their muscle even when it is apparent they have been ignored unduly. In light of this, Neher (1997:28) points out that the context available for employees to take part in communication is sometimes stage-managed in a manner that prevents them from frank discussion of the issues at hand. In this case, the lecturers are met to rubber stamp what has already been decided and they comply knowing they are not doing the right thing.

Some of the challenges identified about meetings at the college are attributed to the scheduling in the year plan. A certain lecturer stated that

Lecturers did not have input in the preparation of the year plan and there many are mistakes in it. The mistakes sometimes make the meeting schedules to conflict with other core activities we are supposed to be involved when we are called for meetings. If we were consulted, we lecturers would have been able to include issues pertinent to academic matters in the plan [...] the absence of the academic issues in the year plan always result in meetings outside the year plan schedules.

As mentioned above, several lecturers added that the meetings that are not scheduled in the year plan are called when the issues to be addressed or discussed are very close to deadline. Often information necessary for considered opinions is not circulated prior to the meeting and therefore, the academics do not have time to prepare adequately. The lecturers added that the programme managers or Head of School always claim that such information arrives late and that they endeavour to immediately address issues with the lecturers.

4.11 COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AT THE COLLEGE

Although, some of the data analysed thus far revealed communication challenges, in this section, further communication challenges at the college will be discussed in terms of obstacles affecting feedback, which is essential in a two-way communication process.

4.11.1 Poorly written information and delay in the transmission of messages

Among the other communication challenges raised by the communication department at the college, are poor writing skills and delays in the transmission of messages. Regarding the wording of the memoranda and other written information, the manager overseeing communication at the college was reticent in commenting about how well this is done. However, the procedure in place calls for all written information to be submitted to her office before it is disseminated. This procedure, however, is not followed by many departments at the college. This is clearly observable because during this study, the researcher noticed many memoranda that were not worded clearly and several contained grammatical errors. This obviously leads to message filtering, distortion and misunderstandings. But because this is an anonymous study samples of these memoranda cannot be placed in the appendix as evidence.

A constant factor in the data analysed here is that the time factor is a major challenge to communication and effective management at the college. Staff members complain that they do not have sufficient time to respond to matters calling for feedback from them. While the information is sent out to the academic staff, it is done in such a way that leaves little time for reflection prior to either the response deadline or actual implementation (see also table 4.10).

This lack of time arose repeatedly in the responses from both management and staff members, especially the lecturers, regarding communication challenges and their assessment of communication at the college. Many managers admitted that the question of time has always hampered effective flow of communication. They said they could see that their staff members are extremely busy and under pressure, so they find it difficult to demand timely feedback.

In response to this question: *"What is the present communication challenge in your department"?*, one of the managers said

It is difficult for me to respond to this question in terms of challenge in my department because my department does not exist in isolation at the college. We work in conjunction with other departments to get issues managed and often times, I notice that many issues are discarded in order

to attend to what seems to be pressing issues at the expense of the small issues. Later on you realise that the so-called small issues matter but unfortunately they have not been attended to in time.

Other managers and their subordinates in the headquarters of the college stressed time as a challenge of the college. Again the issue of time as a communication challenge is captured in the following comment by an employee at mid-level management:

Relationship is about communication – and we need properly-managed relationship to work well at this college – but where do we get the time to listen to ourselves, know ourselves and communicate accordingly? Not happening at the moment at this college because there are deadlines to meet.

This response touches on the view shared in the transactional model discussed extensively in Chapter Two, section 2.7. It was emphasised that communication should be based on mutual understanding or shared meaning (Steinberg 1997:19). As revealed by this respondent, it is only when the parties in communication know themselves in terms of their cultural backgrounds and other contexts informing their present communication attitudes that they will be able to communicate from shared perspective. This is the view that characterises transactional perspective of communication as discussed by DeVito (1994:32-33) and Steinberg (1997:19). But unfortunately, this is not the situation at the college because of time constraints, or to use her words, “deadlines to meet”.

Although other variables were mentioned as communication challenges, these do not compare with the way lack of time was generally ranked the greatest communication challenge by all categories of employees at the college. One of the frontline staff members summed the problem up when she said: “Do you think you need to look further than me and my office in knowing why time is a killer of communication at this college”? She laughed and said you still don’t know why time is a problem and I responded: “... somewhat understanding you but may be wrong, but I don’t mind further explanation please”. To this she said: “I have not been able to honour my promise to be interviewed by you for more than two weeks now because I

simply don't have the time to spare for the interview ... It is the same thing that happens to other situations here when you have many things to attend to".

