Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Public Relations Review

Appropriateness and acceptability: Employee perspectives of internal communication

Mary Welch

Lancashire Business School, University of Central Lancashire, Preston PR1 2HE, UK

ABSTRACT

Internal communication underpins organisational effectiveness since it contributes to positive internal relationships by enabling communication between senior managers and employees. Paradoxically, internal communication can also pose a threat to organisational relationships, as poor communication can be counter-productive. The potential benefits of internal communication rely on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them. Consequently, insight into employee preferences for mediated internal communication is required. The paper investigates employee views on the format of internal publications, contrasting acceptable attributes with elements which attract criticism. The single-case study contributes consideration of fresh data on an under-researched topic. It adopts a stakeholder approach with an *employee-centric emphasis* on employee preferences, in contrast to much previous research which focuses on *manager perceptions* of internal communication. Contributions include consideration of practical implications of the findings together with suggestions for avenues of further research.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Internal communication underpins organisational effectiveness since it contributes to positive internal relationships by enabling communication between senior managers and employees. Successful internal communication can promote employee awareness of opportunities and threats, and develop employee understanding of their organisation's changing priorities. It can contribute to organisational commitment and play a part in developing a positive sense of employee identification. Paradoxically, internal communication can also pose a threat to organisational relationships, as poor communication can be counter-productive. The potential benefits of internal communication rely on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them. However, if employees feel such communication is conducted inappropriately, the communication process could inadvertently damage internal relationships.

2. Conceptual framework and literature review

Internal communication has been consistently identified as a key area of communication practice, growing in importance (Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič, & Moreno, 2010). The need for research in this area is emphasised by Hargie and Tourish (2009, p. 419) who argue that internal communication is: 'increasingly recognized as a crucial variable in determining organizational success, and as a vital issue requiring further research.' There are many types of internal communication from informal chat and office gossip, to formal corporate communication to all employees from senior management. Between these two extremes, there is a range of formal and informal communication between individual employees in teams and in
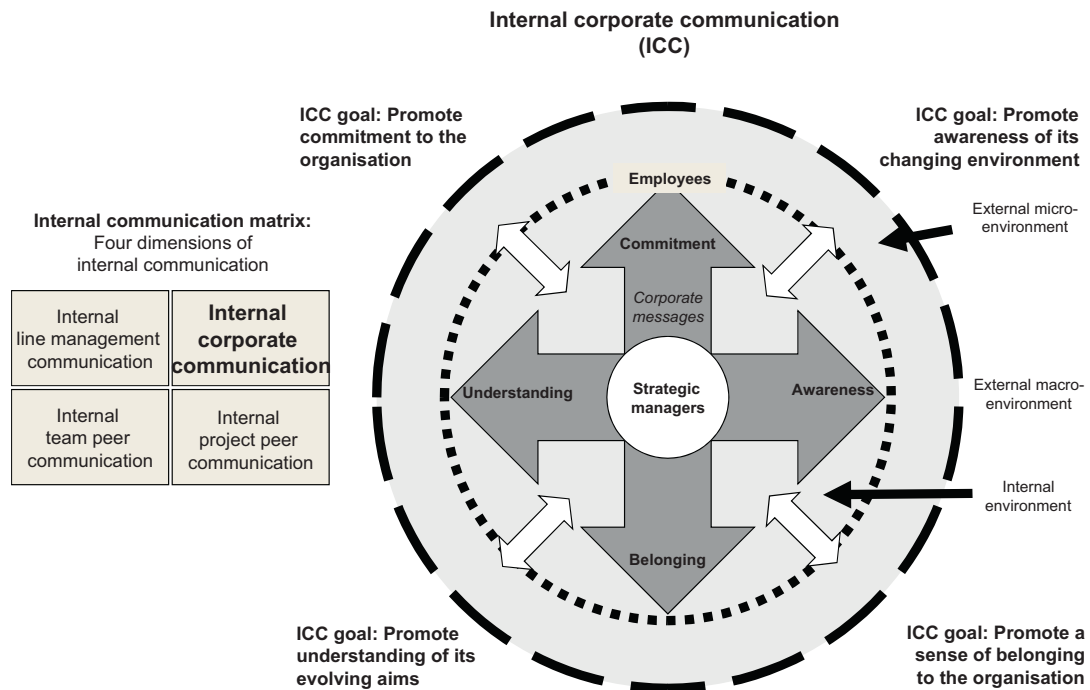
Fig. 1. *Internal corporate communication*, one of four internal communication dimensions in the Internal Communication Matrix. *Source*: adapted from Welch and Jackson (2007).

project groups, and between staff and line management. Clarity around this rich tapestry of communication is necessary for effective practice and research. One framework for appreciating the tapestry is an internal communication matrix (Fig. 1) consisting of four internal communication dimensions: line management; team peer; project peer; and, internal corporate communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007). All four dimensions hold challenges for practice and for research. This paper focuses on one of the four, internal corporate communication which relates to communication between senior managers and all employees.

