
MASTER THESIS

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Enhancing Communication in Companies During the Post- COVID-19 Era: Identifying Challenges and Strategies for Improvement

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**Enhancing Communication in
Companies During the Post-
COVID-19 Era: Identifying
Challenges and Strategies for
Improvement**

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Abstract

Effective communication within companies has become increasingly vital in the post-COVID-19 era, where remote work and hybrid models have transformed traditional workplace interactions. The scientific research addresses the issue of enhancing communication in companies during the post-Covid-19 era. It focuses on identifying the challenges and strategies for improvement in this area. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the sudden shift to remote and hybrid work environments on corporate communication and to propose effective strategies to address these challenges. The subject of study includes communication dynamics within companies, the influence of digital communication tools, and the resulting effects on employee engagement and productivity. The main goal of this thesis is to develop practical recommendations that companies can implement to enhance communication, ensuring better collaboration and overall organisational efficiency in the post-pandemic landscape.

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List of Abbreviations

BE	Behavioural expectation
BI	Behavioural intention
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DOC	Digital organisation culture
ICT	Information and communication technology
IoT	Internet of Things
MRT	Media Richness Theory
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
PPE	Personal protective equipment
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
UN	United Nations
UTAUT	Unified theory of acceptance and use of technology
WFH	Working from home

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Overview

The purpose of this overview is twofold: firstly, to set out the rationale behind this master's thesis and secondly, to provide an overview of the core ideas explored in the research. In addition, the overview offers a brief synopsis of each chapter of the research.

0.1 Motivation

The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably transformed the landscape of professional communication, presenting both unprecedented challenges and unique opportunities. As organizations worldwide strive to adapt to this new normal, the critical role of effective communication has emerged as a cornerstone for resilience and continued growth. This thesis aims to explore the evolving dynamics of communication within companies in the post-COVID-19 era, with the objective of identifying the specific challenges that businesses face and proposing effective strategies for improvement.

The motivation for this study is rooted in the recognition that communication is not just a business function, but a lifeline that sustains operational continuity, fosters employee engagement, and stimulates innovation. The rapid shift to remote work, the integration of digital communication tools, and the need for clear crisis communication strategies during the pandemic have underscored the necessity for a robust communication framework. However, as the world gradually transitions to post-pandemic realities, companies must re-evaluate and refine their communication practices to ensure that they not only recover, but thrive.

This thesis will leverage interdisciplinary approach, drawing insights from organisational behaviour, psychology, and information technology, in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of communication barriers and facilitators in the contemporary corporate environment. By identifying effective communication strategies and tailoring them to fit the unique needs of post-pandemic workspaces, this research aims to contribute significantly to the scholarly discourse on organisational communication and provide practical recommendations for business leaders. Ultimately, enhancing communication in the post-COVID-19 era is not just about adapting to change; it's about leading it.

0.2 Objectives

The research aims to delve into how the shift to remote and hybrid work models has reshaped internal communication within companies following the COVID-19 pandemic. We'll explore the various communication challenges that have emerged, particularly focusing on how the lack of face-to-face interaction and reliance on digital tools has impacted the effectiveness of communication flows.

A significant part of this study will involve evaluating the digital communication tools that have become central to daily operations, aiming to pinpoint which tools have been most effective and

which aspects might still need improvement. By doing so, we hope to propose actionable strategies that can enhance communication effectiveness, thereby boosting engagement and reducing misunderstandings across teams.

Furthermore, the role of leadership in managing communication during crises will be assessed to understand how leadership styles have adapted to better support team cohesion and information dissemination during uncertain times.

Additionally, we'll look at how these communication dynamics influence employee engagement and productivity, providing a basis for practical recommendations that companies can implement for continuous improvement. This will help ensure that organisations are not only adapting to current changes but are also well-prepared for future challenges.

0.3 Chapter Overview

The work is structured into four chapters.

The first chapter delves into various communication models and their relevance within organisational settings. It explores foundational communication theories and assesses how these models can be effectively applied to enhance internal corporate communication. The focus is on understanding the dynamics of both traditional and modern communication frameworks and their impact on organisational efficiency and employee engagement.

In the second chapter, we conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature related to communication challenges in organisations. This section critically analyses studies that document the evolution of workplace communication in response to technological advancements and changing organisational structures. It identifies key communication barriers that have emerged in the post-pandemic workplace and discusses the theoretical and practical implications of these challenges.

The third chapter presents original empirical research conducted through a survey and data analysis to investigate current communication practices in various organisations. It assesses the effectiveness of existing communication strategies and provides evidence-based recommendations. This chapter aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by offering actionable strategies that organisations can implement to improve their communication processes, thereby enhancing overall organisational performance and employee satisfaction.

The final chapter focuses on the practical application of the strategies recommended in Chapter 3. It details a structured approach for implementing these recommendations within organisations, including timelines, responsible parties, and methods for monitoring and evaluating the impact of these changes. Additionally, it discusses future directions for research and practice in organisational communication to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation to emerging trends and technologies. The chapter aims to provide organisations with a roadmap for building a more resilient and dynamic communication environment that can thrive in a rapidly evolving business landscape.

Introduction

The 2019 pandemic, commonly known as COVID-19, had a profound global impact, turning the world upside down in unprecedented ways. Its abrupt onset, rapid transmission and vast scale reverberated through every aspect of human existence, reshaping societies, economies and daily lives.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the cost of shipping from Asia to the US, for example, has nearly doubled, and the cost of long-haul freight within the US has increased by nearly 60 per cent. [64] The average lead time for material and input deliveries has increased significantly, with an increase of about 35 days in the US. This increase in lead times reflects a significant slowdown in logistics and supply chain processes, severely impacting production schedules and deliveries to market. The disruptions have resulted in critically low inventory levels in various sectors in the US, which has further complicated the situation. The reduction in inventories relative to sales has made it particularly challenging for companies to adapt to fluctuations in demand, leading to widespread retail shortages, particularly in imported goods. Resource and product prices in sectors with a high Chinese influence have risen more than in other sectors, indicating that the real decline in activity was not due to falling demand but to supply chain constraints. [63] The confluence of these factors has created a significant barrier to economic activity. The retail sector, already experiencing difficulties due to low inventories, has been further constrained by delayed deliveries, which has made it more challenging to replenish stock and has resulted in significant disruptions in the availability of goods to consumers. The impact of these shocks has been felt to varying degrees across different sectors. Sectors that have relied heavily on delayed deliveries have faced greater challenges, underscoring the vulnerability of industries that depend on complex just-in-time supply chain models. [64]

The economic impact of the global pandemic on businesses, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), was significant. The pandemic resulted in a widespread disruption of business operations, with a considerable number of small businesses permanently ceasing operations. At the outset of the pandemic, the number of active businesses declined from 15 million in February 2020 to 11 million, signifying a considerable decline in business activity due to quarantine and restrictions. [68] The number of active business owners in the United States declined by 2.2 million, or 15%, between February and May 2020. However, there was a partial recovery of 7% from the April low. [67] At the time of the initial restrictions, many small businesses were in a severe liquidity crisis. They had only two weeks' cash on hand and monthly expenses exceeding \$10,000. [68] The majority of industries experienced a decline, with the service sectors, including the arts, tourism, hospitality and accommodation, being particularly affected. In these sectors, 35% of business owners were forced to close business operations. [67] During the period of quarantine, these sectors experienced a virtual absence of both sales and profits. The employment situation in small businesses was significantly impacted, with an average reduction in staff numbers of 40%. The uncertainty surrounding the duration of the closures further exacerbated the instability experienced by both employees and business owners. [68] Consequently, a number of businesses,

including shops and restaurants, were compelled to cease operations, while those employed in the travel and tourism sector were forced to seek alternative employment.

The UN Statistics Report [88] indicates that the global unemployment rate reached 6.5 per cent in 2020, representing an increase of 1.1 percentage points from the previous year. The number of unemployed individuals worldwide increased by 33 million, reaching 220 million. In addition, 81 million individuals ceased to participate in the labour market. In Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Europe and North America, the unemployment rate increased by at least 2 percentage points.

The most severely affected groups were young people and women, with a 8.7% and 5.0% decline in employment opportunities, respectively, in 2020, compared to a 3.7% reduction for adults and 3.9% for men. Prior to the pandemic, the youth unemployment rate was approximately three times that of the adult unemployment rate. During the recession, women were more likely than men to cease employment in order to care for children. This further widened the long-standing gender gap in labour force participation rates.

As outlined in Rafadi Khan Khayru's article "Opinions about Consumer Behavior during the Covid-19 Pandemic" [69], the pandemic has markedly accelerated the shift to e-commerce. This is due to consumers increasingly avoiding conventional shops in order to minimise the risk of transmission. The article notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has catalysed a significant increase in online shopping, digital consumption and average online basket size. These are expected to continue to grow at record rates. This shift is particularly notable in Indonesia, where there has been a dramatic shift from shopping directly in shops and markets to using online channels. Digital shopping transaction methods have become widespread, and many consumers plan to continue shopping online even after physical shops open. Consumer preferences underwent a significant shift during the pandemic, with a heightened emphasis on health, safety, and necessities. The crisis elevated the significance of maintaining a robust immune system, influencing the pattern of purchases of products that support health and wellness. Demand for health, hygiene, and essentials has increased markedly. For instance, a study in the article "Psychological factors and consumer behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic" [70] indicates that spending on essentials increased by 90.69% in Italy at the beginning of the pandemic, while spending on non-necessities increased by 36.11%. Additionally, the purchase decision-making process has become more cautious, with consumers considering risk factors more seriously. This cautious approach reflects a broader awareness and concern about the impact of the pandemic on personal and public health.

Moreover, businesses had to follow the government's new policies and adapt to all the restrictions and new regulations. Businesses around the world rapidly implemented a range of comprehensive health and safety measures to protect employees and customers, while striving to maintain operational viability. [72] Recognising the importance of direct protective measures, businesses furnished their employees with personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gloves, and glasses, particularly in settings where maintaining physical distance was not feasible. Additionally, a significant focus was placed on maintaining personal hygiene standards. The premises were furnished with an adequate number of hand sanitisation stations, and staff were encouraged to wash their hands frequently and to adhere to respiratory etiquette, including covering their mouths when coughing and sneezing. In addition, companies have used administrative controls to change

the way work is done. This included encouraging remote working and introducing staggered shifts to reduce the density of people in the workplace, thus limiting direct interaction.

During this period, the manner in which employees communicated within the company underwent a significant transformation. The lack of physical proximity and the absence of traditional forms of distraction, such as the canteen or cigarette breaks, made it challenging for employees to engage in productive discussions about recent developments or events. However, as the world began to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic and gradually returned to a sense of normalcy, many companies also began to reconsider their home office policies and explore ways to integrate their employees back into traditional office settings. However, the concept of normalcy has evolved over time, and we are now confronted with the new normal, where a significant proportion of employees are reluctant to fully return to the office. This has led to communication becoming a significant obstacle in fostering collaboration with colleagues.

The abrupt transition to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant challenges [73] in communication, which persist into the post-pandemic era. This has fundamentally altered the landscape of organisational communication. In the wake of the global pandemic, businesses across the globe have been forced to rely heavily on information and communication technology (ICT) to maintain operations. While this shift has been necessary, it has also brought about a number of critical issues. Firstly, the absence of non-verbal cues in digital communications has led to misunderstandings and reduced the effectiveness of interpersonal interactions, which are essential for team cohesion and individual job performance. Furthermore, the coordination of communications in a virtual environment has proven to be a significant challenge. Traditional spontaneous and informal exchanges that spark innovation and foster relationships are now significantly curtailed. One more important challenge is the management of the psychological contract between employers and employees, which encompasses unwritten mutual expectations that are frequently unacknowledged in remote work environments. This mistrust is further compounded by the difficulty employers face in implementing effective performance management practices without the benefit of direct supervision. This can potentially lead to breaches of trust and dissatisfaction on both sides. [74]

In addition, the transition to remote work has eroded the traditional boundaries between personal and professional life, necessitating that employees assume greater autonomy in managing their integration into the work environment. The challenge is to communicate and respect these boundaries in a manner that is both effective and respectful, with the aim of preventing burnout and maintaining productivity. Furthermore, the implementation of smart working practices requires a shift from mere accessibility to strategic communication and task management. This implies the development of new skills and communication strategies by both employers and employees that are not only understandable but also promote engagement and job satisfaction.

These challenges are compounded by the variability in access to stable internet and suitable technology, particularly in diverse global teams. This exacerbates inequalities in communication effectiveness across workforce segments. Moreover, cultural and contextual differences have made it more challenging to ensure clear and effective communication among geographically and culturally diverse teams. In the absence of effective solutions to these challenges, organisations run the risk of experiencing reductions in employee engagement, productivity, innovation, and overall organisational cohesion.

In light of the challenges outlined above, there is an urgent need for a systematic examination of the post-COVID-19 communication challenges and the development of strategic measures. It is therefore essential that these initiatives not only address the identified issues, but also seek to exploit new opportunities to enhance communication effectiveness in increasingly hybrid or fully remote working environments. This thesis proposes to explicitly identify these challenges and explore practical strategies that could significantly improve communication effectiveness in the post-pandemic era. This helps organisations to be resilient and adaptable in a fast-changing work environment.

1. Foundations of Communication Models in Organizational Settings

1.1. Definitions of communication

First of all, we need to mention the basics and understand the definition and the meaning of communication and its importance in daily working life.

The word “communication” comes from the Latin verb “communico,” which means “to make common, to connect, to share.” [89] From the word “communication” derived words like “communicability” (the ability to communicate, sociability), “communicable” (a sociable person), as well as the word “communicative” (related to communication; for example, a communicative type of statement). Finding a common definition of communication that everyone agrees on is almost impossible. There are hundreds of definitions.

According to Cambridge Dictionary communication is “the process of sharing information, especially when this increases understanding between people or groups [91].”

Britannica Dictionary defines communication as “the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviours to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else [92].”

Murphy, Hildebrandt, Thomas give the following definition: “Communication is a process of transmitting and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages. It is considered effective when it achieves the desired response or reaction from the receiver [93].”

Pearson and Nelson understand communication as “the process of understanding and sharing meaning [94].”

A summary of the above definitions might be as follows:

Communication is the process by which people transmit information, exchange verbal and nonverbal messages, and share meaning with one another.

Another meaning of the word “communication” refers to routes of transportation, networks, and underground utility systems, and usually used in its plural form. [90] In this sense, people talk, for example, about underground, aerial, and other types of communications, as well as communication systems.

In this work the term “communication” is used, of course, in the first meaning, since the object of the study is precisely communication between people. Let’s have a look at some popular communication models.

1.2. Communication Theories

Shannon-Weaver model of communication

The Shannon and Weaver model was developed in 1948 when Cloud Elwood Shannon wrote an article “A Mathematical Theory of Communication” in the Bell System Technical Journal in collaboration with Warren Weaver. [55]

Shannon was an American mathematician [95] and Weaver a scientist [96]. The mathematical theory later became known as the Shannon-Weaver model of communication and is widely accepted as one of the main seeds from which Communication Studies has grown [58].

Presented as a simple linear process, the model focuses on the transmission and reception of information.

The model is made up of six main components.

- The *information source* is the person who composes a message, chooses a channel to deliver that message, and sends it.
- The *transmitter* is a person who uses a device that converts information into a sequence of signals or characters. The device itself can also be called a transmitter.
- The *communication channel* is the medium through which the message is sent.
- The *receiver* is a device that converts signals or characters into the original message, or a receiver that decodes the message itself.
- The *destination* is the person receiving the information or the place where the information is to arrive. The destination must provide feedback if required by the message.
- The *noise source* is physical noise such as the environment, people, or anything that prevents the destination from receiving the information as it was sent. [56]

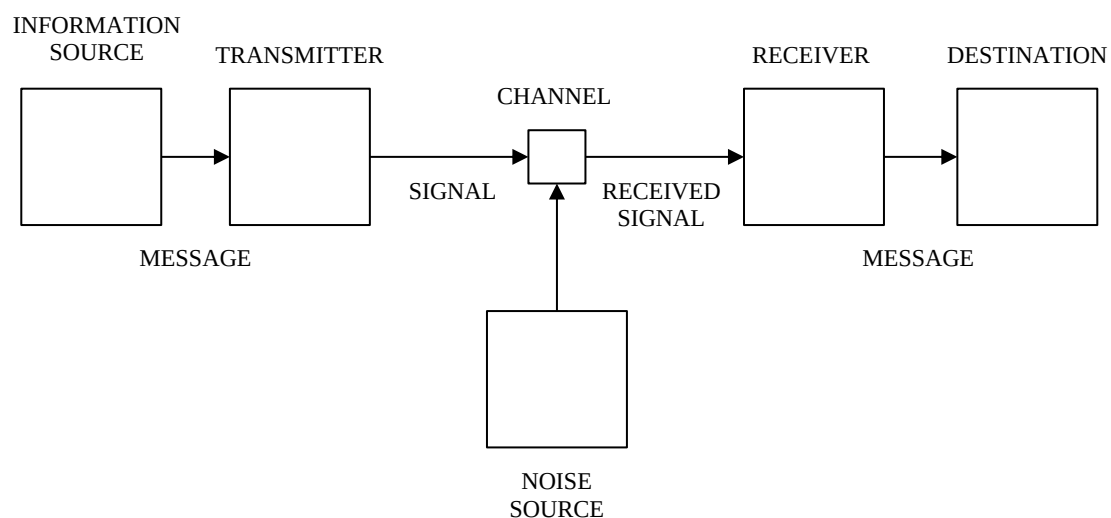


Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver’s model of communication [55]

The information source encodes the information and sends it to the receiver via a communication channel such as telephone or telegraph. The information source encodes the message using a code that is understood by the receiver.

The destination must now decode the message before it can be read and understood. In some cases, the receiving device may also be the receiver. Sometimes the channel contains noise or interference, and the destination may not be able to decode the information received, causing communication problems.

As Shannon was an engineer, this scheme was used primarily to improve the technology of communications, mainly telephone communication. The aim was to maximise the telephone's capabilities and eliminate noise source altogether.

Weaver then applied the scheme to any kind of negotiation or communication. The model became known as the Shannon-Weaver model of communication. In engineering, the Shannon model is also known as information theory and is used in science to calculate the transmission of information between devices. [55]

According to Shannon-Weaver, there are three levels of communication problems:

1. Technical problems are caused by the channel.
2. Semantic problems are when the meaning of the message is misunderstood by the receiver.
3. Effectiveness problems relate to how effectively the message elicits a response from the receiver.

The model may seem primitive at first, but its importance should not be underestimated.

The model laid the foundation for subsequent communication theories and models. It provided a systematic way of understanding the communication process as a linear sequence of events.

One of the major contributions of the model is the concept of 'noise'. It emphasises the possibility of distortion and error in the communication process, and the need for clarity and efficient encoding and decoding of messages.

The model emphasises the importance of encoding (the process of converting a message into signals) and decoding (the process of interpreting these signals back into a message). This aspect is crucial to understanding how communication can fail if the encoding and decoding processes are not properly coordinated.

Although the model was originally developed for electronic communication, its principles are applicable to different forms of communication, including face-to-face, written and mediated communication.

The Shannon-Weaver model presented a quantitative approach to understanding communication to measure and analyse the effectiveness of information transfer. This approach has played an important role in fields such as telecommunications and information theory.

The model emphasises information transfer and the challenges associated with it. This emphasis

is particularly relevant in contexts where accurate and efficient information transfer is of key importance, such as organisational communication, data transfer and networked systems.

In addition to the advantages, it is also important to bear in mind the disadvantages of this model.

The model is criticised for its linear nature, which assumes a one-way flow of communication. It does not take into account the feedback necessary for interactive and dynamic communication processes.

The model does not take into account the context in which communication takes place and the interactive nature of human communication, where the roles of sender and receiver can be fluid and interchangeable.

The model simplifies the complex nature of communication by reducing it to a series of steps. In reality, communication involves more subtle factors such as emotions, cultural differences and relationship dynamics.

The Shannon-Weaver model of communication is important because of its pioneering role in conceptualising the communication process. It has become a foundational framework that has influenced various fields and subsequent models. Despite its limitations, the model's focus on coding, decoding and noise remains relevant and valuable for understanding and improving communication, especially in technical and organisational contexts.

Transactional model of communication

The transactional model of communication was formulated by Dean Barnlund in 1970. He is an important researcher of interpersonal communication in the context of intercultural relations. [60] The main idea of Barnlund's transactional communication model is that there is a mutual influence between communication and human relationships that needs to be understood and properly implemented. Barnlund states that communication between two people is effective when both of them manage to have a "transaction", to meet and exchange messages with each other, trying to give these messages equal importance. It is a kind of a "deal". This is possible if both parties treat each other as equals and recognise their interdependence. Only then will they be able to transfer this feeling into their communication with each other. Another important aspect of Barnlund's model is that people do not communicate with a single message, but with many parallel messages. Parallel messages are constantly circulating between people, even though they may not be the subject of a particular conversation. Finally, Barnlund's transactional model of communication is characterised by the fact that people use not one but many communication channels to send and receive messages. They are a reflection of the past, the present and the future. In other words, people's communication with each other, parallel messages and the channels of their transmission and reception represent what the speakers' relationships were before, what their relationships and feelings are now, and what their expectations and hopes for the future are.

Barnlund emphasised several communication postulates:

- Communication describes the evolution of meaning.
- Communication is dynamic.

- Communication is continuous.
- Communication is circular.
- Communication is unrepeatable.
- Communication is irreversible.
- Communication is complex. [97]

These postulates help to form a broad view of communication as a complex, dynamic interchange between individuals who actively interpret and respond to each other's messages within a shared context.

Barnlund's model of transactional communication includes six main components: Communicator A and Communicator B (both of them are senders and receivers); message; feedback; context; channels for transmitting and receiving information; noise. Below is a simplified diagram of the transactional model of communication.

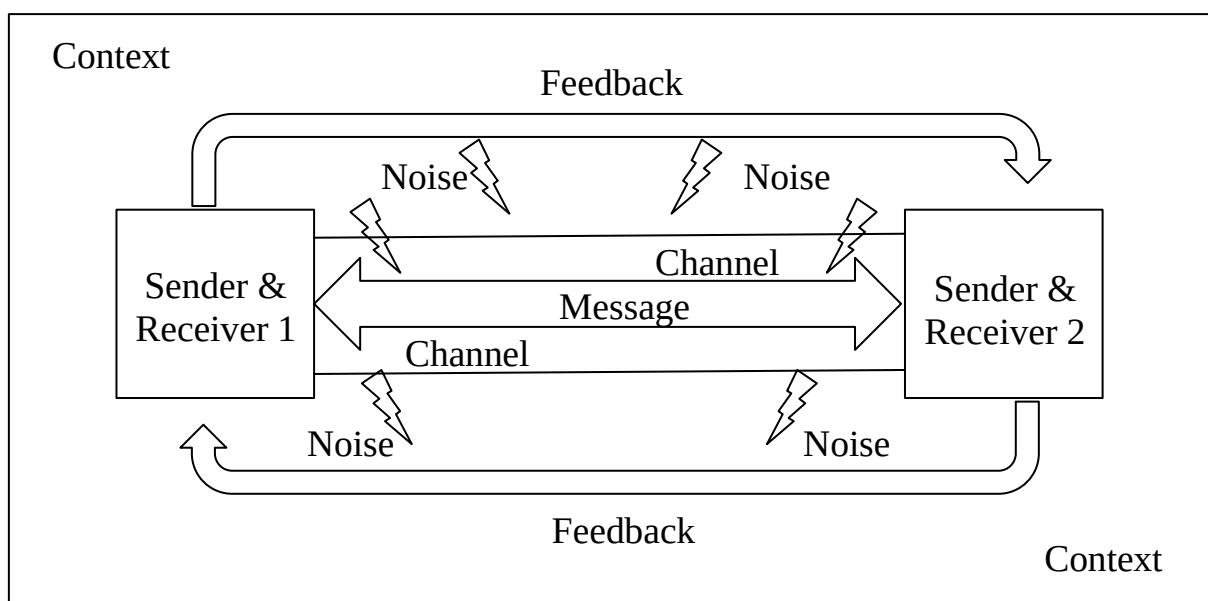


Figure 2. Simplified view on transactional model of communication

Let's take a closer look at the components of the transactional communication model.

1. Communicator A and Communicator B

According to Barnlund's model, transactional communication requires both communicators to be both the sender and receiver of information.

This means that both need to speak and listen to each other in order to create an atmosphere of "exchange" and thus achieve a "transaction" by encoding and decoding messages.

If communicator B is silent because he or she feels obliged only to listen to communicator A and does not react in any way (e.g. with short interjections, nods of the head, short words of agreement or disagreement), then a transaction between them is difficult or even impossible.

The same happens when communicator A wants to "speak his or her mind" and refuses to be interrupted.

Barnlund's model of transactional communication includes not only communication about some current information, but also communication about the goals and attitudes of the two communicators. As already mentioned, this communication expresses the past, the present and the future of the two communicators. [59]

2. Messages

Messages are the core of communication, representing the content exchanged between communicators. Cues are the specific elements used within messages. In Barnlund's model there are three types of cues: public, private and behavioural. Public cues are physical or environmental elements that help all communicators understand what's happening around them. Private cues are personal and can only be experienced by the person directly interacting with them. Behavioural cues include both non-verbal and verbal behaviours that are controlled by the individual.

Verbal cues, a subset of behavioural cues, consist of spoken or written words that convey explicit information and serve as the primary means of communication in many interactions.

Non-verbal cues, another aspect of behavioural cues, include all forms of communication that do not involve words, such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, eye contact and tone of voice. These often convey an emotional state and can complement, reinforce or contradict verbal messages.

Messages are created through a process of encoding, where the communicator translates thoughts and feelings into a communicable form. These messages are then transmitted through the chosen communication channel, where they may be affected by noise and context, before being decoded by the receiver. [59]

3. Feedback

Feedback is the response that a communicator gives after receiving a message. It is a critical component that distinguishes this model of communication from the Shannon-Weaver model and other linear models. Barnlund was convinced that feedback is essential in communication.

Both messages and feedback are continuously and simultaneously transmitted and received between communicators, making the interaction dynamic and cyclical. This continuous exchange, influenced by the actions of the communicators, the communication channel, noise and the surrounding context, forms the transactional nature of Barnlund's model.

4. Context

In the transactional model of communication, three contexts co-exist when people interact:

Social context includes the rules and norms that govern how people communicate with each other. This context includes, for example, greeting, thanking or apologising.

Cultural context includes the cultural and co-cultural identities that people have (e.g. age, biological sex, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexual orientation, social class). According to this context, communication between two people from the same culture will be easier

and more natural, while two people from different cultures will find it more difficult to find common ground.

Relational context describes the nature of the bond or emotional attachment between two people, e.g. parent/guardian-child, siblings, teacher-student, health professional-client, best friends, acquaintances. This context determines the degree of formality in communication. For instance, communication between colleagues will be less formal than communication between a subordinate and a superior.

Through our interpersonal interactions we create a social reality, but all these different contexts influence that reality. [98]

5. Channels for transmitting and receiving information

A channel is a medium through which messages are transmitted. Barnlund's transactional model provides different channels for sending and receiving messages. Each has a role to play as long as it is used appropriately.

These channels include words, visual channels, auditory channels, tactile channels like handshakes or touching, position of legs, arms, torso, facial expressions and gestures, the overall tone and atmosphere of the conversation.

Not all channels for sending and receiving information are appropriate in all situations. For example, because of the intimate nature of the message, hand-to-body contact is not appropriate for face-to-face business communication. [99]

6. Noise

Another important aspect to consider in Barnlund's transactional model is noise, which disrupts the flow of communication. Noise can be present throughout the communication process. In addition to the three contexts discussed above, there are four other contexts that can affect our ability to communicate effectively with people:

Physical context is the physical space in which the interaction takes place (e.g. doctor's office, inappropriate time and place to communicate, comfortable furniture, etc.)

Physiological context refers to the reactions of the organism to various stimuli in its environment, which can significantly influence the communication process. This context is divided into internal and external reactions:

Internal reactions are physiological responses that come from within the body. These reactions can influence communication by affecting a person's ability to concentrate, process information or manage their emotions. Examples could be hunger, which can distract or reduce patience; headaches, which can impair cognitive ability and affect mood; and physical fatigue, which can reduce alertness and enthusiasm during communication.

External reactions are physiological responses triggered by environmental stimuli. These reactions can affect how information is received and processed during communication. For instance,

reactions to the ambient temperature of a room, which can make people uncomfortable and less receptive; reactions to auditory distractions, such as loud noises, which can make it difficult to understand what is being said; and visual disturbances, such as poor lighting, which can strain the eyes and affect recognition of non-verbal cues.

Psychological context refers to how the human mind reacts to events in its environment. This context affects communication by influencing various mental and emotional factors such as emotional state, thoughts and perceptions, intentions, attentiveness or nuances such as sarcasm, rash judgements or lack of empathy.

Semantic context involves the meanings of words and phrases and how these meanings can change depending on the communication context. It involves the use of language or interpretation. The use of language includes the choice of words, the size of the vocabulary, and the effectiveness of grammar, all of which contribute to how messages are constructed and understood. Different interpretations of the same message may depend on factors such as the background of the communicators or the situational context. [100]

All of these types of noise have a negative impact on achieving a “transaction” in communication.

Like any other model, the transactional model of communication has its advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages, the model shows how both sender and receiver use their common background and shared experiences to enhance their communication. It is based on the simultaneous exchange of messages and includes the elements of noise and feedback in the transaction. In addition, Barnlund’s model is often widely acknowledged by scholars for its comprehensive and systematic approach to understanding communication.

However, the model does have its disadvantages. One of the main drawbacks is its complexity. Effective communication within this model requires a high level of mutual understanding between sender and receiver, which means that both parties need to have a well aligned understanding of the symbols and meanings being used. Without such an understanding, communication is likely to fail. In addition, the absence of verbal feedback can leave the sender uncertain as to whether the message has been understood as intended. Feedback plays a critical role in the communication process, particularly in interpersonal settings, as it allows for the clarification of misunderstandings. Furthermore, the transactional model highlights that when communication takes place simultaneously between multiple parties, it can generate significant noise. For example, in a meeting where several people are speaking at the same time, it can be difficult to achieve the objectives of the meeting due to competing voices and potential confusion. [101]

Barnlund’s model of transactional communication can be successfully applied to a wide range of business communications with employees, managers, customers and partners, as long as it is not equated with friendly conversations. Transactional communication aims to “transact” messages when both communicators are aware of their interdependence “past”, “present” and “future”.

Take, for example, a job evaluation interview, which is a routine management practice and has all the characteristics of “face-to-face” transactional verbal communication. For instance, when a manager has to evaluate the performance of his or her employees, he or she is faced with the responsible task of showing interest in the performance of tasks, being kind to employees, being

grateful for their results, helping them to solve problems, providing support and making employees feel satisfied. By following the rules of the Barnlund model, all this can be achieved through transactional communication.

Communication Theory as a Field

Finally, I would like to mention Robert Craig's 1999 article entitled "Communication Theory as a Field". [61] The essay considers communication as a dynamic, multifaceted phenomenon embedded in everyday practice. The author approaches the definition of communication through the lens of a dialogical-dialectical approach, seeing it as a process of interaction between different theoretical and practical approaches. This definition emphasises that communication is not a static or one-dimensional process, but rather a network of interactions that correspond and complement each other in different contexts and cultures.