Time is a factor in the nature of communication that takes place at the college as most of the lecturers (85%, [N=47]) said they do not get the information they need to do their work in time. One lecturer said "I do not blame them for bringing the information late; honestly here in this college everybody in most cases have much to do but I hate it when they have to blame us, the lecturers, for not responding in time when it is obvious we are crammed up with tons of activities just like them".

Time management is essential to every organisation. Regarding the relevance of time in communication, DeVito (1994:175), remarks that "promptness or lateness in responding to letter, telephone calls ... communicate significant messages to others. As explained further by DeVito, when acceptable time is given about a message, it shows respect for the individuals the message is meant for and it creates room for the message to be understood. Lack of time will negatively affect the internal bonding necessary for the good relationships needed for the organisation to communicate and function optimally. Indeed, as can be seen in the college as a whole, when everything is urgent, nothing is considered important.

The responses to the question "*If you were to improve communication/information flow at the college, what would you do or suggest*"?, show that time was cited in a significant 45 percent of the responses of the six common responses. In other words, time has the highest percentage score. In Chapter Three, sub-section 3.5.1, it was pointed out that some lecturers did not provide answers to questions they were given because they complained they had no time to fill in answers to the spaces provided in the questions. The analysis of the data from them further highlights how time affects appropriate communication between them and other employees at the college.

4.12 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE CAMPUSES

An interesting aspect of horizontal communication at the college is what I will refer to as inter-campus horizontal communication flow. The data elicited in this regard

showed how communication takes place between staff holding similar rank on other campuses. The three campuses are administered from the main campus, with only a few administration staff such as the Head of Campus and deputy as well as some front line staff members, together with the academics.

The Heads of Campus agreed that there was frequent communication between them regarding issues at the college. They also attend periodic meetings about inter-campus issues.

Horizontal communication along academic lines across the campuses is often resorted to by the lecturers out of frustration. This is usually in the form of informal discussions. One lecturer characterises inter-campus communication with peers as "liberating communication" as the information that flows from such communication places them in a better position to confront issues about their rights at the college. For example, this lecturer cited a policy which has been adhered to on the satellite campuses, but is not in force at the main campus. The lecturers said when they learnt of this, they raised the matter and received positive response from management.

A programme manager on one of the campuses said the understanding of communication, especially in terms of time and communication specific to the context of her campus, is a problem. She explains that although the campus where she works has some autonomy in communication due to the structure of the college, the academic staff encounter problems when dealing with departments such as HR, Education Services and Student Affairs, that are stationed on the main campus. She did not go into detail, but such a scenario has been acknowledged as a possibility by Cramton (2001 in Mäki, Järvenpää & Ziegler n.d:1). Cramton remarks that organisation with branches across different cities always have "difficulty or inability to create and maintain mutual knowledge and understanding about work-related issues" which may cause frustration among the organisation's employees.

A perceived problem to the free communication flow between campuses, pointed out by a manager, has to do with differences arising out of the various fields of

specialisations and levels of education of the lecturers. The two satellite campuses offer mainly vocational subjects, such as carpentry, engineering courses, agricultural science; and the lecturers employed to teach these courses are either artisans or holders of artisan qualifications. On the main campus, however, the courses on offer are more academically oriented, such as business and information science and communication technology, most of the lecturers have university degrees and some hold postgraduate degrees. These educational differences, according to the manager, affects inter-campus communication. While the lecturers on the main campus of the college have little difficulty understanding the concepts and fundamental issues informing what has been communicated, their counterparts on other campuses seem to have problem in this regard, according to the manager. She said: "If you ask me to cite example, I will not be able to cite one and I think there is no need but it is generally known that they are not the type of members of staff one can easily communicate with".

This was confirmed by a Head of Campus and three programme leaders, however they felt that this was due to the ethos of the satellite campuses which is completely different to that of the main campus. One lecturer explained:

Remember before the merger that took place, this campus was autonomous with its own tradition and identity. Our lecturers are mainly artisans with a type of training that emphasises practical as opposed to theory and I believe this should be factored in when communicating with them.

The Head of Campus provided further confirmation by saying "the merger gave us the same uniform to be worn on different types of bodies. I will simply say that as we grow together as one college we will get used to ourselves and communication will be easy".