Internal corporate communication is a term that has been used in public relations and corporate communications for years (Kazoleas & Wright, 2001; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2003; Zerfass, 2008). Here (Fig. 1), it is understood as communication between strategic managers and internal stakeholders designed to promote commitment and a sense of belonging to the organisation, to develop awareness of its changing environment, and understanding of its evolving aims (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Senior management communication and open, effective communication strategies are recognised as having a crucial role in the development of positive employee engagement (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Bindl & Parker, 2010; Saks, 2006). Employee engagement is expresseed via positive physical, cognitive, and emotional work role performance (Kahn, 1990), it enables organisations to innovate and compete and has communication implications (Welch, 2011). To contribute to engagement, the organisational practice of internal corporate communication requires practical and theoretical consideration to enable communication perceived as appropriate by employees. Among other issues, insight into employee views of, and preferences for, mediated internal corporate communication is required. This paper draws on underpinning theory such as medium theory, previously utilised to discuss public relations media (Hallahan, 2010), to explore issues which impact employee communication preferences.

2.1. Internal communication media: medium and messages

The focus of this paper is internal communication media, since a surprising dearth of work in this area has been highlighted and public relations theorists have paid scant conceptual attention to media (Hallahan, 2010). Medium theory offers a useful conceptual framework to enable the consideration of internal media. Qvortrup (2006) summarises the development of medium theory and notes the role of key writers such as Innis (1951), McLuhan (1960) and McLuhan and Fiore (1967). Innis (1951, cited in Heyer, 2003, p. 133) argued: 'A medium of communication has an important influence in the dissemination of knowledge over space and over time and it becomes necessary to study its characteristics in order to appraise its influence in its cultural setting.' Innis inspired McLuhan's work, and McLuhan's notion that *the medium is the message* has found more support in recent years with the advent of the internet, than when originally posited (Meyrowitz, 2001). Medium theory highlights the intricate interplay between the format of communication and the content of communication. It looks at the social and cultural influences on, and consequences of, communication media (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). For example, the

advent of the printing press provided literate people with wider access to previously exclusive texts, heightening the need for literacy skills. Medium theory focuses on the fixed features of media and how the characteristics of one medium (e.g. direction, speed of dissemination, level of difficulty involved in encoding and decoding the medium, audience reach) are physically, psychologically and socially different from other media (Meyrowitz, 1994). In a paper which updates medium theory, Qvortrup (2006, p. 351) argues: 'Successful communication is not a 'natural', but a highly improbable phenomenon. Thus, the effect of communication media is to limit the improbability of communication success, and the qualities of media can be measured by their impact on communication success.' He asks whether it becomes more or less probable that new media can reach the intended receiver; achieve understanding; and, achieve the sender's intended effect. This echoes Lasswell's (1948) well known verbal model of communication: Who, says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?

Qvortrup identifies dissemination (reach), understanding and effect as three basic communication dimensions of any communication medium. Recent research supports the notion that the *medium is the message* inside organisations (White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010) since internal communication media play a symbolic as well as practical role. Consideration of medium theory in the context of internal communication can encourage fresh perspectives such as a focus on the interplay between internal communication message content and its mediating format. One such perspective relates to the psychological *affects* of internal media, raising the question: how do employees *feel* about internal media? Arguably, affect might join Qvortrup's three communication dimensions prompting further questions. Does it become more or less probable that particular media cause affective employees reactions? Does receipt of internal media produce positive or negative affects in employees? One way to explore employee affect or their feelings about internal media is to consider their media preferences.

2.2. Employee preferences

Beneficial internal communication relies on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them. Paradoxically perceived inadequacies in the communication process could inadvertently damage internal relationships. Employees have expectations of communication media which influence their evaluations of internal communication (Cameron & McCollum, 1993; White et al., 2010). Internal communication can be facilitated by a range of media which, taking a receiver's point of view, can be categorised by format as: print (accessed on paper), electronic (accessed on a piece of technology) and face-to-face (interpersonal). Each category contains methods with potential for efficient communication. To be effective, the communication methods need to be appropriate and acceptable to internal stakeholders.