Communication is defined as a metadiscursive practice involving theoretical discussion and practical application. It interacts with a variety of disciplinary approaches and includes elements from rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, social psychological, socio-cultural and critical traditions. Each of these traditions offers different ways of defining and approaching communicative problems and practices, which enriches the understanding of communication as a complex and multidimensional process.

This definition emphasises that communication is an active and reflective practice that influences social life and cultural practices, maintaining a dialogue between different theories and the real world. This interaction between theory and practice makes communication theory relevant and applicable to real life, contributing to the development of the discipline and supporting socially relevant goals.

Let us examine the definition of communication in this case study in greater detail. The article emphasises that communication is not limited to the mere exchange of information between two parties. It is a complex process that encompasses both verbal and non-verbal aspects, as well as contextual factors and the background of the communicating participants.

A particular focus is placed upon the manner in which cultural and social contexts influence communicative practices. The nature and effectiveness of communication can be significantly influenced by the cultural foundations and social structures that shape it.

The author analyses a number of theoretical approaches to communication, including phenomenological, semiotic, cybernetic and others, as was mentioned above. This facilitates a more nuanced comprehension of communication as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that necessitates a multidisciplinary approach.

Furthermore, the article considers the potential application of theoretical knowledge of communication in real-world settings, including education, business, and interpersonal relationships. This encompasses methods for enhancing communication abilities and recognizing communication barriers.

Finally, the article addresses ethical and normative aspects of communication, including issues of truthfulness, manipulation, and ethical responsibility in communication.

Accordingly, in this article, the author defines communication as a process in which participants exchange information and give meaning to it through interaction. Communication is not merely the transfer of data from one individual to another. It is a complex process involving the interpretation, perception and understanding of information. The interpretation and response to messages is dependent on the use of language, non-verbal cues and contextual knowledge. This process facilitates the construction of shared understanding between participants and the creation of new meanings within the context of their interactions.

The author emphasises that an understanding and study of communication requires the integration of knowledge and approaches from different disciplines, which makes it a complex but extremely important object of study.

It is also important to note that the article discusses the practical application of theoretical knowledge of communication in business. It is emphasised that effective communication is a crucial factor in successful management and organisational development. The following paragraphs will outline the key aspects that are emphasised in the article.

The article discusses the potential for communication skills to enhance internal communication in companies, with the objective of fostering greater mutual understanding between employees at different levels. This encompasses the provision of training for managers in effective communication techniques, with the objective of enabling them to communicate expectations and feedback in a clear and concise manner.

The ability to negotiate and interact with clients is a crucial skill in any professional setting. An understanding of the complexities of communication is beneficial in the context of negotiation processes and the establishment of long-term client relationships. The article outlines the manner in which theoretical knowledge can be employed to develop communication strategies that take into account cultural and individual differences between parties.

Crisis communication is the process of exchanging information and messages in a timely and appropriate manner during a crisis. The necessity of developing clear communication strategies in advance of crisis situations is highlighted. This encompasses the capacity to respond timely and effectively in the event of a crisis, characterised by transparency and openness towards stakeholders.

Another important aspect of effective business communication is the training and development of employees. Theoretical knowledge is applied to create training programmes aimed at developing employees' communication skills. This includes everything from improving verbal and written communication to developing presentation and public speaking skills.

The use of digital tools is no less important in business communication. The article also touches on the use of modern digital tools and platforms to optimise communication processes in companies, thereby improving coordination and efficiency at work.

Thus, the article highlights that a deep understanding of communication can significantly contribute to improved business practices and organisational effectiveness. [61]

Conclusion

This section presents an in-depth analysis of two significant models of communication: the Shannon-Weaver model and Barnlund's Transactional model. It discusses their foundational principles, applications, and limitations. Through a detailed analysis, it becomes evident that each model offers unique insights into the complex processes of communication. Each responds to different needs within the study and practice of communication.

The Shannon-Weaver model, established in the mid-20th century, is the gold standard for straightforward, mechanistic approaches to communication. It outlines the roles of sender, message, channel, receiver, and noise, providing a clear, if simplified, pathway of how messages are transmitted and received. This model's greatest strength lies in its ability to frame communication within a context of information theory, which is particularly useful for understanding and improving technical systems where the efficiency of message transfer is essential. However, its linear, sender-receiver orientation is inadequate for the nuances of human communication, where feedback and interaction play a crucial role. The model's focus on noise as the primary obstacle to effective communication remains relevant, particularly in areas such as telecommunications and data transmission.

In contrast, Barnlund's Transactional model, formulated two decades later, offers a more dynamic perspective. It acknowledges that communication is inherently a multi-directional, continuous, and contextually embedded process. It is clear that communicators are simultaneously senders and receivers within a network of messages that reflect past, present, and future contexts. This model is the ideal tool for addressing the nuances of interpersonal and group communication, where feedback, shared meanings, and the influence of socio-cultural factors are crucial. Barnlund's model is a robust framework for understanding how communication processes foster greater understanding and collaboration among individuals. It emphasises the circularity and complexity of communication, which is essential for grasping the nuances of interpersonal and group communication.

Both models offer significant theoretical insights, and their practical applications can be seen as complementary. The Shannon-Weaver model's emphasis on the technical aspects of communication will undoubtedly enhance the effectiveness of data-driven, technological communications. In contrast, Barnlund's model, with its focus on interaction and context, is the better choice for informing more effective interpersonal communication strategies within diverse organisational settings.

Organisations must integrate these models into practical strategies that are responsive to the rapid changes in workplace norms brought about by the pandemic. As companies increasingly rely on digital communication tools, it is vital that the principles highlighted by Barnlund – particularly regarding the importance of feedback and context – are incorporated into training programmes that enhance the communicative competence of employees across various digital platforms.

Furthermore, the framework makes it clear that communication has the power to transform organisational cultures. By leveraging insights from communication theory, companies can and must foster environments that not only prioritise clear and efficient information transfer but also enhance mutual understanding and collaboration among employees. This cultural shift is essential

for organisations to become more resilient and adaptive in the face of ongoing global disruptions.

It is crucial that ethical considerations are also taken into account when implementing effective communication strategies. The integrity of communication processes within companies has a direct impact on trust and morale. This, in turn, affects both internal dynamics and external perceptions of the organisation. Therefore, it is essential that ethical communication practices are adhered to, ensuring transparency, accuracy, and respect in all exchanges.

In conclusion, the post-COVID-19 era presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for organisational communication. The theories discussed here serve as a framework to facilitate an understanding of the complexities presented by the post-COVID-19 era. Nevertheless, in order to apply these theories in practice, it is necessary to make a thoughtful and adaptable adjustment to the realities of modern organisational life. By embracing the principles of effective and ethical communication, companies can enhance their operational effectiveness and contribute to the construction of a more connected and resilient organisational culture. In the future, it is essential to prioritise the continuous improvement of communication practices, which must be adapted to the evolving needs of the workforce and aligned with the core goals of the organisation. This strategic focus on communication will undoubtedly constitute a cornerstone of successful business practices in the context of the dynamic global business landscape.

1.3. Organisational communication

At the outset of this discussion, we addressed the term “communication.” It is now necessary to gain an understanding of what constitutes an organisation and the role of communication within that context. This will be the focus of the following section.

As with the term “communication,” the term “organisation” is defined in a multitude of ways.

Collins English dictionary provides several definitions: [102]

1. the act of organising or the state of being organised
2. an organised structure or whole
3. a business or administrative concern united and constructed for a particular end
4. a body of administrative officials, as of a political party, a government department, etc.
5. order or system; method.

There are also other definitions:

- “a system of consciously coordinated activities of two or more persons.” Barnard, C. I. (1938). *The functions of the executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pg. 73.
- “The accomplishment of an objective requires collective effort, men set up an organisation designed to coordinate the activities of many persons and to furnish incentives for others to join them for this purpose.” Blau, P. M., & Scott, W. R. (1962). *Formal organizations: A comparative approach*. San Francisco: Chandler, pg. 5.
- “a Body of individuals working under a defined system of rules, assignments procedures, and relationships designed to achieve identifiable objectives and goals.” Greenwald, H. P. (2008). *Organizations: Management without control*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, pg. 6.
- “a social unit within which people have achieved somewhat stable relations (not necessarily face-to-face) among themselves in order to facilitate obtaining a set of objectives or goals.” Litterer, J. A. (1963). *Organizations: Structured behavior*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, pg. 5. [24]

There are numerous other definitions that all have a place within the broader context of the subject matter.

Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger. Upon examination of a comparable list of definitions, it was determined that there are three primary features that are consistently present in all definitions of the term “organization.” These features are the structure, the goal, and the people. [24] Let us proceed to a brief discussion of these features.

Organisational structure

The discussion of organisational structure primarily concerns the functioning of organisations in terms of both internal operations and their external environment in order to achieve its objectives.

The configuration of reporting and authority relationships within the organisation, the design of systems to ensure effective communication, decision-making, and control, as well as the alignment of roles and responsibilities to achieve the organisation’s strategic goals, are all elements of organisational structure. The structure impacts how the organisation operates and performs, and it can vary widely between different types of organisations, such as corporations, non-profits, or governmental institutions.

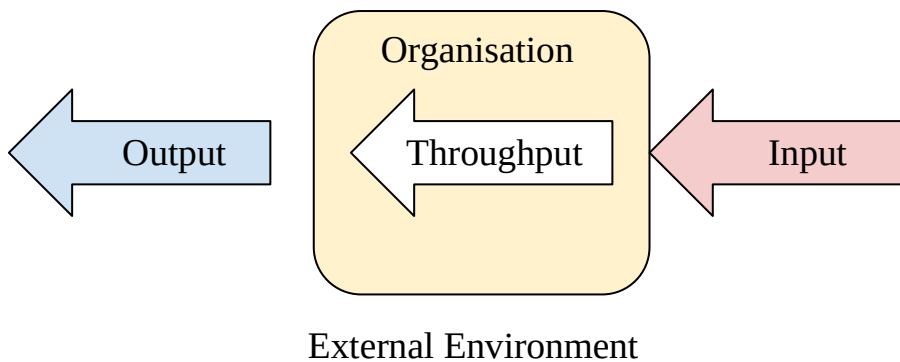


Figure 3. Organisational Structures [24]

External environment is defined as all external entities that interact with the organisation. These include competitors, suppliers, customers, and regulatory agencies. The organisation must respond and adapt to changes and pressures from these external factors. This interaction can influence strategic decisions and affect the organisation’s performance and survival.

Inputs are defined as resources that originate from the external environment and are essential for the operational functioning of an organisation. Such inputs may include, but are not limited to, raw materials, financial resources, information, and human resources. The effective acquisition and management of inputs are of paramount importance for the operations and success of the organisation.

Throughput encompasses the processes and activities that transform inputs into outputs. This includes all operational procedures, workflows, and activities that occur within the organisation. The objective is to ascertain the efficiency and effectiveness with which the organisation utilises its resources in order to achieve its objectives.

Output represents the final products, services, or results produced by the organisation. It is delivered back to the external environment and is critical for the organisation to meet the needs and expectations of customers and other stakeholders. In order for the organisation to maintain a

competitive advantage and achieve its goals, the quality, efficiency, and responsiveness of producing these outputs is of the utmost importance. [24]

The organisational structure and its processes play a pivotal role in determining the functionality and strategic direction of an organisation.

Organisational goals

Edward Gross identifies five distinct goals that organisations typically pursue: output, adaptation, management, motivation, and positional.

The *output goal* concerns the products or services that an organisation produces and delivers to its external environment. Achieving high-quality output is of great importance, as it has a direct impact on customer satisfaction, market share, and overall success. Organisations aim to optimise their output in terms of both quality and quantity in order to meet the demands of their market and stakeholders.

The *adaptation goal* is used to describe an organisation's capacity to alter or evolve in response to external environmental factors. This encompasses the capacity to adapt to changes in the market, technological developments and competitive pressures. The objective is to guarantee long-term sustainability by demonstrating responsiveness and flexibility to external dynamics.

The *management goal* is to ensure the effective administration of the organisation's resources, including human, financial, and material resources. Effective management ensures that these resources are utilised efficiently and that organisational activities are aligned with strategic objectives.

The *motivation* of employees represents a pivotal goal that serves to enhance performance and productivity. Organisations endeavour to create motivational strategies that encourage employees to perform at the highest possible level. This includes the development of reward systems, the fostering of a positive work culture, and the alignment of individual goals with organisational objectives.

Positional goals relate to the organisation's standing or position within the industry or market. This encompasses goals relating to market leadership, innovation leadership, and the organisation's reputation. Securing a strong position within an industry provides competitive advantages and enhances the organisation's ability to influence the industry. [24]

Each of these goals is interrelated, and success in one area often supports or enhances performance in others. For example, output quality can affect the company's market position; effective management facilitates better adaptation to external changes; motivation directly influences employee performance, impacting output and management effectiveness.

Organisations typically balance these goals to create a holistic strategy that encompasses all aspects of operation and performance. The specific emphasis on each goal can vary depending on the organisation's mission, industry, and current market conditions.

Organisational people

The final and most crucial aspect of the definition of the term “organisation” is the role of the people. The author emphasises several key aspects regarding people within an organisation [24]:

The concept of *interdependency* is defined as the mutual dependence among individuals within an organisational structure. This illustrates how people within an organisation rely on each other to achieve the organisation’s goals. If one part of the system fails or falls behind, it impacts others, demonstrating the interconnected nature of organisational roles and functions.

The *interaction* between individuals within an organisation is a fundamental aspect of defining the organisation itself. Without the ongoing interactions between colleagues, customers and other stakeholders, the organisation would not exist in its current form. These interactions play a significant role in shaping the organisational culture and achieving collective goals.

Leadership is of utmost importance, as it provides direction and guidance to an organisation in order to achieve its objectives. Effective leadership includes not only the management of the workforce but also the inspiration and direction that fosters productivity and innovation.

The concept of *control* in organisational settings is concerned with the regulation of behaviours and processes within the organisation in order to ensure efficiency, discipline, and goal achievement. Organisations are by definition social entities that must regulate the behaviour of its members. In contrast, members typically seek their own individual goals. When there is a divergence of needs and desires between two or more groups, a dialectic tension can be observed. The table below illustrates the numerous dialectical tensions that exist between organisations and their various members.

What the organisation needs/wants	What workers need/want
Minimise costs	Maximise salary/benefit package
Systematisation of job duties	Autonomy to do one’s job
Ability to streamline the organisation	Job stability
Agreement	Dissent
Transparency	Privacy
Conventionality	Innovation
Organisation-focused	Self-focused
Permanence	Change
Rights of the organisation	Rights of the individual
Work life	Social life

Table 1. Dialectical Tensions [24]

The contradictions between organisational objectives and employee needs underscore the intricate interdependence of these two factors, which must be managed with precision to ensure the

maintenance of a healthy and productive workplace environment. It is therefore evident that effective communication and negotiation strategies are essential in order to address these tensions in a constructive manner.

Control mechanisms are implemented through the establishment of policies, procedures, and management actions with the intent of aligning individual behaviours with the organisation's needs. [24]

These elements collectively contribute to the dynamics of organisational people, influencing a range of outcomes, including operational efficiency, organisational culture, and change management. It is therefore of the utmost importance to gain an understanding of these aspects if one is to be able to communicate and manage effectively within an organisation.

Organisational communication

In the previous chapters, we have examined the concepts of communication and organisation. It is now necessary to define the term "organisational communication".

Organisational communication is a complex and multifaceted concept that involves the interaction of various elements within an organisation. Communication is not merely a component of an organisation; it is a fundamental aspect of its very existence. The organisation is understood to be the consequence of communicative actions and interactions between its members. [24]

Organisational communication is a process that takes place when there are three basic elements present: [47]

1. Organisational communication takes place within a complex open system, which is itself influenced by and influences its environments, both internal (which is called culture) and external.
2. Organisational communication involves messages and their flow, purpose, feelings, and media.
3. Organisational communication also involves people and their attitudes, feelings, relationships, and skills.

The following figure illustrates the aforementioned propositions.

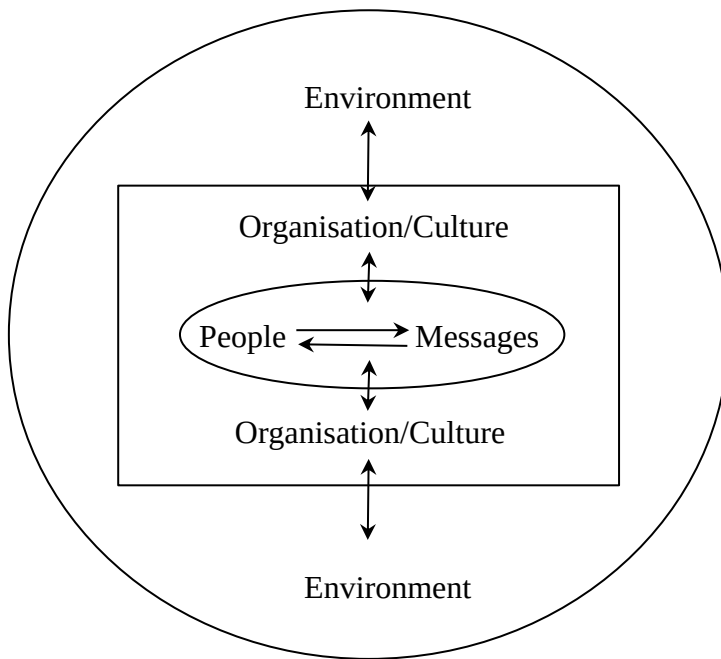


Figure 4. Paradigm of organisational communication [47]

In consideration of the above paradigm, the definition of organisational communication may be posited as follows: it is the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships, with the objective of coping with environmental uncertainty.

This definition encompasses seven key concepts: process, message, network, interdependence, relationship, environment, and uncertainty. [47] We will now briefly examine these concepts, which are essential for an understanding of organisational communication.

Organisational communication is a *process* that includes all forms of communication within an organisation, both formal and informal. It encompasses not only the exchange of information but also the creation and negotiation of meanings. This process is continuous and dynamic, playing a crucial role in supporting essential organisational functions such as decision-making, coordination, and control. Furthermore, the understanding of communication as a process emphasises the significance of feedback loops, which permit adjustments and ongoing dialogue, thereby facilitating organisational adaptation and learning.

The concept of the *message* in organisational communication concerns the content that is communicated. It focuses on the manner in which messages are constructed, conveyed, received, and interpreted within the organisational context, emphasising the importance of clarity, relevance, and timing. Messages in an organisational setting are not only verbal but also non-verbal and can be transmitted through various media. They must be crafted and tailored to fit the cultural and contextual nuances of the organisation and its stakeholders.

In the field of organisational communication, *networks* are understood to be the patterns or systems through which members exchange information. This encompasses both formal channels, which are defined by the organisational structure, such as reports, memos, and meetings, and informal networks that emerge from interpersonal relationships among employees. The networks determine the flow of information and can significantly influence organisational efficiency and morale. The

mapping of these networks enables organisations to identify the key communicators and potential impediments to the flow of information.

The concept of *interdependence* in organisational communication posits that no component of the organisation operates in isolation. It highlights the interconnectivity of disparate departments and teams, showing how the actions and communications of one part influence the others. Effective communication is a fundamental aspect of managing interdependencies within an organisation. It facilitates the coordination of efforts and alignment of goals across the entire organisation, thereby ensuring that all parts work in unison towards the achievement of common objectives.

The formation of *relationships* through communication is of great importance in shaping organisational culture. These relationships influence employee engagement and loyalty. Effective communication fosters positive relationships, which are critical for collaboration, conflict resolution, and creating a supportive workplace environment. These relationships, whether between superiors and subordinates, among peers, or across different organisational levels, significantly influence the dynamics and flow of communication within the organisation.

The *environment* in which an organisation operates exerts a significant influence on its communication practices. This environment encompasses both internal aspects, such as organisational culture and climate, and external factors, including market trends, competition, regulatory frameworks, and economic conditions. In order to respond effectively to these environmental changes, it is necessary for the organisation to adapt its communication strategies in order to manage stakeholder expectations and maintain a competitive advantage.

The lack of clarity and predictability in information and situations encountered by organisational members is a significant source of uncertainty in organisational communication. The provision of clear and timely information is a fundamental function of organisational communication, as it enables employees to comprehend their roles and the organisation's objectives. [47]

Functions of Organisational Communication

In the field of organisational studies, the functions of organisational communication are at the very core of not only the day-to-day operations, but also the long-term strategic goals of organisations. [46] It is essential to examine the nuanced roles they play and the overarching impact they have on organisational effectiveness and adaptability. Below is a comprehensive analysis of the importance of these functions in an organisational context.

Distribution of information functions as the foundation of organisational operations. Effective communication channels ensure that all members of the organisation have access to the necessary, up-to-date information, which is crucial for the efficient performance of tasks. In the context of academic research, studies have demonstrated that information asymmetry can lead to significant inefficiencies and conflicts within organisations [79]. Consequently, the strategic dissemination of information serves to mitigate these risks by ensuring transparency and promoting a culture of openness.

The process of communication within an organisation facilitates the *coordination and control* of activities across various departments and teams, ensuring that individual endeavours are aligned with the organisation's overarching goals. This function is of paramount importance in complex

projects where the involvement of multiple stakeholders is required across different phases. Scholarly research indicates that effective coordination through communication can significantly enhance project outcomes and reduce the likelihood of project failure [78]. Moreover, communication serves as a mechanism of control, guiding employee behaviour through the establishment of clear guidelines, expectations, and feedback.

Effective communication is crucial in *problem-solving* and *decision-making* processes, as it facilitates the pooling of diverse ideas, leading to innovative solutions. Participatory communication, where insights from employees at all levels are actively sought and valued, not only enriches the decision-making process but also secures stronger organisational commitment to the resulting decisions. This collaborative approach harnesses collective intelligence efficiently, ensuring that decisions are both high-quality and broadly supported

The concept of *motivation and morale* is of great importance in the field of organisational communication. By implementing recognition, feedback, and effective internal communication strategies, organisations can enhance employee morale and cultivate a positive workplace culture. The dissemination of motivational messages can facilitate the alignment of employee efforts with the overarching mission and vision of the organisation.

In the field of organisational communication, there is a constant process of negotiating the reality of the situation. Members of an organisation collectively determine meanings, values and norms through communication. This function is of critical importance for the establishment of a shared sense of purpose and community within the organisation.

Organisational communication is of vital importance in the *management of change*. The dissemination of information regarding the rationale behind changes, the advantages of new strategies, and the specifics of implementation plans serves to reduce resistance and gain employee support. Effective communication ensures that changes are understood and integrated in a seamless manner.

Externally, organisational communication shapes public perception and manages stakeholder relationships. This function includes public relations, investor communications, and customer service interactions. It is essential for maintaining a positive public image, attracting investments, and building customer loyalty.

In conclusion, the functions of organisational communication are multifaceted and interlinked, each contributing significantly to the operational and strategic success of organisations. As evidenced by various scholarly works, the mastery of these communication functions enables organisations to operate efficiently, adapt to changes, innovate, and maintain competitive advantages in their respective fields. Consequently, the study of these functions is not only academically enriching but also practically essential for organisational leaders and managers striving to achieve excellence in an increasingly complex and dynamic business environment.

Directions of communication within an organisation

Communication within an organisation typically flows in three main directions, each serving a distinct function and facilitating various aspects of organisational life. These directions are vertical, which in turn could be downward or upward, and horizontal (or lateral) communication.

An understanding of these directions is essential for the development of effective organisational communication strategies.

Downward communication

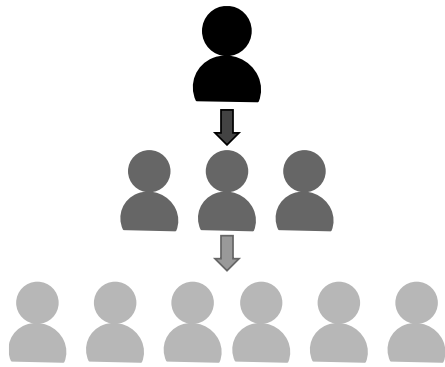


Figure 5. Downward communication [104]

Downward communication represents a fundamental aspect of organisational communication, characterised by the flow of information from higher levels of the organisational hierarchy to lower levels. This directional communication typically involves managers, supervisors, and senior leaders conveying messages to subordinates. Downward communication is a fundamental aspect of organisational communication, and is essential for establishing authority, setting expectations, and maintaining operational alignment within an organisation.

Let us briefly consider the functions of downward communication.

Provide direction and guidance. Leaders use downward communication to clarify job roles, provide specific task instructions and communicate expected outcomes. This ensures that employees understand their responsibilities and how to perform their tasks effectively.

Disseminate policies and procedures. Updates to organisational policies, procedures or regulatory changes are typically communicated from the top down. This ensures that all employees are aware of the standards and practices they are expected to follow.

Feedback on performance. Downward communication is often the channel through which performance evaluations and feedback are provided. This feedback helps employees improve their work by understanding their strengths and areas for improvement.

Organisational goals and objectives. Communicating the broader goals and objectives of the organisation helps to align the efforts of individual employees with the strategic direction of the organisation, fostering a sense of purpose and engagement.

Motivational messages. Leaders use downward communication to motivate employees, celebrate achievements and build morale. This can include messages of encouragement, recognition of employee contributions, and communication of the organisation's success stories. [105]

The significance of downward communication within organisations cannot be overestimated. It is fundamental to organisational clarity and coordination. Effective downward communication ensures that all team members are working with the same information and towards the same goals, which is crucial for coordinated action and efficiency. Control and authority reinforce the structure of authority within an organisation, helping to maintain order and discipline. Regular and consistent messages from the top help to reinforce the organisation's culture, values, and ethics. In the event of organisational change, effective downward communication is essential to ensure that all employees are aware of the new directives and the rationale behind them. This facilitates a more seamless transition and reduces resistance.

Despite its significance, downward communication faces several challenges. One such challenge is information overload. If not managed well, the volume of information sent downward can overwhelm employees, leading to confusion rather than clarity. Another challenge is distortion of messages. As messages filter down through various layers of management, there is a risk of alteration or dilution of the original message, which can cause inconsistencies and errors in execution. Finally, there is a lack of feedback loop. One potential consequence of a lack of feedback in downward communication is that valuable insights from employees may be overlooked, which could otherwise inform improvements to processes and decision-making. [28]

These challenges can be overcome through the implementation of effective communication strategies.

It is of paramount importance to ensure that communication is clear, concise, and free from jargon. This helps to minimise misunderstandings and ensure that all employees understand the message as intended.

It is also crucial to encourage feedback. This can be achieved by establishing mechanisms for employees to ask questions and provide feedback on communicated messages. This creates a more interactive communication environment.

Regular updates serve to maintain clarity and reduce uncertainty about tasks or organisational changes.

Cultural sensitivity entails the adaptation of messages to align with the cultural norms and values of the workforce, which can enhance understanding and acceptance. [57]

As previously discussed, effective downward communication is crucial for maintaining the structural integrity of an organisation. By ensuring clear directives, fostering an informed workforce, and encouraging motivational exchanges, organisations can achieve a harmonious alignment of goals and enhanced operational efficiency. Implementing robust communication strategies that address the inherent challenges can further optimise the benefits of downward communication.

Upward communication

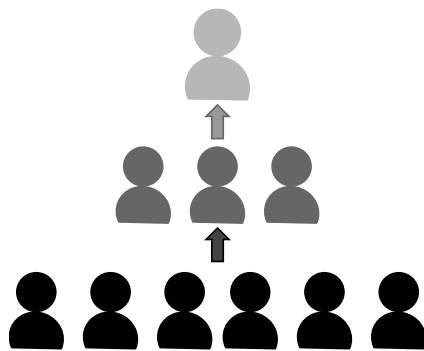


Figure 6. Upward communication [104]

Upward communication is a process by which information is transmitted from lower levels of a hierarchy to the upper levels. [30] This type of communication allows employees to convey their feedback, suggestions, and reports to their supervisors or management, thereby playing a crucial role in informing decision-making processes and enhancing organisational effectiveness.

As with downward communication, let us now consider the functions of upward communication.

Feedback on processes and policies. Employees provide valuable insight and feedback on the effectiveness of current organisational processes and policies.

This information is critical in helping management identify areas for improvement or adjustment.

Reporting problems or issues. Upward communication allows employees to report problems they encounter in their roles, whether they are operational challenges, interpersonal issues or resource constraints.

Offer suggestions and ideas. By allowing employees to suggest innovations or improvements, organisations can tap into a wealth of creative ideas that can lead to improved processes, products or services.

Employee sentiment and morale. This flow of communication provides insight into employee morale and sentiment. Understanding how employees feel about their work environment and culture is critical to maintaining motivation and addressing any concerns that may impact productivity.

Performance reporting. Employees can communicate their achievements and progress towards goals, helping management to effectively assess individual and team performance.

Upward communication is very important in organisational communication.

Managers and leaders are better equipped to make informed decisions when they have access to first-hand insights from employees who are directly involved in day-to-day operations. Upward communication empowers employees by giving them a voice within the organisation. This empowerment can lead to increased job satisfaction and a sense of ownership. It facilitates the early identification of potential problems before they escalate, allowing the organisation to address them proactively. Encouraging upward communication helps build a transparent organisational culture where openness and honesty are valued.

Upward communication also has its challenges. One such challenge is fear of reprisal, whereby employees may hesitate to share negative feedback or report problems due to fear of reprisal or damaging their relationships with superiors. Another challenge is filtering, whereby information may be altered or filtered as it moves up the hierarchy, either intentionally by middle managers to avoid conveying bad news or due to misunderstandings. Finally, underutilization is a challenge. In some organisational cultures, upward communication may be underutilised if not actively encouraged by management, which may result in missed opportunities for improvement.

Strategies to Optimise Upward Communication:

It is recommended that managers encourage openness in their employees. It is the responsibility of leaders to actively encourage employees to share their thoughts and concerns without fear of negative consequences. This may entail the regular provision of reassurance and reinforcement of the value of honesty and transparency.

It is also vital to implement formal mechanisms. The establishment of formal channels, such as suggestion boxes, regular surveys, and open forums, can facilitate the structured flow of upward communication and ensure the systematic collection of feedback.

It is of the utmost importance that managers are trained to be receptive to feedback and to handle

it constructively. They should be skilled in active listening and in creating a safe environment for employees to express their views.

The implementation of recognition programmes for valuable suggestions or critical feedback serves to encourage a greater number of employees to engage in upward communication.

It is important to implement follow-up actions in order to ensure that the aforementioned recommendations are carried out. Demonstrating that employee feedback leads to real changes is crucial. Management should regularly communicate what actions have been taken in response to the feedback received.

Upward communication is critical for maintaining a healthy organisational environment. It enables management to stay connected with employees' experiences and insights, driving better business decisions, fostering innovation, and ensuring a responsive and adaptable organisation. Effective management of upward communication strengthens trust and alignment across all levels of the organisation.

Horizontal communication

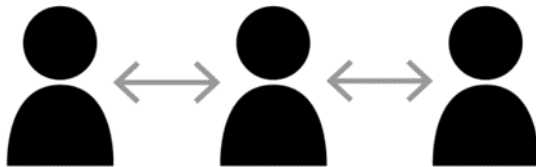


Figure 7. Horizontal communication [104]

Horizontal communication, also known as lateral communication, refers to the flow of information across departments or peers within the same level of an organisational hierarchy. [30] This type of communication is crucial for collaboration, coordination, and problem-solving among teams or individuals

who operate at similar organisational levels but may work in different departments or geographical locations.