This type of problem may occur in any organisational environment where there are differences like the ones cited above. Thus, it has been suggested that in such circumstances, a good approach to use is communication based on transactional perspectives. This type of communication (see also sub-section 2.7.3) takes individual differences such as education, gender, and other socio-cultural milieux into

consideration in order to ensure that the outcome of a communicated message is based on mutual understand.

4.15 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the data gathered at the college has been presented and analysed. The discussion showed that the college has a fairly low regard for communication as a management tool, as seen by the positioning of the sub-department handling communication.

Another issue that was given attention is the flow of communication at the college. It was noted that communication flows along top-down channels, upward channels, horizontal channels and diagonal channels, however the analysis showed that the usual route of communication is top-down and for information to go through prescribed structures.

Different means of communication at the college were reviewed. These included internal memoranda, e-mail, meetings, and so on. Some of the challenges arising from these were discussed and it was noted that many messages are not transmitted in time and consequently the employees suffer from information overload.

When communication policies and strategies were discussed, it was noted that the college does not have a proper communication policy and strategy in place.

The data revealed that the interrelationship between the academic staff members and their superiors is not particularly good. The academics and other staff members agreed that there is a breakdown in communication with the Human Resources department, labelled as being most unfriendly to staff.

Several challenges militating against feedback to communication at the college were discussed. It was stated that because of information overload and delays in transmission of messages to the employees, feedback is not submitted in time or not at all because of other pressing issues that demand the attention of the staff members.

The nature of the inter-campus communication was looked at, and it was noted that consideration is not given to the differences between the lecturers across the campuses.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the data collected for this study were analysed and discussed. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

The main focus of this case study was on the communication flow at the college. This refers to communication aimed at the college's internal publics as well as communication between the employees, inter-departmental communication and other fundamental issues about organisational communication, as it is believed that understanding the communication types and flow will help the college realise its communication objectives in its overall strategic objective. To do this, the study sought to achieve the following primary objective:

- To evaluate the functionality of organisational communication at the college.

This broad objective of the study was realised through the follow secondary objectives:

- To examine the channels of communication used and their information contents at the college.
- To uncover the perceptions of official communication channels at the college.
- To find out if the information received by employees of the college is regular, adequate, accurate and equitable.
- To investigate the communication behaviour of superiors at the college.
- To find ways of improving organisational communication at the college.

An introduction to the study as a premise informing the research was given. This was followed by a review of the literature regarding theoretical issues relevant to organisational communication. Both these premises and the issues covered in the literature review will be summarised in the section that follows.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The premises for the study were discussed in Chapter One, to ensure a better understanding of the focus of the analysis. The importance of communication in an organisation's strategic management objectives was stressed. The need for employees to be well-informed about the products, policies and procedures of the organisation to enable them to perform their tasks well was emphasised.

The importance of communication in an organisation was shown by examining various definitions of organisational communication. This then led to a discussion of the definitions of organisational communication as it applies to internal communication. It was noted that these definitions stressed the centrality of communication within an organisation.

In order to describe the scope of the study, the research problem, the objectives, and research questions were given in Chapter One. These were followed by an overview of the significance, limitation and organisation of the study, listing the chapters and their contents.

In Chapter Two, there was a review of the relevant literature regarding pertinent theoretical issues in organisational communication. The main emphasis was a detailed review of different organisational structures, the direction of flow of communication, the communication process and models, organisational theories and pertinent communication approaches.

In the discussion of the different organisational structures, it was pointed out that the type of organisational structure is an indication of where its power resides and the direction of flow of communication between its management and employees. The discussion of the direction of communication flow focused on the different directions through which communication can take from the management to employees or vice-versa. The different directions of communication flow have advantages and challenges and these were indicated in Chapter Two.

When looking at the communication process and models, it was noted that communication could be interpreted differently by various individuals and this could be attributed to the context influencing the communicator. The different models used to illustrate the nature of communication in an organisation were discussed. Particular attention was paid to the Shannon-Weaver model depicting linear and top-down communication and Osgood-Schramm's model that depicts a two-way communication where feedback is emphasised. Other factors such as culture, value, education, gender and attitudes, were highlighted in the transactional model as factors that could influence the nature of communication in a two-way communication between the sender and the receiver.