Employee preferences for amount, channels and types of information have attracted recent qualitative (White et al., 2010) and pilot quantitative (Friedl & Verčič, 2011) studies. White et al. (2010) found a preference for internal communication from a variety of sources with face-to-face communication valued for team and project peer communication as well as electronic communication via email Friedl and Verčič (2011) note that Generation Y employees prefer traditional internal media despite a strong preference for social media in their private lives. Kelleher (2001) found different internal communication preferences associated with different work roles; managers favouring face-to-face communication, and technicians written communication. Stein (2006) identifies preferences for face-to-face and email communication for establishing a sense of community in an organisation. Woodall (2006) suggests employees prefer different media for different sorts of information. This is consistent with media richness theory (Lengel & Daft, 1988) which posits that richer media are appropriate for more equivocal content and leaner media are more appropriate for unequivocal content. Woodall (2006) observes that print communication seems to be losing preference to electronic forms of communication. This raises a question about media attributes which might influence changing employee preferences for internal communication media.

2.3. Attributes of internal communication media

The first priority for any communication plan is to reach the intended recipients. Communicators can make a series of strategic decisions about attributes that increase the probability of communication reaching internal stakeholders. Such media attributes include controllability, usability and dissemination capability (Fig. 2).

2.3.1. Controllability

Mediated communication can be classified on a control continuum from controlled, through part-controlled, to uncontrolled methods as illustrated in Fig. 2. Controlled media allow communicators to control message content, format, and channel. Uncontrolled media can be filtered by gatekeepers.

To date, controllability has largely been considered from the perspective of senders (Chiper, 2006; Hendrix, 2004; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), ignoring the issue of *receiver control*. In contrast, this paper encourages a stakeholder-centric approach, shifting focus from senders to receivers. Receiver-controllability features may influence the likelihood of media reaching employees and then being accepted by employees. *Employee-controllability* is manifest in employee acceptance and rejection behaviour. Acceptance relates to picking up a print newsletter, opening an emailed e-zine, attending an organisation wide open meeting, or clicking on an intranet link. Rejection relates to disregarding the newsletter, deleting the unopened e-zine, overlooking the open meeting, or ignoring the intranet link. This view leads to questions relating to media *controllability by employees* and attributes that promote acceptance or rejection.
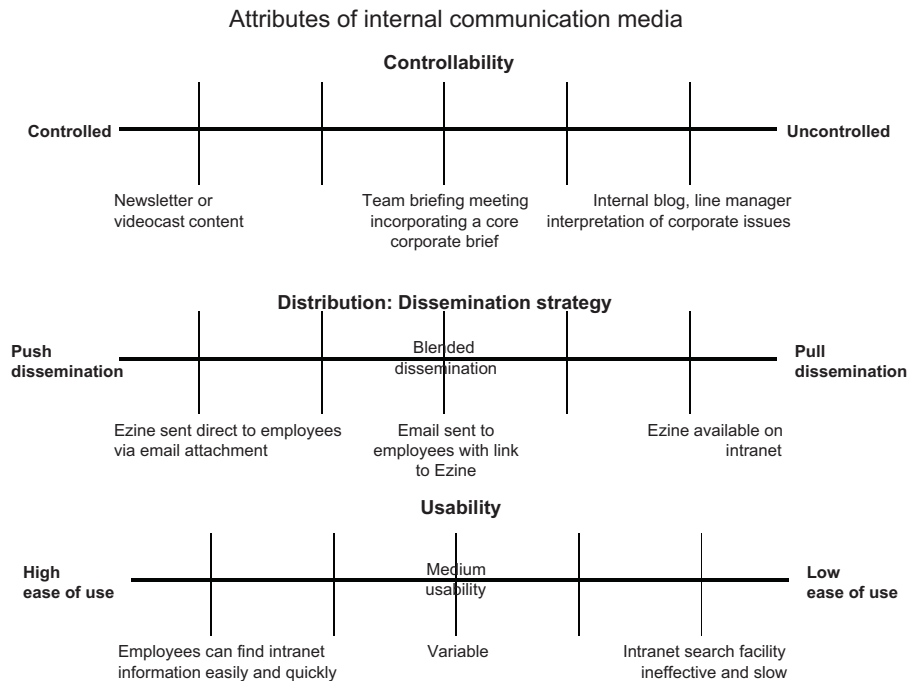
Attributes of internal communication media

Controllability

Controlled ———————————————————————— Uncontrolled

Newsletter or
videocast content

Team briefing meeting
incorporating a core
corporate brief

Internal blog, line manager
interpretation of corporate issues

Distribution: Dissemination strategy

Push
dissemination ———————————— Blended
dissemination ———————————— Pull
dissemination

Ezine sent direct to employees
via email attachment

Email sent to
employees with link
to Ezine

Ezine available on
intranet

Usability

High
ease of use ———————————— Medium
usability ———————————— Low
ease of use

Employees can find intranet
information easily and quickly

Variable

Intranet search facility
ineffective and slow

Fig. 2. Some attributes of internal communication media: controllability, dissemination, and usability.