The following paragraphs will present the core functions of horizontal communication.

Coordination of Activities. Horizontal communication facilitates the coordination of activities between different departments or units that need to work together to achieve common objectives. It helps synchronise efforts and ensures that projects are executed efficiently.

Problem Solving. When issues arise that affect multiple departments, horizontal communication allows for quick sharing of information and collaborative problem-solving. This collective approach often leads to more effective and sustainable solutions.

Sharing of Information. This type of communication enables the sharing of important updates, knowledge, and resources across departments. It supports a learning organisation where information is freely circulated and not limited to specific teams.

Conflict Resolution. Horizontal communication plays a key role in resolving conflicts that may arise between departments or teams. Open dialogue helps clarify misunderstandings and promote mutual understanding.

Innovation and Creativity. By facilitating regular interactions between different departments, horizontal communication encourages the exchange of ideas, fostering innovation and creativity.

Employees from diverse backgrounds and expertise can generate novel solutions and improvements.

The significance of horizontal communication is threefold. Firstly, it enhances efficiency by streamlining operations and reducing the duplication of efforts across departments. Secondly, it supports teamwork by fostering a spirit of collaboration and engagement across different parts of the organisation. Thirdly, it improves agility and responsiveness in today's fast-paced business environment. It has been demonstrated that employees who are able to communicate across organisational boundaries frequently report higher levels of job satisfaction and a more comprehensive understanding of their role within the broader organisational context.

Horizontal communication also presents its own set of challenges.

The existence of organisational silos can impede the effectiveness of horizontal communication, resulting in the formation of isolated departments that are out of sync with each other. In the absence of clear protocols, horizontal communication can result in information overload, whereby employees receive a greater quantity of information than they are able to effectively process. The misalignment of goals is a further impediment to effective horizontal communication. Conflicts may arise when the goals and priorities of different departments are not aligned, making it difficult for teams to communicate and collaborate effectively.

This following paragraph outlines *strategies to optimise horizontal communication*.

The establishment of formal communication channels, such as interdepartmental meetings, joint task forces, and integrated communication platforms, can facilitate structured and consistent horizontal communication.

The use of collaborative tools and technologies, such as intranets, shared databases, and project management software, can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of horizontal communication.

It is crucial to foster an organisational culture that prioritises openness, collaboration and cross-functional teamwork. It is the responsibility of leadership to set an example and to reward those who demonstrate behaviours that support effective horizontal communication.

Providing development programmes and training to employees on effective communication skills and teamwork can improve horizontal interactions across the organisation.

Ensuring that all departments and teams have aligned objectives and understand how their roles interconnect will support more effective and goal-focused communication.

Horizontal communication is integral to the success and cohesion of modern organisations. By implementing strategies to optimise this aspect of organisational communication, companies can enhance their integration, efficiency, innovation and responsiveness to the dynamic business environment.

Barriers to Effective Communication

Barriers to effective communication in an organisational context have the potential to significantly impede productivity, collaboration and overall corporate health. It is therefore incumbent upon

management to identify and understand these barriers, as doing so allows for the development of strategies to overcome them and ensure that communication flows efficiently across all levels of the organisation. [28]

1. Physical Separations

In organisations that are geographically dispersed or have multiple locations, physical barriers frequently arise. This is because direct face-to-face communication is often infrequent.

The impact of such barriers on communication is significant. Such separation can result in a delay in the dissemination of information and a reduction in the opportunities for informal knowledge sharing.

In order to circumvent the necessity for a physical separation barrier, it is recommended that advanced communication technologies such as video conferencing be implemented in order to simulate face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, it is advised that regular physical meetings be organised in order to maintain a connection among dispersed team members.

2. Language Issues

Language barriers can arise in diverse workplaces where multiple languages are spoken, or where technical jargon is misunderstood.

Such barriers can lead to errors and decreased efficiency, which in turn can impact overall organisational performance.

Therefore, it is advisable to offer language training programmes and encourage the use of simple language for internal communications. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to employ translation services or multilingual staff to facilitate clearer understanding.

3. Differences in Perception

The perception of individuals is influenced by their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and personal biases.

These perceptual differences can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of information, which in turn affect decision-making processes.

In order to facilitate effective decision-making, it is essential to cultivate an inclusive environment that values diverse viewpoints and promotes open dialogue. Furthermore, it is crucial to conduct workshops on effective communication and perception management.

4. Psychological Barriers

Psychological barriers include personal prejudices, emotions, and mental health issues that can distort communication.

These barriers can lead to resistance to feedback and change, which in turn impacts team dynamics and progress.

It is therefore important to implement policies that support mental health and provide training on emotional intelligence. It is also essential to encourage a supportive communication climate where employees feel safe to express their thoughts.

5. Cultural Differences

In globalised work environments, cultural differences can influence communication preferences and interpretations.

These differences can lead to misunderstandings, which in turn can result in conflicts and ineffective communication practices.

To address this, it is recommended that organisations provide their employees with cultural competency training. In addition, it is beneficial to encourage cultural exchange programmes and team-building activities that enhance mutual understanding.

6. Technological Challenges

The reliance on communication technology can create barriers, especially among employees who are not technologically adept.

Technological issues can lead to information overload or exclusion of certain employees from communication loops.

Standardisation and simplification of technology use within the organisation is therefore recommended. In order to ensure that all employees are technologically proficient, ongoing training and support should be provided.

The ability to effectively communicate within an organisation determines its capacity to function efficiently and adaptively. By addressing the identified barriers through strategic managerial actions, organisations can significantly enhance their communication processes, fostering a more integrated and responsive organisational environment. Future research should continue to explore innovative solutions and tools with the aim of further breaking down these barriers and enhancing organisational communication landscapes.

Managerial Roles in Communication

In organisational structures, managers play a key role in establishing and maintaining effective communication systems. Their responsibilities in this area are of great importance, as they have a direct impact on organisational transparency, performance and employee morale. [80] This section will examine the key roles of managers in communication, highlighting how managers can develop, maintain and improve organisational communication systems.

Development of Communication Systems

Managers are instrumental in developing the communication infrastructure of an organisation. This involves:

- Designing Communication Frameworks

Managers establish the channels and systems through which information flows within the organisation. This includes setting up formal communication channels such as meetings, reports, and newsletters, as well as fostering an environment conducive to informal exchanges.

- Integrating Communication Technologies

With the advent of digital communication tools, managers must integrate suitable technologies that enhance interaction without overwhelming employees. This might involve choosing platforms for instant messaging, video conferencing, and project management that align with the organisation's needs.

- Customizing Communication to Fit Organisational Needs

Each organisation has unique needs based on its size, structure, and culture. Managers tailor communication strategies to these specifics, ensuring that the systems are efficient and effective in disseminating information.

Maintenance of Communication Systems

The ongoing maintenance of communication systems is crucial, involving:

- Monitoring and Evaluating Communication Flow

Managers regularly assess how information circulates within and outside the organisation. They identify bottlenecks or breakdowns in communication channels and work to address these issues promptly.

- Updating Systems as Needed

Organisational needs and technologies evolve, and so must communication systems. Managers are responsible for keeping systems updated and relevant, adapting to new technologies and eliminating outdated practices that may hinder effective communication.

Enhancing Organisational Communication

Beyond development and maintenance, managers also actively enhance communication by:

- Promoting Openness and Transparency

Managers lead by example, promoting a culture where open and transparent communication is valued. This involves being accessible to team members, encouraging staff to share their ideas and concerns, and ensuring that important information is not confined to the upper echelons of the hierarchy.

- Addressing Communication Barriers

Managers proactively identify and address barriers to effective communication, whether they are physical, linguistic, cultural, or technological. This may involve arranging language training, facilitating cultural awareness programs, or ensuring all team members have access to necessary

technological tools.

- Facilitating Effective Feedback Mechanisms

Feedback is a two-way street in effective communication systems. Managers not only provide constructive feedback to their teams but also encourage and facilitate upward and lateral feedback. This helps in adjusting strategies and improving team dynamics.

The role of a manager in organisational communication is multifaceted and dynamic. Managers must act as architects, maintainers, and enhancers of communication systems to ensure that information flows efficiently throughout the organisation. Their ability to effectively develop, maintain, and enhance these systems is crucial for overcoming communication barriers and fostering an environment of clarity and openness. By fulfilling these roles, managers directly contribute to the organisational well-being, enhancing employee engagement and operational success.

1.4. Theoretical Foundations for Post-Pandemic Organisational Communication

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, organisational communication has encountered unprecedented challenges and transformations. As companies navigate through the complexities of remote and hybrid work environments, the need for robust theoretical frameworks to guide effective communication strategies has become more evident. This chapter delves into the theoretical foundations that are critical for understanding the dynamics of organisational communication in the post-pandemic era.

The theories discussed herein not only provide a scholarly backdrop for the study but also offer practical insights that can be applied to enhance communication efficacy within modern workplaces. Each theoretical framework will be examined for its relevance to current communication practices, particularly those emerging in response to the global shift in work dynamics caused by the pandemic. This exploration includes classical communication models that have shaped the field, as well as contemporary theories that address digital interaction and the psychological aspects of remote communication.

By articulating these theories, this chapter aims to bridge the gap between traditional communication paradigms and the novel demands of post-COVID-19 organisational environments, offering a comprehensive base for developing strategies that foster clear, effective, and resilient workplace communications. This theoretical grounding is essential for the subsequent chapters, which will build upon these foundations to analyse current challenges and propose innovative communication strategies.

Media Richness Theory

The Media Richness Theory (MRT) is a theory of communication organisation that explains the relationship between the content of a message and the medium through which it is transmitted. According to the MRT, this relationship is directly proportional, i.e. the more ambiguous and difficult to understand and interpret the message being communicated (the so-called communicative task), the richer the communication medium should be in terms of its capabilities.

The theory was developed by Richard Daft and Robert Lengel in 1986.

The term “media richness” is used to describe the capacity of a communication medium to convey complex information in an effective manner and to resolve ambiguities in a timely fashion. The use of rich media allows for the immediate processing of feedback, and it is capable of handling multiple cues, such as tone, gesture, and facial expressions, which are crucial in clarifying unclear information. [75]

The MRT categorises media based on their perceived richness. Face-to-face interactions and video calls are considered “rich” because they provide real-time feedback and multiple sensory cues that enhance understanding. In contrast, text-based communications, such as emails or memos, are characterised by a relative lack of immediacy and sensory depth, which differentiates them from richer media.

The following table is based on the foundational work of Daft and Lengel (1984) and provides an explanation of the media richness theory.

Information richness	Medium	Feedback	Channel	Source	Language
High  Low	Face-to-Face	Immediate	Visual, Audio	Personal	Body, Natural
	Telephone	Fast	Audio	Personal	Natural
	Written, Personal	Slow	Limited Visual	Personal	Natural
	Written, Formal	Very Slow	Limited Visual	Impersonal	Natural
	Numeric, Formal	Very Slow	Limited Visual	Impersonal	Numeric

Table 2. Characteristics of media that determine richness of information processed (Daft and Lengel 1984)

Information richness refers to the depth and breadth of information that can be transmitted via a communication medium. Information richness is higher in media that can convey more nuanced and complex information effectively.

Medium describes the type of communication channel used, such as face-to-face, video, telephone, written documents or e-mail. The choice of medium influences how rich the communication can be because of the different ability to convey cues and provide immediate feedback.

Feedback refers to how quickly and effectively a receiver can respond to the sender after receiving a message. Immediate feedback is possible in face-to-face and telephone communication, making these media richer than emails or memos, where feedback is delayed.

Channel is used to describe the sensory modalities used in communication, including auditory, visual and tactile. Richer media use multiple channels simultaneously, which can enhance the understanding of the message. For instance, face-to-face communication involves auditory and visual channels, and often tactile (through gestures), making it richer than purely auditory (telephone) or visual (text) channels.

Source refers to the degree of personal contact involved in the communication. Media that permit the expression of personal nuances and communicator characteristics, such as voice inflections in telephone calls or facial expressions in video chats, are considered to be more rich. These media are better able to convey emotions and subtle cues, which are essential for resolving ambiguities.

Language refers to the richness and variety of language that can be used in the medium. Some media, such as email, typically involve more formal language, whereas face-to-face communication may involve informal, expressive and nuanced use of language. The ability to use varied and rich language adds to the richness of the medium and helps to make communication clearer and more effective. [103]

Since its introduction, MRT has undergone significant evolution, particularly in light of technological advancements. The theory now encompasses not only traditional media such as telephone calls and face-to-face meetings, but also modern digital tools such as instant messaging and collaborative platforms.

The primary objective is to assist managers in selecting the most effective communication methods to address specific organisational challenges. For example, the selection of an appropriate communication medium can facilitate the reduction of uncertainty and equivocality, thereby enhancing clarity and decision-making efficiency.

The use of MRT enables the optimisation of communication within organisations by matching the media's richness to the complexity of the situation. In instances where detailed explanations or consensus among team members are required, the use of richer media is preferable. In the case of straightforward information dissemination, it can be argued that leaner media may be more efficient.

Nevertheless, this theory is not always effective, which is why it is a theory. To illustrate, the article "Media Richness and Information Acquisition in Internet Recruitment" examines the impact of varying levels of media richness on the information gathering process during Internet recruitment, with a particular focus on contrasting the effects of richer and less rich media environments.

The study conducted a controlled experiment with 471 participants who were exposed to different recruitment media that varied in richness. These media included traditional websites (which were considered to be less rich) and interactive virtual worlds (which were considered to be richer).

Information about organisational culture and job openings was modified so that it was presented in these different formats in order to ascertain the impact of media richness on the learning and retention of this information by potential job applicants.

The study revealed that participants who viewed less rich media (websites) demonstrated better

recall of factual information about the organisation compared to those who viewed richer media (virtual worlds).

Furthermore, the authors examined cognitive load theory, which suggests that although richer media may provide a more engaging and interactive experience, it may also increase mental workload, making it more challenging for users to process and retain factual information.

The findings challenge some traditional claims of media richness theory, particularly in contexts where the ability to process detailed factual information is critical, such as in personnel selection. This indicates that richer media may not always be more effective, especially when cognitive load is high, which may impede the effective communication of detailed information needed to make informed hiring decisions. [76]

For organisations, this means balancing the richness of their recruitment tools with the type of information conveyed. Although multimedia may be more attractive, it may not always be the most effective means of transmitting detailed information about the organisation and the work in question.

The study assists human resources professionals in considering cognitive load and media richness in order to optimise their recruiting strategies. This ensures that job seekers receive and understand the information they require without becoming overwhelmed.

In conclusion, while Media Richness Theory offers valuable guidelines for selecting communication media based on task requirements and information ambiguity, it must be applied with consideration of context-specific factors such as audience characteristics, content complexity, and the intended outcome of the communication. This adaptive approach ensures that the selected media optimally supports organisational goals and enhances overall communication effectiveness.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

A crisis is defined as a significant occurrence with the potential to have a negative impact on an organisation, company, or industry, as well as its stakeholders, products, services, or reputation. A crisis disrupts normal business operations and can, in extreme cases, threaten the very existence of the organisation. A crisis can take many forms, including strikes, terrorism, fire, a boycott, product tampering, product failure, or numerous other events. The size of the organisation is not a determining factor. It can be a multinational corporation, a sole proprietorship, or even an individual. [49]

Crisis management is the strategic planning process that is required to deal with a crisis or any significant turning point. It focuses on reducing the risks and uncertainties associated with such events, thereby allowing the organisation to take better control of its destiny. The idea is that effective planning can mitigate the effects of a crisis, even though the circumstances are very complex due to high stress and rapid changes that make real-time decision-making difficult.

Crisis communication is defined as an ongoing dialogue between an organisation and its public (stakeholders, customers, general public, etc.) before, during and after a crisis. This communication encompasses the specifics of the strategies and tactics employed to mitigate the potential damage to the organisation's image. Dialogue is of critical importance in the management

of perceptions of the crisis, and can have a significant impact on an organisation's ability to recover and even improve its reputation after a crisis. [49]

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is a framework developed by W. Timothy Coombs to help organisations determine the most effective response strategies during a crisis. It provides guidelines on how organisations can protect their reputations by selecting appropriate communication strategies based on the nature of the crisis and the organisation's responsibility for it. SCCT categorises crises into different types and suggests corresponding communication strategies to manage stakeholder perceptions and reactions.

The core principles of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) revolve around strategically managing an organisation's communication to effectively handle and mitigate the impact of a crisis. These principles are rooted in understanding how stakeholder perceptions of responsibility influence reactions during a crisis and guide the choice of communication strategies. Here are the fundamental principles of SCCT:

1. *Crisis Typology*: SCCT classifies crises into categories based on how much responsibility the organisation bears. The three main types are:

- **Victim Crises**: The organisation is perceived as a victim, facing minimal responsibility (e.g., natural disasters, sabotage, rumours, or product tampering).
- **Accidental Crises**: The crisis is unintentional, with moderate responsibility attributed to the organisation (e.g., technical errors, equipment failures, unforeseen accidents).
- **Preventable Crises**: The organisation is seen as responsible due to negligence or intentional actions (e.g., ethical violations, fraud, or severe product defects). Responsibility is high.

2. *Attribution Theory*: This principle underscores the role of stakeholder perceptions in determining the extent of an organisation's responsibility for the crisis. The theory suggests that the way stakeholders assign blame influences their emotional and behavioural responses to the organisation during the crisis.

High responsibility (preventable crises) leads to stronger negative reactions, requiring more intensive response strategies.

3. *Crisis Response Strategies*: Based on the type of crisis and the level of attributed responsibility, SCCT outlines specific communication strategies to manage stakeholder perceptions and protect the organisation's reputation:

Denial Strategies: These strategies aim to reject any connection between the organisation and the crisis, used primarily when the organisation is believed to have little or no responsibility.

- **Denial**: Asserting that there is no crisis or that the organisation is not involved.
- **Scapegoating**: Transferring responsibility to an external entity or third party.

Diminishment Strategies: These strategies are used when the organisation bears some responsibility but seeks to minimise its role or the severity of the crisis.

- **Excuse**: Minimising the organisation's responsibility by citing lack of control over the

circumstances or lack of intention to cause harm.

- **Justification:** Reducing the perceived severity of the crisis by comparing it to worse outcomes, or suggesting that the intentions were good, thereby diminishing negative feelings.

Rebuilding Strategies: Employed when the organisation is significantly responsible for the crisis, these strategies focus on taking responsibility and seeking to make amends.

- **Compensation:** Offering compensation or other forms of reparation to the victims or those harmed by the crisis.
- **Apology:** Admitting responsibility and seeking forgiveness. This may include a public apology from a high-level executive.

Bolstering Strategies: Supplement other strategies by reminding stakeholders of the organisation's positive attributes and past good deeds or highlighting the organisation's own losses in the crisis.

- **Reminding:** Highlighting past good deeds or contributions to the community to remind stakeholders of the organisation's positive role.
- **Ingratiation:** Acts of praising or giving something beneficial to stakeholders to garner their goodwill.
- **Victimage:** Presenting the organisation as a victim of circumstances beyond its control, to gain sympathy and reduce negative attributions.

Combination Strategies: Often, organisations may use a combination of these strategies to effectively address the complexity of stakeholder perceptions and the dynamic nature of a crisis. The choice of strategies may evolve as the crisis unfolds and new information becomes available.

The **application** of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) involves a systematic approach to managing a crisis through precise assessment, strategic planning, effective implementation, and rigorous evaluation.

Assessment Phase. The initial phase involves a thorough assessment, beginning with crisis identification. This step requires recognizing the crisis and accurately categorising its type based on the SCCT framework. Following this, the organisation must evaluate the level of responsibility it bears for the crisis. This involves determining how much blame stakeholders are likely to attribute to the organisation, which will significantly influence the response strategy. Concurrently, a stakeholder analysis is conducted to gauge the concerns, perceptions, and expectations of different groups affected by or interested in the crisis. This understanding is critical for tailoring communication strategies effectively.

Strategy Selection. Based on the findings from the assessment phase, the next step is to choose an appropriate response strategy. For example, a victim crisis, where the organisation is seen as a victim, may call for bolstering and diminishing strategies to minimise damage and emphasise positive attributes. Conversely, a preventable crisis, where the organisation's actions are directly responsible for the situation, would likely require robust rebuilding strategies, such as issuing apologies and providing compensation, to restore trust and repair the damage.

Implementation. With a strategy in place, the focus shifts to implementation. This includes developing a detailed communication plan that outlines the chosen strategies and the tactics for executing them. Key to this phase is crafting messages that align with the selected strategies. These messages must be clear, consistent, and transparent to effectively convey the organisation's stance and actions to stakeholders. Active engagement with stakeholders is crucial; this involves using various communication channels to reach all relevant parties, addressing their concerns, and providing timely updates on the crisis management efforts.

Evaluation. The final stage involves evaluation. Implementing feedback mechanisms is essential to monitor how stakeholders are reacting to the communication efforts. This feedback allows the organisation to adjust its strategies dynamically in response to stakeholder sentiments. Additionally, an overall impact assessment should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication strategies. This assessment helps determine how well the reputational damage has been mitigated and the extent to which stakeholder trust has been restored.

By following these structured steps – assessment, strategy selection, implementation, and evaluation – organisations can apply SCCT effectively to manage crises, protect their reputations, and maintain stakeholder trust even in challenging circumstances.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory can be enhanced by considering additional, nuanced crisis categories that reflect the complex challenges organisations face today. These extended crisis types include public health crises, environmental crises, and economic crises, each requiring specific strategies tailored to their unique contexts and stakeholder expectations.

Public health crises, such as pandemics or food safety issues, pose significant risks to community well-being and necessitate a highly collaborative approach. Organisations involved in these types of crises must work closely with health authorities and maintain transparent communication with the public. The focus should be on providing accurate, timely information and demonstrating an active role in solving the public health concern, which helps in maintaining trust and demonstrating responsibility.

Environmental crises involve situations where natural disasters occur or where company actions result in environmental damage. These crises require organisations to demonstrate accountability and a strong commitment to environmental stewardship. Communication strategies should focus on immediate transparency about the impact and ongoing updates about remediation efforts. This demonstrates the organisation's dedication to resolving the environmental impact and its commitment to sustainable practices moving forward.

Economic crises, such as bankruptcy or significant market crashes, impact not only the organisation but also its wide array of stakeholders, including employees, investors, and local communities. In these situations, the communication focus should shift to the economic implications and the organisation's plans for financial recovery. By openly discussing recovery strategies and showing empathy for those affected, organisations can work to rebuild trust and reassure stakeholders of their resilience and long-term viability.

By expanding SCCT to include these refined crisis categories, organisations can develop more tailored and effective communication strategies that address the specific needs and concerns of

stakeholders, ultimately enhancing their capability to manage crises in a diverse range of situations.

In the aftermath of a crisis, it is crucial for organisations to engage in a comprehensive **crisis response evaluation**. This process not only aids in understanding the efficacy of the response but also provides critical insights for improving future crisis management strategies. The evaluation typically encompasses several key activities aimed at gaining a holistic view of both the response's impact and the areas needing enhancement.

Post-crisis analysis begins with gathering and analysing stakeholder feedback. This involves collecting detailed inputs from various stakeholders – including customers, employees, and partners – about how they perceived the organisation's response to the crisis. Understanding stakeholder reactions helps in gauging the effectiveness of the communication strategy and identifying any gaps in expectations versus reality.

Another vital component of the evaluation is conducting a media analysis. This step entails reviewing how the crisis and the organisation's response were portrayed in the media. Analysing media coverage helps in understanding the public narrative and the reach and reception of the organisation's communication efforts. It provides insights into which aspects of the communication were most effective and which areas may have been misunderstood or underemphasized.

Finally, an internal review of the organisation's processes, decision-making, and communication flow during the crisis is essential. This review assesses how internal systems supported or hindered the crisis response, examining everything from initial reaction times to the coordination between departments. Such an internal review not only highlights operational strengths and weaknesses but also identifies key areas for improvement in handling future crises.

Together, these evaluation activities enable organisations to learn from their experiences, refine their crisis management protocols, and strengthen their readiness for any future challenges. This continuous improvement cycle is fundamental to effective crisis management and helps organisations build resilience and trust with their stakeholders.

Communication channels

Effective crisis communication requires the strategic use of various channels to reach and engage with different audiences. Each channel serves a unique purpose and helps organisations maintain control over the narrative, ensuring that accurate information is disseminated and stakeholder concerns are addressed promptly.

Digital platforms are central to modern crisis communication. Social media, websites, and email allow for real-time updates and direct engagement with the public. These tools enable organisations to disseminate information quickly and broadly, as well as interact with their audience in real time. It's imperative to monitor these platforms continuously, especially social media, to detect and correct any misinformation swiftly. Rapid response is crucial in preventing the spread of false information that could exacerbate the crisis.

Traditional media also plays a vital role in reaching broader and sometimes more diverse

audiences. Press releases, news conferences, and media interviews help communicate the organisation's side of the story and any steps being taken to manage the crisis. Building strong relationships with journalists and media outlets can be beneficial, as these connections may lead to more favourable and accurate coverage. This media engagement helps establish the organisation's narrative and provides a controlled avenue to update the public.

In addition to digital and traditional media, direct communication with affected stakeholders is crucial. Methods such as town halls, webinars, and personal outreach initiatives provide forums for open dialogue. These interactions are especially important for directly addressing the concerns of those most impacted by the crisis, offering support, and reinforcing the organisation's commitment to resolving the issues at hand.

Together, these communication channels form a comprehensive approach to crisis communication, ensuring that all stakeholders are kept informed and engaged throughout the crisis lifecycle. By leveraging the strengths of each type of communication, organisations can manage their message effectively and maintain trust even under challenging circumstances.

Change Management Theories

Change management is the process of guiding an organisation from its current state to a desired future state. Organisations are complex entities, and without effective change management, they are unlikely to achieve the desired outcome of the change process due to the numerous interrelated factors. To achieve the desired end result, change must be managed. Change is the only way for an organisation to survive in a turbulent world characterised by instability, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. An organisation must change in order to respond to the anticipated situation and environment of tomorrow, rather than merely responding to the situation of yesterday or today. This phenomenon was clearly observed following the onset of the pandemic, when operational structures and communication processes were distinctly categorised into "before pandemic" and "after pandemic" phases. [53] However, change processes can fail due to the extensive time required to plan and implement an effective, integrated change strategy. Often, by the time these changes are ready to be deployed, the environment they were designed to address has already evolved.

Let us have a look at the various theories of change management that are relevant to how organisations adapt their communication strategies to meet new challenges and maintain continuity in times of uncertainty.

Kotter's Change Model

The Kotter Change Model, developed by a Harvard Business School professor John P. Kotter, was first introduced in 1996 and has since become a widely recognised framework for leading organisational change. [108] The model comprises eight stages designed to facilitate the implementation of significant organisational change, ensuring that the changes are implemented effectively and sustained over time. The following section provides a detailed overview of each step, accompanied by illustrative applications and critiques.

It is first necessary to examine the principal steps of this model:

1. Create a Sense of Urgency

The initial step in Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model is to motivate employees and stakeholders to recognise and embrace the necessity for organisational change. This sense of urgency is of paramount importance, as it serves as the catalyst that initiates the desire to engage in the efforts necessary for effective change implementation.

The following actions are necessary to create a sense of urgency:

Identify and discuss potential threats and opportunities. The process begins by conducting a thorough analysis of the external and internal environments to identify existing or potential threats and opportunities. This analysis helps in understanding the critical factors that necessitate change and can either pose a risk if ignored or offer a benefit if acted upon promptly.

Communicate the urgency of change to stakeholders. Effective communication strategies are employed to ensure that all stakeholders comprehend the urgency of the situation. This involves clear, concise, and impactful messaging that conveys not only the critical nature of the circumstances but also the consequences of inaction.

Develop a narrative that conveys the necessity and benefits of the change. Crafting a compelling narrative is essential for gaining buy-in from various stakeholders. This narrative should articulate the direct benefits that the change will bring to the organisation and its stakeholders, thereby aligning the change initiative with the overall strategic goals of the organisation.

To illustrate, let us consider a company that is experiencing a notable reduction in market share, coupled with intensified competition. The leadership may exploit these developments as leverage points to emphasise the pressing necessity for innovation and strategic reorientation. By presenting data and trends that demonstrate a decline in market share and discussing how competitors are capitalising on new technologies or consumer preferences, the company can create a persuasive case that resonates across the organisation, thereby underscoring the necessity for immediate and innovative responses to reclaim market leadership. This approach not only intensifies the perception of urgency but also facilitates the mobilisation of the workforce and stakeholders around a common goal of transformation and success.

2. Build a Guiding Coalition

The objective of this step is to assemble a group of influential leaders who support and drive the change initiative. This coalition serves as the backbone of the change effort, providing leadership, support, and credibility to the process.

Actions here would be the following:

Identify key leaders and stakeholders. It's crucial to identify individuals within the organisation who have influence, authority, and a vested interest in the success of the change effort.

Form a coalition with diverse skills and perspectives. The coalition should include members with a variety of skills and perspectives to ensure all aspects of the organisation are considered in the change process.

Ensure the coalition has enough power and influence. The coalition must be powerful enough to lead the change, overcome resistance, and drive the organisation towards its new vision.

An effective example would be to bring together a dynamic group comprising senior executives, middle managers, and other respected employees. Each member contributes different insights and holds sway over distinct groups within the organisation, facilitating widespread support and effective implementation of change initiatives.

3. Form a Strategic Vision and Initiatives

The objective is to articulate a clear and compelling vision of the future and to outline the strategic initiatives that are necessary to achieve this vision. This vision should be aligned with the organisation's long-term goals and values.

It is essential to create a vision that is aligned with the organisation's values and goals. The vision should reflect the core values of the organisation and depict a future state that is desirable to all stakeholders.

The next step is to develop strategic initiatives that will realise the vision. It is necessary to identify specific, actionable initiatives that will help achieve the vision.

It is of paramount importance to communicate the vision and strategies in a clear and consistent manner. Regular communication is essential for ensuring that all members of the organisation are aware of the vision and the steps required to achieve it.

An illustrative example is the defining of a vision to become the market leader in customer satisfaction, accompanied by the launching of specific initiatives such as the enhancement of customer service protocols and the investment in new technological tools with the objective of improving customer interaction.

4. Enlist a Volunteer Army

The objective of this step is to mobilise a large group of people across the organisation who will drive the change effort forward through active participation and commitment.

The following actions should be taken:

Communicate the vision and urgency to all employees. It is essential that every employee understands the vision and feels a personal stake in the outcome.

Encourage employees to participate in change initiatives. Employees should be invited to contribute ideas and participate in projects that relate to the change.

Foster a culture of collaboration and commitment. It is necessary to create an environment where employees are encouraged to work together towards common goals.

An illustrative example is the implementation of an internal campaign that enables employees to register for specific roles or tasks within the change initiative. These roles may include participation in pilot projects or innovation teams focused on process improvements or new

product development.

5. Enable Action by Removing Barriers

The objective of this initiative is to identify and remove obstacles that hinder the progress of change within the organisation, thereby enabling a more efficient implementation process and empowering employees to act.

Actions should include:

Identify structural, procedural and behavioural barriers. Assess the organisation to understand what barriers are preventing progress.

Empower people to make decisions and take action. Adjust policies and delegate authority to allow those involved in the change to make decisions quickly and effectively.