Organisational theories have been used to explain the nature of communication in an organisation. Some of the pertinent theories referred to in this chapter were bureaucratic theory, human relations theory, systems theory and cultural approach. These theories, as explained, were said to have direct bearing on the flow of communication and how employees respond to issues in the organisation.

Lastly, in Chapter Two, some fundamental approaches, functional perspective, interpretive perspective and critical perspective, were mentioned. These perspectives have been used by scholars to explain how human beings deal with issues and how they affect communication in an organisation.

In Chapter Three, the methodology used for this study was discussed. The qualitative approach used was discussed in terms of how it would allow the research to be approached from an interpretive paradigm. As a case study, qualitative study was also considered appropriate for the nature of the research undertaken.

The sampling method used to select the participants from the population of the study, stratified sampling was discussed. This allowed data to be collected from different strata of employees at the college. It was noted that documents, survey, interviews, and observation would be employed in the data collection.

The methods used to analyse the data collected were explained. This included how the data were arranged in different categories according to the themes they addressed. Following this, the ethical considerations applicable to this study was discussed.

5.2.1 Summary of the findings

The presentation of the analysis started with the findings regarding the position of communication personnel at the college. The data analysed showed that the profile of communication and the personnel responsible for communication is very low. The position occupied by communication personnel is subsumed under a department called PRAID. This means the personnel in charge of communication at the college are not independent and they have to report to a manager whose main duties are not communication.

Regarding policy and communication strategy, the data showed that there is no clear implementation plan to enforce a communication policy. Although English is the official language at the college, this is not adhered to. Lecturers used isiXhosa as the language of instruction and in some of the staff meetings isiXhosa is regularly being spoken even when there are other non isiXhosa-speaking members of staff present.

Communication strategy is linked to communication policy. It was acknowledged by the manager in the department handling communication that there is no approved communication strategy to deal with communication issues proactively. For example, the data showed that there is no communication strategy to deal with issues, such as a crisis on campus. An example was cited of a situation that resulted in media attention on the college, but because there was no official communication strategy, all members of staff were responding to media enquiries.

It was shown in the analysis that communication flows in all directions (downward, upward, horizontal and diagonal communication) at the college. While these types of communication directions are being used at the college, the analysis revealed that the preferred modus operandi at the college is for communication to pass through designated structures, especially when it downward or upward communication. Other

types of directional flow such as horizontal and diagonal channels are reportedly resorted to by the employees of the college when the downward or upward channel does not yield results in terms of feedback. In this case, employees use horizontal or diagonal communication channel in order to reach the employee from whom the information can be sought directly.

The grapevine is resorted to for similar reasons. Students, lecturers and other categories of employees reported that they rely on the grapevine due to insufficient information or when they are uncertain about a situation. The Human Resources Department was cited in the analysis as being uncooperative when information is sought from them, and the employees (in this case, the lecturers and maintenance workers) said they rely on the grapevine to get the information they need.

The students revealed that they do not pass through structures to get their information as they would prefer to go straight to the relevant staff members.

Regarding feedback, the lecturers felt that their views were marginalised and not reflected in the decisions made. Some of the challenges identified in the analysis affecting feedback are late delivery of information, lack of opportunity to seek clarification to unclear messages, message filtering and distortion. Compounding the problem of feedback was lack of a medium such as suggestion box to respond anonymously when it is not possible for employees to voice their feelings openly to messages they have received.

There is disproportionate access to Internet facilities at the college. All employees have access to Internet, except the maintenance workers. The college has a website through which all members of staff are supposed to use the intranet. The administrative staff and the management can communicate with each other through intranet but this is not the case with the lecturers. On the main campus, the employees are able to access Internet in their offices, but on one of the satellite campuses, the employees have to go to a central point at the college to access the Internet.

One of the main sources of information at the college is its QMS. The QMS of the college was lauded by quality regulatory body in 2008 and it resulted in the college being awarded an ISO certificate in 2008. The college's QMS is regarded as a storehouse where information of all types about the college can be obtained. According to the data analysed, all members of staff, except the maintenance workers, at the college said the QMS was its main source of information about the college and for the duties they perform. The maintenance workers reported that they do not have the know-how to access the information in the QMS. Other sources of information mentioned in the analysis were the annual report, brochures and newsletter.

Challenges identified about communication at the college were poorly written messages and delays in the transmission of messages. While other departments at the college were not declared completely satisfactory by the college's employees, the HR department was rated very unfavourably by the lecturers and the maintenance workers. Indeed, 80 percent of the lecturers said they were not satisfied with the flow of communication from the HR department and they also labelled it as an unapproachable department.