2.3.2. Distribution: dissemination strategy

The terms 'push' and 'pull media' have been used to describe different delivery mechanisms associated with communication methods (Hallahan, 2010; Ranchhod, Guraun & Lace, 2002) and internal media has been broadly categorised as push or pull media. White et al. (2010) observe that employees in their study preferred information via email (push dissemination) or directed links to .pdfs to having to find it for themselves by searching their intranet (pull dissemination). Push media are sent to employees (e.g. electronic or print newsletters sent directly to employees). Pull media require employees to collect or go to the media, e.g. collecting a printed annual report from a central location, searching for information on an intranet, attending the CEO's annual address to staff. It is useful to think of this in terms of *dissemination strategy* as illustrated in Fig. 2. Attributes can be used in conjunction, resulting in blended, dual or multiple dissemination, for example sending a newsletter to employees in print form and uploading it to the intranet in .pdf format.

2.3.3. Usability

Usability refers to media qualities that enable ease of use for the receiver. Hallahan (2001) notes that usability is a condition of effective communication. His view of web site usability can be adapted to internal media. So, usability is understood as an attribute of internal communication media that enables employees to find information quickly, accurately, and in a satisfying manner. Email usability relates to attributes that allow employees to filter material, delete unread email, and catalogue or archive email for later retrieval. Usability relates to employee views on a medium's convenience and efficiency.

2.4. Research questions

Questions developed within the conceptual discussion and literature review suggest ways to explore employee preferences for mediated internal communication. Research questions include:

- RQ1: What employee preferences are evident for internal media formats?
- RQ2: What formats do employees consider acceptable and appropriate?
- RQ3: What attributes do employees value and associate with preferred formats?
- RQ4: Which attributes attract criticism?
- RQ5: How do employees feel about internal communication media: what medium affects are evident?

These questions were explored in an analysis of a qualitative data set collected in one large UK higher education organisation.

Table 1
Sample description: respondent employment categories.

Staff category	Number	Percentage
Academic and research staff	28	44
Support staff	36	56
Total	64	100

3. Method

A qualitative research design is particularly appropriate for research questions which explore employee views and preferences. This paper analyses data gathered via a qualitative survey. Data consists of open ended question responses to an invitation to all employees with computer access via (a) an intranet posting and (b) an article in a weekly internal e-newsletter, both in June 2010. Employees were invited to give their opinions on whether the automatic distribution of hard copy printed newsletters to all staff was an area in which the organisation could reduce its environmental impact. The invitation was issued by an employee with management responsibility for the organisation's environmental impact and sustainability policies. The invitation attracted 64 responses which ranged in length from 6 to 668 words, resulting in a total data set of 5342 words, with a response average of 83 words. Descriptive coding (Richards, 2005) was applied to the data set to analyse its demographic attributes. The self-selected sample consisted of 51 (80%) female and 13 (20%) male respondents. The employment categories of the 64 email respondents are given in Table 1.

The sustainability manager subsequently made the whole data set available for secondary analysis for this paper. This was serendipitous as gaining access to internal organisational data sets can be problematic. Assurances of confidentiality for the sustainability manager's organisation and anonymity for employees were made as a condition of access to the data set. Steps have been taken to ensure confidentiality for participants and the focal organisation. Data from the self-selected sample has been handled sensitively to provide participant anonymity, for example participant roles are indicated by generic job role titles (academic and research; and, support staff).

Analysis of the self-selected sample responses involved a *deductive stage* to explore the data from the perspective of issues identified in previous research, and an *inductive stage* to identify emergent themes. The qualitative data was analysed iteratively by one researcher. During the data reduction stage, repeated comparison, evaluation, coding and re-coding was undertaken following advice in the literature (Bazeley, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards, 2005). A series of themes were identified from the literature review, and the data was coded in accordance with these themes in the deductive analysis phase (including media attributes). The data was also subjected to grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008) in the inductive stage, when in vivo topic codes (such as *annoyance*) were applied to words and chunks of data representing 'units of meaning' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The results were clustered, processed into a series of analytical matrices, and then incorporated into the analysis and discussion displays which follow (Section 4, Tables 2–4).