Provide resources and support to overcome barriers. Ensure that sufficient resources, training and support are available to address and remove barriers.

An example of this is the simplification of approval procedures to facilitate the speedy decision-making process. Additionally, training sessions can be provided to ensure employees possess the necessary skills. Finally, it is essential to address and manage resistance to change in an open and constructive manner.

6. Generate Short-Term Wins

The objective of generating short-term wins is to build momentum and reinforce the commitment to the change effort by achieving and celebrating visible, quick successes.

With regard to actions, it is first necessary to identify and achieve short-term goals. Set and pursue achievable goals within a short timeframe to demonstrate the benefits of the change.

Recognize and reward contributions to these successes. Acknowledge and reward individuals and teams who contribute to the achievements.

Publicise and celebrate short-term wins to build confidence and support. Use these successes as proof points to build confidence in the change effort and motivate all stakeholders.

For example, implementing a pilot project that improves operational efficiency while simultaneously disseminating information about the project's achievements across the organisation. This approach serves to demonstrate the benefits of change and encourage widespread buy-in.

7. Sustain Acceleration

The objective of sustain acceleration is to maintain momentum by building on short-term wins and continuously driving further change in order to achieve the ultimate vision.

In order to achieve this objective, the following actions are required:

Analyse what worked and what did not in the short-term wins. This will enable the organisation to learn from both successes and failures in order to refine its strategies moving forward.

Set new, more ambitious goals. Based on the early successes, set higher goals that will push the organisation closer to the complete realisation of the vision.

Keep communicating the vision and progress. Continuous communication helps to keep the change effort aligned and maintains organisational focus and energy.

An illustrative example is the expansion of successful pilot projects to other parts of the organisation, accompanied by the incorporation of feedback to refine and improve the initiatives continuously.

8. Institute Change

The objective of this step is to integrate new approaches and practices into the organisational culture in a way that ensures the change is sustained over the long term and becomes the new norm.

The implementation of this objective necessitates the following actions:

Anchor changes in the corporate culture. Integrate the changes into the core values and norms of the organisation.

Ensure leadership continues to support and promote the changes. Continued leadership endorsement is crucial to sustain change.

Develop policies and practices that reinforce the new ways of doing things. Formalise the changes through policies and practices that institutionalise the new approaches.

For instance, it is necessary to revise human resource practices to align with the new values, incorporate achievements related to the change into performance evaluations, and ensure that leadership consistently models the new behaviours.

As with any theoretical framework, Kotter's theory has its advantages and disadvantages. We will start with an enumeration of the **advantages**.

The model improves clarity and focus. It provides a clear and systematic roadmap for implementing change. Each step builds upon the previous one, ensuring that the organisation maintains its focus and does not deviate from its goals. This clarity helps leaders manage complexities and align their teams towards common objectives, reducing the likelihood of oversight or strategic drift.

The model also engages employees, as it places a strong emphasis on communication and involvement at every level of the organisation. The involvement of employees in the change process, from the creation of a sense of urgency to the formation of volunteer armies and the celebration of short-term victories, is a key aspect of Kotter's approach. This approach fosters a culture of inclusivity and commitment. This engagement reduces resistance, as employees perceive themselves to be part of the change process and understand the benefits that it offers.

This, in turn, leads to higher morale and a greater sense of ownership.

Kotter's model emphasises the importance of securing short-term wins. These early successes are crucial because they provide proof of the benefits of change, validate the effort, and motivate all stakeholders by demonstrating progress. This helps to build momentum and confidence, which are essential for sustaining long-term change. Celebrating these wins keeps the organisation energised and committed to the ongoing change effort.

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model is widely regarded for its structured approach to organisational change. However, it is not without its criticisms and limitations, which scholars and practitioners have noted in various contexts. Below is an examination of these **critiques** alongside potential responses that suggest ways to address these concerns. [109]

A common criticism of Kotter's model is that it appears too *linear and rigid*. This perspective argues that the model fails to adequately reflect the dynamic and iterative nature of change processes, which often require flexibility and adaptability as situations evolve. While Kotter's model outlines steps in a sequential order, it does not necessarily prevent revisiting or modifying earlier steps as new insights emerge or circumstances change. The model's structure is intended to provide a clear path, but it can be adapted to allow for iterative learning and adjustment throughout the change process.

Another criticism is the model's significant *emphasis on top-down leadership*. [110] This focus might underplay the importance of grassroots initiatives and contributions from lower levels within the organisation, which can also be vital to successful change. It is essential to recognise that while leadership is crucial, effective change management should also incorporate bottom-up engagement. This approach ensures that employees at all levels have a stake in the outcome and can contribute to the change process, making it more inclusive and potentially more sustainable.

The implementation of all eight steps of Kotter's model can be *resource-intensive*, involving substantial time, effort, and financial outlay. This can be particularly challenging for smaller organisations with limited resources. In this case smaller organisations might consider adapting the model to better fit their capabilities and focus on the most critical steps that will provide the most significant impact. By prioritising certain aspects of the model, smaller entities can manage change effectively without overextending their resources.

Kotter's model provides a high-level framework for understanding and managing change but often lacks the specificity needed for implementation. Critics argue that it does not offer enough detailed, actionable guidance for those executing the change.

The model is designed to be a flexible framework that organisations can adapt to their specific needs. To overcome the lack of specificity, it can be supplemented with detailed action plans, tools, and strategies tailored to the unique characteristics and requirements of the organisation. This approach allows for a customised implementation strategy that aligns with both the spirit of Kotter's model and the practical realities of the organisation.

Despite criticism, Kotter's theory is finding application in real life. For example, in the article "Using Kotter's Change Management Framework to Redesign Departmental GME Recruitment"

[86], the authors use the theory to modernise the Graduate Medical Education (GME) recruitment process at Wake Forest University School of Medicine's Department of Internal Medicine. This included transitioning from in-person to virtual recruitment methods for 15 GME programs, a change prompted by the pandemic's restrictions on traditional face-to-face interactions.

The application of Kotter's model led to maintained program fill rates and increased website engagement, demonstrating the effectiveness of the model in guiding significant changes in recruitment practices during a crisis.

In conclusion, while Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model is a valuable tool for conceptualising and leading change, like any model, it has its limitations. By understanding and addressing these criticisms, organisations can better leverage this model to suit their particular needs and contexts, thereby enhancing its effectiveness in driving successful change.

Lewin's Change Management Model in Crisis

Lewin's Change Management Model, developed by Kurt Lewin, is one of the foundational theories in organisational change. It consists of three stages: Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze. [23] While it's often applied to planned organisational changes, Lewin's model can also be highly effective in managing crises. Let's explore how this model works and how it can be applied specifically to managing crises through its three distinct stages: Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze.

1. Unfreeze stage

In this stage, the organisation recognizes the need for rapid and effective action in response to a crisis, such as a data breach. This initial phase is critical, as it sets the stage for the detailed response that will follow. It involves several key actions that prepare the organisation to tackle the crisis effectively.

Recognition of the Crisis is the first and foremost step in the Unfreeze stage. It requires the immediate acknowledgment of the data breach and an understanding of its potential impact. This awareness is crucial as it drives the urgency of the response measures and ensures that all subsequent actions are carried out with the seriousness and promptness the situation demands.

Following the recognition, the organisation must focus on the *Communication of Urgency*. This involves the rapid dissemination of information to all stakeholders, highlighting the serious nature of the breach and detailing the immediate actions required. Effective communication ensures that everyone within and associated with the organisation is on the same page and fully aware of the severity of the situation, which is essential for a coordinated response.

Concurrently, there is a need for the *Formation of a Crisis Management Team*. This team, consisting of members with diverse but relevant expertise, is tasked with leading the strategic response to the breach. The formation of this team is a critical step as it centralises the response efforts and ensures that decision-making is swift and informed by comprehensive expertise.

Lastly, the *Engagement of Stakeholders* plays a vital role in the Unfreeze stage. It is imperative that all relevant stakeholders are not only informed about the crisis but are also actively involved in the response. This engagement enhances transparency and builds trust, both crucial for managing the crisis effectively. It also helps in mobilising resources and gathering support, which

can be pivotal in mitigating the effects of the breach.

Each of these actions within the Unfreeze stage is essential to prepare the organisation to respond effectively to the crisis. By acknowledging the breach, communicating its urgency, forming a dedicated response team, and engaging stakeholders, the organisation lays the groundwork for a systematic and effective response.

2. Change stage

The Change stage is where the organisation actively addresses the crisis through specific, targeted actions. During a data breach, this stage is crucial as it involves direct interventions to mitigate the impact and prevent further damage.

At the onset of the Change stage, *Containment Measures* are the first priority. These measures are designed to halt the progression of the breach and secure the organisation's assets. Actions such as securing network infrastructures and revoking unauthorised access are essential to prevent further data loss. This might include shutting down compromised systems, changing passwords, and implementing enhanced security protocols.

Simultaneously, the organisation must focus on *Strategic Response Implementation*. This involves developing and executing a detailed response plan that outlines the remediation strategies to be employed and ensures compliance with all relevant regulatory requirements. The response plan is typically comprehensive, addressing both the immediate needs to rectify the breach and longer-term strategies to prevent recurrence. It integrates input from various stakeholders, including technology, legal, and communications teams, to cover all aspects of the breach's impact.

Moreover, *Continuous Monitoring* is a critical component of the Change stage. This involves the real-time tracking of response efforts and the adaptation of strategies as new information emerges. Continuous monitoring allows the organisation to remain agile, making adjustments to the response plan based on the effectiveness of the initial actions and the evolving nature of the data breach. This dynamic approach ensures that the organisation can effectively manage the crisis and minimise its impacts.

Through these actions – containment, strategic response, and continuous monitoring – the organisation takes decisive steps to control and eventually resolve the crisis instigated by the data breach. This stage is about action and adaptation, reflecting the need for immediate and effective responses to secure the organisation and restore normal operations.

3. Refreeze stage

In the Refreeze stage, the focus shifts towards stabilising the organisation after the crisis and embedding the successful strategies into everyday operations. This stage is crucial for ensuring that the organisation not only recovers from the crisis but also emerges stronger and better prepared for future challenges.

Once the immediate threat of the data breach has been addressed, the organisation moves to *Institutionalise the Changes* that were effective during the crisis. This involves formalising the successful strategies and tools into standard operating procedures. By integrating these practices

into the organisational framework, the company ensures that these new methods are not temporary fixes but become part of the regular workflow and culture. This step is vital for maintaining the enhancements made during the crisis and for ensuring consistent application in the future.

Alongside institutionalising changes, the organisation sets up *Feedback Loops*. These mechanisms are designed for continuous learning and are essential for refining crisis management protocols. Feedback loops involve gathering insights from the crisis response – what worked well, what didn't, and why – and using this information to improve. Regular reviews of the response actions and outcomes feed into ongoing training and development programs, enhancing the organisation's preparedness and responsiveness.

Furthermore, the implementation of *Preventive Measures* is a critical component of the Refreeze stage. The organisation takes proactive steps to prevent future breaches by enhancing security measures and conducting regular audits. These measures may include updating security software, revising access controls, and continuous monitoring of IT systems to detect vulnerabilities early. Preventive strategies are tailored based on the lessons learned from the breach, ensuring a robust defence against similar or new types of threats in the future.

Through these focused efforts – formalising successful changes, establishing feedback mechanisms, and implementing preventive measures – the organisation aims to stabilise its operations and solidify the improvements made during the crisis. The Refreeze stage is about cementing these changes and setting a new standard of operation that incorporates enhanced security and resilience, thereby concluding the cycle of change management effectively.

Applications and Strategies in Crisis Management

Effective crisis management requires a multifaceted approach encompassing communication, leadership, flexibility, employee engagement, and a commitment to learning and improvement. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in guiding an organisation through the turmoil of a crisis and emerging stronger on the other side.

Communication is fundamental during all stages of crisis management. The importance of clear and transparent communication cannot be overstated; it is essential for maintaining trust and ensuring that all stakeholders are informed and aligned with the crisis response strategy. Organisations should utilise multiple channels to disseminate information to ensure that messages reach everyone effectively. Regular updates and the provision of open forums for questions can help in maintaining an environment of openness and trust.

Leadership also plays a critical role during a crisis. Strong, visible, and approachable leaders can steer the organisation effectively through challenging times. Leaders need to be decisive yet supportive, providing clear direction and reassurance to both employees and stakeholders. Their ability to embody resilience and maintain calm can significantly influence the organisation's ability to navigate the crisis successfully.

The nature of crises often requires *flexibility and adaptability* in response strategies. As crises can evolve rapidly, the ability to respond swiftly and efficiently becomes crucial. Organisations should develop plans that are adaptable and foster a culture open to change and innovation. This agility

allows them to pivot as new information emerges, ensuring that the response remains relevant and effective.

Employee engagement is another critical component of successful crisis management. Engaged employees are more likely to be proactive in supporting and contributing to the resolution efforts. Organisations can foster this engagement by involving employees in problem-solving and decision-making processes, recognizing their contributions, and providing necessary support to maintain morale and commitment during challenging times.

Lastly, every crisis offers an opportunity for *learning and improvement*. Conducting post-crisis reviews to analyse the response's strengths and weaknesses is vital. These reviews should be used to refine policies, training, and contingency plans. Learning from each crisis not only prepares the organisation for future incidents but also contributes to a culture of continuous improvement.

By integrating these strategies organisations can enhance their crisis management capabilities. This comprehensive approach not only helps in managing the current crisis but also lays a stronger foundation for future challenges.

Criticisms and Considerations of Lewin's Change Management Model

Lewin's Change Management Model, while foundational in the study and application of organisational change, has been subject to criticism, particularly when applied to complex and dynamic crises. These critiques mainly revolve around its perceived simplicity, static nature, and cultural fit. However, with thoughtful considerations, the model's utility can be enhanced to better suit modern organisational needs.

Simplification is one of the prominent criticisms of Lewin's model. It is often viewed as too simplistic to adequately handle the intricate and multifaceted nature of crises that organisations face today. While the model offers a clear and structured framework for managing change, it may overlook the nuances and unpredictability inherent in many crisis situations. To address this limitation, the model should not be used in isolation but rather complemented with detailed, context-specific strategies and tools that consider the unique aspects of each crisis. This approach ensures a more tailored and effective response, enhancing the model's applicability.

Another critique concerns the *static framework* of the model. Lewin's model traditionally outlines a linear process of change – Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze – which may not accurately reflect the dynamic and ongoing nature of many modern crises. Crises often evolve unpredictably, requiring responses that can adapt to changing conditions. To make Lewin's model more effective in such scenarios, it is beneficial to treat the stages as fluid and iterative, rather than strictly sequential. Organisations might find themselves revisiting earlier stages or cycling through stages multiple times as circumstances evolve. This iterative approach allows for continuous adaptation and refinement of strategies, making the model more dynamic and responsive.

Cultural Fit is another consideration. The model was developed in the early 20th century, a very different era from today, and may not fully align with the diverse and complex organisational cultures and structures now prevalent. This mismatch can hinder the model's effectiveness and acceptance within an organisation. To mitigate this, it is crucial to adapt the model to fit

contemporary organisational contexts. This adaptation involves aligning the model with current cultural values and practices, ensuring that it resonates with the organisational ethos and is relevant to the team members' and stakeholders' expectations. Customising the model in this way can significantly enhance its relevance and effectiveness in managing change.

Despite these criticisms, Lewin's Change Management Model remains a valuable tool in the field of organisational change. By considering these critiques and adapting the model accordingly, organisations can better leverage its strengths while mitigating its limitations, thereby enhancing their overall crisis management capabilities.

For example, the article "Operationalizing Lewin's 3-Step Change Model in the Outpatient Setting: A COVID-19 Case Study," [87] Lewin's change management model is applied in practice to address the operational challenges faced by an outpatient healthcare facility during the COVID-19 pandemic. The application is structured around Lewin's three phases: Unfreeze, Change and Refreeze, each tailored to the unique circumstances of the pandemic.

The organisation recognised the need for immediate action due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. This unfreeze phase involved recognising the impact of the crisis on their operations and preparing the organisation for the changes that were to come. Key activities included assessing existing processes and identifying their inadequacies in the face of such a public health crisis.

During the change phase, the facility implemented new procedures and protocols to adapt to the demands of the pandemic. This included introducing telehealth technologies, rearranging physical spaces to ensure social distancing, and adapting staff roles to meet changing operational needs. These changes were necessary to ensure patient safety, comply with health regulations and maintain operational effectiveness under crisis conditions.

In the refreeze stage, the organisation worked to turn these changes into the new standard operating procedures. This stage was critical in ensuring the sustainability of the new practices. Efforts were made to integrate the changes into the everyday culture of the organisation, making them the new norm. This included training staff to adapt to the new technologies and procedures, reinforcing the new practices through continuous feedback, and making adjustments to refine these practices based on real-time results and feedback.

The practical application of Lewin's change management model during the COVID-19 pandemic, as described in this article, demonstrates its effectiveness in guiding an ambulatory care setting through significant operational change. By structuring the transformation process into unfreeze, change and refreeze phases, the facility was able to methodically address and manage the complexities introduced by the pandemic. This structured approach not only facilitated immediate adjustments in response to the crisis, but also helped to embed these changes into the fabric of the organisation, promoting resilience and adaptability. The article thus demonstrates how Lewin's model can serve as a robust framework for crisis management, ensuring that organisations do not just react to change, but actively embed it for long-term sustainability and improved service delivery.

Lewin's Change Management Model provides a structured and valuable framework for managing organisational crises. By delineating the process into three distinct stages – Unfreeze, Change, and

Refreeze – the model helps organisations systematically approach and navigate crises. The Unfreeze stage prepares the organisation for change, ensuring readiness and acceptance among all stakeholders. During the Change stage, necessary actions are implemented to directly address and manage the crisis. Finally, the Refreeze stage aims to solidify new practices and ensure that changes made during the crisis become permanent, thereby stabilising the organisation post-crisis.

Despite its structured approach, the model's effectiveness in managing crises depends significantly on its adaptation to the specific context and complexities of each situation. It is crucial that the model is not applied rigidly but is adapted to accommodate the dynamic nature of crises. This includes maintaining flexibility in the face of evolving scenarios, ensuring comprehensive communication to keep all stakeholders aligned, fostering strong leadership to guide the organisation through the crisis, and promoting continuous learning to refine and improve crisis management strategies based on real-time feedback and post-crisis analysis.

By adapting Lewin's model to these requirements, organisations can enhance their ability to manage crises more effectively. This tailored approach not only addresses the immediate challenges posed by the crisis but also contributes to building a more resilient organisation capable of facing future uncertainties with greater confidence and preparedness. Thus, while Lewin's Change Management Model serves as a foundational tool in crisis management, its full potential is realised through thoughtful customization and application tailored to the unique demands of each crisis.

Conclusion to Chapter 1

In this chapter, we explored a range of communication theories and models that serve as the backbone for understanding effective communication within organizations. From the basic linear models like Shannon-Weaver to more dynamic frameworks such as the Transactional model, each theory contributes uniquely to our comprehension of how communication functions in business environments, particularly in times of change like the post-COVID-19 era.

The discussion highlighted not only the mechanisms through which information is transmitted and received but also the potential barriers that can disrupt effective communication. Issues such as noise, lack of feedback, and the absence of non-verbal cues in digital communication were identified as significant challenges that can diminish the clarity and effectiveness of organizational communication.

Moreover, the chapter set the foundation for applying these theoretical insights to practical scenarios where communication strategies need to be adapted to meet the evolving demands of modern organizational structures. This theoretical grounding prepares us to further investigate, in the subsequent chapters, the practical challenges faced by companies during the pandemic and to propose strategies that enhance communication efficacy and support organizational resilience.

As we transition to the next chapter, which delves into a literature review of communication challenges in contemporary organizations, the insights gained here will inform our understanding of the gaps in current practices and the potential for innovation in communication strategies.

2. Analyzing Modern Communication Challenges in Organizations: A Literature Review

2.1. Secondary data analysis

The global COVID-19 pandemic presented companies with a series of unprecedented challenges in the realm of internal communication. These challenges, and their subsequent evolution in the post-pandemic-era, have been the subject of extensive study. This section examines the specific communication difficulties encountered during the pandemic and the strategies employed by companies to enhance internal communication as the world transitions to a new normal.

As organisations continue to evolve in the post-pandemic era, the focus on refined communication strategies is of critical importance. Enhanced communication not only facilitates more effective management but also has the potential to enhance employee morale and engagement. The integration of AI and machine learning into communication tools has emerged as a pivotal development, allowing for more personalised and efficient interactions. Moreover, the growing emphasis on mental health has prompted companies to adopt more empathetic communication practices, acknowledging the stress and challenges employees encounter in the current period of change. Consequently, the creation of an environment in which open and honest communication is encouraged has become a fundamental element of organisational success in the new normal. This approach not only improves operational efficiency but also cultivates a supportive workplace culture.

The abrupt transition to remote work during the pandemic represented an unprecedented challenge that tested the adaptability of organisations globally. In this section, we will attempt to examine the problem from a variety of perspectives. The initial issue to be addressed concerns one of the most significant changes precipitated by the global pandemic, namely the transition to remote work.

The research “Coping with post COVID-19: Can work from home be a new norm” [1] enables an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of remote work from the perspective of employees.

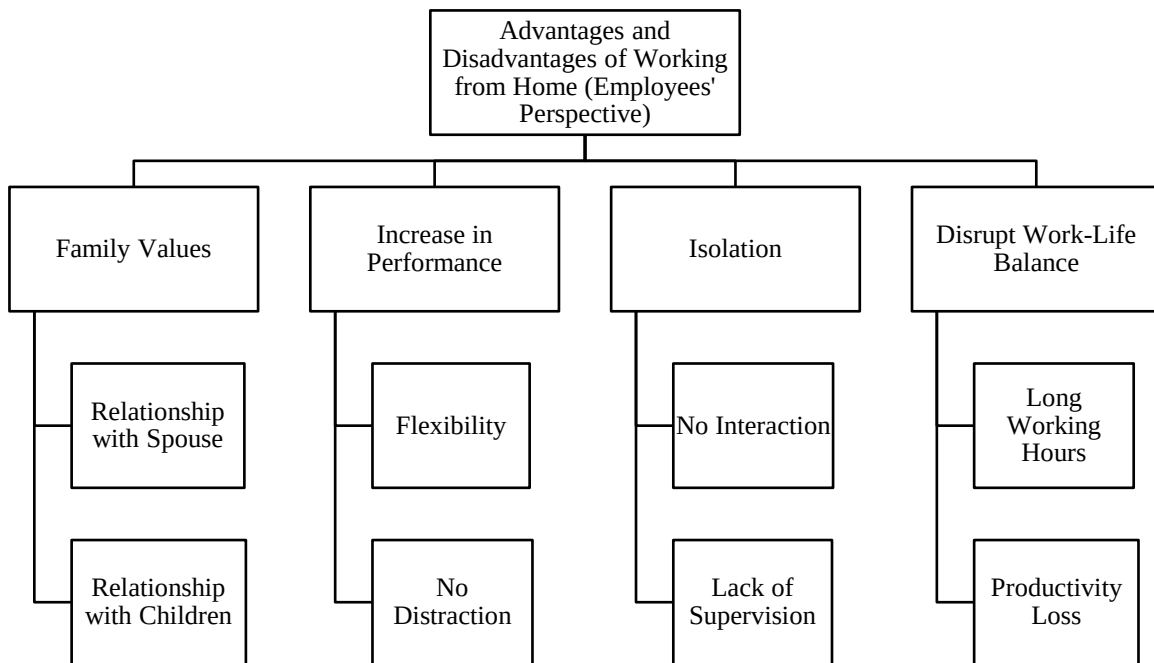


Figure 8. Advantages and disadvantages of working from home from employees' perspective [1]

The findings of a study into employees' attitudes to working from home indicated that, in the majority of cases, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The implementation of a policy of working from home (WFH) afforded companies greater flexibility to adapt their operations in accordance with changing business needs.

The study was conducted on a random sample of 249 executives from various companies and confirmed that WFH had a positive impact on factors such as family values and increased productivity. The respondents indicated that the WFH arrangement facilitated enhanced communication and greater quality time with their families. They were able to establish routines that enabled them to spend time with their partners and children, thereby enhancing family relationships.

Many respondents observed that WFH led to an increase in performance due to the flexibility it offered. They were able to work in environments that they found more comfortable and free from typical office distractions, which in many cases improved their productivity.

In contrast with the prevailing apprehensions surrounding WFH, the study revealed that employees did not experience a notable sense of isolation. Despite the absence of face-to-face interaction, the respondents reported effective communication with colleagues and supervisors, facilitated by digital communication tools.

Furthermore, the research indicated that the majority of respondents did not experience any disruption to their work-life balance as a result of working from home. Indeed, it appeared to facilitate the management of work and personal life due to the flexibility and time savings resulting from the elimination of commuting.

The study demonstrated that the majority of respondents expressed a preference for maintaining the practice of working from home, even in the context of the post-pandemic era. The findings also suggest that with adequate support and effective communication tools, WFH can be a

sustainable and beneficial working arrangement.

The team conducting the research “The adoption of remote work platforms after the Covid-19 lockdown: New approach, new evidence” [12] approached the topic of remote work with considerable complexity.

The researchers posed a question: After the Covid-19 lockdown, what are the driving factors that influence behavioural intentions and expectations to use remote work across generational and gender boundaries?

To address this question, the research team devised a mixed-method approach to survey service sector employees in China a few months after the pandemic quarantine was lifted. These employees had been mandatorily shifted to remote work during the quarantine and were given the option to work from home or on-site thereafter.

During the study, the UTAUT (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology) model was proposed and tested. This model was chosen because it goes beyond other models of technology acceptance, which typically focuses only on Behavioural Intention (BI), by integrating the relationship between BI and Behavioural Expectation (BE). Mahardika et al. [118] suggests that BE demonstrates stronger temporal stability and predictive power compared to BI, noting that “subjects may overestimate their likelihood to act when responding to BI questions.”

Prior to proceeding further, it is essential to have an understanding of the meanings of the concepts of “behavioural intention” and “behavioural expectation.”

Behavioural Intention is in this case basically the plan or decision someone makes to use remote work technology. Think of it as someone saying, “I intend to start using this tool for my work.” It’s about their personal commitment to use the technology based on what they think about it – like whether they believe it’s useful or easy to use.

Behavioural Expectation goes a step further and reflects how likely they actually are to follow through on using the technology. It’s like saying, “I expect I will be using this tool regularly.” This expectation considers not just the intention but also practical things, like whether the work environment supports using the tool or if there are any hurdles that could prevent its use.

So, BI is about deciding to use the technology, and BE is about expecting to use it based on both the decision and the surrounding circumstances.

As a result, the research hypothesised that BI influences BE, and both BI and BE impact the actual use of remote work. Consequently, the study put forward the following hypotheses:

- H1a: Behavioural expectation has a positive effect on remote work use.
- H1b: Behavioural intention has a positive effect on behavioural expectation.
- H1c: Behavioural intention has a positive effect on the remote work use.

In accordance with the authors’ findings, social influence can also serve as a key benchmark in shaping views and opinions on remote work. Consequently, the authors proposed two additional hypotheses:

- H2a: Social influence has a positive effect on behavioural intention.
- H2b: Social influence has a positive effect on behavioural expectation.

Several additional hypotheses were motivated by the notion that the effectiveness of remote work can also be influenced by the conditions an employee has at home compared to those at the workplace, such as the ergonomics of the workspace, temperature, noise levels, and so on. Consequently, two more hypotheses were considered:

- H3a: Facilitating conditions have a positive effect on behavioural expectation.
- H3b: Facilitating conditions have a positive effect on use.

Part of the hypothesis is also linked to the expectation that employees become more efficient when transitioning to remote work as they are not compelled to take longer breaks, can work in more comfortable personal conditions, and do not spend time commuting to and from the office. Therefore, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

- H4a: Performance expectancy has a positive effect on behavioural intention
- H4b: Effort expectancy has a positive effect on behavioural intention.
- H4c: Effort expectancy has a positive effect on performance expectancy.

Effort Expectancy is understood as the degree of ease associated with the use of the system. This dimension evaluates how an employee perceives the simplicity of using technology and remote work tools, influencing their adoption and continued use.

Given the substantial number of hypotheses and definitions, a diagram is provided below to facilitate a simplified understanding of the information. This image visually demonstrates the interactions between various definitions and how certain parameters influence others, assuming all the hypotheses are valid:

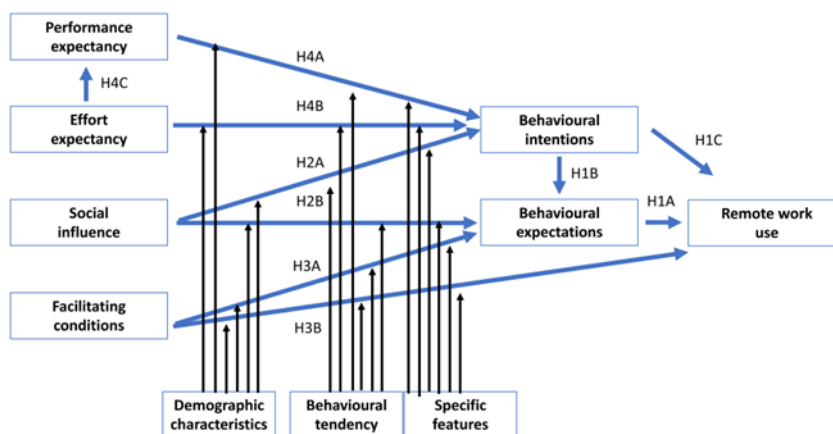


Figure 9. Conceptual model [12]

The study was conducted in Beijing, China, among employees working in the central business district. To ensure maximum objectivity in analysing the results, only those surveys that were fully completed were included. Consequently, 244 surveys were analysed. The authors note that the case of China is particularly significant, as it was the first country in the

world to face the pandemic. However, by January 2021, less than 1% of employees were still working from home.

The quantitative research conducted identified a typology of users who work remotely. Based on these criteria, candidates from the same companies were selected for 50-minute interviews. Using

data initially gathered through surveys and subsequently through interviews conducted in June 2021, 9 out of the 10 proposed hypotheses were confirmed. Hypothesis 4Hb was rejected.

The results of the study underscore the importance of investigating remote work platforms and confirm the significant impact on communication efficiency of moderating variables such as demographic characteristics (gender and age), behavioural tendencies (voluntariness and experience), and specific features of remote work (distance to office, job position, and firm culture).

It should be noted that there have been similar studies and findings in relation to remote working in the past. Consider study [13] carried out in 2018, which surveyed five employers who manage employees working remotely and who themselves also worked from home. Four of the respondents were from the tech sector and one from the finance. The results of 30-minute interviews with the respondents led to conclusions that are now well-understood, which these professionals had articulated back in 2018: the critical importance in managing remote employees lies in setting clear and concise goals, as well as the high variability and effectiveness of the platforms used for remote communication. Frequent and brief meetings, along with coaching sessions, help employees receive timely feedback and remain efficient, since they lack the possibility of random office encounters. A remote employee is still a social entity, and employers must strive to ensure these employees have the opportunity to be heard.

It is worthy of note that the phenomenon of working from home has been a prevalent practice for some time, preceding the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic period merely served to demonstrate the potential of working from home. The primary question was not whether individuals could adapt to working from home; rather, it was whether they could work entirely from home. In other words, the most significant challenge was the uncertainty surrounding the ability to complete all business tasks remotely.