Lastly in the analysis, it was stated that at inter-campus level there is satisfactory communication especially when looked at from horizontal communication perspective. The Head of Campus interviewed, reported that the Heads hold meetings about their campuses. This also applies to the lecturers on the campuses, but the lecturers in the main campuses pointed out that the need for communication between their colleagues would arise when they are being starved of the necessary information. Thus, they will contact their colleagues on the other campuses, who may have been given the information.

One of the challenges pointed out in the analysis about inter-campus communication was the need to communicate based on the context and reality of the campus concerned. This, in other words, means that instead of communicating centrally from the main campus where the management is located, information should be

decentralised to take into account the prevailing context in each of the campuses of the college.

5.3 PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was designed to collect information from the employees of the college using suitable sampling technique. This was done but unfortunately it was not possible to collect information from some employees at the college. For example, the HR department was castigated by the lecturers and other employees of the college and as a part of good research practice, the views of employees in HR should have been sought. Effort was made to do this, but only a few junior staff members of the department responded. This was not the only problem in gathering data. The Head of School of the main campus, who was criticised by his subordinates also refused to participate in the study. This raises a concern whether or not the findings can be generalised and a true reflection of the situation.

Although this study has provided an in-depth findings about communication at the college investigated, this does not in any way mean that the findings reflect or can be used to generalise the communication situations in other FET colleges in Eastern Cape in particular and South Africa. The strength of the study is that it has been able to highlight the fact that any college with a similar communication environment may be faced with the communication challenges identified in the study.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has implication for organisational communication, especially as it relates to internal communication. Although, no significant findings in the data collected has pointed to problem of communication between the three campuses of the college studied, the centrality and the contextual nature of communication calls for a different approach to how communication is addressed at the college. I would recommend that each of the campuses should have their own in-house or resident communication department to deal with communication specific to its campus. This is important because the campuses are located in different cities with different socio-cultural settings that may affect the nature of communication on campus.

One of the campuses is in urban area while the other two are in peri-urban areas and they offer different courses with different staff whose level of education differed markedly from each other. For example, most of the lecturers on one of the campuses teach artisan-related subjects such as carpentry, auto mechanics, auto electrician, etc, and their level of education generally ranges from trade certificates to artisan-related diploma. Their colleagues on another campus teach commercial subjects such as Business Management, Information and Communication Technology, New Venture, Project management, and they hold university degrees, some even have master's degrees. This will obviously affect the way communication is understood and used among these lecturers, hence the need for each campus to have its own communication department.

In addition, the profile of communication at the college is very low. At the college, the position of the personnel in charge of communication are junior in rank and they do not have the authority to deal with communication issues independently. This is symptomatic of an organisation in which communication is not considered as one of the essential tools to realise its set strategic objectives. An organisation with this attitude about communication may only realise too late the importance of communication and it is usually at the expense of many things dear to the organisation.

Thus, I would recommend that the profile of communication should be elevated to a top management level or, at least, a department of its own headed by a director where the personnel in charge of communication are able to design and influence policy for a good communication environment in the organisation. Skinner *et al.* (2009:6) refer to this as communication practised at advanced level because the communication practitioners are able to "act as instrument in bringing about policy changes and directing new courses of action".

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This study has provided an in-depth detail about communication at the college investigated. This involved communication in general, the flow of communication and challenges associated with the different channels mentioned. No mention was made

about social media and cellular phone-enabled communication and yet there is no organisation where this is not a feature of organisational communication. With specific reference to the college and other colleges with a similar background, studies should be conducted to ascertain how social media and cellular phones can be used to mitigate some of the challenges mentioned in the study. This is especially important in the case of feedback and prompt delivery of information.

Further studies to assess the role of intercultural communication and the impact on employee relationship may be necessary given the data analysed in this study. This may help to put into perspective the problematic communicative relationship between the lecturers and their superiors.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided the summary of the findings, problems and limitations, recommendations, and suggested areas for further study. A synopsis of the research undertaken was given. The problems that arose and the limitations of the study were stated. Some recommendations to improve organisational communication in terms of the issues mentioned in the data analysis were suggested. Lastly, suggestions for further studies were mooted, pointing out areas in communication which need further research, given the situation uncovered at the college.