Miles and Huberman (1994) recognise a range of qualitative–quantitative linkages including *quantizing content analysis,* which was employed in this study. Caution must be exercised when quantifying qualitative data since: 'Converting words into numbers and then tossing away the words can get a researcher into all kinds of mischief' (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Therefore, this study followed Miles and Huberman's advice to 'keep words and any associated numbers *together* throughout the analysis' (p. 56) and the analysis and discussion includes illustrative examples of participants' words alongside the results of quantification.

4. Analysis and discussion

The analysis and discussion is structured in relation to the research questions identified in Section 2.4.

4.1. What employee preferences are evident for internal media formats?

Electronic formats were most preferred by 30 (47%) of the respondents including receipt of internal newsletters via email, by .pdf files and via the organisation's intranet. Ten (16%) participants expressed a dual preference for both electronic and print. These participants showed a concern that print copies should be available to people who wanted them, alongside the electronic format. Two (3%) participants expressed a preference for print newsletters. This suggests a preference hierarchy starting with electronic methods; followed by blended methods (electronic and print); and lastly, print formats. This finding is in line with previous research which found a variety of employee preferences for media (White et al., 2010) and a tendency for a higher preference for electronic communication (Woodall, 2006). Table 2 includes illustrative comments showing employee preferences and indicates the volume of similar views.

While a preference hierarchy emerges from the analysis, a range of differing preferences are evident in the sample and communicators need to take account of such preferences if they want to maximise the reach of their communications.

Table 2
Employee preferences for internal media formats: preference hierarchy.

Preference for:	Illustrative comments	Number	Percentage
Electronic format	Notification of the newsletter's existence with a brief summary on [Name of organisation's weekly email newsletter] with a link to a PDF would be great (Ref. 22)	30	47
Electronic plus print	A link to a PDF with the ability to request a hard copy if necessary (Ref. 55)	10	16
Print format	I prefer to be able to read a paper copy in comfort (Ref. 15)	2	3

4.2. Influences on preferences

Concern about wasted resources and financial costs of printed materials was evident in 44 (69%) of the responses. Of these, 35 (55%) indicated concern about the wastefulness of printed internal communication material; 18 (28%) showed concern about the financial costs of print production and nine (14%) mentioned concerns about both waste and costs. These responses indicate that some participants found printed internal communication unacceptable because of their perceptions of wasted resources and financial costs. These responses indicate a concern with environmental sustainability as well as financial sustainability. Table 3 provides illustrations of views expressed by participants.

Participant concerns indicated formats deemed unacceptable. One inference from this is that participant criteria for appropriate formats include resource effectiveness (environmentally sustainable) and cost effectiveness (financially sustainable).

4.3. Valued attributes

Participants in this study valued cost-effective, sustainable electronic internal communication media formats with a proviso that printed copies could be made available on request. Some participants gave reasons for their electronic format preferences which highlighted valued attributes. Usability attributes (Hallahan, 2001) were valued including: the ability to easily save, store, and retrieve information; and, the ability to find information on intranet pages. Six participants (9%) indicated that usability features influence their preferences. The usability features highlighted by the participants indicate that they value having a sense of control over their internal communication access, suggesting *employee-controllability* as a valued attribute of internal communication media. Illustrative comments include:

> Compared to paper documents, electronic documents are quicker and easier to file and retrieve, and take up much much less space (Ref. 5)
> pdfs are also easier to search if you are looking for something specific (Ref. 7)
> can zoom in on important items – I can also store them easily (Ref. 39)

In keeping with White et al. (2010) the analysis indicates that some participants value directed push dissemination (an email with a link to more information), termed blended dissemination here, as opposed to pull dissemination (information available on the intranet). Eighteen participants (28%) valued blended dissemination via provision of electronic links to material. Opinions on pull dissemination material were less evident. One participant referred to searching the organisation website for material and commented that there: 'is therefore a responsibility that every [organisation name] website is easy to find and search within, with links that work!' (Ref. 38). This implies a perception that the organisation's intranet

Table 3
Participant concerns regarding printed newsletter.