A crucial question is posed in the research “Forced to go virtual. Working-from-home arrangements and their effect on team communication during COVID-19 lockdown.” [5] regarding the interaction between team members within the team. On the one hand, we have teams that have been working together in the same location for an extended period of time and were subsequently compelled to transition to remote work following the onset of the pandemic. Conversely, we have teams that were fully constituted during the period of the pandemic and never had the opportunity to work together in one place. It remains to be seen whether the two types of teams will prove to be equally effective.

The findings of the research [5] were based on an analysis of network communication via email, as well as interviews with senior management, middle managers, and employees. The research setting was a family business in East Germany, which was founded at the end of the 19th century.

Team	On-site work (2019)	Forced remote work (2020)	Relative difference
Branch Office			
Emails	2,571	1,617	-37%
Density	48%	52%	8%
Reciprocity	82%	82%	0%
Indegree centralization	32%	21%	-34%

Outdegree centralization	32%	48%	50%
Betweenness centralization	13%	12%	-8%
Competence Center			
Emails	400	173	-57%
Density	39%	30%	-23%
Reciprocity	59%	41%	-31%
Indegree centralization	43%	34%	-21%
Outdegree centralization	61%	61%	0%
Betweenness centralization	25%	34%	36%
Customer Team			
Emails	783	474	-39%
Density	64%	50%	-22%
Reciprocity	78%	76%	-3%
Indegree centralization	27%	23%	-15%
Outdegree centralization	36%	41%	14%
Betweenness centralization	10%	8%	-20%
IT Team			
Emails	436	106	-76%
Density	69%	50%	-28%
Reciprocity	90%	76%	-16%
Indegree centralization	14%	33%	136%
Outdegree centralization	31%	50%	61%
Betweenness centralization	15%	56%	273%

Table 3. Teams' network measures of email communication before and within the COVID-19 lockdown [5]

First of all, we need to understand what all this information means.

Emails represent the number of emails sent and received by the team.

Density shows how many connections between team members actually exist compared to the maximum possible number of connections. If density is high, it means most people are communicating with each other. If it's low, only a few people are communicating.

Reciprocity is the percentage of connections where both people communicate with each other. For example, if a person writes an email to another person and they reply, that's a reciprocal connection.

Indegree centralization shows how many incoming emails are concentrated on a few people. If this measure is high, it means a few people receive a lot of emails from others.

Outdegree centralization shows how many outgoing emails are concentrated on a few people. If this measure is high, it means a few people are sending a lot of emails to others.

Betweenness centralization shows how many certain people control the flow of information within the team. If this measure is high, it means a few people are key intermediaries through whom a lot of information passes.

The study results indicate that, of the four teams studied, the Customer Team showed that remote work can be quite effective if team members can fully substitute each other.

Another noticeable change during COVID-19 has been the statistics of time spent on social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram.

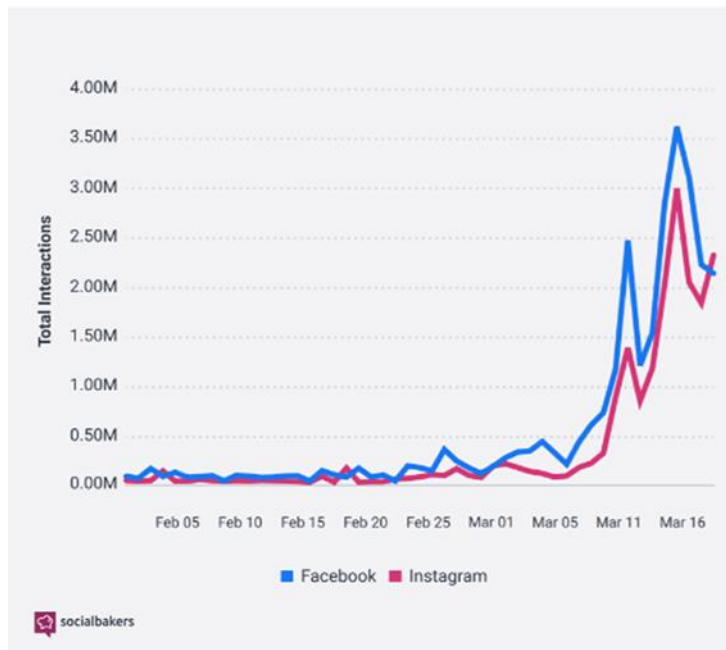


Figure 10. Evolution of total Interactions [2]

activities on social networks. It can be observed that the development trend in social networks remains positive at this point in time. A considerable number of companies are developing their accounts on social networks, and the number of businesses based on promoting accounts has increased exponentially. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the availability of online learning content has also demonstrated a positive growth trend. In the context of the pandemic, numerous universities made recordings of their lectures available to the public, which can still be accessed by anyone.

It's also important to highlight thoughts expressed in McKinsey's article [19] about our uncertainty regarding what to expect moving forward, especially concerning labour leaders – those who will be organising workers in the coming years. The necessity of remote work has introduced a series of challenges, the overcoming of which is described in earlier studies, but truly new challenges emerge in hybrid work environments:

Hybrid work models blend remote and onsite work, requiring nuanced management strategies to ensure cohesion and efficiency. Leaders must navigate the complexities of scheduling, communication gaps, and maintaining a fair work culture that accommodates both remote and in-office preferences. This evolving dynamic prompts a continual reevaluation of best practices in leadership and operational management to adapt to the shifting landscape of workplace norms.

The results presented in Figure 10 may be unexpected. The considerable increase in active users may be attributed to a number of factors, including the necessity for individuals to search for information about the novel coronavirus and to obtain the latest updates, which has led to a surge in social media usage. However, this growth was due to the fact that many activities that people could afford before were temporarily blocked, which accompanied the fact that people found themselves in a new, virtual society.

This undoubtedly had a significant impact on the evolution of promotional

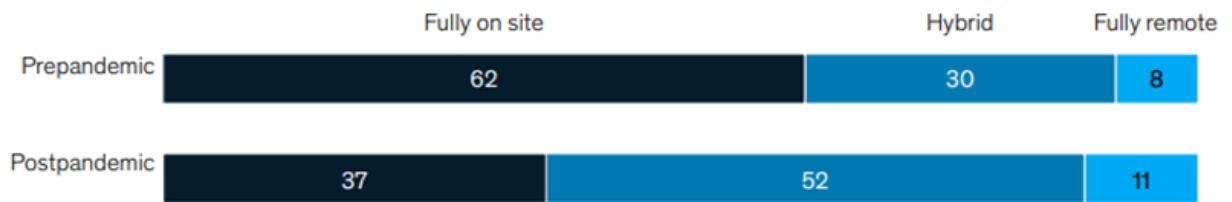


Figure 11. Working model before COVID-19 pandemic and desired working model after COVID-19 pandemic, January 2021 [12]

As we can see, the hybrid work model has proven to be the most convenient for employees, and this trend continues to this day. This makes sense upon deeper consideration, as working from home three to four days a week allows us to reap all the benefits of remote work while mitigating its drawbacks. Spending one or two days in the office each week facilitates effective communication and provides the necessary feedback from management. At this time, it can confidently be said that the hybrid work model has become a privilege rather than a necessity. However, leaders must be sufficiently inventive to ensure a decent level of communication on two fronts: remotely and in the office. Currently, this remains one of the more critical issues in employee communication.

One of the most extensive studies “The impact of COVID-19 on digital communication patterns” [21] was conducted jointly by Harvard and Stanford universities. During the research, 3,143,270 emails between employees from 21,438 companies located in 16 of the world’s largest megacities were analysed. This vast collection of data provided a unique insight into global communication patterns across diverse industries and cultural contexts, highlighting how workplace interactions evolve in response to varying regional and corporate environments.

Table 1 Lockdown dates.		
MSA	First 100 cases	Lockdown starts
Milan	20-Feb	8-Mar
Rome	20-Feb	10-Mar
Oslo	4-Mar	12-Mar
Madrid	28-Feb	14-Mar
Zurich	2-Mar	16-Mar
Geneva	2-Mar	16-Mar
San Jose	10-Mar	16-Mar
Paris	10-Feb	17-Mar
San Francisco	10-Mar	17-Mar
Brussels	5-Mar	18-Mar
Tel Aviv	6-Mar	19-Mar
Chicago	27-Feb	21-Mar
New York City	10-Mar	21-Mar
London	17-Feb	24-Mar
Washington, DC	14-Mar	25-Mar

This table provides a list of cities (MSAs) included in the study and the corresponding dates of the lockdown and the first 100 cases.

Table 4. Lockdown dates [21]

scale of the event was global, with practically the whole world going into quarantine within a month. Additionally, the communication problem had not been resolved even before the quarantine began. In large companies, two problems often arise: one is the too frequent holding of general meetings, which at some point leads to employees being distracted from their individual tasks. The other issue is the failure to attend large meetings, which results in employees failing to

It is also noteworthy that the authors of the study correctly identify that the 2019 epidemic is not the first instance in human history in which individuals have been compelled to undergo quarantine. There have been previous instances of such occurrences, including acute disasters such as the Christchurch earthquakes in New Zealand, the Tohoku tsunami in Japan, and the 2011 earthquakes. In all of these cases, individuals were required to adapt to the sudden onset of challenges, including those related to communication. However, a fundamental difference in 2019 was that people were unable to anticipate the duration of the quarantine. Moreover, the

comprehend the objectives and responsibilities of the corporation. This, in turn, leads to a decline in motivation and recognition of the significance of their individual contributions. Typically, different companies and leaders adopt distinct approaches to balancing the frequency, duration, and scale of such meetings. Consequently, with the onset of the quarantine, as the research [21] notes, these issues were addressed to varying degrees in different organisations. Some companies were able to swiftly adjust their communication processes and implement innovative technologies to support remote work, effectively adapting to the new conditions.

The initial focus of the study is the frequency of meetings. Classical literature on communication posits that virtual communication conveys less information than face-to-face interactions. Consequently, teams that operate entirely virtually must compensate by interacting more frequently via email and increasing the number of meetings. Another issue that can arise is the strictness of accountability, which is associated with the fact that managers no longer have the opportunity to observe the work of employees directly. Nevertheless, recent research indicates that, despite the awareness of these approaches, virtual meetings remain less effective than their offline counterparts.

With regard to the duration of meetings, it can be anticipated that there will be a general reduction in meeting length. This is because meetings conducted during the pandemic are not as effective as those conducted prior to the pandemic. Consequently, many top-level managers and others have resorted to using virtual gatherings to ensure strict accountability remotely. Conversely, there are grounds for supposing that meetings may prove to be longer-lasting. This is because the depth of issues that can be discussed during the pandemic may extend beyond purely work-related matters to encompass global concerns. It is possible that organisations may encounter more serious global issues with greater frequency during the pandemic. Furthermore, remote meetings frequently encounter connectivity issues due to technical reasons, which can also extend the length of meetings.

The aforementioned study involved the analysis of over three million messages. The research employed a variety of methodologies to assess the aforementioned variables, including the measurement of meeting duration, the number of meetings, the number of participants in each meeting, and the total time of all meetings. The study period encompassed the week in which the lockdown was declared, as well as the eight weeks preceding and following its inception. The average expected time for all the parameters listed above was predicted using linear regression, and the calculated coefficients are presented in the table below.

The table presents two linear regression coefficients for predicting three parameters: the frequency of internal emails within the company, the frequency of external emails, and the number of recipients expressed in people.

(a)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Meetings			
DV is log of:	Total time (h)	Length (h)	Meetings (count)	Attendees (people)
Week -8	0.050*** (0.011)	0.089*** (0.012)	-0.048*** (0.008)	-0.025 (0.017)
Week -7	0.029* (0.012)	0.075*** (0.011)	-0.063*** (0.006)	-0.033* (0.014)
Week -6	0.031* (0.013)	0.065*** (0.013)	-0.049*** (0.005)	-0.037** (0.011)
Week -5	0.020 (0.010)	0.058*** (0.011)	-0.051*** (0.010)	-0.040** (0.010)
Week -4	0.031 (0.015)	0.064*** (0.015)	-0.039*** (0.006)	-0.016 (0.015)
Week -3	0.021 (0.013)	0.055*** (0.011)	-0.042*** (0.009)	-0.0003 (0.015)
Week -2	0.029* (0.010)	0.045*** (0.011)	-0.025** (0.006)	0.011 (0.012)
Week -1 (Base week)				
Week 0 (Lockdown Week)	-0.057*** (0.012)	-0.106*** (0.012)	0.061*** (0.008)	0.026 (0.021)
Week 1	-0.081*** (0.017)	-0.178*** (0.021)	0.116*** (0.011)	0.077** (0.022)
Week 2	-0.076*** (0.013)	-0.192*** (0.021)	0.130*** (0.012)	0.109*** (0.018)
Week 3	-0.116*** (0.021)	-0.197*** (0.022)	0.105*** (0.017)	0.136*** (0.015)
Week 4	-0.194*** (0.049)	-0.204*** (0.030)	0.029 (0.023)	0.129*** (0.015)
Week 5	-0.095** (0.026)	-0.177*** (0.024)	0.101*** (0.017)	0.116*** (0.016)
Week 6	-0.078*** (0.018)	-0.168*** (0.020)	0.097*** (0.014)	0.135*** (0.015)
Week 7	-0.108*** (0.027)	-0.174*** (0.024)	0.058*** (0.011)	0.116*** (0.014)
Week 8	-0.072*** (0.019)	-0.146*** (0.022)	0.064*** (0.015)	0.105*** (0.020)
Observations (MSA × Day)	1904	1904	1904	1904
MSA	16	16	16	16

(b)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Emails		
DV is log of	Sent Internal (count)	Sent External (count)	Recipients (people)
Week -8	-0.099*** (0.020)	-0.066** (0.019)	-0.076*** (0.014)
Week -7	-0.092*** (0.020)	-0.074** (0.020)	-0.062** (0.015)
Week -6	-0.092*** (0.021)	-0.066* (0.026)	-0.065*** (0.015)
Week -5	-0.089** (0.027)	-0.050** (0.017)	-0.073*** (0.014)
Week -4	-0.093*** (0.019)	-0.046* (0.017)	-0.061*** (0.013)
Week -3	-0.091*** (0.018)	-0.022 (0.013)	-0.053** (0.013)
Week -2	-0.051** (0.017)	-0.022 (0.012)	-0.016 (0.015)
Week -1 (Base week)			
Week 0 (Lockdown week)	0.126*** (0.020)	0.033* (0.015)	0.062** (0.018)
Week 1	0.114*** (0.023)	0.01 (0.013)	-0.008 (0.016)
Week 2	0.065* (0.029)	-0.024 (0.017)	-0.016 (0.014)
Week 3	0.006 (0.028)	-0.059*** (0.014)	-0.019 (0.017)
Week 4	-0.104** (0.035)	-0.117*** (0.026)	-0.006 (0.027)
Week 5	(0.038) (0.029)	-0.065** (0.017)	-0.008 (0.026)
Week 6	-0.059* (0.027)	-0.074** (0.018)	-0.029 (0.015)
Week 7	-0.089*** (0.021)	-0.092*** (0.014)	-0.015 (0.016)
Week 8	-0.067* (0.026)	-0.066** (0.021)	-0.034 (0.019)
Observations (MSA × Day)	1904	1904	1904
MSA	16	16	16

^aThe main analysis of the event study for meeting measures.
^bThe main analysis of the event study for email measures.

Table 5. (a) Meeting regression results over time. (b) Email regression results over time [21]

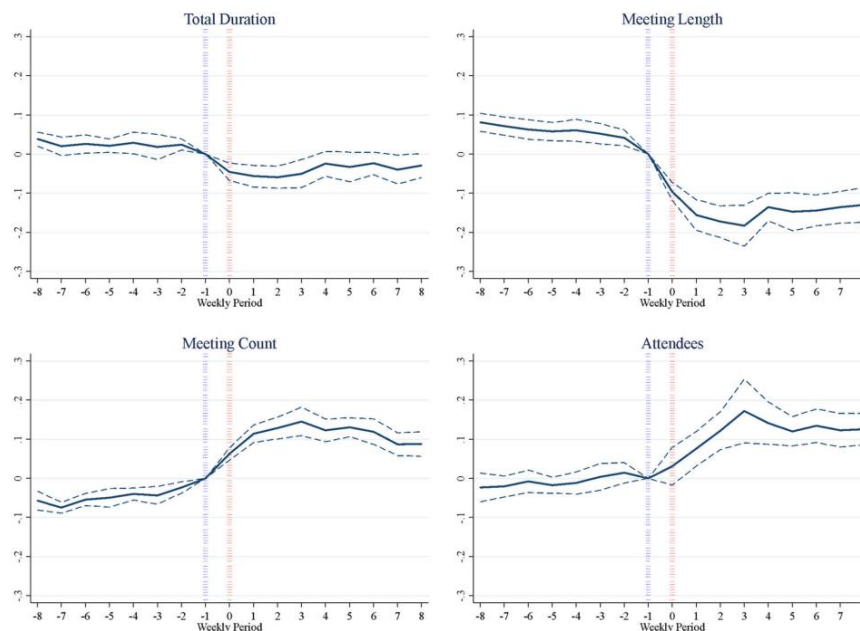


Figure 12. Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on meeting measures [21]

their work throughout the day.

In the next part, we will examine the manner in which companies have adapted to the changes in communication patterns that have occurred during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The

The “lockdown week” is the 7-day period that includes the lockdown date at its center.

For the sake of clarity, the regression coefficients are graphically represented below.

As illustrated in the accompanying graphs, the majority of organisations demonstrated an ability to adapt to the conditions of the imposed quarantine. Although the total number of meetings increased, the overall time spent in meetings declined, indicating that the average meeting duration significantly decreased.

The data does not indicate whether these changes are the result of deliberate strategic management decisions or simply a consequence of organisations transitioning to remote work. However, the observed patterns align with the notion that virtual forms of communication were used to replace in-person interactions typical of an office setting. This shift was likely intended to free up time so that employees could focus on

research “COVID-19 and the reorientation of communication towards CSR” [3] enables us to examine this issue from the perspective of those responsible for communication in companies. The study comprised 45-minute interviews with communications directors at eight companies from four regions.

The research process yielded three hypotheses.

1. Companies have changed their communication strategies as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The degree of “CSR” implementation influences how communication has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. The size of the company positively moderates the changes in communication strategies.

	Degree of CSR implementation		
	Low	Medium	High
Support messages to the general public	15.5%	43.7%	40.8%
Support messages to frontline workers (police, nurses ...)	10.8% ^a	40.9% ^b	48.4% ^b
Information on opening hours, new schedules ...	20.7%	24.1%	55.2%
Communication on safety measures adopted in production	10.4% ^a	52.1% ^b	37.5% ^b
Communication on new security protocols implemented	19.4%	33.0%	47.6%
Communication of CSR actions	7.8% ^a	39.2% ^b	52.9% ^b
Positive and optimistic messages	19.2%	36.3%	44.5%

Notes: Data analysed using the chi-square test of independence. In each row, values with different superscript letters are significantly different ($p < 0.01$).

Table 6. Degree of “CSR” implementation [3]

The results of the study confirm the proposed hypotheses 1 and 3, and provide partial confirmation for the 2nd hypothesis. In other words, the results demonstrate that companies have altered their

communication practices as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We now turn to the question of how company leaders have adapted to the rapidly changing work and living conditions brought about by the 2019 pandemic. It is possible that the views and approaches of leaders and employees to this problem may differ. A broader look at this problem would help us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. The hypotheses that leaders applied different techniques and approaches to communication were confirmed experimentally based on the statistical data collected from two surveys. In-person meetings became less frequent and were often replaced by more secure communication methods such as SMS and email. Despite the apparent necessity for increased frequency of meetings in light of the urgency of the situation, the number of meetings, including virtual ones, decreased to almost zero after the onset of the pandemic.

Furthermore, the study “The impact of COVID-19 crisis on a company’s internal communication” [4] yielded another somewhat surprising outcome. Despite the urgency of the situation, it would be logical to expect that leaders’ meetings would become shorter and faster. However, the study found no significant difference in meeting times before and during the pandemic. It could be assumed that this is because it takes less time and resources to organise meetings online. However, this is only an assumption, and the research above did not seek to answer the question of why this was the case.

Additionally, it is important to note that the manner in which communication is conducted has undergone a transformation not only in the way leaders interact with employees, but also between employees themselves. The findings of the study indicated that in March 2020, employees

exhibited a preference for virtual communication within their teams, with telephone communication emerging as the most popular mode of communication.

The most significant finding of this study is that the preferred modes of communication were consistent across all hierarchical levels, which facilitated effective and satisfactory communication within the entire organisational structure. This was achieved through the use of SMS and messenger applications.

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-statistic	P-value
		Leaders (n = 43)		Workers (n = 56)			
Pair 1	Face to face before Covid	4,90	1,61	5,60	0,49	3,088	0,000**
	Face to face after Covid	3,79	2,12	3,00	2,01	1,893	0,060
Pair 2	Phonecalls before Covid	3,69	1,99	4,87	0,87	3,950	0,000**
	Phonecalls after Covid	4,11	2,08	5,64	0,69	5,323	0,000**
Pair 3	Emails before Covid	4,51	1,71	4,73	1,68	0,580	0,560
	Emails after Covid	3,68	2,08	5,30	1,27	4,699	0,000**
Pair 4	SMS and Viber before Covid	4,42	1,76	4,64	1,68	0,54	0,590
	SMS and Viber after Covid	4,63	1,84	5,26	1,54	1,964	0,050*
Pair 5	Video conversation one-on-one before Covid	1,42	1,05	1,30	0,46	0,766	0,440
	Video conversation one-on-one after Covid	2,37	2,04	3,71	1,89	3,386	0,000**
Pair 6	Video conversation one-to-many before Covid	2,35	1,96	1,16	0,37	4,411	0,000**
	Video conversation one-to-many after Covid	3,89	2,09	2,94	2,17	2,165	0,030*

*statistically significant at 5 %

**statistically significant at 1 %

Table 7. Comparison of preferred way of communication of leaders and organisation members (1 is the lowest rank, ..., 5 is the highest rank) [4]

hypotheses:

- H1: Employee Communication affects Employee Performance
- H2: Employee Communication affects Job Satisfaction
- H3: Employee Communication affects Work Commitment
- H4: Employee Engagement affects Job Satisfaction
- H5: Employee Engagement affects Work Commitment
- H6: Employee Engagement affects Employee Performance
- H7: Job Satisfaction affects Employee Performance
- H8: Work Commitment affects Employee Performance

The study demonstrated that communication among employees has a positive effect on their productivity, job satisfaction, and commitment to work. Interactions with colleagues facilitate the experience of being acknowledged by one's colleagues. It is of the utmost importance for employees to be aware that their input is valued by the organisation, as this fosters a stronger sense of commitment to the role. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that enhancing employee satisfaction and engagement should be a continuous process, embedded within the corporate culture, in order to facilitate ongoing development of both the individuals and the organisation as a whole.

Another investigation by McKinsey & Company [8] further corroborates the significance of

In the context of labour productivity in the post-COVID era, it is important to consider which factors may exert a significant influence. A research study conducted in Jakarta between March and June 2022 employed a methodology involving the collection of 200 questionnaires through Google Forms from employees who are married and work remotely. The study proposed the following



Figure 13. Importance of communication vision and policies on productivity, support, and inclusion, impact multiplies [8]

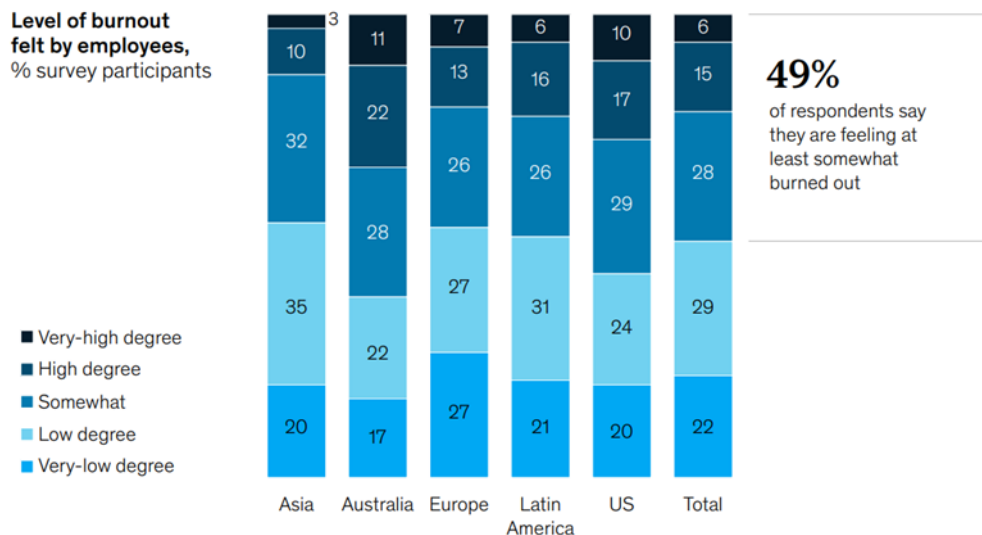


Figure 14. Level of burnout felt by employees, % survey participants [8]

communication among employees, particularly in relation to their commitment to work and operational efficiency. This study, conducted among 5,000 full-time employees across various global corporations and government bodies, presents the following results, illustrated in the accompanying graphic.

Organisations with clearer communication are seeing benefits to employee well-being and productivity. In addition to evaluating the influence of communication on employee productivity, the research also examined the phenomenon of employee burnout.

The lack of transparent communication regarding the strategic direction of the company during the post-pandemic period has been identified as a contributing factor to the elevated rates of burnout among employees. Over

half of the survey participants reported experiencing symptoms of burnout. It is essential to exercise caution when interpreting these results, as employees who have suffered severe burnout consequences may be more likely to either terminate their employment or be reluctant to participate in such surveys. Nevertheless, the survey's findings on the prevalence of burnout symptoms among participants present a concerning statistical trend that warrants further investigation.

The objective of the study, conducted by Helena Lee, [22] is to examine the influence of emotions associated with social comparison within work groups, as well as organisational and managerial support, on the formation of psychological safety during periods of organisational change. The findings indicated that social comparison of emotions and critical social-emotional resources, such as tasks, flexibility, communication, health, safety, and support, play a pivotal role in influencing emotional states during a health crisis.

The study revealed that feelings of anxiety, stress, injustice, inferiority, and vulnerability arise from perceived inequality and comparison with others at a higher level of management. Conversely, feelings of pride, empathy, and a sense of solidarity are fostered by a sense of shared interests and caring when compared with those at a lower level, such as subordinates. The study also demonstrated the impact of social-emotional resources on the psychological safety of core and peripheral employee groups. Full-time employees value autonomy, trust, and open communication, while peripheral employees are more interested in fair distribution of resources and compliance with contractual obligations. Those who experience flexibility and emotional

support exhibit high levels of psychological safety, whereas control, lack of trust and conflicts in employment contracts are associated with decreased psychological safety.

It is of the utmost importance for those responsible for human resources to be aware of the social and emotional needs of both core and peripheral employee groups. In order to enhance psychological safety and positive emotions, it is essential that leaders guarantee fair conditions, autonomy, and open communication across

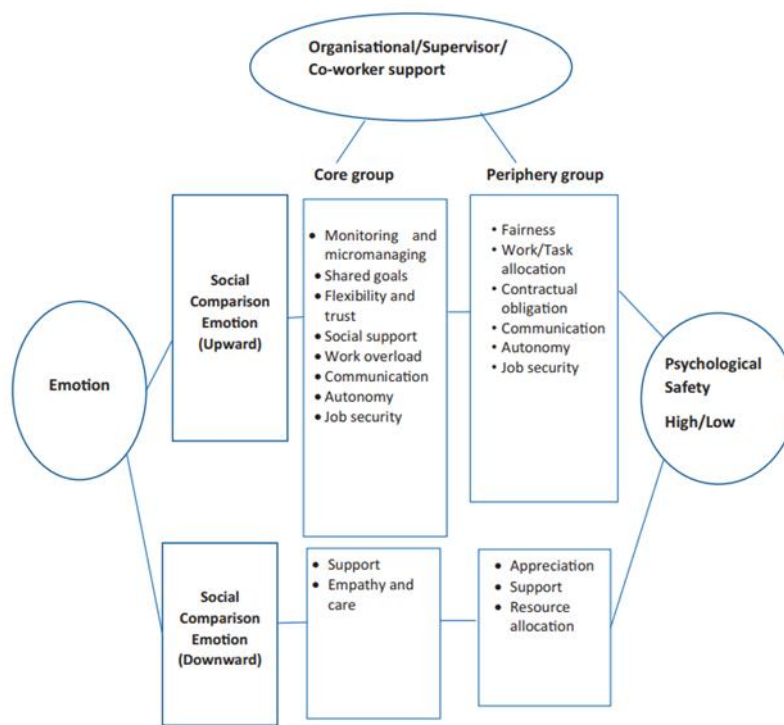


Figure 15. Overview of emotion, organisation support and psychological safety in study [22]

all organisational groups.

The issue of micromanagement in the context of organisational management has been the subject of considerable debate in recent years, particularly in relation to the potential for this control mechanism to engender feelings of mistrust and disrespect among employees. It is evident that a culture of excessive managerial involvement in the day-to-day activities of subordinates may be detrimental to the effective functioning of the organisation and the maintenance of positive working relations.

The research “Exploring Characteristics of Digital Organizational Culture in Post COVID-19: A Systematic Literature Review” [32] defines a concept known as the “new normal”. The new normal can be described as a situation in which the character/behaviour of an organisation has changed in response to new medical, social and economic realities following the Covid-19 period. Covid-19 has been a significant accelerator in the rapid development of global trends towards the adoption of new modern technologies that facilitate changes in lifestyles, work patterns and business strategies. Therefore, the changes that organisations and employees have adopted based on their experience of the crisis will continue to be part of the system and will become the new

norm. Consequently, the research questions in the paper [32] are as follows:

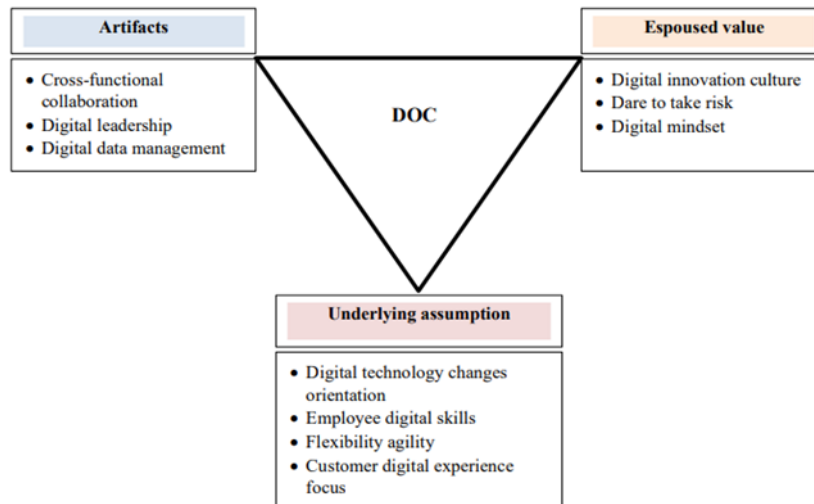


Figure 16. 10 Characteristics of DOC in the Post-COVID-19 [32]

Question 1: What research has been conducted in DOC in the post-COVID-19 period in terms of definition, key elements and methodology?