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¹³ Complete end-text reference could not be stated in order not to state the college's name following the promise made to treat the college anonymously.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO RESPONDENTS

1. LETTERS TO PROGRAMME MANAGERS

Cape Peninsula University of Technology,
Department of Public Relations,
Cape Town.

2 February 2011

Dear Programme Manager

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

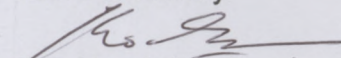
My name is Sam Erevbenagie Usadolo. I am currently conducting a research about the general communication situation at your college. My interest in the research is to find out the nature of communication at the college and how it impacts on your work and the overall strategic objective(s) of the college. It is a study that straddles all personnel functions at the college hence input will be sought from the management, academic members of staff, maintenance workers, etc.

I kindly ask for your assistance in getting the information I need for the research by providing answers to the attached questions. All the information you will give is strictly confidential and will be treated anonymously. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is what matters. Your honest response will assist in generating information that will help the college to improve its internal communication practices.

This research has been approved by the relevant authority of the college and any queries about this may be addressed to Mrs G. Jacobsz, Senior PRAID Manager, on 043 6040704. If you have any questions about this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me on 082 4292647 or via e-mail at erevbenagie@gmail.com or osadolo1@yahoo.com.

Thanking you for your anticipated co-operation.

Yours sincerely



S.E. Usadolo

2. LETTERS TO LECTURERS, AND OTHER CATEGORIES OF STAFF

Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Department of Public Relations,
Cape Town

2 February 2011

Dear Respondent

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

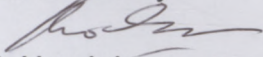
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This research has been approved by the relevant authority of the college and any queries about this may be addressed to Mrs G. Jacobsz, Senior PRAID Manager, on 043 6040704. If you have any questions about this, please do not hesitate to contact me on 082 4292647 or via e-mail at erevbenagie@gmail.com or usadolo1@yahoo.com.

Thanking you for your anticipated co-operation.

Yours sincerely


S.E. Usadolo

APPENDIX B
LETTER OF AUTHORITY (see page below)

P.O. Box

Tel:

Fax:

E-mail:

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Ref: Senior Manager: MR. B - Mrs

27 October 2010

Mr. E. Osadolo

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH REGARD TO OUR COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

I wish to inform you that my office grants you permission to conduct your research with regard to our communication systems as discussed with the Senior Manager: at our College.

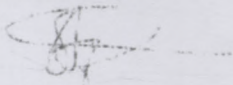
We grant you permission to conduct this research in line with the following conditions:

- Your Contact person will be the Snr. Manager: or designated person in that department;
- You will at all times keep the identity of the college anonymous in all your actions/activities to guard against situations where the name/image of the college is harmed because of negative findings, opinions conclusions etc.
- You will keep within the agreed upon time schedules, allowing the college and everybody involved to participate in an organised manner, thereby not disrupting the activities of the college;
- You will provide a hard copy of the results of your research to the college to allow us to learn firsthand what your findings and recommendations are;
- Our permission to allow you to conduct this research must primarily be understood by yourself in that the research will be conducted by means of the completion of questionnaires by members of management and staff in different categories as well as interviews with staff members
- All questionnaires and research material must first have the approval of the Senior Manager.
- The categories of staff allowed to participate in the research are:
 - *Snr. Manager: P
 - *Manager: P
 - *Heads of Campus x 3
 - *PRO
 - *Front desk staff and Secretary of the CEO
 - *Programme Managers.
- The research conducted by yourself will not have any financial implication for the college;

My office requests you to offer this letter of approval to all the College stakeholders to conduct your research.

My office wishes to extend only our best wishes with your involvement with PFET College in relation to your research.

Yours sincerely



CEO

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY

SECTION FOR LECTURERS

If the space provided for answers are not enough, please feel free to write in the space below or in an extra piece of paper.

1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

INDICATE YOUR RESPONSE BY CROSSING THE APPROPRIATE BLOCK

1.1 Sex

Male	
Female	

1.2 Age

21 - 25 years	26 - 30 years	31 - 35 years	36 - 40 years	41- 45 years	46-50 years
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Age

51- 55 years	55 years and above
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1.2 Nationality

South African	
Non South African	

1.2.1 If you are a non South African, please indicate your nationality in the box below

--

1. How do you receive information about what you need to do at the college? (Please indicate your answer with an 'X')

Through meeting	Through memoranda
Through verbal instruction from immediate boss	E-mail
Others (Please state)	

2. Apart from your immediate superior, do you have access officially or formally to other superior members of staff at the college? **Yes or No**, If 'yes' or 'no' please explain why.