Themes	Illustrative comments	Number	Percentage
Concern about waste	I think paper newsletters are wasteful (Ref. 6) the waste is actually shameful (Ref. 62)	35	55
Concern about financial cost	Where on earth do they get the budget for all this? (Ref. 2)	18	28
Concern about waste and financial cost	Glossy brochures and newsletters that are produced for staff internally is a waste of paper (and money) when we can all access the information online (Ref. 61)	9	14
Total concern		44	69

is not sufficiently usable, suggesting a barrier to pull distribution and an insight into the apparent preference for blended dissemination via links to material.

4.4. What attributes attract criticism?

As outlined above (4.3), usability issues relating to poor website search-ability and broken website links attracted some criticism. The data analysis suggests that participants are concerned about sustainability implications of internal communication. They were critical about perceived waste of environmental resources and the generation of paper waste with printed materials characterised as wasteful. Participants were critical about the perceived financial costs of internal communication and a quarter of participants (16) used the term *glossy* in a pejorative manner to describe their perception of extravagant 'over the top' (Ref. 40) printed formats. Illustrative comments include:

> Internally circulated glossy brochures are indicative of a misallocation of [organisation] resources, and of areas where cost-savings can be made (Ref. 5)
> The thick/glossy copies are over the top anyway – the materials content should speak louder than the weight of the paper (Ref. 40)
> It wouldn't be so bad if the newsletters weren't so thick and glossy which adds to their expense (Ref. 60)

4.5. How do employees feel about internal communication media: what medium affects are evident?

An in vivo theme was identified in the data termed *annoyance*, relating to negative affects of internal media. As this theme emerged in the analysis, it prompted the focus on medium theory outlined earlier (2.1) (Hallahan, 2010; Innis, 1951; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008; McLuhan, 1960; McLuhan & Fiore, 1967; Meyrowitz, 2001; Qvortrup, 2006).

Dissemination and usability are objective attributes, but internal media are also characterised by subjective attributes. Communicators craft their strategies with a view to achieving positive effects. Paradoxically, internal communication can be a source of irritation to employees. For example, internal corporate communication may be subject to routine cynical interpretation in symbolic resistance to organisational power (Christensen, Cornelissen & Morsing 2007; Llewellyn & Harrison, 2006). Likewise, communications might be ignored if channelled via media formats employees dislike, disapprove, or find unacceptable. Workforces comprise of groups with different features, and people with different education levels and communication needs (Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Gray & Laidlaw, 2002). Communication preferences may not be uniform. Consequently, employees ought not be considered as a uni-dimensional entity (L'Etang, 2005; Welch & Jackson, 2007) and a one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate (White et al., 2010). Managers need to evaluate the *acceptability* of communication formats to employees and take account of circumstances such as demographics (Marques, 2010). One implication of this is a need for communicators to understand subjective responses to internal communication media. It suggests a need to explore the emotional responses various internal media formats might provoke in groups of employees.

Evidence of affective employee reactions emerged in the data analysis. Emotional affects were evident in 19 (30%) responses relating to the format of internal communication media. Paper based newsletters were a source of annoyance for 18 participants, and electronic internal communication was a source of annoyance for one participant. Expressions of annoyance varied in intensity and illustrative examples are provided in column 2 of Table 4 which summarises these findings. Participants expressed a range of negative feelings using terms such as frustration, object to, annoyance, irritating and infuriating. Innis (1951, cited in Heyer, 2003) highlighted the value of studying the characteristics of communication media to

Table 4
Emotional affects of internal communication media.

Annoyance in vivo theme	Illustrative comments	Number	Percentage
Annoyance associated with printed newsletters	There is an overwhelming if not universal frustration and annoyance at school level with the dissemination of expensive and wasteful material (Ref. 11) We are living with suggestion of cost cutting exercises across the campus. Please can we start with this 'confetti'? It's unnecessary and irritating (Ref. 51) It's infuriating having our office printers taken away and there being very little money for travel and conferences but then being sent these glossy brochures (Ref. 53) The appearance of wasteful hard copy print in my mail box is a continual annoyance at a time the message from every quarter is 'economise' (Ref. 64)	18	28
Annoyance associated with electronic newsletters	I object to the recent trend towards abandoning all 'paper-based' forms of communication (Ref. 15)	1	2

appraise their influence. Likewise, McLuhan (1960) encourages a focus on complex medium and message interrelationships. Applied to analysis of internal communication in this study, this led to the identification of participant reports of negative affects, prompted by the use of media perceived as unacceptable, suggesting unintended media effects have occurred.