Question 2: What is the future research agenda in the field of DOC?

These DOC characteristics are then used to propose a model in the post-COVID-19 period by combining the three levels of culture from Schein's research (2010). These are artefacts,

espoused values, and underlying assumptions, as shown in Figure 16. The findings are expected to guide the implementation of DOC, impacting digital transformation and organizational performance. Organizations can use these characteristics to build resilience and adapt to the new normal brought about by the pandemic.

It would also be beneficial to examine the insights provided by Steve Glaveski [37] on the topic of asynchronous communication.

The advent of streaming, e-commerce and food delivery platforms, coupled with the widespread adoption of remote working, has resulted in the acceleration of numerous trends. Rather than taking advantage of the opportunity to improve the efficiency of their operations, the majority of organisations merely virtualised their offices, inadvertently perpetuating the malpractices that accompanied them.

Despite the elimination of commuting time, people have ended up working longer and less efficiently than before, which has led to excessive workloads and a diminished work-life balance. These two factors are key causes of workplace stress. A recent study by Gallup revealed that 83% of American workers experience stress at work, while a similar percentage of people globally (85%) are disengaged at work.

In order to mitigate the potential for conflict between one's professional and personal lives, leaders have been known to transition from a state of hyper-responsiveness and real-time communication to a more asynchronous mode of communication. This enables individuals to determine their own work schedules and locations, thereby providing a more autonomous approach to work. A variety of tools have been utilised by leaders in order to facilitate this change. Task boards provide a transparent and unified source of information regarding the status of project tasks, affording a clear view of the work being done by colleagues, at what stage, and the extent of progress made. Irrespective of the particular task board under consideration, whether it be Trello, Asana, Monday, or Basecamp, these platforms facilitate asynchronous communication, enabling users to leave

comments and pose questions in a manner that does not rely on the use of real-time emails and instant messaging. The aforementioned transparency serves to reduce the negative pressure on communication related to reporting and status updates, thereby facilitating the prioritisation of work in a manner that aligns with long-term urgent goals. This approach prevents individuals from becoming unduly preoccupied with the immediacy of tasks, allowing them to prioritise those that are genuinely important.

The claim that meetings are an ineffective use of time for the majority of attendees is supported by the findings of Bartleby's Law, which indicate that 80% of meetings result in 80% of attendees spending 80% of their time in a state of inactivity. A study conducted by Professor Leslie Perlow of Harvard Business School in 2017 provides further evidence to support this assertion. A study conducted in 2017 revealed that 71% of top managers consider meetings to be unproductive and inefficient. Moreover, the utilisation of shared documents during real-time Zoom calls ensures the preservation of crucial messages.

The research [32] asserts that leaders must exemplify the desired conduct and communicate that this is the expected norm. In response to the unfolding events, leaders should react in real time, declining to attend the meeting. They should also request that notifications be disabled and that this is the standard procedure. Finally, leaders should avoid being online all day.

Conclusion to Chapter 2

The extensive research presented on communication challenges and adaptations during and post-COVID-19 pandemic underscores a significant transformation in workplace dynamics, particularly in the adoption of remote and hybrid work models. The findings indicate that remote work has become an integral aspect of business operations, presenting both advantages, such as increased flexibility and productivity, and challenges, including the risk of isolation and the necessity for effective communication strategies.

The integration of AI and machine learning in communication tools has significantly enhanced interaction efficiency, enabling the delivery of personalized and streamlined communications. The combination of this technological advancement with an increased focus on mental health has prompted organisations to adopt more empathetic communication practices. Such adjustments are of the utmost importance in creating an environment where open and honest communication is encouraged, thereby enhancing employee morale, engagement, and operational efficiency.

The transition to remote work tested the adaptability of organisations on a global scale. Various studies have demonstrated that the advantages of remote work generally outweigh the disadvantages, provided that companies implement supportive policies and technologies. Nevertheless, the transition has demonstrated the necessity of addressing the social-emotional needs of employees, promoting psychological safety, and maintaining a balanced work-life integration in order to mitigate burnout.

The findings indicate that businesses have implemented notable changes to their communication strategies in response to the pandemic, with a pronounced shift towards virtual communication tools that have transformed interactions among employees, as well as between leaders and staff. Furthermore, the findings suggest a continuous necessity to reevaluate communication and

operational strategies in light of the ongoing transformation of the workplace environment. This ongoing adaptation is not merely a response to the immediate effects of the pandemic; it is also part of a broader trend towards a more flexible, responsive, and employee-centric workplace culture. It is anticipated that this cultural shift will persist and evolve, indicating a permanent change in the landscape of workplace communication and collaboration.

3. Primary data: Quantitative research

3.1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted workplace communication, necessitating rapid adaptation to remote and hybrid work models and the adoption of new communication technologies. This thesis aims to identify the challenges companies face in maintaining effective communication during the post-COVID-19 era and to explore strategies for improvement. By gathering insights from employees across various companies, roles and departments, this research seeks to develop effective communication strategies that enhance organisational cohesion and productivity in the evolving work environment.

3.2. Questionnaire description

The survey's title is "Enhancing Communication in Companies during the Post-COVID-19". It is organised into seven distinct sections comprising a total of 33 questions. The survey is structured to assess various aspects of internal communication within organisations as they adapt to changes brought about by the pandemic. It is designed to capture a broad range of data related to communication challenges, effectiveness, and preferences for workplace arrangements post-COVID-19.

The survey was constructed and administered via Google Forms. The survey is designed in such a way as to guarantee anonymity, thereby preventing any link between the responses and the identities of the respondents. It is estimated that the completion of the survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes. A survey was conducted on both the English and German languages in order to obtain a greater number of responses. On the day of analysis, 122 individuals participated in the survey.

Here's an overview of the survey's structure and content:

Section 1: Demographic Information

Purpose: To gather background information about the respondents, which can help in analysing differences in communication experiences across various groups.

Questions Include:

- Gender (Multiple choice)
- Age range (Multiple choice)
- Highest level of education completed (Multiple choice)
- Current job role within the company (Multiple choice)
- Department within the company (Multiple choice)
- Tenure at the company (Multiple choice)

Justification: The demographic section of the survey aims to capture a broad spectrum of participant backgrounds, facilitating a nuanced analysis of communication impacts across diverse corporate roles and demographic segments. The literature underscores the variability in communication preferences and challenges among different demographic groups, particularly as they relate to age, gender, and job roles. Capturing this data enables a stratified analysis which is crucial for understanding how different groups have experienced and navigated communication challenges, aligning with studies that highlight demographic influences on technology adoption and remote work dynamics.

Section 2: Communication Evaluation

Purpose: To evaluate how communication within the company has been perceived in terms of clarity, effectiveness, and consistency.

Questions Include:

- Rating the clarity of information communicated within the organisation since the COVID-19 pandemic began (Likert scale)
- Rating the clarity and understandability of communication within teams (Likert scale)
- Consistency of communication from leadership during the pandemic (Likert scale)
- Current effectiveness of communication within teams (Likert scale)
- How well superiors understand and address communication needs (Likert scale)

Justification: The survey questions related to the evaluation of communication directly probe the effectiveness of information dissemination and the clarity of communication within organisations. This section is pivotal as the literature review identified clear, consistent, and effective communication as fundamental to maintaining employee engagement and operational efficiency during disruptive periods such as the pandemic. Questions are designed to assess the perceived clarity of directives from management, the consistency of messages across the organisation, and how effectively these communications meet the employees' needs, reflecting concerns cited in the literature regarding the rapid changes to work environments and the subsequent communication challenges.

Section 3: Communication Challenges During the Pandemic

Purpose: To identify specific challenges that employees faced during the pandemic related to communication.

Questions Include:

- Whether respondents faced any communication challenges during the pandemic (Yes/No)
- Detailed follow-up on specific challenges such as lack of clear communication, inconsistent messages, difficulties accessing tools, etc. (Multiple choice, select multiple)
- The participant's evaluation of the company's effectiveness in addressing the above-mentioned communication challenges (Yes/No and open-ended)

Justification: This segment of the survey addresses the direct challenges experienced by employees as identified in the literature, such as inconsistencies in messaging, difficulties with

remote work technologies, and the feeling of isolation. These questions are critical for identifying gaps in the current communication frameworks that may persist post-pandemic, especially as companies continue to adapt to hybrid or fully remote models.

Section 4: Remote and Hybrid Work Dynamics

Purpose: To explore experiences related to remote and hybrid work setups.

Questions Include:

- Whether the respondent worked remotely at any point during the pandemic (Yes/No)
- Satisfaction with remote work arrangements (Likert scale and open-ended)
- Biggest advantages and challenges of remote work (Multiple choice, select multiple)
- The perception of an ideal work environment after pandemic (Open-ended)
- Whether the respondent is currently working hybrid (Yes/No)

Justification: In light of the literature pointing to a significant shift towards hybrid work models, the survey includes questions about employees' experiences with remote work, the benefits they perceived, and the challenges they faced. These insights are vital for understanding the practical implications of hybrid work setups on communication strategies and employee satisfaction, enabling organisations to refine their approaches based on actual employee feedback.

Section 5: Tools and Training

Purpose: To assess the effectiveness of communication tools used during the pandemic and the adequacy of training provided for these tools.

Questions Include:

- Rating the effectiveness of various communication tools like email, instant messaging apps, video conferencing software, etc. (Likert scale)
- Whether respondents received any formal training on using these communication tools (Yes/No)
- Necessity of the training for effective use of the tools (Yes/No)

Justification: The review highlighted the integration of new technologies in communication strategies as a key development during the pandemic. The survey questions related to the effectiveness of communication tools and the adequacy of training provided are designed to assess whether these tools have been implemented effectively and if the training has been sufficient to meet employees' needs, directly addressing the literature's focus on technology integration and its impact on communication efficacy.

Section 6: Impact on Employee Well-being

Purpose: To understand the impact of communication practices on employee stress and job satisfaction.

Questions Include:

- Rate stress level during the pandemic (Likert scale)
- Factors contributing to stress (Multiple choice, select multiple)
- How the quality of communication within the company impacted job satisfaction (Multiple choice)
- Whether a company values employee well-being in the opinion of a participant (Yes/No)

Justification: Reflecting the literature's emphasis on mental health and empathetic communication practices, this section probes the relationship between communication quality and employee well-being. Questions seek to understand the impact of communication practices on stress levels and job satisfaction, offering insights into how well companies are supporting their employees during ongoing adjustments to work practices.

Section 7: Future Preferences and Improvements

Purpose: To gather insights on preferences for future work models and suggestions for improving communication within the company.

Questions Include:

- Preference for continuing remote, returning to the office, or a hybrid model (Multiple choice)
- Suggestions for how the company could improve or adjust its remote or hybrid work policies (Multiple choice, select multiple, open-ended)

Justification: Finally, questions about future work preferences and suggestions for improving communication practices address the need for forward-looking strategies that accommodate employee preferences and enhance communication effectiveness. This section ties directly to the literature's indications that ongoing adaptations and improvements in communication strategies are crucial for long-term organisational resilience and employee satisfaction.

The following section will present an analysis of the provided responses.

3.3. Analysis of the responses

Section 1: Demographic Information:

1. Please select your gender:

The diagram shows that among respondents in different companies, 41% are women and 59% are men. This means that there are more men in these companies. This information is important because men and women may communicate differently at work. Knowing this, companies can better tailor their communications to ensure everyone feels comfortable.

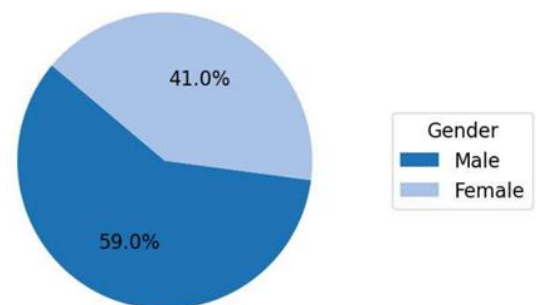


Figure 17. Please select your gender

2. Please select your age range:

The majority of them, 48.4%, are in the age group of 25 to 34 years. They are followed by people from 35 to 44 years old, who make up 26.2%. People under 25 and over 54 participated the least in the survey - they make up only 6.6% and 12.3%, respectively. This suggests that companies have more young employees and fewer older employees.

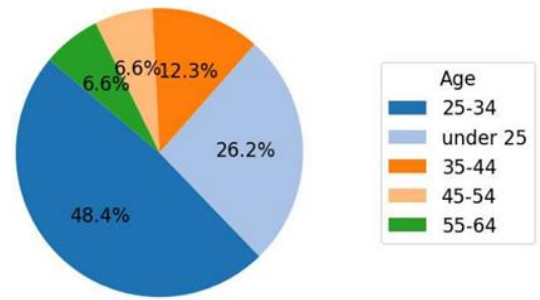


Figure 18. Please select your age range

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

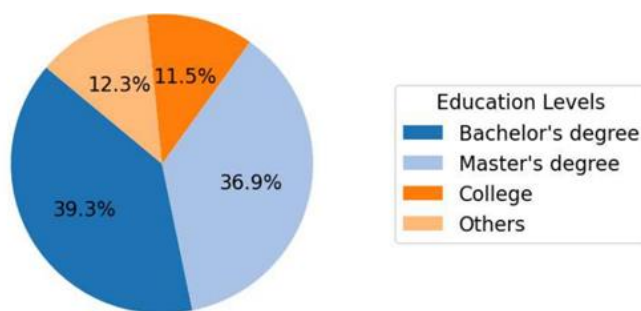


Figure 19. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

The chart illustrates the educational level of the respondents. The majority of participants (39.3%) have obtained a bachelor's degree, while 36.9% have a master's degree. Additionally, 11.5% of the participants have completed college, and 12.3% have pursued other forms of education. These findings suggest that the majority of employees have attained a higher level of education.

4. What is your current job role within the company?

The majority of respondents (over 60%) are ordinary employees, which allows us to primarily examine communication challenges from their perspective. However, a notable proportion of respondents are also managers and team leaders, representing approximately 30% of the total sample. As leaders, they can provide valuable insights into how they managed communication during and after the pandemic.

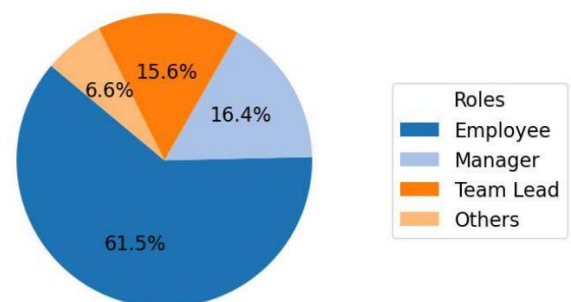


Figure 20. What is your current job role within the company?

5. Which department do you work in within the company?

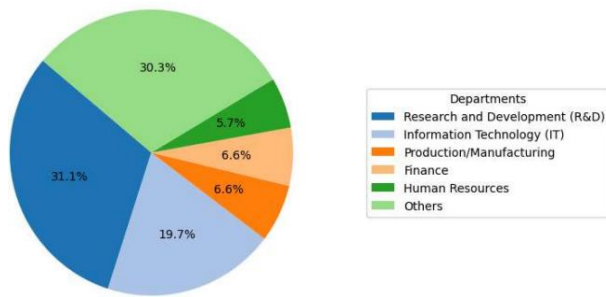


Figure 21. Which department do you work in within the company?

The majority of workers are from research and development, human resources, and IT departments, which underscores the technological and innovative focus of the companies under study. In general, these sectors align with those that have been previously investigated in the academic literature.

6. How long have you been with the company?

The survey was completed primarily by employees with a minimum of one year's experience. The proportion of participants with a tenure of between one and three years is 38.5%. The second largest group of participants were those who had worked for less than one year. It is probable that these individuals did not encounter significant difficulties during the pandemic; however, they may be able to provide valuable insights regarding the current working environment. The third largest group, comprising 21.3% of the participants, were those who had worked for their company for more than seven years. They possess a wealth of experience in navigating communication challenges, having witnessed the onset of the pandemic and been part of the evolving environment.

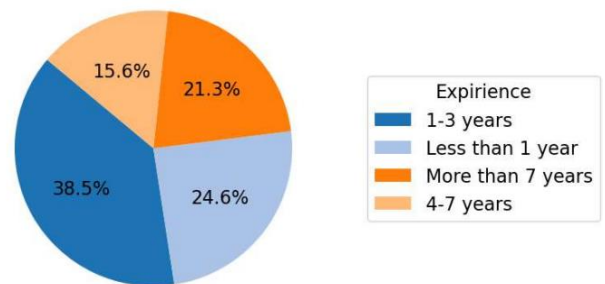


Figure 22. How long have you been with the company?

Therefore, the typical survey participant can be described as a young, well-educated professional working in a technology-oriented environment that reflects current trends in business and management.

Section 2: Communication Evaluation

7. How clearly information is communicated within the organization since the COVID-19 pandemic began? This includes directives from management, updates on company policies, or the spreading of critical health and safety information related to the pandemic.

The histogram shows that the majority of employees assess communication in the organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic as quite clear and effective. The majority of responses centred on a score of 4, which indicates that management directives, company policy updates, and the dissemination of health and safety information are perceived as generally satisfactory. However, a significant number of responses fell into the 3 range, indicating that some aspects of communication may require improvement to achieve a higher level of clarity and understanding.

The presence of responses with ratings of 2 and 5 indicates that there are different opinions among employees regarding the quality of communication: some find it very effective, while others see significant shortcomings. The minimum number of answers with a rating of 1 emphasises that only a few rate communication extremely poorly.

These findings highlight the importance of continuing to work on communication strategies within an organisation, especially during critical times such as the pandemic. It may be worthwhile to take a closer look at the areas that cause the most frustration and implement improvements accordingly to ensure more effective and clear communication at all levels of the organisation.

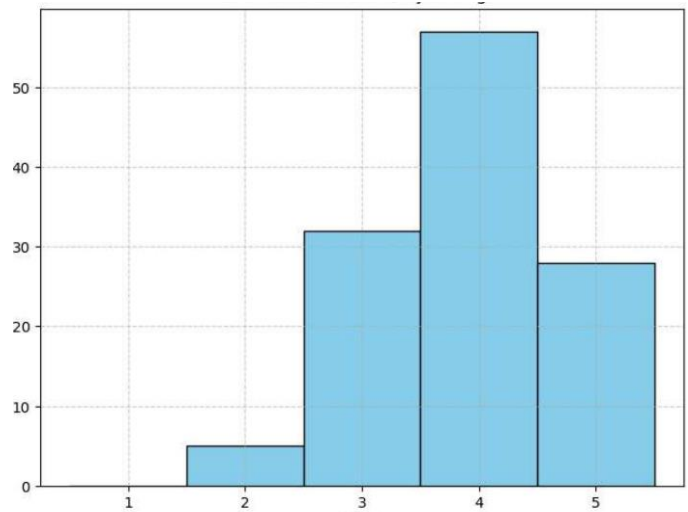


Figure 23. How clearly information is communicated within the organization?

7.2. How clear and understandable has the communication flow within the teams been since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic? This includes daily communication, collaboration, and social communication.

In a bar graph showing ratings of clarity of communication within teams since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of responses centered on a score of 4. This indicates that the majority of employees perceive intra-team communication to be effective and clear. A score of 3 indicates that some teams still have room for improvement, especially in aspects of daily communication and collaboration.

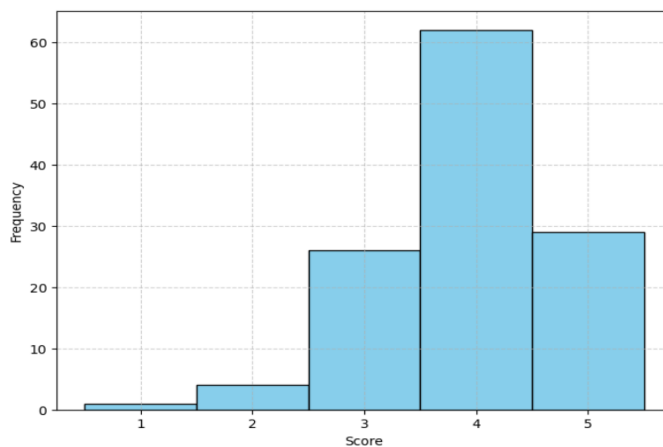


Figure 24. How clear and understandable has the communication flow within the teams?

of a minimum number of responses with a score of 1 emphasizes that serious communication problems are rare.

The smaller number of responses with ratings of 5 and 2 show polarized views on communication: some employees see it as extremely successful, while others point out significant shortcomings. The presence

Thus, the data shows that the majority of teams successfully adapted to the pandemic in terms of communication. However, to achieve higher levels of understanding and effectiveness, it is worth considering how to improve communication processes, especially in those teams that rate their communication at levels 2 and 3.

8. How consistent was communication from your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The bar graph shows that the majority of employees rate management's communication during the COVID-19 pandemic as fairly consistent, with the largest number of responses at level 4. However, a noticeable number of ratings of 3 indicate problems with the regularity and consistency of communication. This highlights the need to improve communication strategies for more effective communication within the company.

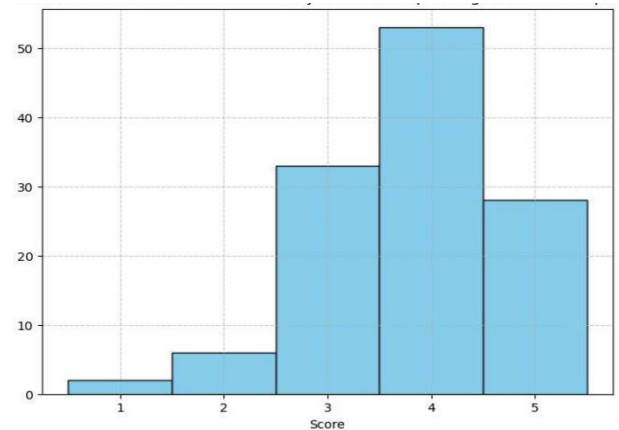


Figure 25. How consistent was communication from your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic?

9. How effective is the communication within your team currently?

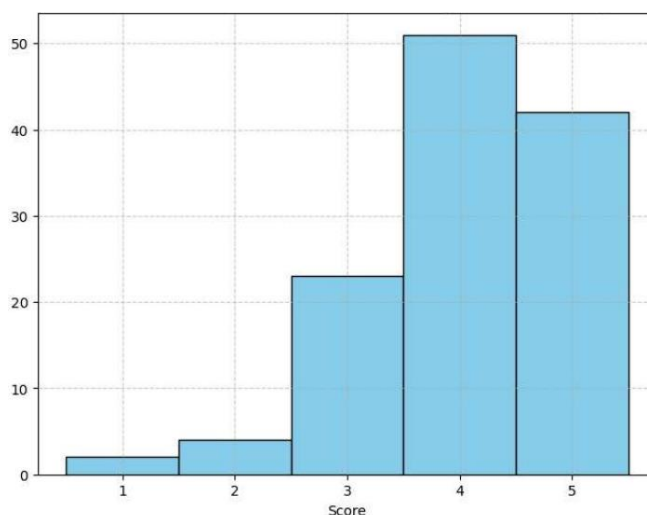


Figure 26. How effective is the communication within your team currently?

The bar chart illustrates the extent to which employees perceive the communication within their team to be effective. The scale employed for the assessment of effectiveness ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 representing a rating of very ineffective and 5 indicating a rating of very effective.

The graph illustrates that the majority of employees assigned a rating of 4, which indicates a relatively high level of effectiveness in communication within their teams. Additionally, a considerable proportion of respondents assigned a rating of 5, which corroborates the assertion that

communication within these teams is highly effective. The scores of 3 and 2 indicate that some teams experience communication difficulties, while the score of 1 was the lowest.

The data may be taken to indicate that communication is at a fairly high level in most teams, but that improvement is needed in some groups.

10. How well do your superiors understand and address your communication needs?

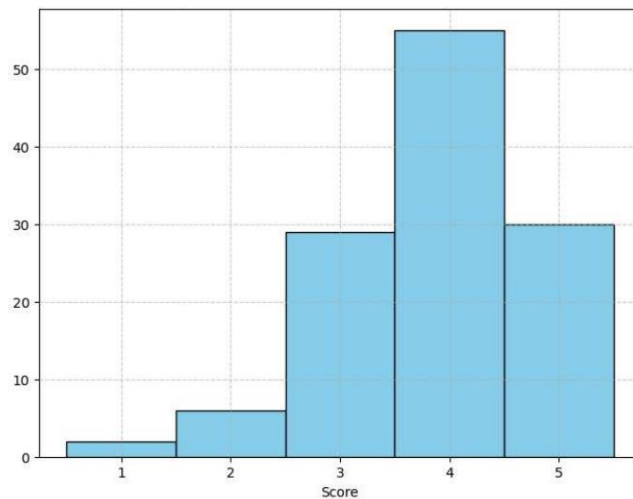


Figure 27. How well do your superiors understand and address your communication needs?

The presented histogram illustrates the manner in which employees attend to their communication requirements. The majority of respondents indicated a level 4 attitude, which suggests that managers exhibit a positive disposition towards this mood. A rating of 3, which is indicative of popularity, suggests that the item is of average quality. The considerable number of ratings at the upper end of the scale, specifically 5 and 2, indicates the efficacy of the assessment of managerial communication. This indicates that, although the assessment is positive overall, there are some areas that require improvement in order to enhance communication with all employees.

11. Did you face any communication challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The pie chart illustrates that 52.5% of survey respondents reported experiencing communication difficulties during the course of the pandemic, while 47.5% did not encounter such challenges. This distribution aligns with the findings of previous literature, which have indicated that communication challenges are a significant phenomenon in the context of a pandemic. A total of 52.5% of participants encountered difficulties, which underscores the necessity for flexibility and adaptability in communication strategies in unconventional circumstances. These findings corroborate observations previously documented in the literature and can be used as a foundation for further analysis of methods for enhancing internal communications in crisis situations.

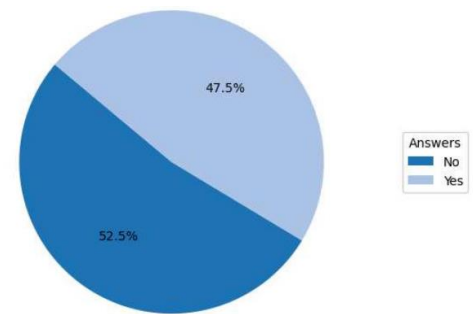


Figure 28. Did you face any communication challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Section 3: Communication Challenges During Pandemic

12. What were the most significant communication challenges you faced during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please select up to three options.

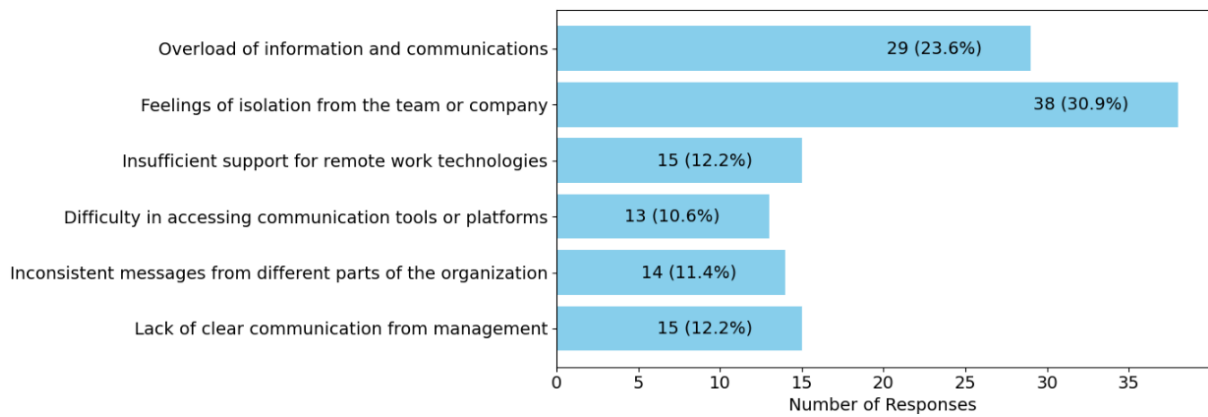


Figure 29. What were the most significant communication challenges you faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The data indicates that the most significant communication challenges encountered by employees during the pandemic are feelings of isolation from the team or company (30.9%) and information overload (23.6%). These findings underscore the difficulties inherent in maintaining corporate communications and managing information flows in the context of the pervasive transition to remote work.

A potential cause of feelings of isolation is a lack of informal and personal communication that naturally occurs in the office. The prevalence of information overload is likely indicative of difficulties in adapting to novel communication channels and an increase in digital interactions.

The data obtained corroborate the significance of the reasons posited in the extant literature with respect to the phenomenon of loneliness experienced by individuals when transitioning to remote work. Additionally, employees encountered a lack of technological assistance for remote work and encountered difficulties in accessing communication tools, as evidenced by 12.2% and 10.6% of respondents, respectively. Furthermore, the data indicates that inconsistent messages from different organisational units and a lack of clarity in communication from management were also identified as problematic (11.4% and 12.2%, respectively).

These findings emphasise the necessity of adopting a meticulous approach to the management of communications during periods of crisis. This entails the improvement of technological support and the guarantee of consistency and transparency in communications from the management team.

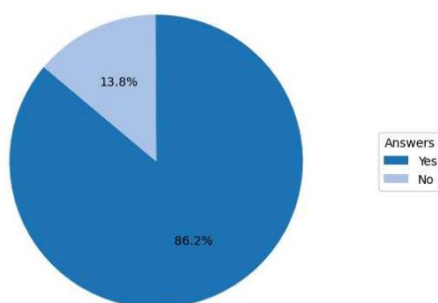


Figure 30. Do you think the company has adequately addressed these communication challenges?

13. Do you think the company has adequately addressed these communication challenges? Please explain your answer.

The results of the survey indicate that the majority of employees (86.2%) believe that the companies effectively addressed communication challenges during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. This high level of satisfaction indicates that the companies have been effective in maintaining clear and accessible communications in challenging environments. The companies may have expeditiously adapted their tools and communication methods for remote work, furnished

assistance in the utilisation of novel technologies, and assiduously endeavoured to guarantee that information flows remained consistent and intelligible for all employees. These actions helped to mitigate feelings of isolation among teams and ensure the continuity of work without significant obstacles.

Based on the employee comments provided, several key aspects can be identified in which the companies successfully coped with communication challenges during the pandemic:

Adaptation and Digitalization: Many employees emphasise that the companies have quickly adapted their communication approaches and tools, moving to digital platforms such as SharePoint, Teams and Trello. This helped improve the flow of communications and ensure smooth operations. “Company was able to adapt to a new digital way,” and “Extensive switch to digital tools” indicate the effective implementation of digital solutions.

Clear and Timely Communication: The speed and clarity of communication were highly rated: “There was clear communication as far as possible” and “Information was communicated to the company very promptly.” This emphasises that the companies tried to promptly inform employees about new rules and changes.

Support and Resources for Remote Work: Despite some difficulties, as mentioned in one of the responses “as a hardware engineer, due to Work from home policy, one shall work from location without access to systems and technologies,” many employees appreciated the provision of the necessary resources for effective remote work. works: “Within a week I was prepared for long-term home office = screens, VPN, headsets.”