3. When you have complaints, how are they dealt with? Please state your answer in the box below.

.....

4. Is feedback to your query sent to you directly or through your supervisor or your immediate boss?

.....

5. Do you think your queries are dealt with on time?

.....

6. Is your suggestion sought about your work or about any change to your work? **Yes or No**, if yes or no please explain why

7. Do you think your suggestion counts? **Yes or No**, please give reason for your answer.

8. What is the medium of communication between you and the management?

Please state your answer briefly below

9. Do you think there is sufficient information available for you to do your work? If **yes**, explain. If **no**, explain.

10. If no, what do you think is responsible for the lack of information?

11. Has this lack of information affected your commitment to your job?

12. If there is lack of information, do you think the situation of lack of information at the college applies to your colleagues at the college? **Yes or No**, (Please explain briefly your answer).

13. Is the lack of information discussed between you and your colleagues? **Yes or No**, please explain briefly your answer.

14. Have you discussed this with your immediate boss? **Yes or No**, (Please explain briefly your answer).

15. If you do, how is it addressed or being address?

16. Is there a process for you to raise this with somebody higher in authority?

17. Do you think there is information students need to have but do not have? **Yes or No**

18. If yes, is this affecting your working relationship with the students? Please explain with an example.

19. When there is a meeting, are you notified on time before the meeting takes place? **Yes or no** (Please explain briefly your answer).

20. Through what channel is the notice given to you?

Notice placed on notice board	Notice given to by hand	E-mail	SMS	Telephone
Words of mouth by your immediate boss	Words of mouth by your colleagues	Others		

21. Are the agenda of the meeting made known to you before the meeting? **Yes or No**

22. Do you have access to internet at the college? **Yes or No**

23. Is the access limited or unlimited?

Limited
Unlimited

24. Does the college have intranet? **Yes or No**

25. Do you have e-mail address? **Yes or No**

26. If yes, do you communicate through it to your colleagues? **Yes or No**

27. Do you communicate through it to your superiors at the college? **Yes or No**

28. How do you seek information about what you need to do at the college? *Please state your answer below.*

29. Generally, please comment about communication at the college – tell me if you are satisfied or not satisfied in the comment.

30. What information do you have access to about the college as an organisation?

Please state your answer below.

31. Who or what is your source of information at the college?

32. How frequently do you receive the information about your work?

From here, please substantiate or explain your 'yes' or 'no' responses briefly.

33. Do you think you are sufficiently informed about the activities and other vital information about the college?
Yes or No

34. If you were to improve communication/ information flow, what would you do or what would you suggest?

35. Are you consulted regarding organisational policy relevant to your position? **Yes or No**

36. If yes is your answer, is it the same with other levels of employees? **Yes or No**

37. If no is your answer, is it the same with other levels of employees? **Yes or No**

38. When you do not have information regarding your job, who do you turn to for advice and information?

39. How does your physical work setting affect your communication at the college?

40. Is there some information which you think has been left out about the college's communication process? **Yes or No**. If yes, please explain briefly.

41. Do you think it is necessary for you to have this information? **Yes or No**

42. To what extent do you know the college or how is the college marketed among its internal publics?

43. Do you think information about other aspects (except work-related one) that matter to you as a staff is made available to you in time? **Yes or No**

SECTION B

1. Do you believe information about employee benefits and pays is sufficient and suitable?

Yes/No

2. Do you believe that your boss offers appropriate guidance for solving job-related problems?

Yes/No

3. Do you believe your supervisor is open to ideas?

Yes/No .

4. Do believe that your subordinates anticipate your needs for information?

Yes/No.

How satisfied are you about the information passed by the following? Or do you like how information is passed to you by the following?