So, application of medium theory encourages reflection on media affect as well as message effect. The negative affects reported by participants in this study suggest that perceived inappropriate media format represents a possible barrier to effective internal communication. Employees who feel annoyed and irritated by the media could transfer their negative feelings to their reading of the message. In the extreme, such annoyance could prompt employees to avoid messages altogether and lead to them boycotting internal communication.

5. Conclusions

The paper contributes: suggestions for avenues of further research; proposals relating to practical implications; and, theoretical implications which extend previous thinking.

5.1. Avenues for further research

While the paper is limited by its discussion of one organisation, this single-case study contributes consideration of fresh empirical data from a sizable qualitative sample on an under-researched topic. Additional qualitative studies could usefully explore these findings in different research settings. The qualitative analysis presented here cannot be considered conclusive. Nor can the self-selected sample be considered representative of the organisation's population as a whole. While exploration of the qualitative data in this study has provided valuable insight into employee perspectives on internal communication, future studies could use quantitative approaches to further investigate issues raised here and to see if they apply in other settings.

5.2. Implications for practice

The data analysis (4.1) shows that in this study, a preference hierarchy emerged starting with electronic methods; followed by blended methods (electronic and print); and lastly, print internal communication formats. The findings suggest that it would be dangerous for communicators to assume that employees share uniform preferences for internal communication media. The findings support a need to consider employees as a multi-dimensional set of diverse internal stakeholders rather than a single entity. This suggests that provision of alternative formats is necessary to enable employees to choose media they find most acceptable, appropriate and usable. This represents a challenge for internal communication practitioners charged with developing strategy and selecting suitable tactics to achieve communication objectives.

Practitioners may need to take account of employee views on resource and cost effectiveness in the selection decision making process (4.2). Practitioners need to be aware of formats deemed acceptable and appropriate by employees in their organisations in order to inform their strategies. Practitioners need awareness of the media attributes valued by their organisations' employees including usability and employee-controllability. The findings (4.3 and 4.4) show that some participants preferred internal corporate communication blended dissemination strategies (receiving links to .pdfs or webpages) compared to pull (searching for the information on a website). This encourages practitioner reflection on dissemination strategies for internal communication. Practitioners may want to consider the use of dual or multiple dissemination tactics.

A surprising finding related to strong negative emotional reactions to media format which was evident in some participant responses (4.5). This finding suggests that communication practitioners need to reflect on *media affects* as well as *message effects*. This has consequences for the education of internal corporate communicators which tends to focus on persuasive writing and rhetorical messaging skills. While these skills remain important for effective internal communication, detailed understanding of media affect is also required.

5.3. Significance for theory

The paper adopts a stakeholder approach with an employee-centric emphasis on employee preferences. This is an important complement to previous research which too often focuses on *manager perceptions* of internal communication rather than *employee perceptions.* The findings show that participants in this study made a variety of judgements about the appropriateness and acceptability of internal communication media formats. The findings support the value of a stakeholder-centric approach to internal corporate communication which encourages a focus on varying employee communication needs, and recognition of a variety of preferences held by different groups of employees. One consequence of this employee-centric approach is consideration of media affect on employees. Medium theory was a useful underpinning theory in this regard. Participants reported negative affects suggesting unintended media effects have occurred. The application of medium theory, and the analysis and discussion in this paper suggest a possible extension to Lasswell's (1948) communication model in relation to media affect in the context of internal communication. This results in an expanded verbal model of *internal communication*: Who, says what, in which channel, **with what media affect**, to whom, with what effect?

This paper contributes insight into employee views of, and preferences for, mediated internal corporate communication and by doing so, suggests fresh ways in which internal communication theorists and practitioners can reflect on

communication practices which contribute to employee engagement. Positive media affect can be considered a necessary prequel for effective communication and employee engagement. If the media which is carrying the message is not acceptable to employees, the message has little chance of being attended to or acted upon.

References

Bakker, A. B., Albrecht, S. L., & Leiter, M. P. (2011). Key questions regarding work engagement. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *20*(1), 4–28.

Bazeley, P. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. London: Sage.

Bindl, U. K., & Parker, S. K. (2010). Feeling good and performing well? Psychological engagement and positive behaviors at work. In S. L. Albrecht (Ed.), *Handbook of employee engagement: Perspectives, issues, research and practice*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Cameron, G. T., & McCollum, T. (1993). Competing corporate cultures: A multi-method, cultural analysis of the role of internal communication. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *5*(4), 217–250.

Chiper, S. (2006). The discourse of Romanian Universities. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *19*(6), 713–724.