Problematic Points: Some answers indicate problems, for example, “The superiors neglected the safety of the employees,” which suggests a lack of seriousness about employee safety at the beginning of the pandemic. However, the overall context shows that the companies tried to improve the situation as problems arose.

Overall, although there were some shortcomings, a large majority of employees rate the companies’ efforts to maintain effective communication amid the pandemic as successful. Comments like “It certainly wasn’t all perfect. But with the dynamics of the Covid-19 issue, I don’t know how much better it could have been,” confirm that, despite some difficulties, employees appreciate the companies’ efforts to adapt to the current circumstances.

Section 4: Remote Work

14. Did you work remotely at any point during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The data presented in the chart demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of employees (93.2%) have engaged in remote work at some point during the course of the global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This reflects the substantial impact of the pandemic on conventional work practices, with remote working becoming the prevailing norm for the majority of organisations.

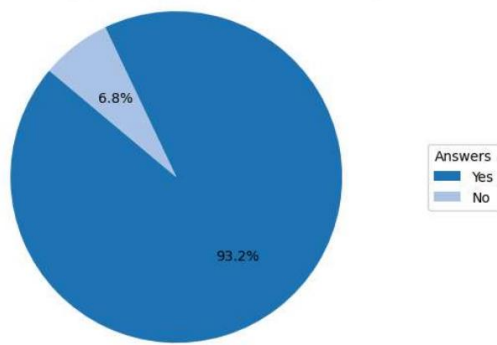


Figure 31. Did you work remotely at any point during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This high level of adoption of remote work serves to confirm that companies have proactively adapted to changing conditions in order to ensure the safety of their employees and the continuation of operations. Furthermore, it emphasises the significance of digital tools and technologies in maintaining connectivity and efficiency.

The relatively small percentage of employees (6.8%) who did not work remotely may be indicative of the nature of their roles, which necessitate in-person work, or the presence of effective virus mitigation measures in place to allow businesses to maintain business as usual.

15. How satisfied were you with the remote work arrangements? Please explain your rating.

The bar graph illustrates that the majority of employees expressed high levels of satisfaction with the remote work arrangement during the pandemic, with the majority of ratings falling within the score 5, which means that they were very satisfied. Additionally, a notable number of employees provided ratings within the scores 4 and 3, indicating an overall positive perception of remote work. A minority of respondents indicated dissatisfaction by selecting options 1 and 2, which may be indicative of technical difficulties or a lack of support. The data indicates that companies are effectively adapting to the new operational conditions.

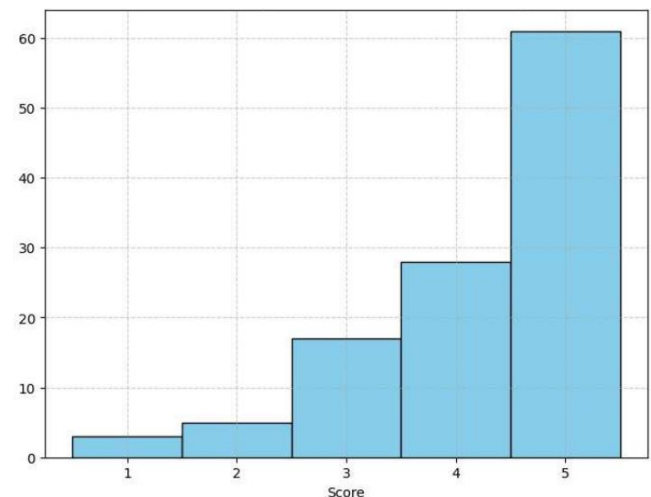


Figure 32. How satisfied were you with the remote work arrangements?

From employee comments, the main aspects influencing their satisfaction with remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic can be identified:

Support and Resources: Many have expressed positive feedback due to the resources provided and support from the company. For example, one employee mentioned: “I was paid remote work bonus, I could choose to work from home or office,” which emphasizes flexibility and support from the employer. Another added: “Flexible working times, good access to files/services and other company resources, work was more efficient remotely.”

Technical Limitations: Some employees experienced technical limitations that reduced their satisfaction. For example, a CAD design engineer noted: “Its highly important to access multiple displays and huge work table. This is heavily restricted as I work from home, it was limited to single screen and small work table.”

Communication and Engagement: Mixed reviews were given regarding communication. Some employees felt more productive and focused while working from home: “Communication takes place online regardless of being in the office. More focused on work.” At the same time, others expressed nostalgia for the office environment and personal communication: “I really miss separating home and work chores, plus communicating with people not through headset and camera.”

Flexibility and Work Schedule: Of great importance for employees was the possibility of a flexible schedule and organization of their workspace: “Great flexibility, more concentrated work,” and “Remote working increases the flexibility of the employee enormously in the organization of working hours and the place of work.”

Stress and Tension: For some, managing stress and controlling work was problematic: “On the whole I was satisfied but control of my work was stressful.”

Overall, comments indicate that most employees appreciated the benefits of remote work, such as flexibility, reduced travel time, and improved access to resources. However, areas for improvement remain, including technical support and ways to maintain company culture and communication while working remotely.

16. What were the biggest advantages of remote work for you during the pandemic? Please select up to three options.

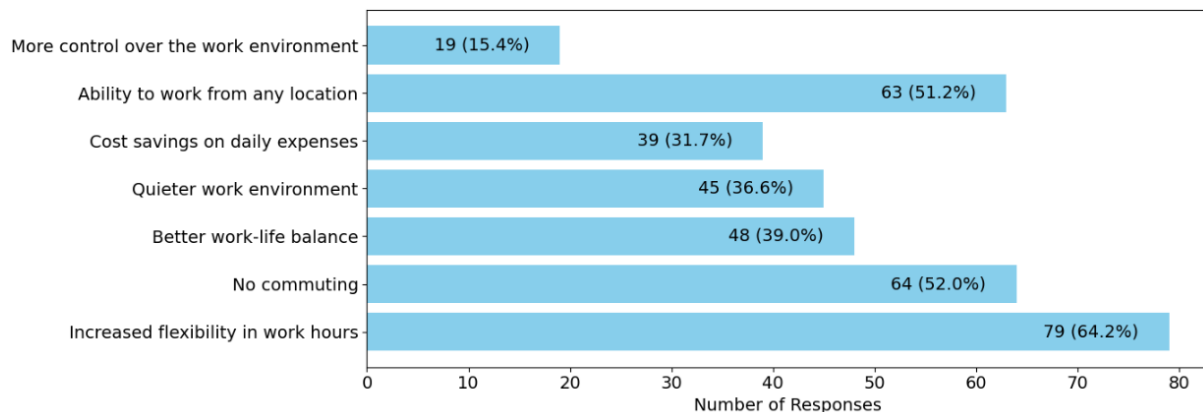


Figure 33. What were the biggest advantages of remote work for you during the pandemic?

In the context of the pandemic, employees identified several key advantages associated with remote working. The most significant advantage identified was the enhanced flexibility in working hours. Another significant benefit was the elimination of the necessity for daily commuting. Additionally, the capacity to work from any location and the enhanced work-life balance were also considered to be of significant importance. Furthermore, the opportunity to work in a more relaxed environment and to make savings on everyday expenses were identified as additional benefits. The aforementioned responses indicate that remote work has yielded numerous favourable outcomes for employees.

In addition to the primary advantages associated with remote work, employees also identified a number of ancillary benefits. Some respondents indicated that the reduction in management control had a positive impact on the enjoyment and efficiency of their work. Furthermore,

respondents indicated that remote work offers protection against infections and a reduction in the number of sick days due to a reduction in unnecessary contact with people. These factors contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the benefits of remote work for employees during the pandemic.

**17. What were the biggest challenges you faced with remote work during the pandemic?
Please select up to three options.**

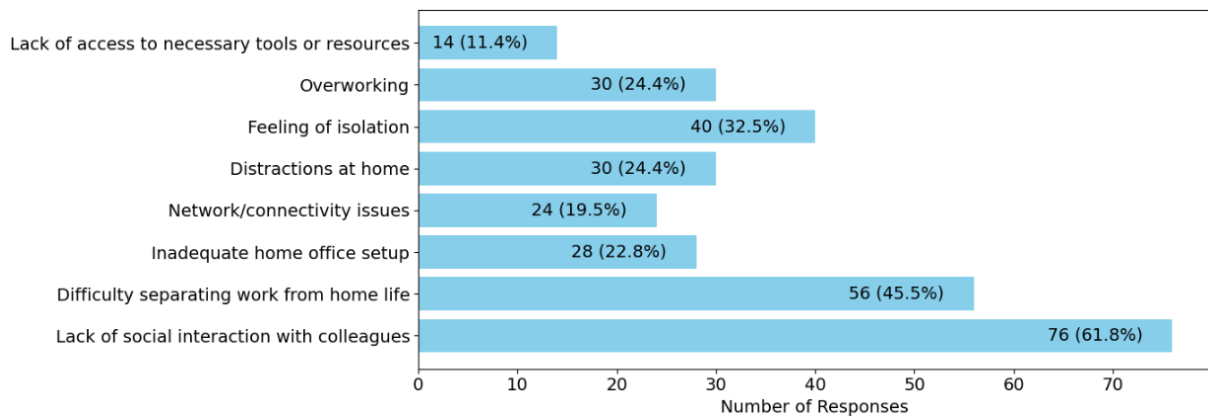


Figure 34. What were the biggest challenges you faced with remote work during the pandemic?

The primary difficulties encountered by employees when working remotely during the pandemic were a lack of social interaction with colleagues (61.8%) and the challenge of maintaining a clear distinction between work and personal life (45.5%). A further significant issue was the sense of isolation experienced by many (32.5%), which serves to underscore the importance of personal communication and teamwork in the work environment. Additional challenges included overwork and distractions at home (24.4% each), as well as internet connection problems (19.5%). Some employees observed deficiencies in their home offices and a lack of access to essential tools and resources (22.8% and 11.4%, respectively). These responses indicate that, despite the advantages of remote work, it has also presented considerable challenges, particularly in relation to maintaining clear boundaries between work and personal life and the lack of face-to-face interaction.

Problems with coordination and informal communication were also mentioned, such as “Short coordination, ‘corridor radio’ was somewhat lacking,” highlighting the lack of spontaneous interaction typical of an office environment. One employee noted the difficulty of adapting to work during a pandemic: “So learning to work during Covid was hard.”

Overall, these additional comments indicate that while many employees experienced challenges with remote work, for some it went smoothly after the initial onboarding.

18. How has remote work affected your perception of an ideal work environment?

Remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the perception of the ideal work environment among employees. Many respondents now prefer a hybrid work model, combining work from home and in the office. As one participant noted, “Now I prefer a hybrid work model, when I can mix working from home and in the office depending on schedule and health state.” This allows you to combine the advantages of both formats and adapt to individual needs.

The flexibility afforded by remote work has become an important aspect for many employees. This has allowed for a better work-life balance. One of the respondents emphasized: “It has highlighted the importance of flexibility, work-life balance and autonomy.” Employees now value the ability to manage their time and space, which improves their comfort and productivity. Another comment said: “Remote work has significantly reshaped my perception of an ideal work environment. I now value flexibility and the ability to tailor my workspace to my preferences, which enhances both comfort and productivity.”

Remote work has also allowed some employees to increase productivity and improve working conditions. As one participant noted: “I loved to wake up later and the time saved because of not spending it on the way to work, so working at office became less ‘ideal’ in my mind.” This comment highlights how not having to commute every day can save time and reduce stress.

However, despite its many benefits, remote working has also highlighted the importance of social interaction. Some employees have realized that face-to-face interactions with coworkers play a key role in their productivity and job satisfaction. One of the respondents noted: “That social contacts are more important than I had previously thought. Working from home for 1-2 days is perfect for me.” This comment highlights the need to combine remote work with the ability to meet regularly in the office.

Some employees noted that remote work has its disadvantages. For example, blurring the boundaries between work and personal life has become a problem for some of them. As one participant noted: “I cannot distinguish personal time from professional time. In my opinion, working from office really helps us maintain separate professional and personal lives.” This shows that despite the many benefits of remote work, it can create difficulties in setting clear boundaries between work and personal time.

In conclusion, remote work has significantly impacted the perception of an ideal work environment. Most employees now value flexibility and the ability to choose between working from home and in the office. This allows them to better adapt to their personal and professional needs. At the same time, the importance of social interaction and the need to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life remain critical aspects. Thus, a hybrid work model that combines elements of remote work and office presence appears to be the optimal solution for creating an ideal work environment in the post-pandemic world.

19. Are you currently in a hybrid work arrangement?

As illustrated in the chart, 69.2% of respondents are currently engaged in a hybrid work model, while 30.8% are not. This corroborates the preceding responses in which employees indicated a tendency for a hybrid work model. A significant number of respondents highlighted flexibility and the ability to combine work from home and in the office as crucial factors contributing to their satisfaction. The hybrid model enables employees to maintain a healthy work-life balance and engage in essential social interaction. These findings underscore the significance of the hybrid work model as an

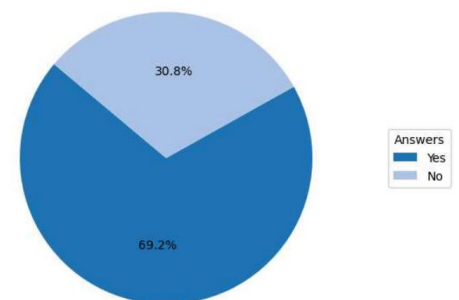


Figure 35. Are you currently in a hybrid work arrangement?

optimal format for contemporary work environments.

Section 5: Tools and Training

20. Rate the effectiveness of the following communication tools used during the pandemic:

In the context of the ongoing pandemic, a range of communication tools have been employed, with varying degrees of efficacy. The majority of employees identified email and video conferencing as the most effective communication tools. Instant messaging and project management tools also demonstrated notable efficacy, although opinions were divided. Internal portals and mobile apps were found to be useful, but their efficacy was not as pronounced as that of email and video conferencing. In general, these tools have facilitated employee connectivity and the management of work tasks while working remotely.

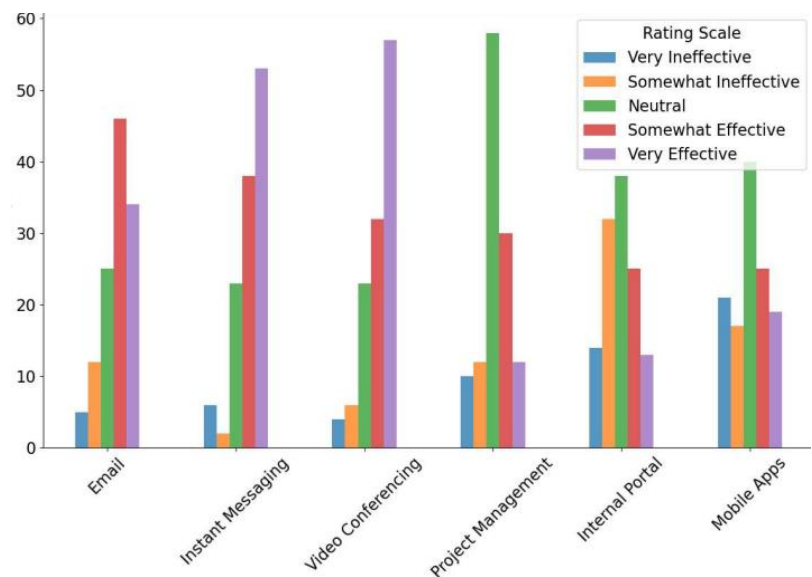


Figure 36. Rate the effectiveness of the following communication tools used during the pandemic

21. Have you received any formal training on using these communication tools effectively?

The chart shows that the majority of employees (77%) have not received formal training on how to effectively use communication tools. Only 23% of respondents received such training. This indicates that despite the widespread use of various tools for remote work, formal training was rare. Companies can improve employee training by offering more training on how to use these tools. This can improve employee efficiency and satisfaction in using communication technologies.

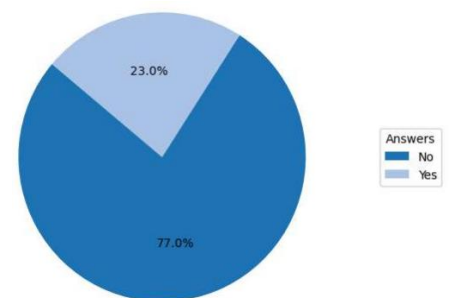
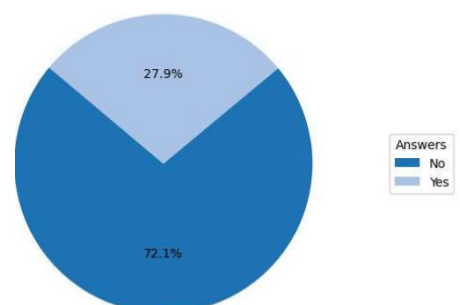


Figure 37. Have you received any formal training on using these communication tools effectively?

22. Did you feel that you needed this training to use the communication tools effectively?

The data illustrated in the chart indicates that the majority of employees (72.1%) did not perceive the necessity of training in order to effectively utilise communication tools. A mere 27.9% of

Figure 38. Did you feel that you needed this training to use the communication tools effectively?



respondents indicated a desire for such training. This indicates that a significant proportion of employees were able to utilise these tools with minimal guidance. Nevertheless, for those who encountered challenges, training could enhance their performance and comfort with technology.

Section 6: Impact on Employee Well-being

23. Rate your stress level during the pandemic.

The chart shows that employee stress levels varied during the pandemic, but the majority rated it at 3, which is a medium level of stress. Ratings of 4 and 5 were also quite common, indicating high levels of stress among a significant number of respondents. Fewer employees rated their stress at level 2, and very few at level 1, indicating low levels of stress. These data show that the pandemic has caused moderate to high stress for the majority of employees. It is important to consider these indicators when developing programs to support and improve employee well-being during periods of crisis.

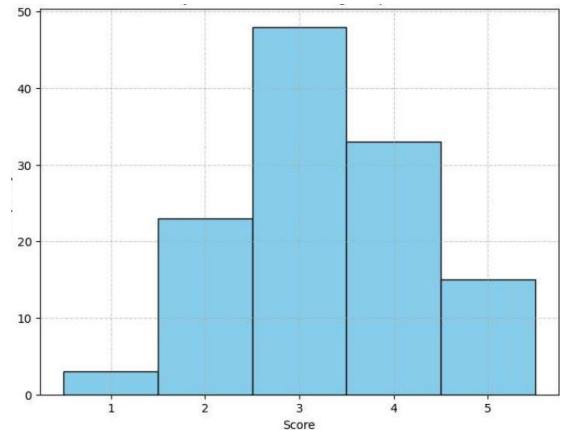


Figure 39. Rate your stress level during the pandemic.

24. Please explain the factors that contributed to your stress level during the pandemic. Please select up to three options.

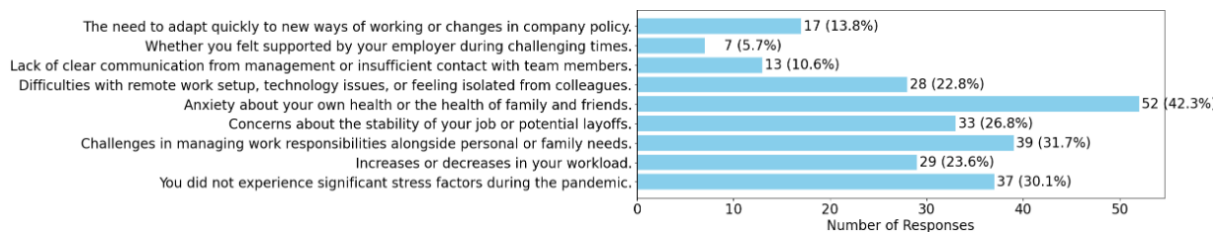


Figure 40. Please explain the factors that contributed to your stress level during the pandemic.

The ongoing pandemic has resulted in a multitude of factors that have collectively contributed to elevated stress levels among employees. The primary source of concern for the majority (42.3%) was the health of themselves and their loved ones. The prevalence of emotional stress related to health risks was significantly higher than that of other factors.

Furthermore, a considerable proportion of employees reported alterations in their workload. A further 23.6% of respondents indicated that fluctuations in workload were a source of additional stress. A notable proportion of respondents (31.7%) reported difficulty in managing their work responsibilities and personal needs, underscoring the challenges associated with maintaining a healthy work-life balance in a remote working environment.

Technical difficulties and feelings of isolation from colleagues were also identified as significant contributors to stress levels, as reported by 22.8% of employees. The inability to establish a fully functional work environment at home, coupled with the absence of face-to-face communication, served to exacerbate the situation. Furthermore, 26.8% of respondents expressed concern

regarding job security and the potential for layoffs, reflecting the economic uncertainty that has prevailed during the pandemic.

Nevertheless, 30.1% of respondents indicated that they did not encounter substantial stressors, which implies that a subset of employees were able to effectively adapt to the novel working circumstances. This fact highlights the necessity of a comprehensive approach to promoting employee well-being, considering the diverse origins of stress and the means of coping with them.

Some respondents mentioned “Personal stuff” and “No separation between private and work/university,” which highlights the difficulties in maintaining a balance between personal life and work, especially in remote work environments where boundaries are often blurred.

Lack of personal interaction with clients (“Difficulty with customer access / lack of personal exchange”) also caused stress, indicating the importance of personal interaction in some professional contexts.

Finally, some employees noted the need to quickly contact a colleague for rapid support, which was difficult in a remote work environment (“The need to quickly contact a colleague for rapid support and not wait until he or she is available”).

These additional comments highlight the complexity and multiple layers of stressors experienced by employees and further emphasise the importance of comprehensive support for employees during the pandemic.

25. How has the quality of communication within your company impacted your job satisfaction?

The diagram illustrates the relationship between the quality of communication within the company and employee job satisfaction. The majority of respondents (48.4%) indicated that a positive quality of communication had a favourable impact on their job satisfaction. This emphasises the significance of implementing effective communication strategies to sustain employee morale and motivation.

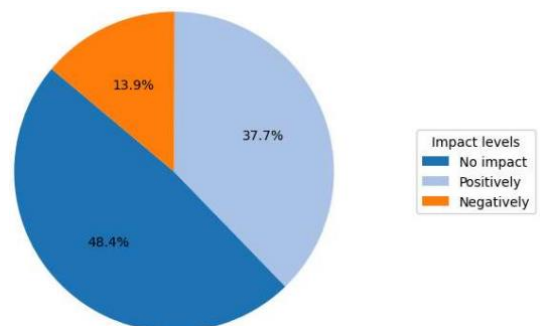


Figure 41. How has the quality of communication within your company impacted your job satisfaction?

Nevertheless, 37.7% of employees indicated that the quality of communication did not exert a notable influence on their satisfaction. This may be because for these employees, other factors, such as the work environment or work-life balance, play a more significant role.

In spite of that, 13.9% of respondents indicated that the quality of communication had a detrimental impact on their job satisfaction. This highlights the necessity for the implementation of enhanced communication procedures in certain organisations, in order to avert a diminution in employee motivation and productivity.

The results demonstrate that the quality of communication within an organisation is a significant

determinant of employee job satisfaction, and that it is a factor that requires consistent attention and improvement.

26. Please describe how the quality of communication has impacted your job satisfaction. Please select up to three options.



Figure 42. Please describe how the quality of communication has impacted your job satisfaction.

A critical examination of the influence of communication quality on job satisfaction reveals several pivotal considerations. Firstly, 43.1% of respondents indicated that effective communication facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities, which notably enhanced their job satisfaction. This emphasises the significance of transparent and coherent communication between management and employees in order to facilitate success.

Effective communication was also found to contribute to improved work processes, reduced stress levels and increased job satisfaction, as confirmed by 30.1% of participants. A further 24.4% of respondents indicated that good communication facilitates interaction with colleagues and enhances the enjoyment derived from shared tasks.

Conversely, 27.6% of employees indicated that a lack of information or misunderstandings frequently resulted in stress and confusion, which had a detrimental impact on their job satisfaction. This illustrates the significance of preventing misunderstandings and guaranteeing the prompt and precise dissemination of information to all members of the team.

Some respondents (18.7%) observed that effective communication from management enhanced their sense of value and connection to the company. Nevertheless, 13.8% of employees reported a sense of disconnection from their team due to inadequate communication, underscoring the necessity for enhanced communication within the company.

Finally, 25.2% of respondents indicated that the quality of communication had no significant impact on their job satisfaction. This may indicate that other factors play a more significant role for these employees.

In conclusion, the data substantiates the assertion that transparent and efficacious communication is a pivotal determinant of enhanced employee job satisfaction. Conversely, deficiencies in information and miscommunication can have a deleterious impact on employee morale and productivity.

27. Would you prefer to continue working remotely, return to the office, or a combination of both in a hybrid model?

The chart shows that the majority of employees (77.0%) prefer a hybrid work model, combining office and remote work. This confirms previously identified preferences among employees who value flexibility and the ability to choose between working from home and in the office.

15.6% of respondents would prefer to continue to work completely remotely, which also indicates a significant number of people who found remote work convenient and effective.

Only 3.3% of employees would prefer to return to the office entirely, indicating a minority who find office work more productive or comfortable.

A small percentage of respondents (4.1%) were unsure of their preference, which may indicate uncertainty or a desire for flexibility in the future.

These data highlight the value of a hybrid work model for most employees, combining the benefits of both formats and allowing them to adapt to personal and professional needs.

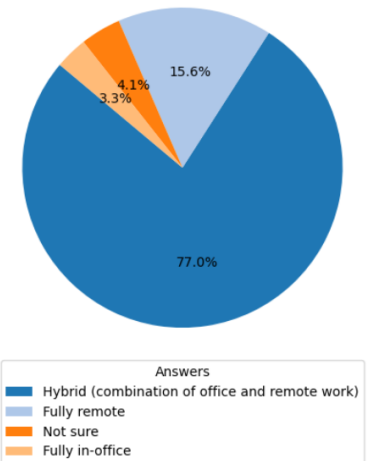


Figure 43. Would you prefer to continue working remotely, return to the office, or a combination of both in a hybrid model?

28. How should the company improve or adjust its remote or hybrid work policies to better support employees? Please select up to three options.

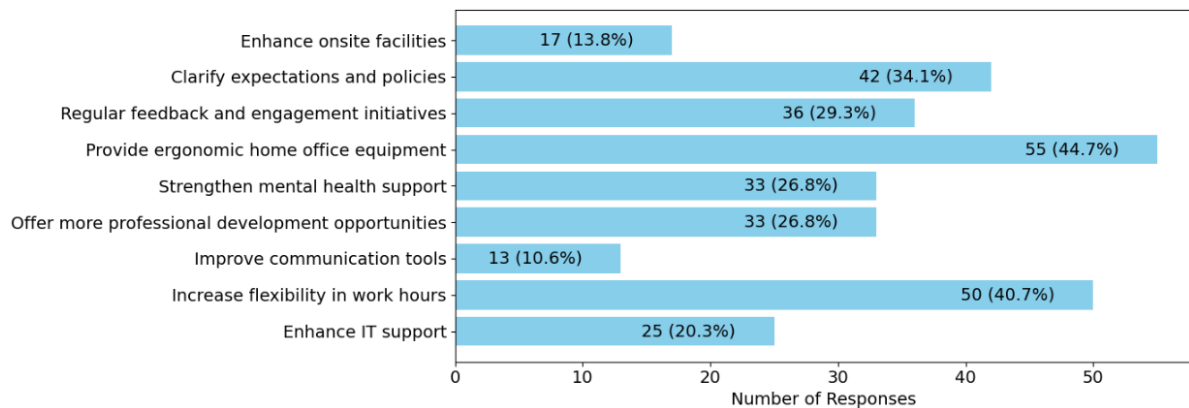


Figure 44. How should the company improve or adjust its remote or hybrid work policies to better support employees?

In examining the potential avenues for enhancement or adaptation of remote or hybrid work policies, employees have identified a number of pivotal areas.

The provision of ergonomic equipment for use in the home office was identified as the most important aspect by 44.7% of respondents. This underscores the necessity of establishing a conducive and efficacious work-from-home setting.

Furthermore, a considerable proportion of respondents (40.7%) identified flexibility in working hours as a significant factor. Greater flexibility facilitates a more optimal work-life balance, which

has a beneficial effect on satisfaction and productivity.

A total of 34.1% of respondents highlighted the significance of transparent and effective communication of expectations and policies. This will assist employees in comprehending their obligations and the expectations of the organisation, thereby facilitating more effective work.

Furthermore, 29.3% of participants identified regular feedback and employee engagement initiatives as important factors. Such practices facilitate the maintenance of communication channels and the enhancement of organisational culture, particularly in the context of remote work environments.

Mental health support and opportunities for professional development were identified as important by 26.8% of respondents. This underscores the necessity for a comprehensive approach to employee well-being that encompasses both physical and mental health.

Other significant areas for improvement include enhancing IT support (20.3%), optimising communication tools (10.6%) and improving the conditions of office workspaces (13.8%).

The data demonstrate that for organisations to successfully transition to hybrid or remote working, it is essential to consider the diverse needs of employees, providing both physical comfort and psychological support.

In addition to the suggested options, employees also provided their own answers to the question of how the company could improve or adapt its remote or hybrid work policies.

Some employees suggested salary increases: “Pay more money,” indicating that financial support remains an important factor for motivation and job satisfaction.

Others noted that they were quite satisfied with the current working conditions: “Everything is fine” and “find the current framework conditions quite acceptable and also compatible with private life.” This shows that some employees are happy with their current hybrid or remote work arrangements.

Some spoke in favour of greater flexibility in the use of home offices and relaxation of existing rules: “More flexibility in the use of HO (relax 3/2 rule)” and “Flexible organisation of when and how often you are in the office. No compulsory regulations.” This highlights the need for individualised scheduling and a reduction in strict mandatory rules.

An opinion was also expressed about the personal responsibility of employees: “Every employee also bears responsibility for themselves.” This points to the importance of self-management and autonomy in the work process.

These additional comments highlight the diversity of employee needs and preferences, highlighting the need for a flexible and customised approach to remote and hybrid work policies.

29. Do you feel that your company values employee well-being?

As illustrated in the chart, 76.2% of employees hold the view that their company places a high value on the well-being of its employees, while 23.8% of employees hold the opposite view. The majority of employees perceive that their company demonstrates a commitment to their well-being, which has a beneficial impact on their motivation and job satisfaction. Nevertheless, nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that their company does not allocate sufficient attention to their well-being. This highlights the necessity for enhancements to be made to the corporate employee support programmes and for the company to demonstrate greater transparency in regard to its actions in the field of employee care.

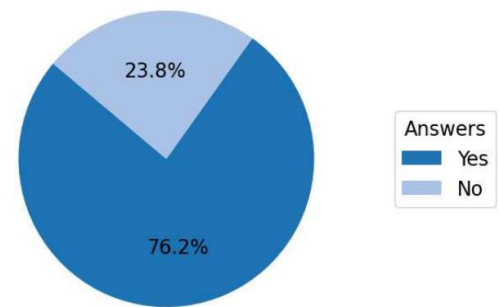


Figure 45. Do you feel that your company values employee well-being?

Section 7: Future Preferences and Improvements

30. What specific improvements would you suggest for enhancing communication within your company?

The question of what specific communication improvements employees would suggest to improve interactions within the company generated varied and interesting responses. Analysis of these responses allows us to identify several key areas and proposals that can significantly affect the quality of corporate communication.