- Campus principal (Satisfied, Not Satisfied) *Please explain briefly*

- Human Resource (Satisfied, Not Satisfied) *Please explain briefly*

- Educational services (Satisfied, Not Satisfied) *Please explain briefly*

- programme leader (Satisfied, Not Satisfied) *Please explain briefly*

- Co-worker (Satisfied, Not Satisfied) *Please explain briefly*

SECTION C

1. How open are the lines of interpersonal (face-to-face) communication between yourself and your bosses or superiors? *Please select the most applicable statement(s).*

- The door is open and any subject is open to discussion, even if it's not work related
- The door is open and selected issues can be discussed (e.g. not personal problems)
- Appointments can be made and any issues can be discussed in private meetings
- Appointments can be made and selected issues can be discussed in private meetings
- Any issues can be listed on the agenda and discussed in public meetings

- Selected issues can be listed on the agenda and discussed in public meetings

- Open discussion is not encouraged

2. Choose the 3 options which are used most often from following list and rank them from 1 to 3 in order of frequency, where 1 is the most frequent.

(Enter the numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the boxes next to your choices.)

1. E-mail	2. Written documentation (not e-mail)	3. Informal meetings	4. Formal meetings	Telephone
6. Other				

2. Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member at the college managed by someone else. Think about any weaknesses or strengths in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

- List three main strengths in the way your manager communicates with you.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- List three main weaknesses in the way you communicate with your manager.

.....

.....

.....

3. What sort of feedback does your managers give you? Select the most applicable option(s).

- Congratulations on a job well done
- Criticism when a job is not done to their satisfaction
- Coaching on the job
- Suggestions for personal benefit (e.g. information about further training opportunities, etc.)
- Personal information about themselves
- Formal evaluation as required

SECTION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS OR COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS

1. To whom does the head of the public relations or communication department report to?

Please tick any of the options below as your answer

- A. Marketing Manager
- B. Human Resources Manager
- C. Manager / CEO
- D. Other (please specify).....

2. As a public relations or communication practitioner do you find yourself working with the following departments in the institution? Please state whether this takes place as subordinate function.

Please tick any of the options below as your answer

- A. Human resources department
- B. Marketing/advertisement
- C. Other (Please specify).....

3. What does the strategic role of public relations practitioners mean to you? *(Here, I just want to find out the view of the public relations practitioner or the person in charge of communication about internal communication of the college vis-à-vis the strategic objective of the college)*

Please tick any of the options below as your answer

- A. Being the go-between, interpreter or communication link between management and stakeholders
- B. Being the authority on both corporate communication and problem solution in an organisation
- C. Being able to monitor relevant environmental development and anticipate their consequences for the organisation policies and strategies and being part of the strategy formulation team that prepares the organisation for the future.
- D. Being the one who helps others in the organisation to solve their corporate communication problems
- E. Being able to carry out the low-level mechanics of communication products that implement decisions made by others.

4. To what extent are you involved in top management decision making?

Please tick any of the options below as your answer

- A. Everyday
- B. Only when there are issues that require your attention
- C. Rarely
- D. Not at all
- E. Other (Please specify).....

5. Do you most of the time find yourself in a situation that your working efforts are attributed to other departments within the institution you work for?

6. What is your role at this college as PRO or communication practitioner?

Please tick any of the options below as your answer

- A. To report on behalf of the organisation
- B. To solve any organisational crisis
- C. Involve in organisational decision makings process
- D. Creating mutual understanding within and outside the organisation
- E. Other (Please specify).....

8. Who is responsible when there is a need to deal with media at the college?

9. How is information disseminated at the college?

10. What is the available feedback channel at the college?

11. To your knowledge, is there any communication strategy in place to deal with unforeseen circumstances such as student violent protest, bomb scare, scandals involving top management, etc?

12. Does the college have a public relations department or communication department?

13. As a manager which department within your organisation do you believe is the most appropriate to make a public statement during an organisational crisis?

Please tick any of the options below as your answer

- A. Legal
- B. Marketing
- C. Advertising
- D. Public relations
- E. Human Resources
- F. Other (Please specify).....

14. At which level of the organisation is the public relations or communication department situated?

Please tick any of the options below as your answer

- A. Top management level
- B. Middle management level
- C. Operational management level

D. Other (Please specify).....

15. As the PRO or communication practitioner of the college, is there a communication strategy for the college?

16. What are the informational needs identified in relation to the internal public of the college?

17. Who is responsible for information dissemination at the college?

18. Is there baseline or benchmark for measuring quality communication at the college?

19. Is there a clearing house at the college or an authority that sees that the information disseminated and the manner of communication meet a set standard?

20. What are the channels of communication with employees of the college?

21. Is there present or an anticipated communication challenge at the college?

22. If there is a present one, how is the challenge being met?

22. If there is anticipated one, how is the college planning to meet the challenge?

CAPE PENINSULA
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