Christensen, L. T., Cornelissen, J., & Morsing, M. (2007). Corporate communications and its receptions: A comment on Llewellyn and Harrison. *Human Relations*, *60*(4), 653–661.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. R. (2008). *Management research* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Friedl, J., & Verčič, A. T. (2011). Media preferences of digital natives' internal communication: A pilot study. *Public Relations Review*, *37*(1), 84–86.

Gray, J., & Laidlaw, H. (2002). Part-time employment and communication satisfaction in an Australian retail organisation. *Employee Relations*, *24*(2), 211–228.

Grunig, J. E., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.

Hallahan, K. (2001). Improving public relations web sites through usability research. *Public Relations Review*, *27*(3), 223–239.

Hallahan, K. (2010). Public relations media. In R. Heath (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of public relations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Hargie, O., & Tourish, D. (2009). *Auditing organizational communication*. London: Routledge.

Hendrix, J. A. (2004). *Public relations cases* (6th ed.). California: International Thomson Publishing.

Heyer, P. (2003). *Key thinkers in critical media studies: Harold Innis*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

Innis, H. A. (1951). *The bias of communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *33*(4), 692–724.

Kazoleas, D., & Wright, A. (2001). Improving corporate and organizational communication: a new look at developing and implementing the communication audit. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 471–478). California: Sage.

Kelleher, T. (2001). Public relations roles and media choice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *13*(4), 303–320.

Lasswell, H. D. (1948). The structure and function of communication in society. In L. Bryson (Ed.), *The communication of ideas*. New York: Institute for Religious, Social Studies.

Lengel, R., & Daft, R. (1988). The selection of communication media as an executive skill. *The Academy of Management Executive*, *11*(3), 225–232.

L'Etang, J. L. (2005). Critical public relations: Some reflections. *Public Relations Review*, *31*, 521–526.

Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2008). *Theories of human communication*. Belmont: Thomson.

Llewellyn, N., & Harrison, A. (2006). Resisting corporate communications: Insights into folk linguistics. *Human Relations*, *59*(4), 567–596.

Marques, J. F. (2010). Enhancing the quality of organizational communication: A presentation of reflection-based criteria. *Journal of Communication Management*, *14*(1), 47–58.

McLuhan, M. (1960). Effects of the improvements of communication media. *The Journal of Economic History*, *20*(4), 566–575.

McLuhan, M., & Fiore, Q. (1967). *The medium is the massage*. New York: Bantam.

Meyrowitz, J. (1994). Medium theory. In D. Crowley, & D. Mitchell (Eds.), *Communication theory today*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Meyrowitz, J. (2001). Morphing McLuhan: Medium theory for a new millennium. *Proceedings of the Media Ecology Association*, *2*, 8–22.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis—An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). California: Sage.

Qvortrup, L. (2006). Understanding new digital media: Medium theory or complexity theory? *European Journal of Communication*, *21*(3), 345–356.

Ranchhod, A., Guraun, C., & Lace, J. (2002). On-line messages: Developing an integrated communications model for biotechnology companies. *Qualitative Market Research an International Journal.*, *5*(1), 6–18.

Richards, L. (2005). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide*. London: Sage.

Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *21*(7), 600–619.

Stein, A. (2006). Employee communications and community: An exploratory study. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *18*(3), 249–264.

Van Riel, C. B. M., & Fombrun, C. J. (2007). *Essentials of corporate communication*. London: Routledge.

Welch, M. (2011). The evolution of the employee engagement concept: Communication implications. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *16*(4), 328–346.

Welch, M., & Jackson, P. R. (2007). Rethinking internal communication: A stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal.*, *12*(2), 177–198.

White, C., Vanc, A., & Stafford, G. (2010). Internal communication, information satisfaction, and sense of community: The effect of personal influence. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *22*(1), 65–84.

Wilcox, D., Cameron, G., Ault, P., & Agee, W. (2003). *Public relations strategies and tactics* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Woodall, K. (2006). The future of business communication. In T. L. Gillis (Ed.), *The IABC handbook of organizational communication: A guide to internal communication, public relations, marketing and leadership.*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley.

Zerfass, A. (2008). Corporate communication revisited: integrating business strategy and strategic communication. In A. Zerfass, B. van Ruler, & K. Sriramesh (Eds.), *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Zerfass, A., Tench, R., Verhoeven, P., Verčič, D., & Moreno, A. (2010). *European communication monitor 2010. Status quo and challenges for public relations in Europe. Results of an empirical survey in 46 countries (Chart Version)* Brussels: EACD, EUPRERA, (available at: www.communicationmonitor.eu).