One of the most common themes was increasing transparency. Employees noted that they lack clarity in communications, especially regarding important decisions and the state of the company. For example, one of the respondents suggested “More transparency about layoffs” and “More transparency in critical decision processes.” Another noted the need for “Honest statements without hidden agendas,” which emphasizes the importance of open and honest communication.

Regular and structured meetings were another important theme. Staff suggested organizing more regular meetings, both formal and informal. There were proposals for organizing weekly or bi-weekly meetings: “Short bi-weekly meeting with all employees in which an update on the company’s goals is given,” as well as more frequent events and meetings in the office: “More offline meetings or team buildings.”

Some employees emphasized the importance of improving employee feedback and engagement. For example, it was proposed to conduct “Pulse checks/engagement surveys” and create a system for anonymous feedback: “Set up a channel in Teams where you can write anonymously for open communication.” This can encourage more open and honest conversations within the company.

The need to improve communication tools and train employees to use them was also highlighted. Some noted the importance of training: “Training on Tools and training people to communicate effectively,” and improving tools: “Improve all communication tools in a company.” There were also proposals to reduce the number of different communication tools used to simplify the communication process: “Decreasing the number of different communication tools used simultaneously, unifying the flow of communication.”

The themes of flexibility and supporting employee well-being also did not go unnoticed. Some respondents suggested increasing flexibility in work hours: “Increase flexibility in work hours,” and providing employees with the necessary equipment for a home office: “Provide ergonomic home office equipment.” There were also references to the importance of taking care of mental health: “Strengthen mental health support.”

We also paid attention to the topic of personal communication, which has become less accessible in conditions of remote work. Some employees suggested more personal meetings and interactions: “Talk more with each other (in person) instead of just Teams Messages,” and organise “One day a month where all employees should be present, e.g. joint barbecue at lunchtime.”

In conclusion, most employee suggestions revolve around improving transparency, meeting regularity and structure, improving tools and training, increasing flexibility and concern for employee well-being. These suggestions highlight the importance of open, honest and structured communication to maintain high levels of employee satisfaction and productivity. Companies that take these suggestions into account will be able to create a more favourable environment for their employees, which in turn will have a positive impact on their efficiency and loyalty.

SWOT-Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the work processes and organisational culture of companies around the world. With many employees forced to work remotely, organisations have faced many challenges in maintaining effective communication, ensuring employee productivity and well-being. In order to gain a better understanding of these challenges and how to overcome them, a survey was conducted among employees of various organisations.

The aim of the study was to identify the key factors that affected employee performance and satisfaction during the pandemic. Using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis methodology, we analysed the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current challenges and prospects in corporate communication and management.

The study took into account aspects such as the skill level and age composition of employees, their perceptions of the quality of communication, and the impact of remote working on their productivity and morale. The results of the study allow us to highlight both positive aspects and achievements, as well as existing issues and risks that require attention and further improvement.

Below is a table with a brief description of the main findings of the study, which will help to better understand current trends and outline ways to further develop and improve business processes in the new environment.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Highly rated clarity and effectiveness of communications. • Quick adaptation to digital tools (SharePoint, Teams, Trello). • Flexibility and support for remote work. • Increased productivity and comfort when	• Gender imbalance and lack of older age groups. • Communication problems during a pandemic. • Employee isolation and information overload. • Problems with technical training and

working remotely. • Effective use of email and video conferencing. • The positive impact of quality communication on employee satisfaction. • Transparency and employee engagement. • Regular meetings to improve coordination. • Willingness of employees to suggest improvements.	personal interaction. • Difficulty establishing boundaries between work and personal life. • Lack of formal training. • High levels of stress among employees. • Opacity and lack of honesty in communications. • Lack of regular meetings and feedback.
Opportunities	Threats
• Development of vocational training programs. • Promoting gender equality. • Introducing regular feedback and communication training. • Adapt to digital platforms to improve efficiency. • Development of hybrid working models. • Training in the use of communication tools. • Implementation of mental health support programs. • Improving work-life balance. • Introducing greater transparency in decision making. • Organize regular meetings to improve coordination.	• Rapid technological change requires constant learning. • Lack of experience among young workers in crisis situations. • Communication problems reduce productivity and morale. • Working from home for long periods of time weakens corporate culture. • Lack of training on how to use technology increases stress. • Economic uncertainty and fear of layoffs. • Lack of personal interaction reduces the quality of work. • The lack of transparency and lack of regular updates increases dissatisfaction.

Table 8. SWOT-Analysis**Strengths:**

The survey included highly skilled young professionals aged 25-34, highlighting the dynamic and innovative nature of the workforce, particularly in research, development and information technology. This gives companies the advantage of an adaptable and skilled workforce that can effectively innovate and streamline processes.

One of the most positive findings is that the majority of employees rated the clarity and effectiveness of communication within teams highly, with scores of 4 and 5. This suggests that despite the potential challenges associated with the transition to remote working and other changes in the workplace environment, many teams have been able to maintain an excellent level of mutual understanding and information support. A high level of perceived effectiveness of communication within teams indicates the presence of well-established communication channels and adaptive leadership.

During the pandemic, organisations showed great adaptability by moving to digital platforms and tools that ensured smooth operations and effective collaboration in the new environment. The rapid adoption of tools such as SharePoint, Teams and Trello helped to keep communications clear and responsive. Employees found that information reached them in a timely and complete manner,

which was particularly valuable during a crisis. This adaptability underlined management's willingness to innovate and overcome challenges, helping to minimise waste and maintain productivity. Support for remote working with the necessary resources was also highlighted, making the transition to working from home easier for employees.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has demonstrated not only the ability of companies to quickly adapt to change, but has also shown significant benefits in managing resources and maintaining operational efficiency. One of the employees emphasized: "I was paid remote work bonus, I could choose to work from home or office," which confirms the flexibility in approaches to organizing the work process. This mobility and adaptability ensure that work can continue without loss of productivity, with employees reporting, "Work was more efficient remotely," indicating increased productivity due to an optimized work environment and reduced commuting times.

Remote work has demonstrated significant benefits, confirmed by positive employee feedback. Most value increased flexibility in work schedules and the ability to combine work from home and the office, which is important for achieving an optimal balance between professional and personal life. Employees highlight how remote work has improved their productivity and comfort, reducing the stress of daily commuting and providing the ability to tailor the workspace to personal preferences: "Remote work has significantly reshaped my perception of an ideal work environment. I now value flexibility and the ability to tailor my workspace to my preferences, which enhances both comfort and productivity."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies successfully implemented a variety of communication tools that were instrumental in keeping employees connected and managing remote working. Email and video conferencing were highlighted as the most effective tools, providing a reliable and accessible platform for day-to-day interaction. Instant messaging and project management tools were also highly effective, although their ratings were mixed, highlighting their importance in supporting timely communication and task coordination.

During the pandemic, companies have shown significant flexibility and adaptability in their communication strategies, which has had a positive impact on employee morale and satisfaction. Most respondents noted that the quality of communication in their companies had a beneficial effect on their job satisfaction. In particular, 48.4% of respondents emphasized that clear and timely communication from management supported their morale and motivation. One employee noted: "Quality communication has highlighted the importance of flexibility, work-life balance and autonomy," which emphasizes the importance of transparency and tailoring communications to maintain work-life balance. These results demonstrate the high effectiveness of existing communication procedures and their ability to maintain productivity and a positive work environment even in times of crisis. Companies were able to quickly adopt digital communication tools such as video conferencing and instant messaging, which helped maintain communication and coordination among employees.

The quality of communication has a significant impact on employee satisfaction. The study found that 43.1% of respondents believe that effective communication leads to a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities, which significantly increases their job satisfaction. This highlights the importance of transparent and consistent communication between management and employees

to achieve success. In addition, 30.1% of participants noted that good communication improves work processes, reduces stress and increases job satisfaction. One respondent stated, “Good communication facilitates interaction with colleagues and enhances the enjoyment derived from shared tasks,” which confirms the importance of effective communication in improving morale and productivity. Also, a significant number of employees (24.4%) noted that high-quality communication helps improve interaction with colleagues and increase the pleasure of working together.

One of the key strengths is the willingness of staff to suggest specific improvements to enhance the quality of corporate communications. This indicates a high level of employee involvement and interest in improving work processes. Transparency was one of the most frequently mentioned issues by employees. They pointed to the need for greater clarity in communication, especially regarding important decisions and the state of the business. This highlights that employees value openness and honesty, which can build trust in management and improve morale. Regular and structured meetings were also highlighted as an important aspect that could facilitate better communication and coordination. For example, the suggestion of short fortnightly updates on company objectives communicates the employees' desire to be kept up to date with the company's current affairs and plans.

Weaknesses:

Despite the strengths, there is a gender imbalance, with men making up 59% of the total respondents, indicating potential missed opportunities in terms of gender diversity. This may limit the company's development prospects as the potential of the workforce is not fully utilised. In addition, the lack of representation of older age groups may affect the level of experience and management skills in the team.

More than 52% of employees experienced communication difficulties during the pandemic, highlighting the significant barriers that exist, particularly in times of crisis. Despite the overall positive assessment, instances were identified where communication was not clear or consistent enough, particularly in communicating key health and safety information, which could contribute to stress and uncertainty among staff.

However, the analysis also revealed key communication weaknesses such as employee isolation and information overload. These challenges were particularly acute due to the lack of informal communication and face-to-face interactions that are natural in an office environment. Such challenges point to the need to plan communication strategies more carefully to ensure that every team member feels involved and informed. Inconsistent messages from different levels of management and a lack of clarity in key communications may also have contributed to lower overall levels of engagement and job satisfaction.

However, remote working has also brought with it a number of challenges, particularly in the areas of technical training and personal interaction. Problems associated with limited technical capabilities became noticeable when employees were faced with a lack of equipment to perform complex tasks. As one of the engineers noted: “It's highly important to access multiple displays and huge work table. This is heavily restricted as I work from home,” which highlights the imbalance between the office and home work environment. In addition, nostalgia for office

communication and the separation of personal and work space also influences the general perception of remote work: "I really miss separating home and work chores, plus communicating with people not through headset and camera."

Remote work has revealed a number of weaknesses associated with the need for a clear distinction between working and personal time. Some employees have difficulty setting boundaries, which can lead to overtime and increased stress. Problems with social interaction also remain significant; as one of the respondents noted: "That social contacts are more important than I had previously thought." A lack of personal interaction reduces overall job satisfaction and can weaken company culture.

The majority of employees (77%) have not received any formal training, which may indicate potential challenges in understanding and using these technologies to their full potential. This lack of training could lead to a misunderstanding of how the tools work and, as a result, reduce overall productivity and job satisfaction among employees.

The pandemic has also exposed significant weaknesses in stress management among employees. The data showed that the majority of respondents rated their stress level as 3, indicating a moderate level of stress, while a significant number of employees experienced high stress (ratings of 4 and 5). Top sources of stress included concerns about the health of themselves and their loved ones (42.3%), changes in workload (23.6%), and difficulties managing work-life balance (31.7%). These factors highlight the need to strengthen employee support for mental health and workload management. Technical difficulties and feelings of isolation also contributed to the situation. As one employee noted: "Difficulty with customer access / lack of personal exchange," indicating the difficulties associated with the lack of personal interaction with clients and colleagues, which is especially important in some professional contexts.

However, lack of information or misunderstandings often led to stress and confusion, negatively impacting job satisfaction for 27.6% of respondents. This highlights the importance of preventing misunderstandings and ensuring that information is disseminated to all team members in a timely and accurate manner. Additionally, 13.8% of employees felt disconnected from the team due to inadequate communication, highlighting the need to improve internal communication procedures. Finally, 25.2% of respondents indicated that the quality of communication did not have a significant impact on their job satisfaction, which may indicate that other factors such as the work environment or work-life balance play a more important role.

However, current communication processes have significant shortcomings. Employees cited a lack of transparency and honesty in management communication. Comments such as "More transparency about redundancies" and "Honest statements without hidden agendas" highlight the lack of trust and clarity around critical decisions. The lack of regular and structured meetings is also a weakness, as it can mean that employees are not well informed about the company's current affairs and goals. A lack of feedback and interaction was also identified as a significant problem. For example, the suggestion to conduct "pulse checks/engagement surveys" and to create a system for anonymous feedback indicates the need for improved channels for employee views and suggestions.

Opportunities:

Companies can take advantage of the current high level of educational attainment of their workforce to develop and implement in-depth professional development and training programmes to help keep skills up to date in the face of ongoing technological change. In addition, actively promoting gender equality can improve corporate culture and enhance the attractiveness of companies as employers, helping to attract talent.

Communication challenges provide opportunities to further improve internal communication. For example, introducing regular feedback and strengthening communication skills training can help improve understanding and change management. Adapting to digital platforms and improving their efficiency can also lead to better coordination and a smoother flow of information.

Identifying weaknesses opens the way to significant opportunities for improvement. A greater focus on training and developing employees' communication skills can help them adapt better to using digital tools. Organisations should consider introducing regular virtual meetings and events to strengthen company culture and reduce feelings of isolation. It is also important to develop clear and consistent communication protocols for all levels of management to avoid misunderstandings and improve internal coordination.

The pandemic era has opened new avenues for organizations to develop flexible working models. Remote work shows the potential to further expand the ability of staff to work from anywhere in the world, which can significantly improve work-life balance and reduce companies' operating costs. Opportunities to create more resilient and adaptable workflows can also be realized through continued integration and improvement of technology solutions.

The transition to a hybrid work model opens up new opportunities for organizations to optimize work processes and create more flexible conditions for employees. This allows companies to adapt to the individual needs of employees and helps retain talent by offering them a choice between home and office work. Maintaining a hybrid working model can encourage innovation and improve employee engagement as employees feel more supported and understood by management.

Providing training in the use of communication tools can significantly improve their effectiveness and make it easier for employees to adapt to working remotely. Improved training will help employees better understand the capabilities of modern technology, which in turn can lead to increased job satisfaction and productivity.

The pandemic presents significant opportunities for companies to review and improve their employee support programs. Given that 72.1% of respondents did not feel the need for additional training on the use of communication tools, companies can use this opportunity to develop training and professional development programs. For example, providing training on the effective use of digital tools and technologies can significantly improve work processes and reduce stress levels. It's also important to consider that 22.8% of respondents experienced technical difficulties, highlighting the need to improve technical support and ensure employees have the resources they need to work from home. Implementing mental health support programs and initiatives to improve work-life balance can also help reduce stress and increase job satisfaction.

The transition to a hybrid working model opens up new opportunities to improve employee satisfaction. The study found that 77.0% of employees prefer a hybrid work model, combining

work from home and in the office, confirming previously identified preferences of employees who value flexibility and the ability to choose between different work formats. One of the respondents noted: “Now I prefer a hybrid work model, when I can mix working from home and in the office depending on schedule and health state,” which emphasizes the importance of an individual approach to organizing the work process. It also allows companies to adapt to employee needs and improve job satisfaction. Additionally, 44.7% of respondents indicated the importance of providing ergonomic home office equipment, highlighting the need to create a comfortable and efficient work-from-home environment.

There are significant opportunities to improve corporate communication processes. Introducing greater transparency in decision-making and regular updates on the state of the business can significantly improve employee trust and satisfaction. Organising regular meetings, both formal and informal, can improve communication and coordination between different levels and departments of the organisation. For example, suggesting weekly or fortnightly updates on company objectives can promote a better understanding of overall goals and objectives. Improving communication tools and training employees to use them effectively are also important aspects that can improve efficiency and reduce stress. Employees noted the importance of training: “Training on tools and training people to communicate effectively”, emphasising the need to develop communication skills. Flexibility in working hours and the provision of ergonomic home office equipment should also be considered, as these can improve the working environment and increase employee satisfaction.

Threats:

Rapid developments in technology require constant updating of professional skills, putting workers at risk of becoming obsolete unless systematic and effective training is provided. In addition, a predominance of young workers can lead to a lack of resilience and experience in dealing with crisis situations, which can affect the performance and resilience of companies in difficult economic conditions.

Communication problems in times of crisis, such as a pandemic, can threaten not only productivity but also the overall well-being of employees. Poor or untimely communication can lead to misunderstandings and low morale, especially in environments where employees are physically isolated from each other. These threats require careful communication strategies to avoid negative consequences for organisational culture and operational efficiency.

The main threats relate to the long-term consequences of inadequate communication, including the potential for reduced morale and increased staff turnover. Inadequate attention to the communication needs and safety of employees can lead to a deterioration in the company's reputation and reduced confidence in management. In the long term, this can weaken the company's market position and reduce its competitiveness, especially if communication problems prevent rapid adaptation to changes in the external environment.

However, prolonged work from home may contribute to new threats, such as a decline in company culture and weakening team spirit due to a lack of face-to-face interaction. “The need to quickly contact a colleague for rapid support and not wait until he or she is available” reflects one of the problems of remote work – delays in communication and interaction. Long-term threats also

include the risk of increased stress levels and possible burnout due to unclear separation of work and personal time, which can negatively impact employees' overall well-being.

However, maintaining a balance between remote and office work presents certain challenges. The need to provide equally effective infrastructure and support in both the office and remote environments requires significant investment. There is a risk that some employees may feel alienated or less engaged unless adequate ways are found to maintain company culture and team cohesion. Additionally, the constant need to adapt to changing conditions can lead to fatigue and decreased overall productivity.

Without proper training, employees may not realise the full potential of the tools available to them, which can lead to less effective communication and task management. This can also lead to increased stress levels among employees, who may feel overwhelmed by their inability to properly use technology to streamline their work processes. In addition, a lack of formal training can leave an organisation vulnerable to technology failures and data security issues, as employees may not know how to properly handle company information.

The main threats involve long-term exposure of employees to high levels of stress, which can lead to burnout and decreased productivity. Economic uncertainty and fear of layoffs, mentioned by 26.8% of respondents, also pose a significant threat to employee stability and motivation. One employee noted: "Stupid, political decision," highlighting the negative impact of external political decisions on working conditions and stability. A lack of personal interaction with colleagues and clients can also lead to lower quality work and a deteriorating company culture. As one employee noted: "The need to quickly contact a colleague for rapid support and not wait until he or she is available," which indicates the difficulties associated with coordination and efficiency of interaction in a remote environment.

The main threats relate to the possible negative consequences of insufficient communication and support for employee well-being. A lack of transparency and consistency in communications can lead to stress and decreased motivation. Also, 26.8% of respondents expressed concerns about job security and possible layoffs, reflecting economic uncertainty and its impact on employee morale. A lack of personal interaction with colleagues and clients can also weaken company culture and reduce the quality of work.

The main threats relate to the potential lack of implementation of proposed improvements, which can lead to further erosion of employee trust and satisfaction. A lack of transparency and regular updates can exacerbate dissatisfaction and misunderstanding among staff. For example, if suggestions such as "more transparency about redundancies" and "more transparency in critical decision-making processes" are not taken into account, this can lead to increased stress and decreased motivation. Lack of feedback and interaction can also lead to poor culture and performance. Employees may feel isolated and undervalued, which will have a negative impact on their productivity and loyalty.

Conclusion to Chapter 3

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented significant challenges to companies, requiring dramatic changes in the way they work and communicate. A study conducted among employees of various organisations revealed key aspects that influenced the effectiveness of communication and the overall well-being of employees during this difficult period.

One of the main findings of the study is the high adaptability of young professionals, who have shown the ability to quickly adapt to changes, introduce new technologies and maintain productivity. The shift to digital platforms such as SharePoint, Teams and Trello has played a key role in maintaining effective communication and task coordination despite working remotely. Employees rated the clarity and efficiency of communication within teams highly, indicating the presence of well-established communication channels and adaptive leadership.

However, the study also revealed significant challenges associated with communication during the pandemic. More than half of respondents noted communication difficulties, highlighting the need to improve internal communication strategies. Problems with employee isolation, information overload and lack of informal communication were particularly acute. These challenges require the development of more structured and transparent communication processes so that every employee feels involved and informed.

Remote work has also highlighted the imbalance between office and home work environments, which is particularly noticeable in technical professions. Many employees reported a lack of equipment and space to work effectively from home, which reduced their productivity and increased stress. In addition, the lack of personal communication with colleagues and clients had a negative impact on corporate culture and team spirit.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of regular training and professional development. A lack of formal training on how to use new technologies and tools has led to decreased productivity and increased stress among employees. Companies must place greater emphasis on developing training and support programs to help employees adapt to new conditions and make the most of available resources.

In an environment of uncertainty and rapid technological advancement, companies must strive to create a flexible and inclusive work environment. The development of hybrid work models that combine work from home and the office can significantly improve employee work-life balance, increase employee satisfaction and retain talent.

Overall, the results of the study highlight the importance of continuous development and adaptation of corporate processes to changing conditions. Companies that can effectively address identified challenges and seize emerging opportunities will be better prepared to overcome future challenges and strengthen their position in the marketplace. Streamlining internal communications, improving employee training and support programs, and creating a flexible and inclusive work environment are key factors for success in the new normal.

4. Strategic Recommendations for Enhancing Communication

As part of the study, a survey of staff was conducted to identify the key aspects of their daily work that they face in the post-pandemic reality. Analysis of the survey data showed that, despite adaptation to changes in the work process, there are a number of issues that reduce employee efficiency and satisfaction. The main ones are the ambiguity of communication processes, the inadequacy of remote working infrastructure and the lack of support from the organisation in terms of professional and personal development.

The aim of this section of recommendations is to develop specific proposals for optimising the company's communication strategy, improving working conditions in hybrid and remote working formats, and increasing the level of employee engagement and well-being. The recommendations are based on the theoretical data discussed in the earlier chapters of the thesis and the analysis of employees' responses, which ensures their relevance and practical value in solving the problems identified.

The study found that the key internal communication issues identified by employees correlated with theoretical beliefs about the importance of effective communication practices in the organisational context. Organisational communication theory, discussed at the outset, emphasises that clarity, consistency and the two-way nature of communication are key to achieving high levels of employee engagement and satisfaction. These aspects were confirmed in the responses of the survey participants, who indicated a lack of transparency and consistency in management communication.

In addition, the results of the analysis showed that ineffective use of digital communication tools reduces overall work productivity, which is also reflected in the theory of media saturation. According to this theory, the choice of communication media should match the complexity of the communication tasks in order to ensure their most effective solution. In practice, this is confirmed by the need to increase the level of training of employees in the use of modern communication technologies.

Communication Strategies

1. Standardisation of communication processes:

Purpose: To create consistent standards for all types of communication across the organisation to improve the clarity and predictability of communication between employees and management.

Actions:

- Develop and implement clear guidelines for corporate style and tone of communication that will be mandatory for all internal and external communications.
- Establishing procedures and checklists to standardise regular reports, email

correspondence and presentations.

- Ensuring availability of all communication standards through the internal company portal for employee reference and training.

2. Regular training:

Purpose: Increase the level of communication skills of employees and confidence in using modern technologies for communication.

Actions:

- Organisation of periodic training and master classes on effective communication, including aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, public speaking and negotiations.
- Introduction of training programs on working with corporate communication platforms, such as CRM systems, internal chats and video conferencing.
- Develop individual training plans for employees based on their current skills and development goals.

Support for flexible working

1. Formalising flexible work policies:

Purpose: Create a structured and transparent system that will allow employees to work effectively in hybrid and remote formats.

Actions:

- Developing a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for flexible working, including hours of work, expected standards of availability and responsibility.
- Introducing clear instructions for organising a workspace at home, including recommendations for security and maintaining data confidentiality.
- Conducting workshops for managers on managing remote teams, teaching the skills needed to keep teams productive and engaged.

2. Technological support:

Purpose: Provide employees with everything they need to work effectively and smoothly from anywhere in the world.

Actions:

- Select and implement reliable tools for remote work, including video conferencing, document collaboration, and project management software.
- Ensuring all employees have the necessary equipment such as laptops, monitors, communication devices and VPN access to securely connect to the corporate network.
- Create a 24/7 help desk to help employees resolve technical issues and issues related to the use of technology for remote work.

Improving employee well-being

1. Health support programs:

Purpose: Supporting and improving employees' psychological and physical health, which is key to increasing overall productivity and reducing absenteeism.

Actions:

- Development of comprehensive programs, including access to consultations with psychologists, organisation of regular fitness classes and seminars on healthy eating.

- Introducing flexible working hours to maintain a balance between personal life and work, which helps reduce stress levels.
- Organising regular medical examinations at the workplace so that employees can pay attention to their health without interrupting their work responsibilities.

2. Regular satisfaction surveys:

Purpose: Systematically assessing employee satisfaction and well-being to identify potential problems early and take action to resolve them.

Actions:

- Development and implementation of structured questionnaires that will collect data on employee well-being, their attitudes towards the work environment and health promotion activities.
- Introducing anonymous surveys to ensure honesty and openness in employee responses.
- Regular analysis of survey results followed by discussion at meetings with management to develop actions to improve working conditions.

Cultural initiatives

1. Building a corporate culture:

Purpose: Creating a strong, inclusive and motivating company culture that promotes employee development and satisfaction.

Actions:

- Development and implementation of team building programs aimed at improving interaction between employees and the formation of positive interpersonal relationships. Examples may include organising corporate sporting events, personal development seminars and creative workshops.
- Conduct regular company events, such as family days and celebrations of significant company achievements, to foster a sense of belonging and loyalty to the company.
- Incorporate rewards and recognition for outstanding work achievements and contributions into the corporate culture, which will support the motivation and desire for success among employees.

2. Transparency and openness:

Purpose: Strengthening a culture of openness and transparency, which will increase employee trust in management and involvement in decision-making processes.

Actions:

- Organising regular company-wide meetings (so-called “All-hands meetings”), at which management discusses strategic plans, the current state of affairs and answers employee questions. This will help employees feel more informed and involved in the life of the company.
- Develop feedback mechanisms, including anonymous surveys and suggestion boxes, so that employees can freely express their ideas and comments without fear of negative consequences.
- Introducing “open doors” among managers at various levels so that each employee can personally discuss their ideas or problems, thereby improving horizontal and vertical communication within the company.

Recommendations' Implementation

Standardisation of Communication Processes:

- **Steps:** Develop standards and guidelines; conduct workshops for managers and employees.
- **Timeline:** Completion of standards development – 3 months; first workshops – 4 months.
- **Responsible:** Internal Communications department in cooperation with HR.

Support for Flexible Work:

- **Steps:** Define and implement flexible work policies; select and implement technological solutions.
- **Timeline:** Policy development – 2-4 months; technology implementation – 4-6 months.
- **Responsible:** HR and IT departments.

Improving Employee Well-being:

- **Steps:** Implement health support programs; start regular satisfaction surveys.
- **Timeline:** Health program launch – 3 months; first survey – 4 months.
- **Responsible:** Health and Safety department and HR.

Cultural Initiatives:

- **Steps:** Organise team building and corporate events; introduce regular company-wide meetings.
- **Timeline:** First team building – 2 months; first meeting – 1 month.
- **Responsible:** Personnel department and company management.

Methods for Monitoring and Evaluating the Impact of Implemented Changes

Regular Reviews and Reports:

- Collect data on productivity and employee satisfaction through systematic surveys and performance analysis.
- Quarterly reports on outcomes and recommendations for improvement.

Employee Feedback:

- Organise focus groups and anonymous surveys to gather feedback on employee perceptions of the changes.
- Monthly meetings to discuss emerging ideas and issues.

ROI Evaluation of Changes:

- Analyse the cost of implementing changes relative to the benefits gained, including metrics for staff retention, cost reduction, and productivity growth.
- Annual audit to assess the long-term impact of the implemented changes.

Study Limitations

In examining how communication within companies has evolved in the post-COVID-19 era, the study has made some insightful observations and recommendations. However, it's important to acknowledge that there are several limitations to consider. First, the study heavily focuses on digital communication tools which have become ubiquitous during the pandemic. While these tools are essential, this focus means we might not fully capture the subtleties and effectiveness of face-to-face interactions, which remain a significant component of organisational communication.

Another limitation is the generalizability of the findings. Businesses vary widely in size, culture, and industry, and what works for one may not work for another. The study might not reflect the unique circumstances and challenges faced by all types of businesses, especially smaller enterprises or those in specific sectors that have unique communication needs.

Lastly, the rapid pace of technological advancement means that the tools and strategies we discuss are continually evolving. What might be considered a best practice today could be outdated tomorrow, so continuous evaluation and adaptation of communication strategies are crucial.

Understanding these limitations helps us frame the findings within the appropriate context and should guide how they are applied in practice to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, the landscape of organisational communication is set to evolve continuously, especially as we navigate the post-pandemic world and further integrate technology into our daily operations. Given the limitations identified in our current study, there are several promising avenues for future research and practical application.

First, it would be beneficial to expand our investigation into the nuances of face-to-face and informal communication methods. Understanding how these traditional forms of interaction can be effectively blended with digital tools would provide a more holistic view of future communication strategies.

Additionally, exploring the specific communication needs and challenges of different types of businesses, particularly small to medium-sized enterprises and those in unique industries, could help develop more tailored communication strategies. This would allow for more nuanced guidance that can be applied across a broader spectrum of organisational contexts.

Another critical area for future exploration is the ongoing advancement of technology. As new tools and platforms emerge, continuously assessing their impact on communication efficiency and employee engagement will be essential. Research should keep pace with technological development to ensure that recommendations remain relevant and that businesses can adapt to the latest communication innovations effectively.

Finally, implementing longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of current communication strategies and technological integration. This could help organisations anticipate shifts in communication dynamics and prepare more proactive approaches to internal and external communication challenges.

By pursuing these directions, we can build on the foundation laid by this study to enhance our understanding of effective communication in a rapidly changing global business environment.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have explored various facets of organisational communication in the post-pandemic era, identified key challenges, and proposed actionable recommendations to enhance communication effectiveness within organisations. The recommendations outlined aim to standardise communication processes, support flexible working environments, improve employee well-being, and foster a transparent corporate culture. Each recommendation is supported by practical steps for implementation and a framework for continuous assessment to ensure they remain effective and responsive to evolving organisational needs.

However, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of the study. The emphasis on digital communication tools, while timely and relevant, may not fully capture the complications of face-to-face interactions that continue to play a critical role in organisational dynamics. Moreover, the generalizability of the findings may be limited by the diverse nature of businesses across different sizes, cultures, and industries. Additionally, the rapid pace of technological advancement poses a challenge to maintaining current best practices, emphasising the need for ongoing updates and adjustments to communication strategies.

Looking to the future, the study suggests several promising avenues for further research. Expanding the investigation into the integration of traditional and digital communication methods can provide a more holistic understanding of effective communication strategies. Tailored approaches for different types of businesses and continuous technological assessments will also be critical in developing more nuanced and effective communication frameworks. Furthermore, longitudinal (long-term) studies could offer deeper insights into the long-term effects of the implemented strategies, enabling organisations to better anticipate and adapt to changes in communication dynamics.

In conclusion, while the work provides a comprehensive analysis and actionable strategies for improving communication in organisations, the continuous evolution of communication technologies and organisational structures requires that these strategies be regularly revisited and adapted. By embracing a proactive and adaptable approach, organisations can ensure that their communication practices not only meet current needs but are also poised to handle future challenges, thereby maintaining a competitive edge in a rapidly changing global business environment.

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Statement of Authorship

I hereby certify that Master's thesis presented here has been composed by myself and is the result of my own investigations, unless otherwise acknowledged in the text. All references and all sources of information have been specifically acknowledged. This thesis has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for a degree at this or any other University. This work has not been published.

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